



Business as unusual

Artist collectives make the personal political in "Peer Pleasure 2"

By Katie Kurtz

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"Peer Pleasure 2" concludes the thoughtfully assembled and intelligently executed series of artist collective exhibitions curated by Berin Golonu in the upstairs galleries of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The series began last fall with contributions by Hamburger Eyes, the Gestalt Collective, the Momentary Academy, Mail Order Brides, and Stretcher in "Bay Area Now 4." "Zine Unbound: Kults, Werewolves and Sarcastic Hippies" followed, focusing on the publications *Hot and Cold*, *K48*, and *Werewolf Express* and the collective activity of assembling and making a zine. Next, "Peer Pleasure 1" examined three collectives — Royal Art Lodge, Instant Coffee, and Space 1026 — that place social engagement at the center of their practices. The collectives in "Peer Pleasure 2" — Red 76, Temporary Services, and the Visible Collective — address politics in tandem with art-making. "Black Panther Rank and File," currently on view in the main gallery, provides a bit of historical grounding for the Visible Collective's installation and sets the tone for the installations by Temporary Services and Red 76.

Chicago's Temporary Services collective has integrated a deep sense of ethical responsibility into the production and dissemination of its work, an aspect of its methodology that was especially critical while developing *Prison Inventions*. One of members Brett Bloom's, Marc Fischer's, and Salem Collo-Julin's many ongoing projects, *Prison Inventions* is a collaboration with "Angelo," a currently incarcerated, pseudonymous inmate at a California state prison. Angelo provided TS with detailed descriptions and illustrations of prison-made objects that the collective then reproduced. Unlike artists, prisoners are forced into ingenuity — it doesn't simply arise out of a desire to be creative. The inmates' limited access to materials provides a basis for inventive alternatives to items we tend to take for granted: salt and pepper shakers, shelving, lighters, even drinking cups. "If some of what's presented here seems unimpressive, keep in mind that deprivation is a way of life in prison," Angelo writes in his overview of the project.

In order to demonstrate the conditions under which these objects are typically made, Angelo requested that TS construct a replica of his cell and include it in the installation. Visitors can enter the 6-by-12-foot cell, where everything is wall-mounted and made of metal: two bunks, a desk with a stool, two shelves, and a combined toilet and sink — for two men. Inventiveness begins to take on a new meaning in this light.

Making it Visible

The Visible Collective, of New York City, is directed by filmmaker, writer, and media activist Naeem Mohaiemen; members include Anandaroop Roy, Jeeyun Ha, Donna Golden, Vivek Bald, Aziz Huq, JT Nimoy, Sarah Olson, Aimara Lin, Anjali Malhorta, and Kristofer Dan-Bergman. Their project *Disappeared in America* is an ongoing chronicle of the effects post-9/11 governmental policies have had on immigrants, particularly those the government deems potential terrorists.

The work in the show represents the intersection of art, documentation, and legal explanation and draws parallels to past efforts of institutionalized racism that serve as predecessors to the USA PATRIOT Act — the House Committee on Un-American Activities, COINTELPRO, and Japanese American internment during World War II. The blurry photographic portraits with overlaid text in *when an interpreter could not be found* seek to make visible the people who have been harassed in order to "protect" our homeland security. Other work in the installation outlines the specific policies and court cases that reinforce the government's right to perform surveillance and to unlawfully detain people. These days, knowledge most definitely is power.

Un-Red

It's impossible to not read Portland, Ore., collective Red 76's contribution in relation to the others', and in this context, it fails miserably for lack of trying. The installation is slapdash, with hand-scrawled explanations and arrows pointing to piles of stuff for people to take. This carelessness is matched by banal content, and the projects are all politics-lite: Political karaoke and cardboard road signs aren't exactly high-stakes activism. There's no sense that the collective has critically explored the myriad potential ways art can deeply and meaningfully impact people beyond its members' social spheres. One hopes their exposure to the work in the rest of the exhibit will help them raise the stakes and examine what it means to make politically engaged art right now.

In the end, TS's installation isn't just about prison-made objects, and the Visible Collective's work isn't just about the people profiled — both are thoughtful and thorough investigations into specific overlooked, ignored, and unfathomable parts of our society. Their work points to the fact that it's difficult to absorb the fact that these events continue to happen today, *this* second. A viewer begins to wonder, what has created the conditions for these things to be made in the first place? And what needs to happen in order for prison-made objects and portraits of disappeared people *not* to exist? SFBG

Peer Pleasure 2:

Red 76, Temporary Services, and the Visible Collective

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