

Excerpts from the catalogue

p. 9 & 10

Margot Norton :

*"Construct Criticism: Artists Subvert
Constructed codes in the Dating Praxis"*

p. 19-24

Emma Braso

"Art of Profit in the Culture of Dating"



The Dating Show



Margot Norton, Dan Lears & Emma Braso

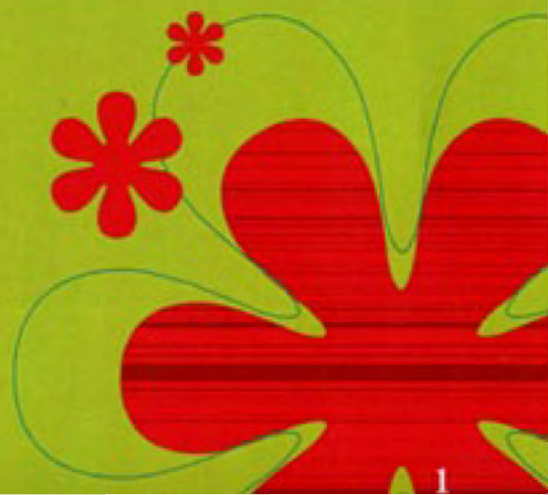


February 9th – March 22nd, 2007 | The Gallery at 3rd Ward, New York

able of e on tent s ta bl e of con t e r t s ta bl e of e o n tents t ab le of e on tent s ta bl e

table of contents

- 3 ✿ Acknowledgements,
- 4 § Editorial Statement
- 5-11 ✿ **Construct Criticism; Artists Subvert Constructed Codes in the Dating Praxis**
By Margot Norton
- 12-18 ✿ **Targeting Audiences: Artists as Advertisers**
By Dan Leers
- 19-24 ✿ **Art and Profit in the Culture of Dating**
By Emma Bresó
- 26-30 ✿ **DO IT for 11 Dalie pieces** by Christopher Patch, Anna Crayemft. Chema Castelló, Matt Keetan, and Discoteca Fleming Star
- 31-32 ✿ Checklist
- 33 ✿ List of Donors



(or user) is ¹ invited to reflect upon personal experience and become part of a global community coping with romantic pain.

Krauss, Rosalind E. "A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999, p. 7.

Fried, Michael, "Art and Objecthood," in Fried, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, 1968, pp.116-147.


Buckland, p. 2.

Bordowitz, Gregg, "The Aids Crisis is Ridiculous (In Memory of Craig Owens)," in Bordowitz, *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings 1986-2003*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2004, p. 49.

Levin's inter-media approach to art-making, utilizing the new interdependency of graphic design and the Internet as a vehicle for his interactive piece, is symptomatic of what Rosalind Krauss refers to as the "post-medium condition." Works operating in this condition, placed chronologically by Krauss at "the rise of a critical post-modernism (institutional critique, site-specificity)," function according to what Michael Fried disparagingly called "theatricality." In his essay "Art and Objecthood," Fried attacked this "new art" (in this case, minimalism) for fostering a relation between viewer and work and privileging experience, in contrast to modernist painting and sculpture that "hold as shape" and privilege "presence" (or timelessness). This new art is site-specific instead of medium-specific and calls for the viewer to actively engage with the piece.

Like Golan Levin, many artists in *The Dating Show* continue the post-medium interdisciplinary approach to art championed by minimal and conceptual art. Aaron Krach's *Dancefloor* (2005), playfully references Carl Andre's signature minimalist floor pieces, which often made use of reflective materials for the floor's tiles. The use of reflective materials in art making is decidedly "theatrical" in Fried's sense of the word, for these materials cannot help but reflect the viewer and environment, precipitating a relationship between subject and object. Krach's piece privileges experience, encouraging the viewers to reflect on how the dance floor has affected their personal lives in addition to offering a literal reflection of the viewers. *Dancefloor* also engages in social and political critique in that the dance floor can be perceived as a politically charged arena, an historic locale for the effects of discrimination—from segregated white/black dancehalls to underground gay clubs. The work acts as an iconic image for the gay community in particular, as it represents the social space of "queer world-making through its physicality and through its embodiment of experience, identity and community." This community created by the dance floor has been referenced in queer theory as a factor for fighting oppression. The dance floor is site-specific in that it exists wherever it is made or wherever someone is dancing.

