

it only has to work once

Gavin Bunner, Bill Conger, Benjamin Gardner, Rebecca Grady, Ashley Morgan, Michael Sirianni, and Nicholas Wylie

curated by Adam Farcus

*Shot through the heart,
And you're to blame
You give love a bad name
I play my part, and you play your game
You give love a bad name.
You give love a bad name.*
-John Bon Jovi

In the arts, romantic love is often steeped in mystique and excess. We can thank romantic comedies, the greeting card industry, and Western standards of modesty for the eye-rolling, cringe factor associated with "the L word". Encircled and ensnared by clichés – puppy love, gushy love, love is forever, and star-crossed lovers – we are forcefully directed to a saccharine-infuse (and frequently feminized) definition of love. Furthermore, portrayals of romantic love in movies and novels are frequently used to pull disingenuously at our heartstrings. The issue at hand is not these sentiments themselves, but the way they are used in service of other (often commercial) agendas that give love a bad rap.

What does our disdain for love say about our outlook on this subject? Why can't we allow love to be a positive and joyous feeling? In "it only has to work once," seven artists take these questions to heart to examine love's problematics and promise. The goal of this exhibition is to dispel cynical notions of love by presenting the subject in surprisingly honest and sincere ways. The works presented here argue that tenderness has the capacity to speak to people and that representations of love need not be ironic or manipulative. As a whole the works in this exhibition critique these platitudes while simultaneously embracing what they are.

Referencing subject matter as diverse as comic strips, pornography, medical conditions, rap songs, and pop icons each artist in the exhibition addresses love in specific and individual ways, ranging from smitten romance, to nostalgic longing, to the endless search for "the one."

Ashley Morgan's proposed piece, *Weep* asks the viewer to contemplate the domestic space as a frame within which romantic tribulations play out. Her use of a window as a synecdochical reference to a house emphasizes the connection between notions of home and loss. The window here is reworked to exceed its conventional architectural use, assigning an objecthood to damaged love, as well as emotional pain and remembrance within viewers themselves.

Bill Conger presents two modest pieces: *coming cold*, a fallen and extinguished candle on a nondescript make-shift table, and *more than ever when it can't be*, a strawberry simply left to rot on the wall. These pieces connect entropy and decay to the human feeling of lost love through worn, sad objects informed by poetic, anthropomorphic titles.

In Michael Sirianni's *I'm not a Player, I just Crush a Lot* a disembodied two-player button from an arcade machine is transformed into a cute, humble, and personally honest gesture. The title of Sirianni's piece references rap artist Big Punisher's song titled, "Still Not a Player." This pop culture allusion gives *I'm not a Player* a humorous and surprisingly charming interpretation.

Rebecca Grady's *Sentimental Sculptures* document and display personal effects mailed to the artist by friends and lovers. The titles: *JN*, *AN*, and *EE* (presumably initials of the senders), show that Grady wishes to withhold the senders' full names and keep these people in a secret place. These pieces speak to the thought, emotion, and history endowed in objects through a nostalgic and personal connection. Through their intimate scale, each sculpture becomes a petite monument to the important private bonds that motivate sending such packages.

Nicholas Wylie's piece consists of quick charcoal drawings of sixteen different men's crotches. The title of the series, *Sixteen Men That I Would Marry Drawn For as Long as They Lasted*, references the amount of time a given man could keep an erection while he watched pornography. Referencing Andy Warhol and Bridget Berlin's *Cock Book*, Wylie's interpretation recasts anonymity as one individual's sad longing and searching for "the right one."

empty plates; full hearts; cosmology and us; phosphate of calcium, binding; and between sheets by Benjamin Gardner read as stanzas to an idiosyncratic and deeply personal poem. His works speak of love in a whole-heartedly and honestly open way. They address our preconceived notions of romantic excess as exemplified by hand-written text from the given pieces: "they shall be shared, our lives" and "right for us."

Gavin Bunner attends to the idea of romantic love in this selection of small drawings from his *Hatercolors* series. As a whole, the drawings range from juvenile humor, in *Rodger I'm Leaving You* and *Flowers for an Ass*, to sincere and often dead-pan juxtapositions, in *Animating the Inanimate through Comparison* and *Roadmaster*. The love illustrated in these works are awkward and funny; almost a "Calvin and Hobbs" view of romance. Bunner simultaneously critiques the disdain of romantic sentiments while embracing the visual and comical language of humor to further deepen his viewers' understanding of the subject.

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