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Judy Fiskin

I was an iPhone Addict

Richard Telles Fine Art

January 13 - February 24, 2018

By Jody Zellen



For many years Judy Fiskin documented Los Angeles' surroundings by making small-scale black and white photographs. These images of dingbat style apartment buildings, desert plants, military architecture and works of art were often shot in a straightforward style and presented centered on the photographic paper surrounded by an irregular black border. These images of interior and exterior locations were often tightly cropped and presented as fragments. Late in the 1990s, due to illness, Fiskin stopped photographing and began making videos. Her videos are idiosyncratic first person narratives that describe her surroundings, impressions and creative metamorphosis from photographer to filmmaker. They are thoughtful, diaristic and personal meditations on art and aging. Rather than frame isolated buildings or objects as she did with her photographs, Fiskin's approach to video was to script observations. The works are conversational and open ended, raw, humorous and often ironically to the point.

While photographs are usually presented in a linear fashion or as a grid on a gallery wall, video demands a different commitment from the viewer. Fiskin has shown her videos as projections in darkened rooms as well as on monitors. At Richard Telles Fine Art, she presents a minimal installation with four wall-based flat screen monitors and four simple chairs. The monitors are touch screens so the viewer can start and stop the player and watch the work from the beginning rather than entering the narrative mid-stream. Two of the monitors display Fiskin's latest work, *I Was an iPhone Addict* and on the other two, viewers can choose from a selection of Fiskin's older works making the exhibition a kind of video retrospective.

In *I Was an iPhone Addict*, Fiskin is both the protagonist and the narrator. As usual, she is unabashed in stating what she thinks and how she feels. In this particular video, she describes her initial hesitation to make photographs with her iPhone. The footage unfolds as a series of stills, colorful images of her neighborhood taken on daily walks containing trees, reflections, windows and uncanny juxtapositions that only appear when framing the world with a camera. Many of the photographs are shot looking down at the ground and contain Fiskin's feet, attesting to the casual nature of iPhone photography, as well as the numerous mystery images that somehow just appear without the photographer realizing or remembering the shot.

And this is Fiskin's point, while on one hand she compares some of her photographs to those of noted photographers Lee Friedlander and William Eggleston, she also is befuddled by the quantity of images she is suddenly making — as no film, development or printing is involved— and the ease of cell phone photography. Soon it becomes an addiction and she has joined the ranks of those who always have a phone in hand. But Fiskin has never been one to take things at face value so she questions and ruminates about whether these images are 'art,' wondering if it is her or the device that is responsible for them. Are the self-imposed rules of a true photographer abandoned — the process of editing and selectivity— in the quest to document everything.

Fiskin's self-reflective video speaks about the nature of photography and her artistic quandary to accept making art with this new device. In the end, she uses her daily photographs to question the ease of the medium and the process itself, presenting her images within the narrative but not as stand-alone art objects.

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