Nadine Norman has also created a site-specific piece that, like other works in *The Dating Show*, concerns the everyday societal interactions that underpin conventional codes of behavior in contemporary society. Norman's interactive multimedia project, *I am available and you?* (2002/03), invites viewers to assume roles of on-line applicants for the privilege of meeting the artist, who has made herself "available". In turn, the artist in various guises plays the dual role of the sought-after and the relationship-seeker, with advertising-inspired images of herself on her website, iamavailableandyou.com. In the post-modern/post-medium fashion, Norman's piece makes use of diverse media (website, performance, photography, video and installation) in order to disrupt the conventional relationship between object and subject. Through media-inspired images and text using direct address ("I" am available and "you"?), Norman advertises herself as a commodity, and encourages the viewer to reflect on the seemingly-innocent images of women in commercial and personal advertising.




Lacan, Jacques, as quoted in Linker, Kate, "Representation and Sexuality", in Wallis, Brian, *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. New York and Boston: The New Museum for Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1984.

Love for Sale: The words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger, text by Kate Linker, New York: Abrams, 1998, p. 59.

Love for Sale, p. 62.

In this work, Norman taps into the rich art historical vein of feminism, by critiquing representations of women. Images of woman as a sign provided key subject matter for many feminist critics and artists, who looked to recent findings in psychoanalytic theory attributing gender difference to a construction of societal standards, reinforced by representational signs. Psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan is famously quoted by feminists for saying, "images and symbols for the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols of the woman...It is representation, the representation of feminine sexuality...which conditions how it comes into play." Here, Lacan suggests that woman's conventional role in society is directly related to images of woman that conform to these constructed codes. Therefore, sexual difference (masculinity and femininity) came to be seen by feminists in the 1980s as a product of societal standards, a social construction instead of being entirely determined by biology.

Works by feminist artists such as Barbara Kruger's composed textual images of the early 1980s, showcase conventional images of women in order to reveal established codes in representing gender. Like Barbara Kruger's work, Norman uses direct address through the pronoun "you" in order to define the relationship to the one who is looking (masculine viewer) and the one who is being looked at (feminine subject). Also like Kruger, Norman shifts the roles inherent in this subject/object relationship through this method of direct address, where the image is speaking directly to the viewer. In doing so, Norman calls into question the violence associated with representation along the virtual battle-lines of the dating effort, evoking the vulnerability inherent in contemporary courtship.



Another Dating Show artist who uses the personal ad to draw attention to and critique gender roles is Petra Valentova. In *Searching for the Sámi COOKBOOK* (2005), Valentova combines the use of the Internet with a site-specific performance, resulting in an installation that focuses on the conventions and limitations inherent in the search for an ideal mate. Like many other contemporary date-seekers, Valentova placed an ad on the Internet and specified her ideal date's gender and ethnicity—a man of Sámi origin (referring to the Sámi people of Lapland). Mixing a traditional element with this new medium for matchmaking, Valentova asked the potential dates to provide her with a recipe for a dish they had enjoyed in the past. Her resulting artwork documents the dates she experienced with these men and the recipes they provided.

Nochlin, Linda, "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art," in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*. Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, UK: Westview Press, 1988, pp. 136-144.

Searching for the Sámi/COOKBOOK uses the suggestive power of food to undermine traditional gender role constructions in the dating praxis, such as the expectation that it is the male who pursues and initiates the relationship. Along the same lines of role reversal, Valentova realigns the traditional site of the dinner table, with her male suitors taking on the role of the "female" nurturer as the preparers of meals. Here, the new and the old are once again in conflict. Given the fast-moving speed of our everyday lives, the preparation of a traditional dish seems to be a vestige of earlier dating practice, where the female was once given a chance to prove her marriage-ability.

