

***Having a Coke
With You:
Claire Loder,
Kim Westfall,
Chantal Wnuk,
& Nihura***

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Curated by Angella d'Avignon

Helmuth Projects

October 11th-October 25th, 2014

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Claire Loder *I'm in here somewhere*
18.5 x 11 x 6" grogged white clay, underglaze, slip glaze 2013

You Suddenly Wonder

Junior Clemons

What is there for me to say about Frank O'Hara that you haven't already found out for yourself or imagined into existence? Nothing maybe. I first read O'Hara a bit after I first read Kerouac, I think. I don't spend much time thinking about Kerouac (I don't find him useful as a model or influence—which isn't to say that I have set up this binary where things are either "useful" or "not useful" but just that's why I think that I don't think about Kerouac. Though I have been known to defend him depending on the circumstance) but this is definitely not about that.

My first encounter with O'Hara must have been shortly before I left for college. I had recently started writing poetry but wasn't really reading anything, which I think is the worst thing a writer can do. Well, not actually the worst thing but still shameful. After two and a half years of frowning in class I changed my major from Political Studies to English & World Literature, I continued frowning, and started sleeping with a copy of Frank O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto" underneath my pillow.

I had rediscovered O'Hara thanks to a couple of poetry workshops I had taken and was reading everything I could get my hands on. I found Personism to be a revelation. In it Frank O'Hara seemed to present a kind of way of being a poet (and maybe other sorts of artist too) that I had been longing for: "I'm not saying that I don't have practically the most lofty ideas of anyone writing today, but what difference does that make? They're just ideas." and "But how then can you really care if anybody gets it, or gets what it means, or if it improves them. Improves them for what? For death? Why hurry them along?" Ugh, how stupid great is that? And what chance did I have against Frank O'Hara shrugging his shoulders and saying you should write and "just let all the different bodies fall where they may". None I think.

On one hand sleeping with Personism beneath my pillow didn't change anything—I just wanted to feel as if I was committing to something completely and this was the deal I struck: "I will sleep with this under my pillow and I'll become the sort of person that thinks the way that this is written." But on the other hand it changed everything because I wanted to justify sleeping with it underneath my pillow and so the more I read O'Hara and other people the more I did become the sort of person that thought the way that Personism was written—or maybe the sort of person that could understand why someone would write what was written or why they would write what they wrote the way they did.

A few years ago some stiff, and highly educated I'm sure, old man while negatively critiquing a book of poetry for the New York Times made a distinction between poets that are interested in the world and poets that are interested in how we talk about the world. What this stiff old highly educated man was attempting to convey was that writing about the world was 'holy' or 'good' or 'authentic' while writing about or being interested in how we talk about the world was 'earthly' and 'bad' and to be written about derisively (I don't recall him sharing what he thought about people who write about people who write about how we talk about the world).

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Kim Westfall *Homewrecker*
18x24" on canvas 2014



Kim Westfall *Flames Comin' Up*
11x14" on paper 2013

There was a moment after I read the article where I asked the person I was dating at the time what they thought of the distinction. They smiled and then they said, "You are definitely in the 'write about how we talk about the world' camp." I agreed. Strongly. Part of why agreed so strongly was that so many of my poems were just about how me and this person talked to each other, talked to others, and talked about the world.

It was and it is incomprehensible to think that someone would argue that these weren't worthwhile things to write about. And not because what we had was some kind of amazing love for the ages. We were in love, I think, and then we weren't, I know. But because what else is there? Well, there are mountains, and being in a car with the window down, and so many parks, and there are also wild flowers, and the ocean, and a cool night breeze pairing with the dim glow of most street lights—and all of those things are great. But there is something special when they are shared or when they help make up the background or border or periphery of a moment between two persons or many moments between many persons or a moment where it's just you but you're thinking of such a person or when they are in the foreground and the persons are in the distance, that works too.

I guess that's all I really have to say about Frank O'Hara. ■