INDY

ART

The Ackland's landmark but short-term More Love exhibition

by Chris Vitiello
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More Love: Art, Politics, and Sharing Since the 1990s
Ackland Art Museum
UNC-Chapel Hill
Through March 31

For the next six weeks, as you enter the Ackland Art Museum, someone will tell you that they love you.

Julianne Swartz's audio work "Affirmation" (2006–13) chirps this positivity from several locations throughout the Ackland, one of many works in *More Love: Art, Politics, and Sharing Since the 1990s* that reaches across the distance between you and the artifact. The organizing idea behind the exhibition is artists addressing love, but that word is really a stand-in for any sincere, meaningful connection, whether between an artwork and a person, between people, or between individuals and the political and social bodies they help comprise.

This show asserts that "love" is a word whose time has come. As same-sex marriage inches toward wide acceptance, the word is gathering momentum in public discourse. Witness the traction of the "If two people love each other, why shouldn't they be able to get married?" argument.

Organized by Claire Schneider, *More Love* picks up on this polysemy. The show consists of about 50 works, much of it with at least one foot in the conceptual, by 33 artists, only two of whomLouise Bourgeois and Félix González-Torresare no longer alive.

Featuring work that locates love in the memorial, the entrance to the first gallery has huge emotional impact. Both monumental and hardly there, Jim Hodges' mournful yet celebratory, ceiling-to-floor curtain of sewn flowers, "You" (1997), blocks off the front of the room as an installation unto itself including works by González-Torres, Dario Robleto and Janine Antoni.

González-Torres' "Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)" (1991), one of the most important artworks of the AIDS-paranoid 1990s, occupies a gallery corner. It's a 175-pound pile of brightly wrapped candiesthe ideal body weight of the artist's partner, Ross Laycock, before his 1991 death from an AIDS-related illness. But the pile dwindles throughout each day just as Laycock did, as visitors take a piece of candy to eat while touring the exhibition. The simple but forceful work represents both the loss of and sexual desire for a loved one. You reduce the size of the pile but enjoy the sweet of taking the candy into your own body. González-Torres, who died from complications related to AIDS in 1996, has three pieces in the museum as well as six wordless billboard works installed in locations around the Triangle. As you drive 15-501 between Durham and Chapel Hill, look for the black-and-white image of González-Torres' empty bed, taken after Laycock died.

In the opposite corner, Robleto shows his great material and emotional range. Two works are classic Conceptual Art wall text. "Love Manifesto" (1997) describes an assignment he gave himself to rearrange into a love poem the words of the manifesto written by the "Unabomber," Theodore Kaczynski, which several major newspapers were blackmailed into publishing in 1995. Robleto then anonymously mailed the poem to friends, undoing Kaczynski's mailborne malice with a personless, personal gesture that reclaims language as a connector rather than an attacker.

Robleto uses love letters more literally in two other works. "Dario's Shredded Love Letters" (1997) contains capsules of his shredded love letters from seventh through ninth grade inside a prescription bottle. Known for gathering materials charged with ritualistic purpose, Robleto pulped letters sent between soldiers and their sweethearts back home as part of his funerary wreath display "Defiant Gardens" (2009-10).

Antoni's "Umbilical" (2001) rounds out the exhibition's entry. She cast a sterling silver, monogrammed spoon with a negative mold of the inside of her mouth attached to its bowl and a negative of her mother's hand attached to the handle. Both ornamental and revolting, the impression of Antoni's teeth evokes her skull as well as the idea of a parent feeding a child. In this way, she honors parental nurturing while acknowledging its necessary time constraint.

Antoni's even more visceral photograph "Mortar and Pestle" (1999) is just down the wall. In a jarring close-up, the artist licks her husband's eyeball. Shudderingly, you feel it as you look

at it. Like “Umbilical,” the work presents intimacy in the frankest possible way. In the glistening of eye and tongue, “Mortar and Pestle” also resonates with González-Torres’ portrait of Ross, especially if you’re still sucking on the hard candy from the corner pile.

From these striking images and powerful objects, the show takes a decisive turn into the collaborative. Several works in *More Love* are the documentation of projects that took place over long periods of time and involved many people in addition to the artists. In Emily Jacir’s “Where We Come From” (2001–03) and Antonio Vega Macotela’s “Time Exchange” (2006–11), both artists become fulfillment agents for communities whose freedom has been limited.

Jacir asked Palestinians unable to move through checkpoints or across borders what they would do if they had freedom of movement. Then, using her American passport, she did their assignments ranging from the profound, such as playing soccer with the first Palestinian boy upon her arrival in Haifa, to the mundane, such as paying a phone bill at a Jerusalem post office or bringing favorite foods and drinks back from forbidden areas. Her experiences are shown through photographs and video.

Like Jacir, Macotela embodies expressions of love. He spent five years gathering 365 wishes from inmates at Mexico City’s Santa Marta Acatitla prison. Then he would perform a task out in the world for the prisoner in exchange for a drawing that the inmate would make simultaneously in his cell. In “Time Exchange 82,” for instance, Macotela danced with the inmate’s mother to Sonora Matancera’s song “How Fortunate It Is” while the inmate danced solo in his cell, drawing the footprints of his dance steps.

Visitors may participate in several interactive works including Yoko Ono’s “Time to Tell Your Love” (2012). A photographer is stationed in the gallery to take a picture of visitors demonstrating their love next to Ono’s light-refracting sculpture. One may play a more substantial role as part of Rivane Neuenschwander’s “First Love” (2010) by signing up on the Ackland website for a Saturday session with a police department sketch artist, who will produce an image of your first flame based on your description.

Among the many video works, Israeli artists Hadassa Goldvicht and Anat Vovnoboy deliver perhaps the most beautiful work in the show with their 51-minute “Lullaby” (2012). In front of a stationary video camera, staff and visitors to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem sing lullabies from their childhood or those that they sing to children now. As the faces, voices and languages pass, a commonality emerges in the soothing, reassuring and often sad songs, and your mind goes to the lullabies you know and the people who sang them to you. Goldvicht and Vovnoboy approach the universal like no other artists in *More Love*.

With *More Love*, the Ackland is trying to raise its institutional profile. Indeed, it’s a major show that merits at least a couple of visits, so get out your calendar and start writing “love”

across all the blank days.

This article appeared in print with the headline "We all need More Love."

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