Art and Profit in the Culture of Dating

As things stand today, going on a date is not far from going on a job interview. In both cases your purpose is to sell yourself, while also evaluating your counterpart's offer. In considering internet dating, the similarities only increase. Browse through the variety of available candidates, submit your profile to the scrutiny of select suitors, and eagerly await their e-mailed response: is it a search for love or employment?

Dating websites try to make the connection between looking for a mate and finding a job even clearer. While Match.com explains how "forming a loving relationship is as easy as clicking on one of the millions of photos and personal ads available on line", another website gives advice on how to write an online personal ad: "Be clear about why you're posting. If the person reading your requirements doesn't fit them, they shouldn't waste their time reading further." And the height of effectiveness: "Describe yourself and let matchmaker.com find your ideal match before you even meet for the first time." If searching for love is a job, try to do it as efficiently as possible! Meanwhile, for these websites, dating has become a profitable business.

"Capital Gain. No Pain", reads one of the photographs that the artist Nadine Norman presents at *The Dating Show* as part of her multimedia project *I am available. And You?*

Publicity material
from the dating website
www.match.com

Quoted from
[http://dating.about.com/
od/navigatingsites/ht/
WritePersonalAd.htm](http://dating.about.com/od/navigatingsites/ht/WritePersonalAd.htm)

Quoted from
[http://dating.about.com/
od/onlinepersonal1/
Online_Dating_
Websites.htm](http://dating.about.com/od/onlinepersonal1/Online_Dating_Websites.htm)



www.iamavailableandyou.com

"Submit yourself", *I am available. And You?*, 2002/03 - Nadine Norman

Next to this typical phrase of banking advertising, a seated young woman looks into the camera, her image repeated in the laptop placed before her. Two other phrases give clear instructions to the viewer: "Submit yourself", and the website where you can do it: "www.iamavailableandyou.com".

Although the web-site is not accepting candidate's profiles anymore, it is still active and can be visited.



By reproducing some of the stereotypical language and images that appear in conventional dating websites, Norman created her satiric personal dating campaign –through photo-posters, short videos and an internet site– where she played the role of a woman available for interaction. Persons interested in meeting her had to fill in a questionnaire obtainable from the website . Then, once the candidate's answers and photographs were scrutinized by a marketing team, the ones selected could meet the artist/"available woman" at a weekly performance at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, where the project was first presented in 2002/03.

"Engaging: Curated Matchmaking" says the advertising card of Ilaria Bonacossa's and Ana Prvacki's artistic project of the same name. Bonacossa's and Prvacki's habitual presence in the lucrative circuit of international exhibitions and biennials made them aware of the difficulty to find an appropriate partner for those artists and curators, whose lifestyles require constant travel. Therefore, they decided to create a marriage bureau that by means of compatibility tests would help international artists and curators to form proper couples and matrimones between themselves. The proposal is straight forward: pay the fee, fill in the questionnaire, and, hopefully, find your ideal spouse. Although the similarity with the procedures of many dating websites is clear, Bonacossa and Prvacki are now applying such strategies to the art world itself, where the idea of engagement is more symbolic than literal.

Nicolas Bourriaud,
"Berlin Letter about
Relational Aesthetics",
p.48, in *From Studio to
Situation:
Contemporary Art and
the Question of Context*,
Claire Doherty (editor),
Black Dog Pub,
London, 2004.

Nicolas Bourriaud,
Relational Aesthetics
(Les Presses du Réel,
Dijon, 2002), p.25.

