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Sadness Reigns with Ucci

An exhibition whose sound transcends personal emotion

By Janet Bellotto

Emotions have become a commodity in culture as much as any collectable accessory. In Kartz Ucci's exhibition sad but true, at the Red Head Gallery, the audience is faced with a site to contemplate and an atmosphere to measure happiness and sadness.

Ucci is a Toronto artist who grew up in Northern Ontario, she is currently an Assistant Professor, CLA, at York University and now lives in a condo. The kind of things done when one grows up, traditionally.

This artist's work is far from being merely traditional, but maintains and fully brings forth an idea that you walk away with mesmerized. She has taken something from the everyday, and researched it, which naturally progressed into this exhibition. Happiness and sadness have become tangible things to grasp in a consumer culture. It is such a culture that has moved into the vortex of instant messaging, peer-to-peer server sharing - sites for desire and romantic wanderings as well as mass dissemination of information while by-passing the corporate strong hold. It is this space that Ucci went to meditate on happiness - and has surfaced with a conflict between two states: emotion and nothingness.

A white leather lounge chair sits beside a record player - a picture cut out from some design magazine. However, the sound that is coming out of the vinyl etched LP is concretely "sad" but good.

This audio piece "368 songs with the word sad in the title mixed into one song" is exactly that and more. Ucci downloaded 368 songs using a gnutella server system where users can share information. Using a meticulous mixing process of layered channels resulted in Side A of 8:02 minutes and the extended mix on Side B totaling 13:09 minutes.

The first minute lounging in the gallery, the sound is immediately abstract and of an experimental genre. Yet, the noise is melodic. It slowly changes from a short wave

radio sound to some clarity: a crescendo at its peak that just ends.

The artist has successfully depersonalized the personal. While feeling at home in the minimalist corner, the sign of text peeping beyond a pillar, "NO", brings us back to reality. The vinyl text "NO trespassing, sitting, eating, shitting, dog shitting, drinking, smoking GET THE F*** OFF MY DRIVEWAY" came from a sign in a back alley observed from a condo. This sign has created a boundary, and that boundary transcends our continual quantifying of space - be it real or fictional.

"Happiness or sadness is in the zeitgeist," says Ucci. It is also what has followed in Canadian cultural production after a year of war, repercussions of 9/11, the local SARS epidemic, West Nile, etc. This is clearly evident as seen in the Toronto Film Festival like Guy Maddin's "The Saddest Music in the World" or Deny Arcand's The Barbarian Invasions.

In addition to the LP and vinyl text on the wall are two works on paper. In one paper work all 368 titles of each song used for the LP are configured into a spiral. The second paper work contains a seemingly continuous sentence, organized in a small rectangle, begins with "i remember when..."to immediately begin again and again with "i remember when..." never ceasing to recount numerous moments where the everyday appear different from the present. Together these works on paper ground the rigorous nature adherent in the artist's process.

The arrangement of Ucci's three works in the exhibition is like concrete poetry: it signifies a meaning and has taken a word, like a painter with his brush, and creates an intricate interchange of meanings. It suggests her medium of the word where Ucci takes "sad" and shears away its dishonesty. Now again, the experience of sad, of sad but true, is essentially part of our everyday that we've forgotten and threw away with the bath water.

Sad but true bonds together a good record and some great lines, where Ucci has tapped into a surging reservoir of thought provoking emotions. Through replication and multiplication the artist's exhibition continues her meditation between grounds: narrative and poetics; landscape and site; keepsake and trophy.

Sad but true runs until September 28, at the Red Head Gallery located at 401 Richmond Street West. For more information visit www.redheadgallery.com or call 416.504.5654.

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