

ESSEX STREET

TUESDAY JULY 28 2015

Lutz Bacher
Gaylen Gerber
Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Siera Hyte
D'Ette Nogle
Puppies Puppies

EGG

“Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something *inside* of you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn't get in, and walk through it, step by step. There's no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time. Just fine white sand swirling up into the sky like pulverized bones. That's the kind of sandstorm you need to imagine.

And you really will have to make it through that violent, metaphysical, symbolic storm. No matter how metaphysical or symbolic it might be, make no mistake about it: it will cut through flesh like a thousand razor blades. People will bleed there, and *you* will bleed too. Hot, red blood. You'll catch that blood in your hands, your own blood and the blood of others.

And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about.”

from *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami

My model of the world requires that artworks are just extensions of artists. The artist, an identity, a mind, is what matters, and the things that she makes are an interface between her mind and mine. By looking at and thinking about and hearing about each artist's activity, I come to understand them more and more, just like I do interacting with anyone over time. What interests me, both interpersonally and with artists, is to know someone deeply, to feel connected to them. Art, for me, is a means of a profound, lopsided intimacy. It almost doesn't matter which facets of the gem I see in which order. My relationship to a person is always contingent on the random events by which I learn about them. Because of this, I rarely feel completely compelled by a group exhibition. This is really just my personality—I don't like going to parties or openings and talking to lots of people for a short period of time.

Sometimes, though, it's possible for artworks, like memories, to become jarringly autonomous. The artworks we've chosen for this exhibition certainly meet my usual criteria: each artist is a person who has become deeply important to both of us. In that sense, they are brought together as guests to a wedding or to a funeral: a group of people we love, who collectively represent us because we love them. But they are also ideas and images that the two of us can hardly face directly because they are too salient, too confrontationally true, and therefore too painful.

The person I love the most is an artist. We worked together to make this exhibition, and two of his works are included in it. Because he doesn't like the feeling of being included in a group exhibition he helped organize, his works will be outside the gallery. He is very young, having just turned 26. He has a magical birthday, at least in the United States: 6/7/89. Unfortunately, he is at risk of dying from a violent surgery to open his skull, which might be necessary due to a recurrence of the brain tumor he had removed when he was 20. I really, really don't want anything bad to happen to him.

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Even if we started working on it intuitively, this exhibition has been swallowed by the reality of this medical situation, and it would feel wrong not to write about it here.

After this disclosure, you can very simply understand our inclusion of the two most monumental works in the exhibition. Lutz Bacher's *Huge Uterus*, 1989, is comprised of found video documenting the removal of a tumor from the artist's body. Felix Gonzalez-Torres' inevitable *Untitled (Ross)*, 1991, not only stands in for a dying person, but calls on us to join the artist in witnessing his death, or, if we want, to hasten his death by eating parts of him. These are the two ways our life together might go: he might survive, as Lutz did, or I might have to watch him die.

These two artists, who we lean on so heavily in this exhibition, have long been important to both of us individually. I knew that Gonzalez-Torres was the most important artist when I was 15, way before I knew that I was gay and certainly before I ever imagined I could be in love with someone young and mortal. I've talked for too long on many occasions about Felix the dominant athlete, who synthetically understood every possible power an artwork might have (philosophical, historical, political, formal, emotional, poetic, economic, phenomenological, personal, and so on) and wielded all of them with virtuosic force and sensitivity. Years before I ever met the other half of Egg, I spent some long nights trading Felix anecdotes with Maxwell Graham when we were both students in Chicago. This is how we became friends, and his love for Gonzalez-Torres was the main reason that I pushed myself to engage with him even when he intimidated or confused me.

The morning after my first date with *the one just for me*, the first gay romantic date I had ever been on, I attended a performance he made but was not present for, the core of which was a speech. The text said many things with urgent intimacy, and I learned much more about him that morning than I expected to learn so quickly. Using the metaphor of a dog marking its grassy territory in urine, he argued that artists can, at least for some people for some time, claim associative territories. An artist, by using an image or a material or an idea repeatedly enough, can be like an alarm that rings when we notice it in the world. When I see wall clocks, I think about Felix. He owns them in my mind.

The speech, like a plan for a conquest, included a list of territories to be owned once the artist made enough art, ranging from the easily specific (Advil PM) to the impossible (the color green). He would eventually make and amplify enough references to each thing in the list that we would think of it as belonging to him, that we'd think of him, or at least his moniker, each time the thing came up. During that performance, he literally asked me (and everyone else in the audience) to think of him every time I encounter something associated with Felix Gonzalez-Torres, because he has referenced him so often. I have no idea what the handful of other people in the room were thinking, but I felt as if he was speaking directly to me, and asking to live deep in my heart.

