

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Sean C Flaherty's Overture

Lisa Young-De Leon · Wednesday, November 21st, 2012

Art and emotion have always gone hand-in-hand, whether it solely a visual expression with perhaps political content (as seen in the Romantic painting by Théodore Géricault in *The Raft of the Medusa*, expressing outrage toward the disregard of human life), or a deeper exploration to find an understanding—much like a science experiment—seen in the work of many contemporary conceptual artists (such as Lygia Clark's *Dialogue goggles*, forcing the two wearing the ocular device into an intimate situation). Some artists have that gift or ability to grab their viewer by the heart (squeezing it ardently), and to solicit sympathetic or empathic emotional understandings.

An artist who has this ability (and who I feel is definitely worth following, as I foresee a maturity equivalent to that of Bruce Nauman) is Sean C Flaherty.

Flaherty is a Los Angeles-based artist whose primary medium is video. His work considers issues in communication, and our understanding of the relationships and dynamics between, say, family members, “through shared cultural experiences such as theater, music, and film.”

Currently, Flaherty has an exhibit at California State University at Fullerton's Grand Central Art Center that continues to explore this content in a three-part act through the use of three specific songs from Act I of the musical *Les Misérables* (based the 1862 French novel by author Victor Hugo).

Flaherty has chosen to appropriate songs from this musical because as a child and while growing up, he would often attend with his father; the musical and its songs conjures up a nostalgia that the artist holds dearly.

The complete exhibit, *An Overture in Parts*, is presented in three acts (three separate videos, each three to four minutes in length).



Act I-The Confrontation: Script as Set

In Act I, Flaherty using the song, *The Confrontation*, places his own father in the character of Inspector Javert (a disciplinarian who “has a certain level of authority,” a stereotype befitting of a father) and himself as Jean Valjean. The kitchen is the backdrop to this act because, as Flaherty says, it is a place common for confrontations to occur. Flaherty and his father face each other in the kitchen, with their music scripts blocking the view of the other.



Act II-One Day More: A Family in Parts

Here, Flaherty uses different family members—each filmed separately, each singing different parts of the song, *One Day More*. *A Family in Parts* is a play on words, bringing together his family

perhaps separated by miles; and, with the wonders of editing, creating “one cohesive unit.”

In the filming of Act II, Flaherty allowed each family member to choose their own set – a location within their home that exuded a sense of hominess. And, each was cast, not by age or gender, but based on the family structure — i.e. their position in the family. For example, Flaherty cast his grandmother as Jean Valjean, for this particular act, the patriarch of the family, the main character.



Act III-A Heart Full of Love: Familiar Parts

In the last act, Flaherty filmed three separate images of himself with a black background, singing the parts of the three different characters in A Heart Full of Love. Here, Flaherty enacts the roles of the three characters in the love triangle: the young male hero and the two girls, one who is privileged and the other who is not. The artist embodies all three characters and plays each role in relation to himself, demonstrating the emotions and facial gestures stereotypical of each character. What interests Flaherty are social stereotypes, and how these stereotypes are portrayed throughout history—good and evil, men and women. Flaherty states, and I agree, that “people perform scripts in everyday life, like the reflections of scripts in culture. And, entertainment reflects the scripts that we take on, ourselves.”

Flaherty’s work is on view, in the Project Room Gallery, at Grand Central Arts Center located at 125 N. Broadway in Santa Ana, California, through January 13, 2013. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Sunday 11:00am-4:00pm with extended hours on Friday & Saturday open until 7:00pm. View more of Flaherty’s work on his website, flahertystudio.com.

Video stills, from top: Act I: The Confrontation: Script as Set; Act II-One Day More: A Family in Parts; Act III-A Heart Full of Love: Familiar Parts.

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