The appropriation by Norman, Bonacossa, and Prvacki –as by many other contemporary artists– of strategies that come straight from the dating industry, raises new questions about the ways in which art relates to its economic and social context. For the French critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, artists are aware and reacting to "the generalisation of supplier-customer relations to all levels of human existence." In his well-known text *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud goes on to defend that such attentive artists as Rikrit Tiravanija, Dominique González-Foerster, Pierre Huygue, Philippe Parreno, and Liam Gillick are capable of fighting the reification processes happening in our personal relations. But the critic also mentions the not-so-new role that numerous artists are taking today: no longer producers or conceivers of things, in the industrial sense, but rather providers of services. He explains, "In international exhibitions we have seen a growing number of stands offering a range of services, works proposing a precise contract to viewers, and more or less tangible models of sociability."

If, as Bourriaud asserts, relational art tries to overcome the commodifying course of human interactions, it does so by using formal procedures-offering services, contracts, and requests for personal commitment-that are constantly employed in modern-day economy.

Michael Hardt and
Antonio Negri,
"Postmodernization, or
the Informatization of
Production", in *Empire*,
(Harvard University
Press, Cambridge-
Massachusetts, 2000)
p.290.

"Immaterial labor" –defined as "labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication" – is today's main economic area. Immaterial labor also dominates the job market, and, concurrently, has transformed the ways in which work applicants are evaluated. In any selection process today, job seekers will be assessed not only on their technical capacities, but more importantly, on their intellectual, entrepreneurial and communications skills. The centrality of those

Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" in *Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics*, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996) p. 135.

Quoted from Iki Nakagawa's 3rd Take project invitation.

Ibid

departments called "of human resources" reveals to which extent the examination of a candidate's personality is a matter of concern for the employing company. As Maurizio Lazzarato discerningly explains in his analysis of immaterial labor, "Today's management thinking takes worker's subjectivity into consideration only in order to codify it in line with the requirements of production."

When creating a profile for a dating website, you are advised to highlight your interests and hobbies, your outgoingness, and social skills. Clearly, the same type of information can be of interest for a future employer. But differently than in a job selection process, no third-party reference letter is requested when you are composing an online dating profile. In Iki Nakagawa artistic project *3rd Take*, however, participants "interested in meeting new people to possibly date", are asked to provide the contact of three persons that will serve as their referees. Nakagawa will then interview those three "acquaintance, co-workers, and/or friends", and their responses will serve as the partaker's profile information. These verbal descriptions, along with video images recorded by the artist at several participants' meetings, will appear in a blog-site as well as in a video-both in the show. By including different points of views, rather than only auto-description, Nakagawa will, in all-probability, complicate the profile-viewing process with contradictory opinions.

All the art projects included in *The Dating Show* certainly deal with how personal relations function in a society driven by economy. Yet, how exactly is the transactional nature of human existence that contemporary artists supposedly attack particular to our times? More than ever, the mastery of the corporate economic model over our lives has made the subjugation of individuality for productivity an everyday situation. While the employee's subjectivity becomes a determinant factor in the profitability of a company, our personal relations are imbued with a businesslike mentality. The efficacy of all our relations is calculated and appreciated accordingly. As we are constantly reminded, we should make the most out of everything, including ourselves and those who surround us.

It is in part the belief that human societies can advance incessantly with the help of technology that has made the Internet absolutely central in the dating scene. This is not surprising when we compare the few chances that we have of meeting people outside the working environment to the nearly infinite opportunities that the Internet offers. The widespread conviction that it is necessary to turn to online dating services in the search for love reveals how we are generally persuaded by the idea that the easiest solution is also the best one: Too busy to look for love? Don't worry. Keep working and let the Internet find you the widest selection of people at your minimum expense!

Many projects in *The Dating Show* reflect this reality by using the Internet as a tool. Petra Valentova's multilayered project *In Search of the Sámi/COOKBOOK* shows how the Internet can be, in many occasions, the most plain and comprehensive resource to pursue a partner. Valentova moved from Prague to New York in 2003. As a foreigner, she had to learn to adapt herself to the surrounding social codes and behaviours, including dating procedures. Valentova's fascination with Sámi people, an indigenous group

Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" in *Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics*, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996) p. 135.