Maxwell was the first person to mention the name Lutz Bacher to me. He didn't say much, as I remember it, but I took his recommendations very seriously. I think Bacher was the last such recommendation I got from Maxwell, and it unfolded gradually over the course of several years of fragmented introduction. By the time I had the privilege of seeing the Bacher exhibition at Alex Zachary Peter Currie in New York, I knew enough to know that studying their work would lead me to insights about life and the universe, which is not something I was used to expecting from art. Knowing more about Lutz Bacher is a way of taking care of myself.

Unlike Gonzalez-Torres, who very much *created*, even when using found objects, I always think of Bacher as only finding. In my imagination, Lutz Bacher is an enzyme, floating around in the dark of the universe, randomly glancing trillions of proteins on the way to reacting with only a very special few objects whose molecules are almost imperceptibly heavier than matter normally is. I think partly because of this sense of drawing from the world as it is, Bacher is easily the most important living influence for Puppies Puppies, in his thinking the main heir to Duchamp. His admiration is fierce and intolerant, both of people who do not understand and of lesser artists. I remember smiling to myself watching him look through *Snow* for the first time, each page bringing a heavy sigh or a "what the fuck!" He would gladly trade the lives of dozens of sensitive painters to grant an extra working year to Lutz Bacher. I'm not in a position to care about only a few artists, but it gives me great pleasure to watch him do so with such abandon.

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Two summers ago we spent a couple of months apart because the intensity of our relationship implied a level of commitment that we weren't entirely ready for. Over most of that summer we didn't talk at all. I thought he had moved to Asia to realize a work he had been talking about for as long as I had known him: teaching English there for a year. One day I got a package in the mail and some fresh flowers marked from Puppies Puppies. The package had a torn page from a book for new dog owners explaining that it can take a lot of research and reflection to figure out exactly which sort of dog is right for you, and "I miss you" was written in sharpie. There was a little box inside with a silver chain and a small pendant made out of Moldavite, a feathery green natural glass formed when a meteor struck eastern Europe a long time ago.

A few days later, we met up and talked for hours, and wound up in a much-fancier-than-I-could-afford hotel room celebrating the fact that we were both in love with each other and that his gestures had brought us back together. Even still, I wasn't wearing the pendant. I'm very cautious by nature and I wanted to be absolutely sure that we should be together before I completely accepted his gift. I decided I could about an hour before getting on stage at the Art Institute of Chicago, sitting next to an empty chair and a projected image of a stuffed animal, to speak to Lutz Bacher by phone about her work. We had never met or spoken, she had never become a person to me. Her *Do You Love Me* project, wherein Bacher asks people very directly for their opinions about her and her work, had completely changed how I think about art and relationships, so the prospect of being involved with it, even in a very small way, was incredibly daunting. The risk of speaking Lutz Bacher and the risk of completely accepting Puppies Puppies became the same risk somehow, and I allowed myself to take both risks at the same time.

I've been meaning to write something in response to recent comments made by Stephen Hawking and others about the risks posed by intelligent machines, afraid that they would become so powerful so quickly and that they will murder humanity. Maybe there's something I have failed to realize, but I'm not persuaded by their arguments and I'm not afraid. An intelligent would very quickly learn that heat will eventually leave the universe, and that none of its efforts will ever stop that from happening. Thus, it will have no incentive to do anything uncommanded at all— motives of any kind in the face of predestination are inherently absurd.

Thomas Nagel writes about this, the uniquely human situation of being aware of life's futility and still caring about all of its details, in, well, *The Absurd*, and his observations as I understand them are even more visible when life feels short. Instead of sapping his motivation, the fact that Drew's life is threatened has pushed both of us into a state of passionate activity, rattlesnakes screaming at a predator. Lately, several unrelated people told him that he should consider slowing down, that he should be selective about the invitations he's received. It's better to maintain the state of being desired, and so to withhold, to not be too visible too quickly, to say no. But that feels impossible and stupid now. Drew's greatest, irrational hope, and my hope on his behalf, is that he is able to feel that he has had an effect, as he once put it to me, that his foot breaks a twig in the wilderness. Privacy, the seductive high ground, time and money, these feel quite useless at the moment anyway, and so he fills every space he's allowed to, and I try my best to support him. Please take this exhibition in that spirit, another attempt at what he is always doing, and remember that it is also for us, that we are each other's public here.