***Interpersonal Stenography: A Materialized Devolution of Love***

Alessia Armeni, Alessandro Cicoria, Silvia Giambrone

Curated by: Annamaria Bittoni, Kirila Cvetkovska, Kathryn Gillon, Arielle Hartman and Jonathan Levin

John Cabot University, Via Della Lungara, 233

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Time: 6:30 PM-8:30 PM

When we look around our environment, what do we see? A vase, a chair, a sofa perhaps. As perfunctory as it may seem to proclaim, these are, of course, objects. But are they more than just their material beings? This exhibition proceeds to explore the role of objects as transcendental entities capable of enacting histories. The works included in the show create a space in which viewers can perceive how the routine objects of their environment can act as testaments to their relationships. This concept contrasts stridently with the idea of objectification, which suggests that human expression cannot be adequately represented by an object. *Interpersonal Stenography: A Materialized Devolution of Love* carefully studies and critiques the transformation of intangible histories into these tangible objects.

In tandem with this theme, Alessandro Cicoria’s photonovella, *York Hotel* (2010), reveals beautifully the intimate ties that a person can have with a given object. The various ways in which a bed can become a silent voyeur for unspoken trysts, a chair a refuge for memories, or a sink a basin for sins that have passed strikes one profoundly. With a keen focus on love, the story that Cicoria presents makes it hard for the viewer to ignore the position that the hotel itself has in relation to the affair of the protagonists. It is through these narrative images that one gets a real sense of how a relationship can be constructed using the tangible world as anchors. While at once utilizing these objects as markers of an external love, Cicoria also demonstrates how these same objects can be markers of a betrayal. A mirror, for example, can provide a lover with a glimpse of something that he or she would not have been able to see on his or her own. Having the ability to retain such complexity in terms of recording not only affection but its surrender in the face of distrust, Cicoria captures how objects record not only the inception of love but the inception of distrust.

While Cicoria’s objects present the troubled path that a relationship can follow after its birth, Alessia Armeni’s *Untitled* works (2008-2010) can be experienced as a microcosm of the devolution of love itself. As the viewer visually navigates through Armeni’s paintings from largest to smallest, a progression becomes noticeable: the works slowly erase human presence itself. In the first work, one can see a clear tension between the two figures in the work. While the figure of the woman near the bottom of the canvas is very much cognizant of the stark realities that surround her, the other figure seems to have left the very dimension that the woman occupies to retreat to a more idyllic, natural setting. With this separation readily apparent, the next painting subtracts one figure. It deceptively leaves the space seemingly empty, but one is confronted with a figure staring back at them from beneath the floor of the white living room. While it would seem the space has been cleared of all presence, the memory of the person remains. Armeni’s last piece, however, completely does away with the need of a person. The lovers are gone and all that is left are the objects. Interestingly, we see that the object that has been there throughout all these paintings is the artist’s armchair. It has seen and witnessed this dissolution take place and can act as a true witness to the fall of this love.

Picking up right where Armeni leaves her viewer is Silvia Giambrone’s *Declaration of Love* (2011). If Cicoria’s *York Hotel* represents the start and betrayal of love and Armeni’s *Untitled* works documents its fall, then Giambrone’s surely signifies its haunting end. The installation imbues its focal point, the armchair, with the role of active witness to the decline of a relationship. With nature, here, so clearly associated with the feral, primal, and dirty qualities of Autumn, the dying/ dead surroundings evoke thoughts of a love that has ended. What we are trying to provoke here, however, is not a guessing game for the viewer to try to discern who was involved. No; rather, what would it mean to sit in that armchair? More importantly, what would it mean to be looking at oneself sitting in the armchair in the mirror opposite it? Would this armchair, itself a declaration of love, transport one into the very essence of the entire story? The power of the object, thus, is rebuffed by Giambrone as a powerful receptacle of not only the beautiful incipience of love, its betrayal, and its dissolution, but also its tragic end.

*Interpersonal Stenography: A Materialized Devolution of Love* hopes to inspire a complete revaluation of the object world. These seemingly meaningless pieces of our milieu are here shown to be something much more than meets the eye. They are the silent witnesses to the social world that envelopes them. Every word spoken recorded in a curve of a chair leg. Every sensual pleasure indulged written in the folds of a mattress. Every curse scratched into the metal framework. At every beginning and with every ending, an object’s symbolic power becomes manifest.

On behalf of the artists and ourselves, we would like to humbly thank you for attending our exhibition. For further information or general inquiries, please contact:

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**THE WORKS**

**Alessia Armeni**

 *Untitled,* 2009

 cm 100x 70

 Oil on canvas

 *Untitled,* 2010

 cm 40x40

 Oil on canvas

 *Untitled,* 2011

 cm60x60

 Oil on canvas

In all three of these works, it becomes abundantly clear that the central figure is not human, but an object itself. Armeni’s armchair, which becomes visible in a variety of different spaces and appearances, plays into the interpersonal devolution of love that occurs before its very eyes. From two figures in the largest of the *Untitled* pieces, to one figure in the 60x60 cm painting, to none in the smallest of the three, Armeni highlights a progression that has taken place in front of the object world. The tension that is felt between the two figures in the first piece is highlighted through their separation of different physical dimensions. The woman remains in the stark, despairing reality of the home, while the man drifts off into a tranquil past, both natural and free. This separation is made manifest in the second painting, where Armeni has cut one figure. The viewer is tricked into thinking the space has been emptied of physical presence, but alas, the image is still anchored by her armchair and a hidden man beneath the floor. The armchair, yet again, bears witness to the separation of lovers, yet it cannot turn away from the haunting presence of them within the space. The last painting, however, completely erases the presence of any human figures. It leaves the viewer only with the armchair (covered in a pink sheet) and a red chair and table in the background. The room has lost all sense of love and longing; it has become a space of negation. Through this image, Armeni manages to capture how the object world records this negation of love by masking it with the sheet. What was once allowed to exist in its natural form must now be covered because of the histories that have been carved into its cushioning.

**Alessia Armeni** was born in Rome, where she lives and works. She received her painting degree in 1999 and her Master’s degree in contemporary art in 2000, both from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera (Fine Arts Academy of Brera) in Milan. After working as a curator in a variety of art galleries (Christin Stein, Milan, and B&D studio), Armeni moved back to Rome in 2006 to begin exhibiting her own works. Her artistic research revolves around the dimensions of space and time, employing both performance and installation in her methods. She has shown her works in many different museums of contemporary art throughout Italy (Palazzo Lucarini Contemporary, Perugia; Ex Manifattura Tabacchi Città Sant’Angelo, Pescara). She has been selected for a variety of prizes (San Fedele Award, 2006, Milan & Adrenalina, 2009, Rome). She has also had a solo show in Tallinn, Estonia in 2009 and in 2011, she was invited to a Residence in Mexico-City ℅ la 77. Currently, she is involved in an itinerary project, *Sing Sweet Song of Conviction*, presented by Julia Draganovich.

For more information, please visit: http://www.alessiaarmeni.com/.