

Amy Adler- A Provocatively Futile Negotiation

Amy Adler's enactment of identity and anonymity provokes an active consideration of the conceptual matters that dominate her work. Her capturing and relinquishing of control inspires a mirroring evaluation of her process. Adler's uniquely constructed oeuvre perpetually discloses and disguises a dynamic that is bound by the alternating forces of control and vulnerability.

Examining the work of Man Ray may reveal much about identity and power in Amy Adler's work. Just as Man Ray once was described as being always an outsider, "who wrapped otherness around him as if it were his flag", Adler compulsively flaunts a sense of being foreign in her own skin.

In *Rose Selavy*, one of the most celebrated collaborations in the history of art, Man Ray's decisive yet anonymous declaration of personal identity was constructed through the otherness of another. But it is not merely in the portrait image of Duchamp as "eros c'est la vie" that the nature of Adler's contrived identity can be cast. Rather, it is that the portrait relies on, and re-stages, an exchange. It is in the requirement of a relationship- an exchange of glances, of terms and of roles- that the work appropriately characterizes Adler's work.

Amy Adler chronicles her psychological and emotional states through an intensive examination of pseudo-intimate encounters processed in a manner to dominate and protect while also unwittingly revealing vulnerability. In her series, *Unknown*, an actress is hired and then photographed in Adler's apartment. The situations are staged and appear highly contrived. The actress lounges on Adler's bed, pets Adler's cat and plays Adler's guitar, staging a mirror image of the artist in a setting that is intimate and familiar in a manner that is foreign.

Adler handles familiar subjects in the same complicated manner as lesser and unknown subjects. When *Young Photographer* takes Adler's own first camera into his hands, the camera seems automatically to belong to him. In these "self-portraits" Adler crafts a schematic, elegant and highly artificial effect allowing only tentative relation to her own characteristic features. Identity, which is remote and contrived, becomes further alienated through the artist's systematic use of setting, casting and posing; photography, drawing, and re-photography. Her "subjects" are stripped of their conventional roles as identity, authenticity, and originality remain sequestered behind layers of technique and technology.

Recorded in the plain light of a single window, the actor, Leonardo DiCaprio presents himself to the camera directly and seemingly "out of character." In this private meeting, there is no mediating screen through which the actor's image is usually encountered. Once DiCaprio departs Adler's apartment, she is left with a single roll of film and her memory to keep a record of the performance. Though Adler indulges the libertarian possibility of personal expression by translating the initial photograph into a drawing, she

restrains the impulse to circulate this in the world by photographing that drawing and then destroying it. Every external reality gets replaced with another, more artificial version- each being farther removed from any recognizable source.

If Adler seeks anonymity in her work she simultaneously acknowledges the futility of such an objective. In order to be anonymous there has to be a true self to conceal- an invisible individuality that demands recognition. Anonymity, in some sense, may be the ultimate dimension of identity- the effacement of the self, of its individuality, its peculiarity, its signature. However, it seems more interesting to take a purely relational identity, from the point of view of all the interactions that converge and diverge, the point of view of identity relations, whereby the self oscillates between being and non-being, between the constitution of a personal identity and anonymity. Thus understood, the self is not contained precisely within a name or face, and the other is not exactly where we imagine it to be. In that space between self and other exists a dramatic intermediary where recognitions fade and come to life.

Man Ray's defining work of and about the tortured self was a photographic image of his former lover's eye attached to a metronome's pendulum. Produced first in 1923 as *Object To Be Destroyed* and last in 1972 as *Perpetual Motif*, it was declared to be an artwork at the edge of his control. According to Arturo Schwartz, Man Ray clipped this eye to the metronome's swinging arm to create the illusion of being watched as he painted. He also maintained that the piece could be destroyed and remade at will.

Like Man Ray's metronome, with its single, taunting photographic eye ticking back and forth, Amy Adler's work disturbs, regulates, and controls. By denying any conventional relationship between artist and subject, between artist and medium, and between artist and viewer, Adler confounds any attempt to identify an original source. She employs photography as a medium to define a dramatic space in which she can alternate between vulnerability and control, allowing identity to thrive in a state of incompleteness, neither premature nor fully mature.

Adler's photographic subjects, her photographic documents, and her drawings can be seen as surrogates in the studio that watch and keep track of her, but that can also be made subject to her complete control. In works featuring herself and those featuring others, strict formulae are maintained. Such control mechanisms seem to anticipate vulnerability and aim to recapture the authority relinquished through desire, through interpersonal relationships, and through exposure to the public, with its conventions and institutions. Traces of self-investigation occur, but they remained sealed within the intangible space of a photographic record.

As a mirror of identity formation, which is a mechanism for adaptation and control, Adler's work mimics the process of event details being stricken from the record, being edited or sublimated. In the end, no tangible evidence is offered except a record of a record- a provocatively futile negotiation.