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10/08/14

Seminar: Memory

Track of the Past Meets Words of the Present

Through the meaningful presentation of the object and incorporation of symbolic elements, Erika Shiba manages to present a gift that is elegant and simple, yet profoundly representative of the special bond between artist and receiver. The object, a cassette case adapted for hanging with a delicate golden chain, is also functional in the sense that the interior has been modified to hold small sheets of paper. These papers, which have been thoughtfully decorated individually with black and white cutouts from vintage magazines, have the purpose of being used as a place to write down notes, memos, or ideas; A brilliant way of integrating the receiver not only into the symbolic manufacture of the piece, but also as a participant in its creation.

The meaningfulness and delicacy of the piece is the product of an exchange of a series of letters that began as the meeting of two strangers, and resulted in friendship. The gift parallels the letters, embodies the path to discovery of the other; their likes and dislikes, passions, ideals, and personality traits. Above all, this piece embodies common interests of the past in regards to music and film, and is a tribute to expression, in particular to the other’s love for writing.

Reminiscent in a way of Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made objects, Shiba takes her piece another step forward into a stage of re-purposing with integrated functionality. The object takes the viewer back in time due to the obvious lack of relevance of a cassette in present time. An idea that is strengthened by the cover décor, which is composed by Bruce Springsteen cutouts, a vintage postcard, and a retro-looking photographer covered with paint. However, it is an object that is meant to be used in the present, a coming together of times that reflects the symbolic usage of her receiver’s interests and identity while at the same time, offering the possibility of a future (through the writing in the sheets).

Another important element of the piece, which was a controversial element of discussion in the initial critique, is the wrapping of the cassette with a bright yellow shoelace. A striking detail that both accentuates the treasure-like quality of the object, and disturbs its elegance. The unwrapping of the lace was performance-like, an essential moment in the presentation of the object as a gift that took the crowd back into the warm comfort of a special occasion. The intimacy of the moment was as important as the content of the gift itself. Although other critics found the brightness of the yellow lace distracting and over-powering to the delicate simplicity of the rest of the piece, there was also a sort of enchantment in the juxtaposition between its softness with the hard and straight edges of the box; As well as the fact that it was as representative of the past as Bruce Springsteen and the cassette itself.

Shiba’s clear intention to demonstrate her and her receiver’s joint passion for film and the past is visible and symbolic, yet not too literal. The object, in both size and representation, is a treasure, an ode to friendship and intimate understanding. Incredibly successful in its meticulous construction, as well as in the achievement of the concept and function, this object became the embodiment of a connection between two people, and a shared possession of deep meaningfulness.