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Internet Treasures: An Interview with Karinne Smith

For the Wrong Biennale, we had the honor to feature Karinne Smith's *Chocolate*, an interactive virtual chocolate box, a collection of seemingly repressed desires and a snapshot of the essentialization of black bodies online.

As she finished her thesis show, we spoke about her secret internet troves, what it means to be online and the evolution of her practice.

Can you describe your work for those who are unfamiliar?

I've been trying to get a grip on that lately. I come from a photography background, which I think is why images still hold an importance to me in my process, but there was a point (I believe after I moved out of NYC) that I shifted into using and making objects to house or go alongside the found photographs I was collecting. At that point, however, I wasn't considering the space around the objects or the movements that would lead one to experience that object. It was when I started thinking about occupying space that I discovered I really enjoyed setting up funny/odd scenarios for viewers to navigate either individually or in groups. I think there's a specific note I try to consistently hit (and sometimes fail) where the lightness of the objects lead to something much darker or discomfiting when you stay in their presence. Sometimes I don't know what that dark or uncomfortable thing is until after I've made everything and sat with it for some time. Overall, I'd say what has remained consistent in my work throughout the years is my use of found photographs, of food or food byproducts, and my interest in thresholds.

2 - I know this might be a trade secret but where do you source your found items?

All the corners of the internet. eBay is a treasure trove, but I also go on Craigslist and other

similar sites. Also, I can't turn down a trip to an antique store or flea market ;)

3 - In most of your pieces, you use objects to which you seem to have no personal relationship, in "from Joel Williams", you include personal family pictures. what is the difference when engaging with your practice at arm's length and when personally involved?

I think all of my work starts from a personal relationship to a thing, experience, person, but sometimes that connection is more subtle than it was with *From Joel Williams*. I actually feel that the album was about engaging with personal history at arm's length and separating yourself from your known narrative that's been given to you or imposed on you and allowing yourself to play with these notions of origin and identity or authenticity. In order to create these new narratives and to map out a family tree I had to kind of disassociate from my personal family photographs and treat them like the found family photographs I sourced from eBay. In the end all the photographs were treated as my family photographs, perhaps even with more care. What has come out of producing that album, for me, is a new intimacy with found images that I consider now to be relics of a family history that feels more whole and perhaps more true.

4 - About "Chocolate", how did this project come about?

I think it was around 2015. I was living in Brooklyn and I was looking on Craigslist (I think for a job?) and something inspired me to check out the personal ads. Next thing I know my roommates and I are gathered around my computer reciting the ads in silly voices with streams of tears rolling down our cheeks from the shock and laughter. I remember going through them again the next day and felt I stumbled upon something worth recording. I didn't actually do anything with it until 2016, which was a website much like the one featured in the biennial. I later turned the work into a book with the hopes that people would read the ads aloud as if they were *The Vagina Monologues*.

5 - What, in your opinion, is the difference when creating a digital interface and physical interface like a sculpture?

When creating a digital interface you have to know a certain language with which to build these online spaces. I started creating websites because I didn't have a studio and the digital space was the only way I could think to bring my work to life. With sculpture I've been able to just go and pick up things along the way (or learn through YouTube). I've also had to contend with the physical limitations of materials and of my own body and I think the problem solving surrounding that has slowed down my pace and allowed my thought process to deepen.

5 - What was your takeaway after having collected all these postings?

I wasn't surprised and if anything, it felt like I had the receipts.

6 - How do you feel about the current depictions of POC in online platforms?

I'm struggling to answer this, because I'm trying to find something better to say than painfully narrow. Because when I say that, I mean that being on these platforms as a black girl was and continues to be a self-image destroying, self-hate inducing experience that is suffocating. I remember being on websites like imgur in high school and seeing an overwhelming preference and "appreciation posts" for either cute, thin, fairy-like white women or cute, thicc, cosplayers that were also white women. Any depictions of black women were usually met with comments that likened their appearance to men or the casual "you know, I've never found black women attractive EVER, until I saw this". The direct and indirect verbal abuse black women experience on internet platforms and dating apps on a daily basis is unreal, but at the same time unseen? unnoticed? Unheard?

7 - What do you make of the histories you uncover via your found photographs?

I'm currently trying to figure this out. I think in making art in this moment, everything feels like an assemblage that is symptomatic of various conditions that have intertwined to bring us to the now. I see pretty much everything as material that could be used to point outside of the work or pull another conversation into the work. So when I observe that these images carry a certain history, be it their location, film process, or material, I see a way to indirectly propose ideas, abstract contexts, or highlight the circumstances which brought the image into my possession.

8 - You mention banality and humor being central themes in your practice. How do you reconcile them with the seeming gravity and heaviness of the issues we face as a society?

I guess for me it's the boring things that perhaps go unnoticed as one goes about their routine that reveal a lot about a society and what that society values. I'm also entertained by the idea that within these objects that we've become so accustomed to seeing and being around is a hidden danger or darker history, which is something that I believe Cameron Rowland is incredible at uncovering. As for humor, I think for me it's a step in my decision-making process. Much like how I decided to use the Craigslist ads, I get stuck on those moments that caused a disruption in what otherwise would have been a very uneventful day or night. I find laughter seductive, but tricky, and I'm interested in seeing what makes certain things/actions/gestures funny, I want to know what exactly is being laughed at.

9 - As we enter Black History Month, a big part of the discourse is centered on remembering and recollection, does your archival practice fall into that movement and, if so, how?

My archival process is not so much about remembering or recollection, but more along the lines of gathering a library of images from which to create a new history or genealogy.

10 - You are having your thesis show in a few weeks. For some, it is the culmination of two years of research and work. How as your practice progressed in the last years?

My practice has scaled up in the past two years, figuratively and literally, and I think mainly from having access to a studio and a library. But I feel (or hope) that the thought process behind my work has become more complex. I used to jump at the first idea that popped into my head and once that idea was manifested into a physical thing I felt bored and dissatisfied. The most valuable thing I've gained from this time is focus.

11 - What's next for Karinne Smith? What projects are you working on? What are you excited about?

Next for Karinne Smith is getting some tasteful nudes and making videos in the desert with my mom. I don't have any plans yet after I'm done with my thesis, but it's an exciting place to be in with many possibilities and I'm feeling pretty open these days :)

Wish you the best.

You can find Karinne's work on her [website](#).



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