



ART IS ABOUT...



a conversation with Jarrett Earnest

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by *Eddie Arroyo*

For the Duration of May, June, and July Gallery Diet has been curated by Jarrett Earnest in an exhibition entitled NIGHT TIDE. He brings, artworks, events, and texts together in a new sensibility — apocalyptic frivolity, Anthropocene Rococo. Earnest is an artist, writer, and co-director of 1:1. After receiving a degree in the History and Theory of Contemporary Art from the San Francisco Art Institute, he attended the City University of New York Graduate Center for two years studying modern art history. His writing can be found regularly in the Brooklyn Rail and as a weekly contributor to the San Francisco Arts Quarterly.

He is presently working on a collection of interviews with young artists in NYC called “After the Doom Generation: Conversations with new New York”, in addition to ongoing work on aesthetics and intimacy. All of his disparate projects engage performance, poetry, visual art and politics. I was curious to know what approaches and concepts he is addressing in his practice. One piece that caught my attention was of documentation of a performance of Ann Liv Young where she dressed as a mermaid and preceded to consume a large fish and spit it onto the audience. Something I was interested in addressing to Earnest.

Eddie Arroyo

Tell me about the Mermaid.

Jarrett Earnest

The mermaid in the show or mermaids in general?

EA

Yes, the mermaid in the show but if you would like to talk about mermaids in general then that’s cool too.

JE

She is defending her food. She does not want to be exploited for being a mermaid. She is not an object. She is everything you want and fear, that is why she spits the fish. And everyone is too scared to stop her. It is a ten minute clip of an hour and a half performance by Ann Liv Young.

EA

I was reading the conversation you had with her on the Brooklyn Rail. I was attempting to derive why The Mermaid in general and found that she has taken this approach with these Disney Icons in an attempt to contextualize them under her conceptual identity. The little mermaid and then Rose from Sleeping Beauty.

JE

Exactly. I think I'd like to do a book on the post-modern fairy tales as opposed to modernism's myths: Paul McCarthy's White Snow, Donald Barthelme's Snow White, what Ann Liv does are just a few. I've been talking about mermaids for a long time.

EA

It was the most compelling piece for me.



JE

Well the other pieces need a lot more subtle looking, the kind that is hard to do at an opening.

EA

The benefit of a conversation. Tell me about the subtlety of Night Tide.

JE

Well it has a lot to do with colors and feelings and surfaces. It takes time to really look at some of the work, to train your eyes to brush over the surfaces, like Nathlie Provosty's very minimal paintings or Prajakti Jayavant's crumpled monochromes that hover somewhere between paintings and low relief sculptures—they might be lead but are actually paper—they balance between being heavy and weightless. That balance is emblematic of the show in general, and that is very subtle.

EA

The subtlety did come into play as soon as I walked into the space. For many who are not aware of Gallery Diet's presentation, when one walks into the space it is normally saturated with white light per-mutating from the walls floor and ceilings. Add to this the fact that I had walked into the space at night so it does leave a significant impact. It does work on some exhibitions but in others it tends to have the opposite affect. As curator you made a conscious decision not to do that for Night Tide was this part of the subtlety? It did change the space. Made it more quiet. Even with the menacing mermaid being projected for everyone to witness.

JE

Yes that was an early conscious decision that relates to the fact that I don't like florescent or overhead lights or very white spaces. Diet is a terrific space but I needed to make it work for me, its a very personal preference. When I was doing 1:1 in New York with

Leigha Mason, Whitney Vangrin and Alex Sloane we used colored lights a lot. It was part of our aesthetic. In some ways NIGHT TIDE clearly grows out of the sensibility of 1:1, but is more refined and fitted to my ideas, where as everything with 1:1 was a four part conversation.

I have gone to hook-ups houses to have sex and left because they don't have a lamp. What kind of a psychopath can deal with overhead lighting?

EA
LOL

JE
That to me is very aggressive.

EA
So one component was to present a level of intimacy?

JE
Yes, if you look at my interviews with artists like Barbara Hammer or Roni Horn, intimacy as an experience, or an aesthetic. It's a huge part of my concern.

EA
In reference to your interest in the postmodern fairytales with the work of McCarthy's White Snow and Barthelme's Snow White there is a component of Magical realism in the work. Why do you find this approach relevant in contemporary art, does it carry a narrative?

JE
Hmmm... as far as I understand "magical realism" is a specific genre that relates to writers like Garcia Marquez (RIP) which I don't necessarily relate to. I am interested in Magik in the way my friends Genesis Breyer P-Orridge or Peter Lamborn Wilson/Hakim Bey talk about it, which as to do with changing reality through changing representation which very often works on an unconscious level. In fairy tales or with magic the most basic narrative structure that holds the enigmatic experience. I've been working on a project about Hans Christian Anderson's "Little Mermaid". There is very little "narrative" there, or maybe its all narrative but its a very short story. But you can reduce it very neatly to : she wants to be a human, trades her tongue to become one to marry the prince, he marries someone else and she turns into sea foam.

“That is the narrative. However within that is a vast space for psychological and emotional complexity.”

That is the stuff I'm interested in, that the fairytale structure has a highly flexible emotional continuity, connecting vivid images, or even art works in an exhibition.

EA
So its latent with allegory?

JE
I don't see a way around that, or around metaphor.

EA
I am curious about the nature of your blog "Tongues and Oysters" where you use it to collect your interactions with artists and writers in New York. Again there is the presence of intimacy especially with entries such as, "Sucking a cock you love is praying". Such a

simple entry but it does speak to the meditative and spiritual aspects of sodomy.

JE

OK...for a while I've been keeping notes on aesthetics and intimacy which I thought would turn into a book and then I realized that is too hubristic—that intimacy is something I'll spend the rest of my life trying to understand, we all will.

In terms of “sucking a cock you love is praying” I think the emphasis is on “you love” that makes it praying—about attention, presence, etc. Just because you are on your knees doesn't make it prayer. But yes, I write about sex a lot, usually as a way of talking about something else, like all forms of human connection, materiality, etc. Honestly I've been moving away from that lately. There was a moment I was amazed at how restrained NIGHT TIDE is: so formal, so many objects, then I remember there are paintings of blow jobs, spitting videos, and angry mermaids....

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