

A collage of observations about Aleesa Cohene's work *Something Better* By Natalie Olanick

The following text on the work of Aleesa Cohene's *Something Better*, is a written collage of observations and descriptions from three different sources: Guillaume Mansour, Aleesa Cohene and myself.

Guillaume Mansour writes his text from a stream of conscious perspective as he first experiences the exhibition:

Something really strong comes out of this machine. Something very dramatic. But at the same time, Something Better is tremendously abstract. There is nothing to hang on to; however the images and their combinations are striking, and such is the play between questions and answers across the three screens. The whole thing is sentimental, full of maternal anxieties, children's lost innocence, fathers' guilt for never being present enough, reaction shots by long forgotten actresses.

An artificial nostalgia is generated by the collage process. All the shots are so closely linked with a given era which is fully assumed in its glorious moments as well as its shameful drifting, happily enough. The funny side creeps in and as we laugh, the works seems to breathe even more.

Some of the montages (be it linearly, on one screen, or on all three screens at the same time) suggest a fine fragmentation, outside of meaning; they are unique, like brief poems (small haikus). I felt like listening again to the montage once or twice, just to lose myself in the careful details. GM

When we first start to become involved with the work of Aleesa Cohene's *Something Better* we see an arrangement of six opaque strips of colours running the length of the gallery walls. The strips take the whole of the wall from floor to ceiling. The multiple meanings of shapes and colours start to activate one's imagination. Associations between flags, symbols and insignias fly by.

Opposite the wall of strips is a short text. A romantic poem, that appears to be taken out of context. The grammar and the familiarity of the phrases creates a sense that we have dropped in on a moment that has not stopped to exist or changed because we have entered the scene. We are the audience.

Behind the text, in a dark room where three monitors are playing found footage of characters from different films, we realize that our real-time viewing experience is one of the components of the various time-based occurrences. The film clips strike connotative or denotative meanings from our T.V. viewing childhood or youth. As we continue to watch the monitors we see that the compilation of footage collages a series of images to create multidimensional signifiers of mother, father and child.

Cohene's type of collage emphasizes the expressions of the actors and the manner in which they perform various tasks. In the works of Christian Marclay or Douglas Gordon, the method of collaging film clips strikes different chords, in remixing what has already been recorded. Marclay's work acts as an audio experience where socially recognizable images add to the at times discordant then melodious concoction of sounds.

Something Better offers us an opportunity to reflect on the types of characters that have been created to tell the stories of our lives. The artist seeks to involve our participation as viewers in the storytelling process. The painting of the gallery space with the text on the wall combined with the film clips places us in a different type of engagement as we experience the work. In the painted area we are in a real-time setting that is merged with the time-based work as we turn the corner. The tools used to tell the stories are the subjects and we become part of the unfolding of events.

We watch movies to feel something more than we allow ourselves to feel in our everyday lives. Recorded images and sounds double as mirrored echoes where we don't have to look or listen to ourselves, we only have to be quiet and watch the screen. I think this is an everlasting power of cinema. It permits us to be who we want to be—free from responsibility and action. It releases us from guilt and shame. The more I pick through old movies the more I find a history of this psychological etiquette. My work aspires to understand why we live in a poverty of emotion and how it can change.

- Aleesa Cohene

Aleesa speaks about her intentions and working process as an occurrence that happens in tandem. The watching offers the opportunity to edit what is seen into an alternative production. This act is perhaps a physical manifestation of our thinking process as we receive information. In this light the work becomes a message expressing that change and possibilities are always an option.

This text is part of a writing series by members of the gallery, reflecting on the works presented during articule's 2008-2009 programming season. Natalie Olanick's text has been produced for Aleesa Cohene's exhibition *Something Better*, presented from November 14 to December 14, 2008, and is also available as a pdf on the gallery's web site.

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