

November 1st - December 15th

Mouthfeel

Big Rock Candy Mountain

Mouthfeel

Helen Reed and Hannah Jickling told me about a studio visit they had. They were in the midst of an earlier incarnation of their multi-pronged ongoing project Big Rock Candy Mountain, and the curator they were visiting with kept asking the question, “What is the work?” It’s a legitimate question to be sure, how one locates the “artwork” for a pair of artists whose history sits pretty squarely outside of material, object-based practices. But what struck me when hearing this anecdote, was the curator’s insistence in trying to single out one thing as being the art work thus relegating other aspects of their project as only supplementary or supportive.

I’m bad with memory details, so I don’t actually recall what the curator was insisting was “the art.” Was it *Sour vs Sour*, the chocolate bar that Reed and Jickling had produced with kids, or were they arguing that that was only a by-product and the actual work was the workshops they led in the classroom? Really, it’s besides the point. It’s a fundamental philosophical question: what is art? And while I don’t disagree with this question being asked of Big Rock Candy Mountain, I contest the restricted scope of how to answer it. I’ve thought of this story often over the process of making the exhibition *Mouthfeel* with Reed and Jickling and, in a way, it helps illustrate how

and why this exhibition came into being. When they first recounted this exchange to me, my first response was, “duh, it’s all the work.”

There is a tendency in exhibition making to cram anything and everything into the frame of a gallery (I’m referring here to both the physical, architecture confines of a gallery as well as the philosophical, ideological, historical frame within which it operates). Dance: let’s put that in the gallery! Cinema: paint the white cube black and stick it in there! Stand up comedy: we can work with that too! While I don’t pretend to be innocent of any of the aforementioned curatorial impulses, I do recognize the limits and problems that come with the attempted (forced) inclusion of practices that don’t situate themselves first and foremost in a gallery.

With Reed and Jickling, this is the question we wrestled with: what would it look like to take a generative, ongoing, pedagogical project and offer up to it a literal white cube as a platform to work within? If the two artists are to spend a year working in a school, thinking about taste and flavour and mouthfeel, and ultimately producing a line of bubble gum, could the resources, structure and frame of an exhibition in a gallery do anything for their work? Unlike cinema,

dance, or music, the practices of artists like Reed and Jickling don't often fall victim to the stuff-it-in-the-gallery impulse that plagues some other practices; when these types of projects find themselves engaged by contemporary art institutions it is, more often than not, via the public programs and/or education department of said institutions. I'm not saying this to point out the often hierarchical relationship between curatorial and education in art institutions, rather, I'm bringing it up as a way of illustrating when the stuff-it-in-the-gallery impulse is resisted. When a social practice project is situated in a gallery's education department, it's actually being supported within a framework that is more appropriately designed for its structure.

In this example, it could be argued that social practice can be allowed to be just what it is. It can exist as pedagogy, or as discursive engagement, and resist its reification into an object/commodity. As Reed, Jickling, Vanessa Kwan of *Other Sights* (who was also engaged with the work as commissioners/producers of the gum), and I talked about an exhibition, the intent was not to make their work fit into the box, but rather to wonder how their practices might manifest in a way that makes sense here. How this might be realized

took a lot of directions which led us through ideas: from how a group of grade 6/7 students might curate a show themselves, to a fruitless months long attempt to track down a series of photographs of chewed up gum made 47 years ago in Poland.

Let's go back to this curator and the insistence about locating the work somewhere. I've spent a lot of time thinking through my knee jerk response to that story: It's all the work. I don't profess to having had a grand analysis at the time, rather, I was simply guffawing at the simplistic reduction of trying to isolate a component of a sprawling project and practice into one gesture. But as I continued to work through this exhibition with Reed, Jickling, and Kwan, I kept returning to the significance of it.

With *Mouthfeel* the question was not how to figure out what the work was, and fit it into the gallery, rather it was to propose the exhibition as one site where Big Rock Candy Mountain could be activated. An exhibition offers another gesture that can be exercised by Reed and Jickling within the overarching structure of Big Rock Candy Mountain. So, where the gum, the workshops in a classroom, the lecture with a flavour scientist, the cardboard chocolate workshop with All-American Jewish Lesbian

Folksinger Phranc, are all various gestures and actualizations of Reed and Jickling's practice, so too, could be making an exhibition.

