

Inside and Outside the Frame: in A Dream About My Garden...Without the Smell of Dirt

J.S.Anderson, Informality, July 30, 2018

A Dream About My Garden Without the Smell of Dirt at Front/Space is an installation that reads like a book who's title quickly draws you in between its covers. Artist, educator and organizer Megan Pobywajlo writes of her concerns with having her first solo show in her booklet of text that accompanies the show. Is it too self indulgent and limiting? Who is not exhibited? Who will never cross the threshold? Pobywajlo extended the walls of the gallery in a gesture influenced by the late photographer Luigi Ghirri who wrote that "in photography the deletion of the space that surrounds the framed image is as important as what is represented". She places her inkjet sticker prints on the windows facing out to include what surrounds the physical frame of the space. Viewing the photos on the outside of the building we must also consider what they do not contain – the "real": the reflections of cars and people walking by, the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts building, the Crossroads district, the Midwest....



Expanding the ideas of her 2017 installation at La Esquina, “PROTO-CHICKEN ON SOFT-BOILED” , she imagined Front/Space as a book, “A spine and two windows spread, a cover: a view from outside in, a curve: a turning page.” The large scaled public images in the windows invite you to turn the page and enter a colorful personal narrative space composed of two framed photos on the walls (framed by larger rectangles of painted color behind them), arrangements of organic and inanimate objects and three accordion photo books displayed on pedestals of varying heights and colors. The space becomes even more intimate with the inclusion of two small booklets of text. Within *Texts (still images)* are brief assemblages of words and phrases, like shots in a film, about her art, *Notes for Cartier-Bresson* and past and present tales of her family to which we provide our own imagined photos to fill in an unseen family album.



It is uncertain what predictions Pobywajlo says these still life photographs are making but there is great pleasure taken from their assembled contents of both the real and artificial. We gaze upon them like objects of desire seduced by a photographic style predominantly seen in and exploited by advertising. Pobywajlo speaks of her approach as “commingling” her own voracity for her subject with that of the viewer’s: “Photographing food (fresh or artificial) has become more cathartic than I could have anticipated. I can find a loving kind of humor in it, and share some recognition that what we eat is inextricably linked to the spaces we occupy in the world. Food is never silent”.



In the *Growing Pitcher* we see the greens of peppers and cucumbers filling a vintage clear Lucite mid-century pitcher whose architectural shape and construction are equal to the nuances of the organic forms within. The use of the pepper as a subject recalls the sensual Edward Weston photos of the 1920's that he said were, "to make the commonplace unusual". Pobywajlo also brings this democratic approach to her forms but by humorously packing the organic within the geometry of the pitcher, as it counteracts any further romantic comparison. However, because her photos are such acutely composed tableaus, they can also be linked in subject to past Dutch still life painters of the 17th & 18th c. despite their more symbolic interpretation of subjects emphasizing the transience of life, the vanitas of a decomposing fruit or a skull. A more closely aligned contemporary comparison can be made with the photographer and bookmaker Ruth van Beek and her collaged flower arrangement still-lives. They both share an unexpected recontextualizing of objects that is consistently inventive.



Instagram

Robert Adams writes in his book *Beauty in Photography*, that photographers love gardens because they are “strikingly like landscape pictures, sanctuaries not from but of truth”. Pobywajlo shows a great affection for her assembled refuges of collected objects that she writes contain, “optimistic views of the future”. Much like how a Japanese garden is re-set from found stones, lanterns and plants, Pobywajlo’s still-lives are composed of elements reassembled from disparate times and places. Upon amber, mustard, azure, emerald, coral and crimson painted walls and pedestals are balanced eggplants, green tomatoes, squash, carrots, roses and leaves that appear to fit naturally together.



Strawberry Air is composed of five objects. A vibrant red plastic porcupine hedge ball on the right is balanced by a single luscious red strawberry on the left. Between them sits a bookend composed of sensually curved clear Lucite pieces in soft focus and ambiguous scale that blends into the yellow & grey split background. Next to it is an organically shaped burnt orange glass vase that holds a red abita air plant whose flat leaves curve and echo its shape. It is a prestidigitation without technical wizardry, an elegant formal composition of colorful playfulness as vibrant as any contemporary work.

Pobrywajlo continues to tend, change, and grow new compositions within the Front/Space interior over the duration of the show to negate the normal stasis of a gallery installation. In this way the space remains as she first envisioned it, like a book that you would want to visit again and again. It reiterates what she wrote is “a search for knowledge” that considers both what’s inside and outside the frame of the gallery—within her deep family roots and without in our current collective image environment.

A Dream About My Garden...Without the Smell of Dirt

was on view at Front/Space through July 28th 2018 by appointment and open to the public 2-5 p.m. followed by a potluck 6-8 p.m on Saturday. For more information on the exhibition, email 18th.frontspace@gmail.com