

## ODES TO WHO WE WERE

### EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Emily Liteplo and Alexa Fahlman

*Odes to Who We Were* attempts to arrange in the material a selection of individual and collaborative works by Emily Liteplo and Alexa Fahlman, that explore the confounding mess that is being in and out of love in the 21st century. The exhibition is a deconstruction of four zines and four social networking pages, as well as photo documentation of a public text based project. All of the work is printed on an inkjet printer, and applied with packing tape to translucent sheets of plastic vapor barrier. The glass cases are backlit behind the barrier; two cases presenting digital work are backlit in pale red, with white lights creating a glare that connotes a laptop screen, while the two other cases present analogue-derived work, including the title hand-written on a silk sheet, and are backlit in yellow to infer a warm, natural light. Artists Liteplo and Fahlman discuss the nature of social media in its ability to perpetuate wounds, and technology's ability to archive past relationships. The notion of closure is explored through their use of digital and analogue, in various means of self publication.

Emily Liteplo is an emerging artist originally from Vancouver, BC and currently based in Toronto, ON as a publications student at OCADU. Liteplo's practice is explored digitally through zines and social media platforms. The artist's work creates narratives that question and acknowledge the contemporary post-internet era in which they are made, wherein social media acts as a platform for distribution of artwork. Alexa Fahlman is an emerging artist from Vancouver, BC, currently living and studying Literature in England. Fahlman's practice is primarily text based, including prose and small publications.

Included in *Odes* is a collaboration between Liteplo and Fahlman titled, *Confessionals* (2016). This series includes photographic documentation of text that nods to their art historical forebearers, the likes of Jenny Holzer, Tracy Emin or Fiona Bowie. The artists discuss the non-physical embodiment of their wounds through concise statements: *you are a burn on my hand that won't heal, I look for you in everyone I meet*, that which is most intimate enters the public realm. A confrontation occurs between artist and viewer, artwork and viewer. The simple, straightforward language creates an opportunity where the viewer is able to infer their own experience on the universal statement. Layers of voyeurism arise, the photographs offer a view of public spaces where the original text is installed for the everyday passers-by to experience. The photographic documentation in this series confronts again an audience in the gallery setting as a two-fold documentation-confrontation. Rather than a violation, *Confessionals* confidently reveals the intimate; and, as if to re-empower the artists, a re-contextualization of pain becomes an act of closure.

In her own confessional series, Liteplo creates multiple networking accounts that document her romantic trials. The time-based social media pages create a similar effect to the *Confessionals* series, but build on the voyeurism by allowing the viewer to anonymously and publicly react by engaging with the artwork online. The work is then installed in a constructionist manner, printed

on paper, layered, and reprinted when viewers respond via the internet. The four experimental series are presented in *Odes* as print-outs, a documentation of the ephemeral digital works, applied with packing tape to enter our material world. The artist's Tinder account confronts the suggestion of romance, wherein her potential partners view heartbreaking prose about past lovers, rather than a selfie. Few of her male matches address her suffering and discomfort. Instead, they respond with crude suggestions and responses that reveal an acute awareness to internet culture. On one Tumblr account, ([Heart Thrasher](#), 2016) Liteplo creates a narrative using a list of objects acquired during a romantic relationship, connoting remnants and memory. Another Tumblr account, ([I don't know if I liked it](#), 2016) is a direct confrontation of the nature of social media, that discusses technology's memory and archive of past relationships. In the fourth series, Liteplo creates an open-call, asking past lovers to anonymously give her closure using a [web-whiteboard](#), a website allowing anyone with the URL to draw or write messages, and erase or edit. The result is a chaotic collage of line drawings and personal attacks. A juxtaposition occurs between the imagery and the messages. The anonymous reactions become confessions themselves, statements including "I still love you," and "I've disappointed my mother," reveal the insights and the burdens of the viewer.

Included in *Odes* are four, low-fi, digital and analogue publications, or *zines*, a medium that allows the viewer to tangibly interact with the work by flipping the pages in their hands. Selected pages have been deconstructed from the zine form and included within the installation as singular print-outs. Viewers are invited to pick-up and read the zines as well, installed in between each display vitrine hanging on a string and metallic tape clothesline.

Alexa Fahlman's *Cherry Blossoms* (2016) is a publication of prose, scans, photographs and drawings of the human form. The small, precious book contradicts itself once opened, the pages reveal ripped graph paper and scratched pen drawings. Pink, flowers, hand-written letters contrast the heavy text that discusses notions of womanhood. While the zine is dedicated to Fahlman's matriarchal lineage, the text becomes a conflicted meditation on the artist's own vulnerability. The imagery is primarily decapitated or fragmented from the whole, drawings of body parts, photographs of hands holding blossoms. The fragmentation connotes ephemerality, the understood love of a flower becomes warped by time and story into an abstract love, of which the blossoms are both a remnant and a continuation. Within the greater exhibition, *Cherry Blossoms* points to a reality sifted through the consciousness of two 18 year-olds, a consciousness attempting to understand its own materiality and position in the world.

Also included in the exhibition, are *Self Portrait* (2016) and *1* (2016) zines by Emily Liteplo. These works explore internet culture through a series of overlapping digital blobs, drawings, photographs and text. *1*, a collaboration with emerging Vancouver based artist, Adriana Kowalczyk, is a deconstruction of social media accounts, including comments copied verbatim from Liteplo's *Instagram* and text message conversations. *Self Portrait* and *1* are both filled with digital images, shapes referencing rose quartz, plastic trash bags, and roses. The chosen and sparse imagery symbolize remains. A series of words and acquired items, diluted abstract versions of their original form, now represent loss rather than the anticipation of love. Among the

imagery included are a series of Liteplo's selfies that are repeated among the abstract forms to embody one thematic symbol - that of emptiness, void, and a hole that can't be filled. Liteplo likens the gift of emptiness to that of the cheap travel t-shirt, in saying "I fell in love with you and all I got was this yellow rose." The composition of Liteplo's *Self Portrait* points to a surrealist aesthetic. Objects are displaced, spread out, the perspective is altered to create a dream scene that is suspended into a digital, and then digital-print landscape.

While *Odes* examines the contemporary, it nods to the past. Our matriarchal lineage and art historical forebearers confront presumed roles and positions for women within romantic relationships. What is notable now is technology's ability to perpetuate these socio-political conventions through the way social media is controlled and presented in women's lives. Is it possible to be a feminist on Tinder? Is selfie feminism being commodified and sold back to us? Are Instagram's community guidelines inherently patriarchal?

In *Closure* (2016), Liteplo writes "Why do men have this power?" Though the statement seems frivolous, within the context of the exhibition it suggests that the perpetual lack of closure is not solely created by social media, but that the internet, too, is a system that gives men power. Any semblance of women's liberation through social media or the internet does not acknowledge the remaining gender imbalance and trials women face. Liteplo and Fahlman make work that reimagines vulnerability into an act of closure. X

Exhibition curated by Greta Hamilton  
Exhibition Statement written by Julia Prudhomme, Curator  
Greta Hamilton, Curatorial Assistant (YCW)  
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