Which brings us to *Mouthfeel*, an exhibition that thinks about the mouth as a means of aesthetic perception and production. Rather than try to materialize Reed and Jickling's work into a set of objects and images, *Mouthfeel* considers the making of making of an exhibition as the work. Contained here are works by two individual artists—Diane Borsato and Dina Danish—and two groups of artists—students from Queen Alexandra Elementary and various livestock from Eastern Oregon. The objects and images contained here, representing research and inspiration that went into the production process for QA CHEW'S BUBBLE TROUBLE. One might argue that this is a parallel exhibition to the gum, curated by Reed and Jickling, I'd simply say that it's just another part of their work.

—Pablo de Ocampo

THAT WAXY TEXTURE

One component of taste is mouthfeel, the feeling of something touching the sides of your cheeks, your tongue, your teeth. A little more than texture - does it make your mouth water? Does it pop? Is it slimy? Mouthfeel is most noticeable when something behaves in a way that is unexpected – when pop lacks a fizz, when stale crackers don't crunch. It is slippery aesthetics, fuzzy authorship and tactile information that goes beyond our typical knowing. The sensibility of cows, fossilized molar impressions of sub-arctic youth, the solar system tiny enough to fit inside a mouth and ABC-ed gum moving between plexi-boxes and teeth every week.

FEELS VERY SMALL IN MY MOUTH

In *Artifacts in my Mouth*, Diane Borsato works towards “a whole different way of knowing.” In 2003 she convinced the Exhibition Center of Saint Hyacinthe, Québec to let her place a variety of objects in her mouth. “[E]veryone can't go through the glass of museum vitrines, or we wouldn't have artifacts. But at least if one person can act out those possibilities, it makes them available for everyone later to contemplate.”

TIP OF YOUR TONGUE

Cows, sheep and horses made the salt licks. The whorls, grooves and curves were formed over a season of licking. They arrived here via The Great Salt Lick, an art auction for and by ranchers in Eastern Oregon, where salt licks are sold off as art objects. The event began as a tongue-in-cheek dig at abstract sculpture by Baker City man-about-town Whit Deschner. But, 11 years on, ranchers walk their fields yearly in search of what they consider to be the most sculptural salt forms.

ANCIENT GREEKS AND ICE PEOPLE

Dina Danish's Brass Replica of Stone Age Chewing Gum is a scale model of one of the oldest discovered chewing gum blobs, found in Finland by an archaeology student. The 5000-year-old glob still bears tooth impressions, was made from birch bark tar and looked “just like a dirty piece of modern chewing gum”, the student told *The Scotsman* newspaper in 2007.

¹ Tousignant, Isa. “Mois De La Photo: Diane Borsato: Mouth Piece.” *Hour Community*. September 08, 2005. Accessed October 29, 2018. <http://hour.ca/2005/09/08/mouth-piece/>.

² Cameron, Richard. “The 5,000-Year-Old Chewing Gum.” *The Scotsman*. August 20, 2007. Accessed October 15, 2018. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/the-5-000-year-old-chewing-gum-1-914800>.

FLAVOURISTS SAY THERE IS NEVER A BAD TASTE

The grid of ABC (already been chewed) gum is an archive of taste from the process of creating QA CHEW's BUBBLE TROUBLE. Over 30 different kinds of gum were chewed by the grade 6/7 class, including our own gum prototypes. These were evaluated through a number of criteria, annotated, and stored for posterity in the plastic cases.

Each impression on the table takes a tactile approach. Sensory information is privileged; forms are repeated and mimicked. Chew and view.

—Helen Reed & Hannah Jickling

List of Works

1. Salt Licks

Mineral salt block

Courtesy of Whit Deschner

2. Brass Replica of Stone Age

Chewing Gum

Dina Danish

Brass, 2018

3. ABC Gum Samples

Produced with students at Queen

Alexander Elementary

4. Artifacts in My Mouth

Diane Borsato

Digital print, 2003

Courtesy Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec

Welcome to Flavour Country

talk by Nadia Berenstein

Wednesday 7 November @ 7pm

Q.A. CHEW'S BUBBLE TROUBLE is a commission of the City of Vancouver Public Art Program as part of Big Rock Candy Mountain, a multi phased project initiated by Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed. Big Rock Candy Mountain is a flavour incubator and taste-making think-tank located at Queen Alexandra Elementary Schhol, produced by Other Sight's for Artists' Projects.

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