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Ellen Cantor, *Joy of Love*
February 25 - March 31, 2024
Opening Sunday, February 25, 5-7pm

Ellen Cantor, *Joy of Love*, an exhibition of major works from the 1990s including a large-scale drawing *Joy of Love* (1996), the video *Remember Me* (1998), and a selection of works related to the series *Micky & Minnie Suck* (1996), from the Estate of Ellen Cantor.

New location

116 Elizabeth Street, floor one
NY NY 10013
bottom buzzer for entry

Hours

Wednesday-Sunday, noon-7pm

Ellen Cantor knew a lot about having more than one life. New York and London; the multiple layers of a subject; the dispersal of authorship; emotionalism as one of many masks for diffuse identities. Cantor's early videos posit the ultimate breakdown of codes, ranging from the 'empowering character of violence' to the violent extinguishing of hope. *Evokation of My Demon Sister* (2002) is an homage to two films that she loved, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* by Kenneth Anger and *Carrie* by Brian DePalma. Perhaps one of Cantor's best-known video works, *Between Heaven and Hell* (1996), also deploys classic films she closely studied: Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which she used as a means to convey a diaristic story of failed love, set against two versions of the 'average' family.

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“I’m going to do this thing. I’m going to find balance. [...] For every problem there is an answer. Answer one question. Do you believe that love is a continuous stream?”¹

An exhibition about John Cassavetes, *Mr. Fascination*, at Thread Waxing Space, New York (2000), was structured around a large-scale projection of another of Cantor’s video montages, *Remember Me* (1998), currently on view. Writing about it later was an attempt to trace a relationship that built on such early collaborations toward a deepening friendship, subsequent exhibitions, completing and screening her feature film, *Pinochet Porn*, and into the present through the archiving of Cantor’s vast estate. Considerations of Cassavetes’ methods, themes, and directorial style were influenced by David Deitcher’s essay, “Sense and Sentimentality,” written for *Parkett* in the mid ‘90s in response to the lukewarm reception of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ Guggenheim exhibition. Deitcher discussed the relegation of “the sentimental” to something corrupting “to the social construction of modernist art and culture, with its preference for abstraction, progressive experimentation and irony over representation, traditional narrative and theatrical or melodramatic emotion.”²

“What do you sell? Love, drugs, poetry?”³

The companion essay to *Mr. Fascination* ended with this question, dedicated to Pat Hearn, who shared an interest in Cassavetes or, more specifically, in his ensemble cast member Ben Gazzara (via pseudonymous artist, J. St. Bernard) whom she cited in numerous exhibitions. Hearn was the first person to suggest to Cantor that she should make her drawings into films. Some twenty or more years later, she did. Prior, Cantor’s videos predominantly reconfigured existing cinematic material through complex editing, such as *Remember Me*, in which scenes from Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* were intercut with voiceover and images from Cassavetes’ *Faces* and *A Woman Under the Influence*. As is typical of Cantor’s practice, *Remember Me* brings together texts from various sources and careful montages of clips from well-known films. Further focusing the original material on themes of love and sadness, these videos condense the cinematic articulation of emotionalism – an aberration the artist fully embraces in the title of her monograph, *My Perversion is the Belief in True Love*.⁴

Cantor’s editing practice takes her sources to their logical extremes, while personalizing them in a cultural present with the use of her own voice as structural narration – employing cinematic tropes as intimate diary. The predominant lack of synchronized sound enhances the disconnection between precise communication and its implausibility. A *New York Times* review of Cassavetes’ final film stated: “Mr. Cassavetes’ work, in *Love Streams* as in his earlier films, is as overflowing with emotional constructs as it is barren of all other forms of thought.”⁵ Cantor’s work,

¹ Sarah Lawson (Gena Rowlands) in *Love Streams*, 1984.

² David Deitcher, “Sense and Sensibility,” *Parkett* 44, 1995: 214.

³ Robert Harmon (John Cassavetes) in *Love Streams*.

⁴ Ellen Cantor, *My Perversion is the Belief in True Love*, (Scalo Verlag, 1999).

