

Free Your Aesthetics

by Charlie Schultz

The Brown Bear: Neither Particular, Nor General

Recess Activities, Inc.

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Oscar Wilde famously said that it is only shallow people who don't judge by appearances. If he was wrong why would dress codes exist? The fact is we all know this, how we *look* is for many the crux of expressing who we are. We read people's choices of hats, haircuts, shoes, etc. as a kind of visual language, a code that reveals some qualities of their wearer's personal identity. We do this naturally, almost without thinking, which is why it's important to acknowledge it.

In their first collaborative work together the artists A.K. Burns and Katherine Hubbard have created "The Brown Bear: Neither Particular, Nor General" as a way of initiating a dialogue that addresses identity issues in the queer community. Drawing from their own personal backgrounds they've transformed the Recess space into a combination hair salon and zine archive, complete with an old school Xerox machine. If you feel inclined to copy something you like, a piece of literature or a picture, the machine is there for you.

In art historical terms "The Brown Bear" functions as a kind of social sculpture, an updated form of relational aesthetics whose focus is less on community activism than the liberation of personal aesthetics. At a fundamental level Burns and Hubbard are addressing the psychology of desire as it operates within body politics. There is a lot of conversation that gets generated, though the central question seems to be this, what are we talking about when we talk about how we *look*?

Even the act of looking is challenged. Every Saturday the Burns and Hubbard invite a performance artist to respond to the question "how does it look" (*it* being the queer experience). None respond visually. This past Saturday the artist MPA executed an all day audio piece that displaced sound in the gallery. What's more is there are no mirrors in the salon. Those who sit for a cut have to trust the artists, who work together and treat the process with the seriousness of two sculptors.

The whole process is a generative one. The artists have decided not to clean up too much, to allow the archive to expand, and to keep traces of each Saturday performance. Consequentially the artwork becomes an ongoing work in progress, constantly building momentum. Like language itself there is no beginning or end, but a sense of infinite possibility. It's the idea that anything can be said, if you have the words to say it.

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