

# Sex, Transubstantiation and Punk Angst: A Review of *bite like a kitty*

*Posted By Alana Coates In All, Art*

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The 2013 CAM Perennial, *bite like a kitty*, is curated by Bill Arning, the former Director of MIT's List Visual Arts Center and the current Executive Director of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Arning was invited to survey the artist studios of San Antonio as a guest curator with extensive expertise, a discerning eye, and an outside perspective.

Arning selected an all female roster to represent his vision of a unique artistic current in San Antonio; featuring the work of Joey Fauerso, Julia Barbosa Landois, Sarah Sudhoff, and Saintlorriane (an artistic collaboration between Britt Lorraine and Kristy Perez), the exhibition opened on Friday, March 15th at The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and will run through Saturday, June 1st.

Arning shared his experience as the CAM Perennial Curator with Art Magazine in the interview that can be found exclusively in the March print edition. Arning found dark humor to be the overarching theme in the artist's studios of San Antonio: "There was a certain type of devil-may-care humor looking at the dark side of life, politics, and society...that made me think of where my aesthetic was formed, which was in the punk rock period of the late 1970s in New York." The exhibition's title *bite like a kitty* is inspired by his memories of a punk band from this era.

Most art enthusiasts would agree that the night of the opening reception is not the optimal time to contemplate a curatorial concept; conversely, an exhibition such as *bite like a kitty* must be viewed multiple times for full conceptual realization. In other words, if you

have not had a chance to view *bite like a kitty*, you should while you still have the chance; and if you attended the opening reception it is imperative that you see it again.

The opening reception was well attended. And as one would expect, during the event the sounds of the video projections clashed with the chatter from the crowd preventing a full understanding of the works as a coherent visual and audio experience. While the crowd actively engaged with the exhibition, Sarah Sudhoff's piece *Wired* invited participants to take elements of the installation. *Wired* consists of a wall-mounted magazine rack that held black plastic sleeves concealing a poster print of sexual medical devices utilized at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction; for a one-dollar donation, gallery-goers could unveil the image of the sexual instrument.

*Giving to Get* is an installation and performance piece by the artist collaborative Saintlorriane. Set in a partitioned section of the gallery, the stage is divided by a theatrical curtain. The space and its swooning performer are bisected with this cloth to evoke the flawed existence of the human perspective. Conveying that just as the curtain and the partition prevent the onlooker in seeing the performer simultaneously in her entirety, by our cognitive design even someone intimate to us may only be known through fragments of reality, many times causing a mere illusion of their existence.

*Wired* and *Giving to Get* best exemplify the exhibition's alter egos of space activation and void. This notion permeates within the artworks subtle but powerful alterations post-opening night. In addition to the installations' transformations, nearly three quarters of the gallery's white wall space is left inactive.

Sarah Sudhoff's piece *Wired* ultimately transforms into a stripped magazine rack with accompanying gallery label. By artist design, the poster prints were not replenished after they sold out and a sole gallery spotlight highlights that the mounted racks now contain nothing; their bareness and utilitarian nature seemingly add further to the clinical sentiment of Sudhoff's work. The artist superimposes the erotic with quantifiable measurements and absurdity.

Exploration of the human connections within stark and grotesque moments appears throughout the artist's oeuvre and this is definitely a concept present in *Wired* as well. The artist states that when looking at the instruments at the institute she started "wondering about the identity of the volunteer subject and the test being conducted." Yet her meditation of the objects connections with life produce a contradictory projection; *Wired* reveals the instruments in a cold and technical manner perhaps to reverberate the aesthetic of the clinic itself or to generate a lingering uneasiness with thoughts of sexual research.

By nature of being a performance piece, *Giving to Get* reflects the notion of activation and void by its use of animate subject, active viewer, and definite end. Performance art modifies the fixed relations of viewer and subject into a fluid and temporal logic. The primary vehicle of communicating the artistic concept—the corporeal subject—is gone after the performance has ended but the aesthetic encounter still lingers; Saintlorriane complements this void by leaving the performer's clothing where her body once was. And again, lighting is successfully utilized to highlight the action that has already past; furthermore, the natural flora incorporated into the installation that immediately starts to wither enhances the concept. All facets lend to thoughts of perception and the idea of transitory action.

*Star-Crossed II* is a powerful and thought provoking piece by Julia Barbosa Landois that is a video recorded reenactment with slight modifications from a performance she gave in conjunction with the *Estampas de la Raza* exhibition at the McNay Museum. With bilingual subtitles, the artist beautifully belts out her rendition of a classic ranchera ballad of scorned lovers that turns into a personal break-up song with Jesus.

In a dual-screen projection, Joey Fauerso's *Nick Reading Nouns #4* is a single-channel video that employs a sensual young man reading a nonsensical script as he breaks his speech with occasional flirtatious glances to provoke his viewer: "you dispense too much, now there is melted candy all over the carpet." In Arning's curatorial statement he describes Fauerso's work as a depiction of men that appear "hyper-sexualized and innocent" as if to create a "blending of gender roles that creates new categories of

sexuality that make binary distinctions like gay/straight or male/female seem hopelessly *retardataire*.” The figure of Nick is juxtaposed with a Keith Haring type simplified line animation that offsets the sexual tension.

Arning has promised “bubbling provocations” and he has delivered; *bite like a kitty* asks the viewer to question his or her own individual actions and voids, relationships and sexual tensions, to then negate their related sensitivities within the formation of things past, depleted and decayed.

The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center Art Gallery is located at 723 S. Brazos Street, San Antonio 78207. Gallery Hours: Tue-Sat 12 – 5 pm.