

Live and Let Give

Edwin Janzen

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impressions s'enroulent sur elles-mêmes à la manière de plans d'architecture sur un chantier. La table et, plus spécifiquement, l'utilisation formelle de la diagonale compliquent la relation binaire atelier/espace d'exposition.

Faits et cause pousse plus loin la réflexion de Rocher sur le processus artistique en questionnant la nature même de l'œuvre par l'exposition de non-œuvres, des objets, souvent outils de l'œuvre finale, essentiels au processus artistique de la photographe. Dans *Sans titre* (2017), des bandes tests sont accrochées au mur, roulées sur elles-mêmes, ne laissant le sujet de l'œuvre qu'à moitié visible. Telle une façon de valoriser chaque étape de sa démarche créative, Rocher expose la circularité de l'élaboration d'une œuvre en revenant sans cesse aux étapes antérieures à l'installation en galerie : des épreuves d'impression à la poussière de bois, toutes ces traces de l'envers d'une exposition deviennent des parties intégrantes de celle-ci.

La pratique de Rocher matérialise en elle-même la flexibilité. La quasi-absence du cadre ouvre les possibilités. Ce qui est traditionnellement ignoré, tel que l'envers d'une exposition, devient le sujet principal que ce soit sous une forme représentative ou en envahissant littéralement l'espace de la galerie. Cette façon qu'a Rocher de revenir constamment au processus créatif sonde la linéarité d'une démarche artistique et pousse à concevoir le sien comme un cercle de possibilités. Le titre de l'exposition, *Fait et causes*, pourrait, dans ce cas, devenir *Faits OU causes* puisque la ligne qui sépare ces deux termes se brouille pour être remplacée par un mouvement circulaire où les souvenirs deviennent réalité, où les outils deviennent les œuvres, où les faits deviennent les causes.

1. Les prochaines expositions de Lucie Rocher auront lieu à la Maison de la culture Frontenac (Montréal) du 29 novembre 2017 au 21 janvier 2018, à la galerie Occurrence (Montréal) du 19 janvier au 2 mars 2019 et chez VU PHOTO (Québec) du 6 avril au 13 mai 2018.

Après avoir complété un baccalauréat en histoire de l'art à l'Université Concordia, Valérie Hénault étudie actuellement à la maîtrise en management des entreprises culturelles aux HEC de Montréal. Commissaire d'une exposition itinérante chapeautée par la Two Rivers Gallery (C.-B.), en 2016, elle a travaillé dans plusieurs institutions culturelles montréalaises, dont le Musée des maîtres et artisans du Québec, le Musée du Montréal juif, le centre OPTICA et la galerie SBC.

Live and Let Give

Edwin Janzen

L'OFFRE
DHC/ART
MONTREAL
OCTOBER 5, 2017 –
MARCH 8, 2018



As Christmas draws nigh, our thoughts turn toward gifts, so DHC/ART group exhibition *L'Offre*, curated by Cheryl Sim, is timely enough. The show's conceptual framework is upbeat: in the brochure, Sim expresses her hope that "a culture of gift exchange develops to the benefit of all." Frankly, though, *L'Offre* takes us to diverse and intriguing destinations, often well beyond such rosy intentions.

Just past the gallery's front desk, the visitor encounters Felix Gonzalez-Torres's "*Untitled*" (*Ischia*) (1993), a single white cord of small incandescent bulbs suspended from the ceiling and piled up on the floor. Located next to the stairs and the elevator, the work has an upward gesture, conjuring impressions of terraces, stages and festival tents: celebration and possibility.

Momentarily, however, the visitor confronts the negation of these very qualities in Sonny Assu's *Silenced: The Burning* (2011), a reflection on Canada's potlatch ban of 1884–1951. *Silenced* consists of sixty-seven hide-covered drums—one for each year of the ban—painted grey with northwest coast Indigenous designs of white and red.

In the potlatch ceremony, the practice of many Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest (Assu's heritage is Kwakwaka'wakw), valuable objects were given away or destroyed in exchange for greater honour. Denigrated as wasteful and incompatible with white Christian capitalism, the practice was outlawed. The ban, difficult to enforce and routinely violated, was lifted in 1951. Here, Assu reminds us how the seemingly natural act of giving and receiving gifts can be criminalized and taken away.

Nearby, the visitor encounters Lee Mingwei's *Money for Art #1-5* (1994). While folding ten-dollar bills into origami sculptures in a San Francisco café, passers-by engaged the artist in conversation. To each person, Mingwei gave a sculpture in exchange for contact information. Months later, he contacted the recipients.

The five photo panels explicate the process: from crumpled bill, to sculpture, to gift. Images of the gifted sculptures are switched for images of other objects, revealing their fates at six and nine months. Most recipients retained their gifts, but some spent them: on a pair of leather slippers ... a Paul Simon *Graceland* CD ... yogourt and bananas. One was stolen. Here, Mingwei reveals gift-giving as a complex, shifting institution that may share its gift-identity with other identities (a medium of exchange, an object of desire) or lose it entirely.

