



Main Space

2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
Tuesday - Saturday 12-6
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The Archivists

Curated by Cameron Lee

Melissa Fisher, Felix Kalmenson, and Zoe Solomon

February 1 - February 23, 2013

Archives are “the secretions of an organism”
-V.H. Galbraith [1].

An archive is a collection, and the exhibition titled *The Archivists* is a collection of artists: Melissa Fisher, Felix Kalmenson and Zoe Solomon. Each work included in the exhibition reflects the functional practices of the respective artists' interactions in the world, without a direct intention or message. Each artists' work is a document of the artists doing their daily activities and rituals: Solomon's regular visits to the Toronto Public Library are recorded in her withdrawal slips, Kalmenson collects conflicting editorial articles from various online newspapers and Fisher recycles found materials collected from construction sites, housecleaning and shopping trips. Each work is a collection materials, sources and texts, as an ongoing process for observation, contemplation and feeling.

In *Date Due*, Solomon compulsively saves her library withdrawal slips, which list the various books and videos she has taken out of the library dating from March 28, 2011 to the present. This collection is an on-going portrait of Solomon, and her relationship with the Toronto Public Library. The withdrawal slips vary in length and content, documenting Solomon's state of mind at the time of each visit, ranging from books about the digestive system, to seasons of the television show *Friends*. The slips are hung with magnets in a line on a metal bar, resembling the food order line in a restaurant kitchen. In fact, Solomon was employed as a line cook in 2012, evident in the repeated withdrawals of food related material. *Date Due* suggests an attempt at creating order and harmony within all aspects of Solomon's life through a compulsive structuring and record of her library habits.

According to the artist, her relationship to the Toronto Public Library is that of a sanctuary: “I go there often when I am feeling stressed about something going on in my life, or if I'm feeling like something is out of my control.” Solomon's collection of her withdrawals is the introduction to her own, on-going personal narrative. Solomon declares “I find it empowering to be able to inform and educate myself about different issues, it's helpful to read about people going through similar things and how it has affected them, or how they got through it.” We get an impression of what Solomon's issues might be from *Date Due*, but the exact details of that are for Solomon's own self-understanding and experience. This collection forms an on-going narrative or documentary portrait of the artist as researcher, within the rational organization of the Library's Dewey Decimal System. The artist inserts herself within this system, by creating her own collected archive, linking texts and sources through her subjective, compulsive interest.

Kalmenson's computer installation *Conversations* documents hourly the news headlines of 24 sources worldwide. The installation reflects an increasing subjectivity within the seemingly objective intentions of news journalism. Kalmenson's work is a technical collaboration with Daniel Thornhill, using custom software connecting internet sourced daily newspaper editorials, printed through a dot matrix printer on a looped surface of printer paper. The structure Kalmenson built to house it looks like a cross between a loom and a newspaper printing press. The buzzing sound the printer emits reminds me of a siren, or of political drama films from my childhood. The sources being printed range from The Guardian to Al Jazeera, with the proceeding sets of varied texts overlapping the previous on a single surface. This work is a palimpsest in the literal sense: “a manuscript on which an earlier text has been effaced and the vellum or parchment reused for another.” [2] This layered text renders the pointed content of each article as a singular, conflicted band of visual noise. Articles promoting America's Second Amendment (the Right to Bear Arms) become interlaced with text



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criticizing recent actions by the Israeli Armed Forces, for example. According to Kalmenson, *Conversations* documents the:

state of political discourse which has become in recent years increasingly polarized, radicalized, and uncompromising. Furthermore, with the expanded access to user-generated media that new social networking and online media platforms afford there is an increasing amount of audible voices in debates surrounding issues from politics to gardening. The result in many cases ends in incomprehensible screaming matches between ideologues, muddling issues and tending towards personal attacks.

Conversations asks the audience to decipher not only the origins of the source material, buried in text and images, but to also organize our own position in relationship to these fragments of information. Kalmenson's work demonstrates the anxiety within deconstructionist theory, explained by Christopher Brown and Greig E. Henderson state that within any text "every term can be read referentially or rhetorically, the reader is unable to arrive at any ultimate decision." [3]. Kalmenson's concern is not with the overwhelming abundance of information available on the Internet, but how that information is disseminated and acted upon by a receiving audience. *Conversations* is a reminder to take the subjectivities inherent to news media with a grain of salt, take in the information buried in subjective rhetoric, and glean from that to form our own critical positions based on the consistencies in each news story.

Finally, Fisher's series of symmetrical site-specific installations are placed in the negative spaces of the gallery surrounding Solomon and Kalmenson's respective works. Fisher's work for *The Archivists* contains collected materials from her ever-growing, self-described 'database of props', accumulated and stored in her studio. Fisher's use of materials focuses on a relationship to feelings and memories the objects invoke, rather than their intended function. Formal aspects of objects like black string direct Fisher's intuitive process, where objective and subjective observations interact, as Fisher describes in "the idea of realities, and our ability to experience, negotiate, and make sense of them in multitudes of different ways (dual subjective reality)." Fisher's process is ritualized cycle of collection, contemplation and then an integration of materials into composed whole installations. Each object, colour and material she chooses to include in this installation is based on an archive of hoarded stuff; Fisher's process is one of repetition and ritualized meditation. In conversation with Fisher, she notes the action of making is crucial to understanding her work. Fisher's installations form compositions drawn from memories of previous installations seen in repeated and repeating visual motifs (grids, symmetry, reflective surfaces) creating a visual trance. Fisher often documents these installations, using photography to both archive an installation, and use the document itself as a source to generate more work, by printing these images repeatedly on fabric. These prints are stand alone works and material to be included in future installations. Fisher's collection of materials, ranging from a clear plastic tablecloth to a neon-orange and yellow slinky, is an archive of her experiences and interactions within the world. The objects on their own do not convey these experiences, but it is their placement, taken out of recognizable context, that forms Fisher's structured subjectivity.

In Kalmenson's *Conversations*, an abundance of information is presented as constantly available, daunting and endlessly conflicted in political discussion. Solomon's *Date Due* represents an internalization of that conflict, where the overwhelming-ness of the world is taken in with manageable bites. Solomon's ritual of library visits and withdrawals is an on-going journey of self-reflection. Fisher offers the audience a place of calm. On one wall, Fisher hung a framed black and white found photo of velour-upholstered theatre seats, an ideal and comforting space to imagine and remember being in.

-Cameron Lee

[1] Galbraith, V.H. (1948). *Studies in the Public Records*, London.

[2] Keep, Christopher, Tim McLaughlin, Robin Parmar. (1993-2000). *Palimpsest, The Electronic Labyrinth*, <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hf10243.html>

[3] Brown, Christopher, Greig E. Henderson. (1997). *Deconstruction, Glossary of Literary Theory*, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Deconstruction.html>.