Quoted from Iki Nakagawa's 3rd Take project invitation.

Ibid

departments called "of human resources" reveals to which extent the examination of a candidate's personality is a matter of concern for the employing company. As Maurizio Lazzarato discerningly explains in his analysis of immaterial labor, "Today's management thinking takes worker's subjectivity into consideration only in order to codify it in line with the requirements of production."

When creating a profile for a dating website, you are advised to highlight your interests and hobbies, your outgoingness, and social skills. Clearly, the same type of information can be of interest for a future employer. But differently than in a job selection process, no third-party reference letter is requested when you are composing an online dating profile. In Iki Nakagawa artistic project *3rd Take*, however, participants "interested in meeting new people to possibly date", are asked to provide the contact of three persons that will serve as their referees. Nakagawa will then interview those three "acquaintance, co-workers, and/or friends", and their responses will serve as the partaker's profile information. These verbal descriptions, along with video images recorded by the artist at several participants' meetings, will appear in a blog-site as well as in a video-both in the show. By including different points of views, rather than only auto-description, Nakagawa will, in all-probability, complicate the profile-viewing process with contradictory opinions.

All the art projects included in *The Dating Show* certainly deal with how personal relations function in a society driven by economy. Yet, how exactly is the transactional nature of human existence that contemporary artists supposedly attack particular to our times? More than ever, the mastery of the corporate economic model over our lives has made the subjugation of individuality for productivity an everyday situation. While the employee's subjectivity becomes a determinant factor in the profitability of a company, our personal relations are imbued with a businesslike mentality. The efficacy of all our relations is calculated and appreciated accordingly. As we are constantly reminded, we should make the most out of everything, including ourselves and those who surround us.

It is in part the belief that human societies can advance incessantly with the help of technology that has made the Internet absolutely central in the dating scene. This is not surprising when we compare the few chances that we have of meeting people outside the working environment to the nearly infinite opportunities that the Internet offers. The widespread conviction that it is necessary to turn to online dating services in the search for love reveals how we are generally persuaded by the idea that the easiest solution is also the best one: Too busy to look for love? Don't worry. Keep working and let the Internet find you the widest selection of people at your minimum expense!

Many projects in *The Dating Show* reflect this reality by using the Internet as a tool. Petra Valentova's multilayered project *In Search of the Sámi/COOKBOOK* shows how the Internet can be, in many occasions, the most plain and comprehensive resource to pursue a partner. Valentova moved from Prague to New York in 2003. As a foreigner, she had to learn to adapt herself to the surrounding social codes and behaviours, including dating procedures. Valentova's fascination with Sámi people, an indigenous group



Valentova project also includes a gallery installation consisting on several painted panels, two tables, and four chairs that together suggest a dating environment.

from Lapland, motivated her search for a Sámi man to date. However, men from all types of backgrounds responded to the personal ad that she placed in the website community *Craigslist.org*. Valentova, nevertheless, went out on dates with several of them, and in exchange, requested the recipe for a traditional dish. In the publication *COOKBOOK*, photographs from her dates are included along with the recipes and pictures of the cooked food .



"Shrimp and Salsa", *COOKBOOK*, 2005 - Petra Valentova

Feuer's paintings are classified according to the composition of the original photographic: Busts (for close-ups), Manscapes (for pictures of men with different backgrounds), and Diptychs (photos where the arm or an ear of a previous girlfriend are visible).

The artist Leila Feuer also resorted to the Internet in the search for a companion. In her case, the prerequisite was that her date should be Jewish. Feuer created her profile in the expanding website *J-Date* (exclusive for Jewish people), and during several months examined the ways in which male candidates represented themselves through photographs. The result of her exploration was a large series of distorted black and white oil portraits abstracted from those photographs , and zero dates.

