

## Hologram of Andy

I've been listening Frank Ocean's single 'Pyramids' for over a month now, reveling in how unusual and amazing his music is. 'Pyramids' is a 10-minute song that is more like two songs in one. The lyrics are dramatic – about Cleopatra and her ancient drama involving army legions, thieves, serpents, and talking cheetahs. The song then shifts to depict the intimately mundane setting of a cheap motel room, and Cleopatra is transformed from legendary queen to a stripper getting ready for work at the Pyramid. Historical fantasies collapse against harder reflections on the everyday. Frank Ocean is an R&B-styled pop crooner but more strange than you'd expect from the genre; he's less polished, and his voice sounds more vulnerable than devotional, his lyrics are self-reflexive and confessional. He's openly bisexual, released his first album for free as a download, and leaked his second record in outright defiance of the label that was supposed to put it out. Ocean's combination of morality, cynicism and sonorous sincerity is highly communicative and personally (subjectively) intoned – an anomaly in the realm of commercial pop. I learned about him from Andy Robert.

Andy came up with the idea for this exhibition while he was thinking about Andy Warhol or, more specifically, while he was thinking after having encountered Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. Andy was confounded by the physicality, and obvious material tactility of the work: he described his experience of this work as *trompe l'oeil*. This term is typically attached to the history of painting and refers to the picture plane forcing the optical illusion of depth, as if it were occupying a place in three dimensions. In Andy's parlance, however, the term means something much more nuanced and askance. Contrived to be playfully disorienting, *trompe l'oeil* affects an eerie ambience; the portrayal of an abandoned card game, or a stack of half-opened letters amplifies the illusion of a human presence on hand, while reinforcing the very absence of a subject/person. Seeing *Brillo Boxes* in person brought about this feeling of the uncanny. Always hyper-realistically rendered, *trompe l'oeil* is an affront to acuity, forcing the viewer to double back on their perceptions and admit they were eagerly lead to put stock in the shimmer of illusion.

A conversation with Andy can be a bit like the Abbot and Costello "Who's on first?" skit. Misunderstanding ensues and humor compounds based on the homonymy of *who*, *what*, and *I don't know*. This comedy routine is a mis-communicé of meanings shifting within context; while initially confusing, the pleasure comes when you realize how mischievously Abbot and Costello are playing at the locus of language. Before that day at LACMA, Andy thought of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* via their photographic documentation; he conflated his mediated read of the work with a faith in the veracity of the form of the art-historical didactic as an effective mode of communication. But in this form, circulated and experienced as images, the possibility to apprehend Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* as sculpture is obliterated. Flattened, they offer a different illusion, a sort of inverse *trompe l'oeil* effect where they become indecipherable from a ready-made. *Brillo Boxes* look like Brillo Boxes. Comprehension is unhinged by a kind of visual homonymy. Andy got the idea for this exhibition thinking about Andy. I asked him if it's because they have the same name, and he agrees that this coincidence is destiny.

Speaking with Andy about his eclectic exhibition topic (the show is titled, *Authenticity? artists questioning myth, origin, and the everyday in art through didactic and trompe-l'oeil aesthetic strategies*) reveals his sincere and persistent curiosity. This exhibit is an intimate and casual depiction of his own

intellectual and artistic preoccupations; it is prescient and personal, and reflective of his immediate peer community. It's a bit like a speed dial list, a reading list, a to-do list, or a recent download of images from a digital camera. Andy is concerned with authenticity: where is something real, when does it matter, and who is responsible for identifying that? He believes if you re-make something you can change it; if you draw a photograph you can re-possess the image. It's a matter of transformation, and a matter of legibility. It is a matter of proximity to a primary source, and mitigating the tone of representation. In his latitudinarian way, Andy is evaluating each artist's choices in regards to representation, determining how he values their work and how legibly he can link a chain of meaning. This is an unusual curatorial endeavor in that its tone is so resoundingly confessional.

Andy's thinking is convoluted, yet he clearly diagrams misunderstanding and draws a direct line to insight. He muses that both didactics and ready-mades have an analogously 1:1 relationship to the reality they are representing, and that photography too shares this attribute. A ready-made is a quote or an excerpt, functioning as cultural shorthand. It operates didactically, inhabiting the role of contextual anchor within the exhibition space while performing as a link to its existence in the outside world; a ready-made functions similarly to a photograph just before it self-consciously knocks against its own discursive limits. The ready-made behaves like a photograph once did- possessing the aura of an arbiter of truth, or an objective representation of reality. A photograph will always fall short of transcribing experience; it can only offer the residue of an utterance as document. Attempting to encapsulate this is like explaining what was *actually* going on at the moment a casual family snapshot is taken. And, while a snapshot appears representative of a family lineage, it is blank without attachment to that family. In this instance, Andy is holding the camera and telling us what he just took a photo of.

Frank Ocean's performance at the 2012 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival was a notable highlight, though his presence was overshadowed by the apparent reincarnation of poet, gangster-rapper and legend, Tupac Shakur. In actuality, a "hologram" (a combination of CGI animation and an 18<sup>th</sup> century stage-lighting trick called 'Pepper's Ghost') of Tupac was fabricated and made to perform. While a photograph is an indexical record of the light residue from a specific scene in time, a hologram – in theory – is comprised of the simultaneous projection and recording of *all* light scattered from *every* point in a scene. Severing a hologram would cause it's multiplication, whereas dividing a photograph yields fractional pieces of that photograph. While a photograph generates a simplified and compressed illusion of depth, a hologram proposes to refract a prismatic inflation of representation. Andy Robert's intuitive sensitivity is a special trait; he is more attentive to acquired knowledge that has a personal effect on him, and he projects that significance outward onto an evaluation of culture at large. Andy turns personal recollection into art historical assessment. In this sense, this exhibition is a holographic portrait of Andy Robert.

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