For Simryn Gill's *Pearls: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: Le Petit Prince, Gallimard 1946/2007* (2017), the artist asked friends to give her a book. She tore out the pages, fashioning each one into a bead. Every string of "pearls" thus stands in for both a book—and a friend. A small vitrine displays a long necklace of beads made in this manner. On the wall is a grid of torn-out book pages; some depict more strings, while others show the covers from her friends' book selections: Mao's *Four Essays on Philosophy* ... Elizabeth David's *French Country Cooking* ... Napoleon Hill's *Think Grow Rich!* ... and many others. The book pages on the wall were torn from a book of these images, which Gill assembled for a friend.



In a darkened room on the second floor is Palestinian artist Emily Jacir's *Entry Denied (a concert in Jerusalem)* (2003), a musical performance on video by Austrian musicians Marwan Abado (oud), Peter Rosmanith (drums/percussion) and Franz Hautzinger (trumpet). The trio was slated to play at a festival in Israel, when Abado, a Palestinian with Austrian documents, was turned away for security reasons. Here, the concert that would have been is restaged, a gift to the visitor. No effort has been made to hide the screen's backside, constructed of wood and Masonite, secured by sandbags. The effect seems provisional, recalling the improvised day-to-day reality many Palestinians live with under Israel's illegal occupation.

Around a corner, we find a second Gonzalez-Torres work, "*Untitled (NRA)*" (1997), a stack of offset-printed posters depicting a large red rectangle on a black background. Visitors are invited to take one. Like many of Gonzalez-Torres's works, this one plays on cycles of depletion and regeneration.

My rolled-up poster in hand, I encounter a young woman wearing a kimono. "May I give you the gift of song?" she asks. She leads me to the fourth-floor chamber, explaining that she is assisting artist Lee Mingwei in presenting his work *Sonic Blossom* (2013–ongoing), and so seats me in a chair. The assistant then performs one of Franz Schubert's many solo vocal compositions, singing "Frühlingsglaube" (faith in spring) for me.

Mingwei created this work after his mother underwent surgery; as she recovered, mother and son took great comfort in Schubert's songs. Though a gift "by proxy," the singer and visitor face one another eye-to-eye, and the result is personal and poignant.

For this reason, only after the performance will the visitor look about at the chamber walls, upon which are hung several of Sergej Jensen's painted works (2016). Jensen's "canvases" are sewn from bankers' moneybags, underscoring the thoroughness of the commodification of today's art market; here, the works are commercial even before artist applies brush. Two works are abstract compositions, foregrounding the material characteristics of the moneybag canvases: loose threads, tears and holes. A large work, *Untitled*, is a field of variegated browns painted with rabbit-skin glue, while *White Natural Moneybags* is a white rectangle. Another, smaller work, *Blue Horse*, depicts a horse's head, while a large fourth painting, *Fired Jockey*, shows a jockey thrown to the ground as a dark horse gallops away. The latter two works invite reflection upon the art market's stallion-like unpredictability and the peril facing whoever rides it. To include Jensen's works—mostly straight-ahead critiques of the capitalist art world—in a show about gifts is a stretch, though hardly an unwelcome one.

Nearby is a third Gonzalez-Torres work, "*Untitled*" (*Blue Placebo*) (1991), in which a rectangular section of floor is covered with candies, wrapped individually in reflective blue plastic. The weight of the candy—130 kg—represents the combined weight of the artist and his lover, who died of AIDS (as did Gonzales-Torres, in 1996). The title refers to medical experiments conducted on AIDS patients in the days before effective medications. Here, Gonzalez-Torres's signature gift, this cycle of depletion and replenishment, transcends his death—as long, at least, as curators continue to reconstitute it.