⁵“The *New York Times* summarized the virtually unanimous critical verdict on the subject [of Cassavetes’ work] in its review of his final film,” quoted by Ray Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, Boston University, unpublished manuscript, this selection and arrangement 1989: p. ii.

perhaps, proves this point to be an impossibility; in this case, by honing works by Cassavetes and Antonioni to their emotional cores, unflattering relentless moments to reveal that there are structures of thought therein.

“As Antonioni put it, he felt a need to ‘avoid certain established and proven techniques’ and was ‘annoyed with all this sense of order, this systematic arrangement of the material’ in cinema. Breaking away from traditional narrative techniques first involved a destruction of conventional plots so that the story’s internal rhythms, rather than logical connections and sequential development, would move the action – the goal was to tie cinema ‘to the truth rather than to logic.’”⁶

Cantor’s interest in such breakdown delivers a different kind of cohesion, that of disparate parts culminating in a depiction of brutal sentimentality, unapologetic love. For Cassavetes, emotion was the sole topic and motivation of his art. It preoccupied him throughout his career, which spanned from approximately 1957-84: “What I think everybody needs is a way to say, ‘Where and how can I be in love so that I can live...’ That’s all I’m interested in – love. And the lack of it. When it stops.”⁷ For Cantor, it was the same, except it never stopped.

Sarah: “Love is a stream. It’s continuous. It doesn’t stop.”
Psychiatrist: “It does stop.”

Cantor eventually made her drawing story *Circus lives from Hell* into the feature-length film, *Pinochet Porn*, which reveals its nature as a microcosm of political discord, cycles of destruction, and mounting violence. “Within this story of circus life – complete with princesses and identical sisters, a boy who dresses like a clown, unicycles – childhood fantasy is permeated by structures of annihilation, which the characters later create in their own lives as adults.”

“The story ends with the question: Is tragedy a choice?” A question which is directly lifted from a text written by Deborah Drier for Ellen’s 1997 exhibition, *Remember the 14 Days and Nights* (Magazin 4, Bregenz, Austria), which factors largely in *Pinochet Porn*. Cantor contemplated this question deeply in her life. Like Rowland’s character in *Love Streams*, her convictions are made clear: “Love is a stream. It’s continuous. It doesn’t stop.”

[This text is an adapted excerpt from “The Hills are Alive / The Hills have Eyes,” in Ellen Cantor, *A history of the world as it has become known to me*, 2018, edited by Lia Gangitano, Fatima Hellberg, Jamie Stevens, contributions by Dodie Bellamy, Jonathan Berger, John Brattin, Ellen Cantor, Lia Gangitano, Cy Gavin, Joseph Grigely, Clara López Menéndez, and John Maybury, co-published by Sternberg Press, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, and Participant Inc.]

⁶ Peter Bondanella, “The Mature Auteurs: New Dimensions in Film Narrative with Visconti, Antonioni, and Fellini,” *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1983): 210-211.

⁷ Cassavetes: 88.

Joy of Love (1996) is a recently located, large-scale drawing from Cantor's Estate, which PARTICIPANT has managed since 2013. This exhibition highlights our on-site holdings to introduce audiences to behind-the-scenes archival efforts, a first look at our intentions for increased activation and access to our estates work. *Micky & Minnie Suck* (1996) is an extensive series of works on paper that exists in the form of a limited edition artist's book, published in 1997 by Feigen Incorporated, Chicago, as well as individual drawings, a modest selection on view. At the time of the first exhibition of this work in 1997, *New Art Examiner* noted, "for all its imposing size, the circa 8 foot square *Joy of Life* seems the most gentle, and therefore has the most subversive potential. If the small pieces are imagined returns to adolescence, this takes us back further..."

Image: **Ellen Cantor**, *Remember Me*, 1998, 10:25 min, b&w and color, sound, courtesy Estate of Ellen Cantor and Electronic Arts Intermix.

PARTICIPANT INC is located at 116 Elizabeth Street, floor one, in Chinatown, between Broome and Grand Streets. The closest trains are the J/Z (Bowery) and the B/D (Grand); the closest wheelchair accessible stop is the 6 (Canal). Entry is on grade and the gallery is barrier free throughout with an all gender, wheelchair accessible bathroom. Service animals are welcome.

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