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If I Do Nothing Nothing Does

Curated by Matt McAuliffe

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The last line of Jack Kerouac's "Mexican Loneliness" finds him in state of mutual active-inaction. Loss swallows every movement and action but the active choice to do nothing retains the potential to do anything or for anything to happen endlessly.

In a similar way the artists participating in *If I Do Nothing Nothing Does* access the tropes and potential of performance. The end game of these "performances" isn't limited to the presence of the artist. These artists empty out the performance to be an inclusive gesture rather than an exclusive one allowing the focus of the performance to be questioned; the order of agent, catalyst and viewer to be reworked. This scenario is played out by the contributors in found object, video, photography and documented intervention.

Benjamin Bellas' work exists in a blurring of personal narrative with abstraction. Elusive references to the pieces, written by Bellas are typically presented on wall placards or gallery notes as a type of tone poem of the event. These writings underpin Bellas' work with both an elusive and ephemeral quality. The work submitted here is a video made in a hotel. Bellas set the floor lamp to signal the last French naval transmission of Morse code before its cessation, from the inside of a hotel room. "Calling all. This is our last cry before our eternal silence."

The French artist Sophie Calle's work includes photography, narrative and objects that challenge the boundary of fact/fiction, public/private, and subject/object. In her work she has been a "fictional" character in a Paul Auster novel, a chambermaid for a hotel, and the subject of surveillance. The last of these projects was enacted by her mother at Sophie's request. The collaborative nature with her mother, Rachel Monique, is present in the piece shown here. "*Ne vous faites pas de souci*" ("don't worry"), the last words her mother spoke before dying become a haunting elegy in the hands of Sophie Calle. Here, the last word of the sentence becomes a visual meditation on life and death existing as a visual exploration of the last word, *Souci* (worry).

The work of Norse artist Matias Faldbakken draws influence from the past radical movements of Punk, Dada, and the Situationists. The antagonistic qualities they lend him merge with a cool conceptual framework to create a potent space where neither can fully exist. In his piece *Newspaper Ad # 12 (Billboard)* Faldbakken references the interventionist strategies of these groups without altering any of the content of the newspaper. Through showing the text from the back and emphasizing the margins of the ads, the limits of the newspaper's ability to provide content is brought to the fore, placing a strain on the relationship between language and the cultural framework in which it is consumed.

Joe Smith's contribution to the show is an untitled work that is a remnant of a performance without fully leaving the performance behind. The work, a sheet of butcher's paper with the lipstick residue of kisses, was collected from a pre-pubescent dance performance where, in lieu of the dance troupe signing any type of banner, the instructors invited the dancers to kiss the paper as their signature. Smith's collection and focus of the ambient darkness inherent in the everyday is heightened by the dislocation of the event from the mark. While the context is shifted, it also retains the trace of the performance as the varying sizes of lips are obviously not Smith's.

This movement in the public world and focus on the “non-performer” is echoed in Andy Kaufman’s work. The piece shown here is one of several of his performances on *The Midnight Special*. The song is a repetition of the words “I trusted you” over a two chord vamp with the only variations being Kaufman’s intonation, volume, and overall delivery of the phrase. What Kaufman’s contemporary Mike Smith has referred to as an “endurance performance” is showing Kaufman acting as both agent and participant of the performance using *détournement* strategies on the medium of popular music to engage the audience and make their reactions and interaction with music and Kaufman to be of equal interest to the spectacle Kaufman presents.