

THREE EASY PIECES

FUJIWARA CULTIVATES CONFUSION

CARPENTER
CENTER FOR
VISUAL ARTS
24 QUINCY STREET
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Simon Fujiwara's aesthetic vocabulary is varied and inclusive. In his exhibit at Harvard's Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, he skips lightly between media – shuffling text, sculpture, photographs and video with apparent aplomb. In years past, this may have left guests curiously pondering artistic boundaries and teleology. But the current environment frees us from media restraints and expectations and allows Fujiwara to focus on the narrative of the relationships he weaves through deeply personal installations.

"Three Easy Pieces" may be a slightly misleading title. Three pieces comprise the show, but none of them is particularly easy to interpret in the effortless way the title seems to suggest. That's right where Fujiwara wants you – reflecting on the relationships between memory and reality, the West and foreign cultures, parent and child, past colony and present identity. And in a slightly subversive wink to the audience, Fujiwara considers and reconsiders the relationship between the artist and the observer. Earnest as he may be as a narrator, you are never exactly sure if his version of truth is rooted in fact or fiction.

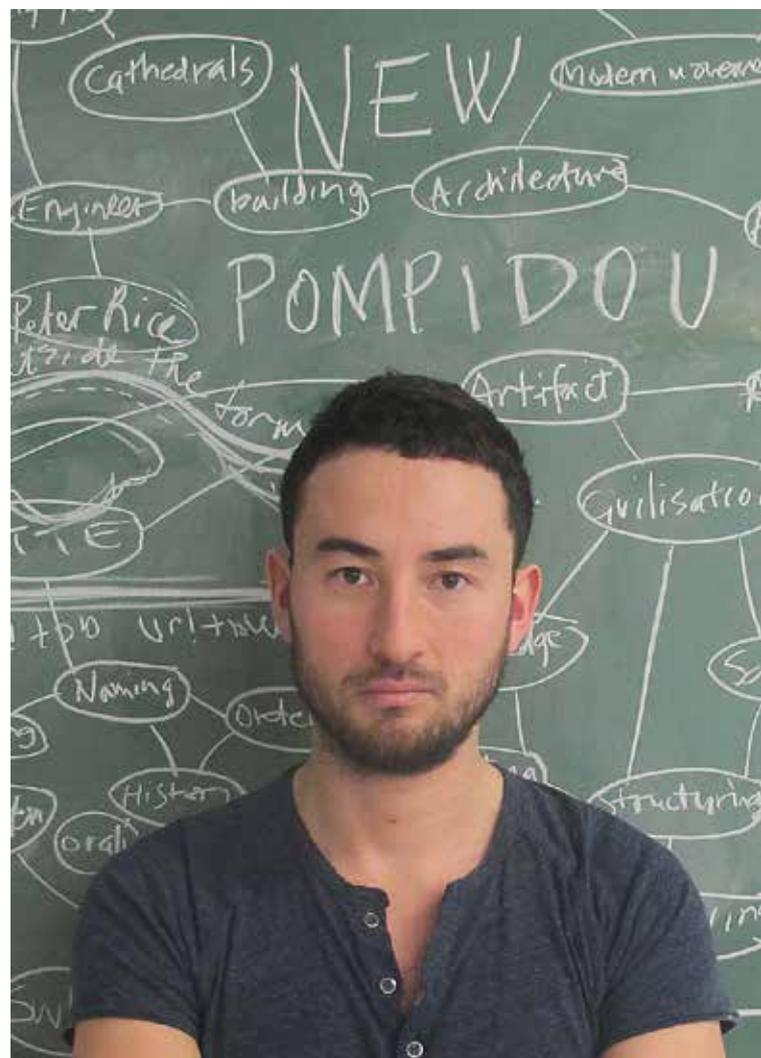
The confusion is cultivated by the physical space. The CCVA exists in what is technically the single North America building designed by Le Corbusier. The building plan highlights key Le Corbusier architectural elements; chief among them and particularly interesting for a gallery is a lack of interior walls. That allowed the center's director, James Voorhies, to erect temporary walls, curtains and pedestals in a serpentine fashion. Add to

that the fact that Fujiwara's "Studio Pieta (King Kong Komplex)" is up several flights of stairs and across an outdoor ramp, and you have the sense of really working for this exhibit – mentally and physically. "Confusion abounds and momentarily arrests the spectator," writes Voorhies, in "Groups of Strangers We Call Friends," his beautiful accompanying essay. "Confusion makes room for thinking."

Fujiwara offers plenty to contemplate. In "Letters from Mexico," he takes inspiration from 16th century epistles penned by conquistador Hernán Cortés. Addressing Europe directly, he questions the notion of independence in a country still bound to the language, architecture and religion of Cortés. During the 200th anniversary of independence from Spain, he witnesses the remains of colonialism and the injustice and poverty of the present-day and wonders what exactly should be celebrated.

Phonetic translations of his letters are drafted by street typists in Mexico City, framed in clear glass and hung against a backdrop of rich red curtains and souvenirs. The phonetic spelling forces the reader to translate carefully back into comprehensible English (if you're like me you may need to actually read some of the words aloud) or risk losing some in translation. Some of the genius of Fujiwara lies here: he manages to keep his sense of humor in check among these weighty topics, excusing his pessimistic attitude on recent efforts to quit smoking and otherwise maintaining a cheeky tone.

"In Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery)," Fujiwara scripts



and acts out a run-through for a meeting with his estranged father in Japan. In the video installation, he explains the purpose of the rehearsal to a quizzical actor cast as father figure. Together they discuss a pottery workshop that will take place when the reunion occurs and they smash mugs into bits – leaving the scattered pottery in shards over the floor of the Carpenter Center – and leaving

Simon Fujiwara with design for *New Pompidou*, Paris project.



the viewer without much in the way of a conclusion. What is the relationship between Fujiwara and his far-away father – what should it be?

Fujiwara resurrects a long-lost seaside photograph of his mother and her Lebanese boyfriend in "Studio Pietà." In a startlingly wistful video, he

casts a German model to play his blue eyed, blond-haired mother. Playing opposite her is the darker male with – according to Fujiwara – all of the primitive and base passions that his features suggest. Once the actors are selected and showered with water, the artist swaps roles from the original picture;

the beautiful blonde drapes her virile mate across her outstretched arms. The video is sumptuous, the accompanying photographs are disorienting, and the effect is sublime. To whom is the artist attracted? Did this photograph ever exist? Does it matter if it didn't?

Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex), photo by Lance Brewer, courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery.

"IS IT POSSIBLE TO THINK OF YOUR LIFE AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AT A TIME WHEN DEFINING ONESELF HAPPENS IN RELATION TO OTHERS," WONDERS FUJIWARA.

"Is it possible to think of your life as an autobiography at a time when defining oneself happens in relation to others," wonders Fujiwara.

He doesn't give an answer. But he addresses the question in a way that will leave you deeply intrigued in the legitimacy of your own narrative.

Catherine Creighton



Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery), 2011, video (14:18 min), mixed media installation, dimensions variable (exhibition view Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2012).