

Art and Cake, May 25, 2017

Brian Bress, *In Lieu of Flowers Send Memes*
Cherry and Martin
April 29 - June 17, 2017
By Jody Zellen



Brian Bress plays with forms and formats—connecting photography to performance to video to sculpture. He is best known for his flat screen monitor works displaying filmed performances which he has been exhibiting since early 2000. These looping videos are unexpected and never predictable. Donning costumes, Bress looks directly at the viewer/camera from behind the screen and often begins to attack the picture plane with a paint brush or a jigsaw. In his current exhibition titled *In Lieu of Flowers Send Memes* he continues his investigations between the still and moving image, as well as the relationship between the two and three dimensional picture planes. A meme according to Wikipedia is “a humorous image, video or text that is copied and spread rapidly over the internet.” Bress’ intention here, is to examine how digital messages and information are transformed, transcribed, communicated and even mis-communicated.

On view in *In Lieu of Flowers Send Memes*, Bress presents four new video works, five sculptures and one digital print. The digital print, *Woman with Plant* (all works 2017) feels like a moment culled from a larger continuum. The image appears to flatten the layers within Bress’ video work into a single plane. It is a satisfying encapsulation.

Looking (for Josef Albers), the most complex piece in the exhibition, is a high definition dual channel video presented on two flatscreen monitors that have been embedded into a black linen

panel decorated with a careful arrangement of appropriated images of statues, pottery and other relics. The composition—a frame within a frame—hence the reference to Albers, ultimately becomes a series of concentric rectangles created over a 15 minute duration before the viewer's eyes. Dressed in a yellow mask and jumpsuit printed with images similar to those on the exterior panel and the filmed interior blue wall, Bress begins to cut away the blue wall with a hand-held jigsaw revealing a similarly decorated yellow facade. As he moves through the composition, his yellow box-shaped mask and printed jumpsuit fuse with the yellow background creating the illusion of a seamless surface— the only difference being a set of googly eyes in the middle of the mask.

The three other video works—*Rickybird* (mint, hot pink), *Members Only* (wintergreen) and *Still Life* (orange to blue)—are more formal investigations that track the changes in color as a masked figure slowly rotates within the frame in front of a constructed three-dimensional abstraction. The figures becomes akin to a living sculpture that reflects these changes over time.

In past exhibitions, Bress has not put his prop on display. Here both the background forms and the masks that appear in three cycling color video works are on view. Devoid of color, they become object objects placed on circular pedestals or hung on the wall. Viewers can walk around and view them up close, noting how their construction directs the play of light and shadow in the videos. These objects are more interesting as costumes, than stand alone sculptures and resonate more vibrantly within rather than outside the frame. Bress comments, “My last shows have been about the picture plane and touching that surface. This show is about the relation between sculpture and video, the play of light, and using form in that space rather than flattening the space out ... Here I tried to turn my body into the sculpture, and found that my body was extruding form.” Although *Rickybird* (mint, hot pink), *Members Only* (wintergreen) and *Still Life* (orange to blue) support these ideas, in comparison they are less satisfying to view than the works that are visual illusions like *Looking* (for Josef Albers).

Bress is an inventive artist whose works fuse myriad mediums—performance, painting, sculpture, photography and video, while simultaneously referencing different art movements, be it art deco, futurism, or the works of Joseph Albers. As he continues to dissolve boundaries that separate disciplines, his pieces confront and confound viewers in exciting and unexpected ways.

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