The not-so-dissimilar outcome of Valentova's and Feuer's projects uncovers the unexpected possibilities, as well as the substantial limitations, that these Internet dating methods imply. Valentova, who used an all-inclusive website like *Craigslist.org*, dated men that weren't Sámi –as she had explicitly demanded–, and when she finally met one, he turned out not to be the ideal partner she had imagined. Feuer, who turned to an ethnicity-based website, was unable to find a single desirable man to go out on date, although they all fulfilled the requirement of being Jewish.

Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996) p. 138.

The recent emergence of more and more specific websites seems to be in line with the efficiency model: if all the preferences and likings are represented, there is no need to go looking anywhere else. However, the apparent attempt to satisfy all possible dreams, might, in reality, be creating new desires rather than fulfilling existing ones. As with other services, the Internet "gives form to and materializes needs, the imaginary, consumer tastes, and so forth, and these products in turn become powerful producers of needs, images, and tastes." On top of that, the promise of personalized service is, on most occasions, accompanied by innumerable restrictions: sites for members-only, endless registration processes, and portals where your identity determines if you can connect or not. If the assumed goal of so many particular websites is to meet the variety of wishes of an ever more heterogeneous cyber-community, the after-effects are a multiplication of our consumable cravings, and a growing control over our personal information.

The ethical dilemma around the disclosure of personal information on the Internet is present in Ashley Neese's project *Say it isn't so*. In this piece, Neese brings together the photographs of the men who responded to her internet petition for a shopping escort after blocking out their eyes. Her ad, posted again on Craigslist's "women seeking men" section, received nearly 300 replies. Neese never told any of the respondents that all of this would become part of an art project, or that their pictures –although unrecognizable– would be exhibited at a gallery show.

As Neese, the artist Otto Berchem links the activity of dating to that of shopping. His project, *The Dating Market*, gives the opportunity for people to meet each other while doing their grocery shopping. In this public intervention, all those supermarket customers interested in participating should pick up one of the baskets designed by the artist, and in doing so label themselves as "available" for interaction. The accompanying poster reveals Berchem's awareness of the extreme pragmatism behind modern dating procedures. It reads:

- * *Single?*
- * *Looking for someone special?*
- * *No time to meet new people?*
- * *Grab your chance to meet someone while you're shopping!*
- * *Pick yourself a flower basket, and make it clear that a date is on your grocery list!*

In fact, the improbable checking-for-dates situation at the grocery stores that Berchem is trying to parody has lately become a new dating trend!



The Dating Market, 2000/07 - Otto Berchem

Berchem, Norman, Bonacossa, Prvacki, Nakagawa, Valentova, Feuer, and Neese are all reacting to the ways in which personal relations function in a society where profitability reigns over life. Furthermore, the fact that most of the projects take place within the real space of dating (some of the artists are seriously looking for partners, while others are facilitating the formation of authentic couples) reveals to which point art is conditioned by the surrounding economic and social reality. Only if one is aware of the centrality of restaurants in dating practices –and the cliché “dinner and a movie” epitomizes this key importance– does Valentova’s request for a traditional dish recipe acquire its non-conformist significance. Similarly, when one considers how ethnicity plays an important role when dating in a multicultural society, Feuer’s failed attempt to find a Jewish date opens up unsuspected questions about the coexistence and mixing of different cultures. In the case of Norman, if one takes into account the capacity of images to generate desire and how commercials play on this, her depictions of the “available woman” acquire all their critical relevance.

Finding a partner today can be extremely difficult. There are few physical opportunities to meet people, work occupies all of our time, and dating procedures require effort and money. Then, there is the idea that looking for love, like the rest of our daily activities, should be carried out in the most professional and efficient way. The result is that dating, like the rest of our personal relations, becomes driven by a business mentality: maximum benefit, minimum risk. By borrowing strategies from the industry of dating –compatibility tests, marketing teams, direct advertising– and by investigating how dating websites work –what they offer, to whom and how–, the artists in *The Dating Show* break the apparent all-beneficial appearance of the dating culture. They remind us that what seems to be the most advantageous solution today might turn, in the long run, to be the less constructive one.