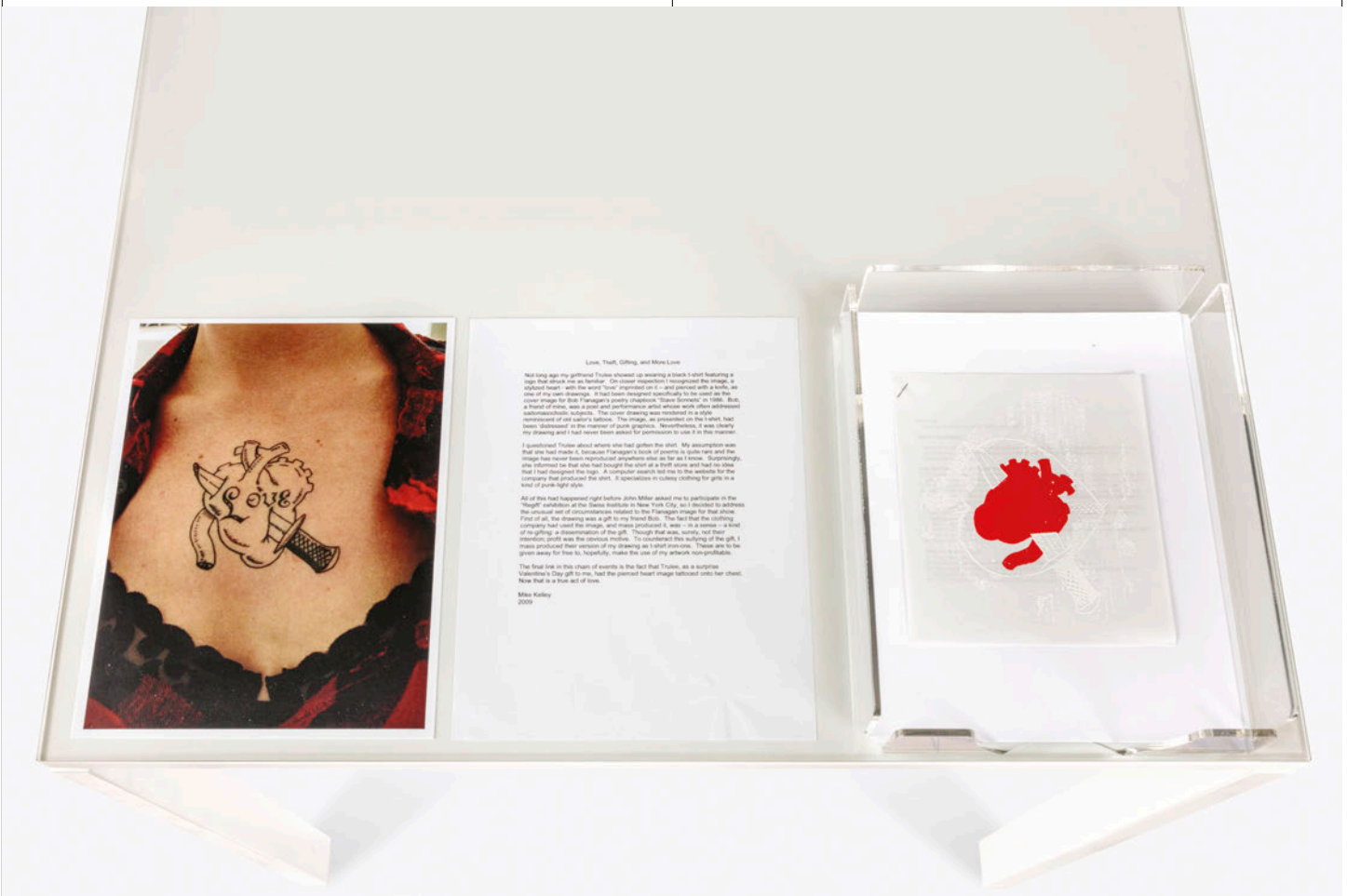
Descending a floor, we encounter Mike Kelley's *Love, Theft, Gifting and More Love* (2009). Some items are displayed on a table: a photograph of a chest tattoo ("Love," with a knife piercing a heart), and a book, a t-shirt, and a tray of decal tattoos, all bearing the same image. Kelley designed the image for a chapbook cover—a gift to his friend, poet Bob Flanagan—so he was surprised to see it one day on his girlfriend's t-shirt. Realizing it had been used without permission, Kelley might have taken legal action to assert his ownership, but instead he reinvented the image as a gift in the form of a takeaway decal tattoo—a noteworthy departure from today's strict intellectual property regimes. Finally, as a personal gift, Kelley's girlfriend had the image tattooed on her chest.



Edwin Janzen is a writer, editor and interdisciplinary artist working in digital print, video and artist books. Born in Winnipeg, he completed his MFA at the University of Ottawa. Janzen currently lives and works in Montreal.

Nearby is Phil Collins's *free fotolab* (2009), wherein the artist invited people to donate their unprocessed 35 mm film rolls, which he developed. A carousel of colour slides plays in this darkened space: a zebra grazing inside an old barn ... a seemingly troubled, shirtless boy in a cafeteria ... rail tracks snaking into the distance ... an old woman drinking tea outdoors and so on. In a sense, *free fotolab* is *L'Offre's* dark heart; here we receive the gift of life—the lives of others, that is. Fleeting glimpses flick past us, faded and momentary, rather like traces of our lives that will bemuse some future viewer when we are gone. This gift is ours for as long as we care to watch.

Mike Kelley. *Love, Theft, Gifting and More Love*. 2009. Mixed media installation including: text by Mike Kelley, found t-shirt, iron-on transfers, framed photograph, duplication of the cover of Bob Flanagan's *Slave Sonnets*, *Variablies Dimensions*. Courtesy of the Mike Kelley Foundation. Photo: Joshua White.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Blue Placebo), 1991. Candles individually wrapped in blue cellophane, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 130 kg (286 lbs). Installation View, Skin Deep, Galerie Jennifer Flay, Paris, April 1st - May 17th, 1997. Courtesy by Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Photo: Marc Domage/Tutti.