

Lisa Cooley is pleased to present *On the Pleasure of Hating*: love turns, with a little indulgence, to indifference or disgust; Hatred alone is immortal, curated by David Hunt and featuring Josh Faught, Simone Leigh, Nicholas Lobo, Shana Lutker, Mike Quinn and Dario Robleto. The exhibition will run from July 9th until August 22nd, with an opening reception on Thursday, July 9, from 6 until 8 pm.

The exhibition takes its title and its premise from an essay by the great English essayist, William Hazlitt:

“Nature seems (the more we look into it) made up of antipathies: without something to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action. Life would turn to a stagnant pool, were it not ruffled by the jarring interests, the unruly passions, of men. The white streak in our own fortunes is brightened (or just rendered visible by making all around it as dark as possible; so the rainbow paints its form upon the cloud. Is it pride? Is it envy? Is it the force of contrast? Is it weakness or malice? But so it is, that there is a secret affinity, a hankering after, evil in the human mind, and that it takes a perverse, but a fortunate delight in mischief, since it is a never-failing source of satisfaction. Pure good soon grows insipid, wants variety and spirit. Pain is a bittersweet, wants variety and spirit. Love turns, with a little indulgence, to indifference or disgust: hatred alone is immortal.”

-The Plain Speaker, 1823

The exhibition, “*On the Pleasure of Hating*,” takes as its conceptual and thematic launching point William Hazlitt’s 1823 essay of the same name. Originally published in *The Plain Speaker*, a journal that did much to cement Hazlitt’s reputation as both innovator and primary exponent of the “familiar” or “personal” essay, I was instantly attracted to the English critic’s tone of wise equanimity, the general mood of resignation writ large in every one of his paragraphs. Hatred, after all, needs no introduction; its mere incantation perfectly approximates its heated emotional tenor. But miraculously, a man for whom every relationship – wife, daughter, mistress, friends, colleagues – succumbed to the kind of emotional entropy Hazlitt describes so well in his essay, seemed to write with a calm, retrospective clarity absent any lingering resentment.

Forgotten in his lifetime, largely viewed as a crank and a boor by polite society, and abandoned by Wordsworth and Coleridge, the two great Romantic poets who had Hazlitt to thank for their early success, the master rhetorician, in line after line of aphoristic prose, consistently brought a mood of requisite detachment to the radical notion that the human race is biologically hardwired for – and

largely motivated by – hatred, rather than its consoling opposite. As retailed by Hazlitt, hatred’s symptoms include anger, rage, jealousy, envy, and the beginnings of what would later become that most fashionable of memes: schadenfreude. A striver to the core, Hazlitt intuitively recognized that one’s success is never enough. No, in order to gain complete satisfaction our rivals must also fail miserably.

Hazlitt, in my estimation, was the first modern thinker to dispense with the primitive notion that hatred is a simmering urge lingering just beneath a veil of civility that needs to be neutralized, suppressed, or at least controlled, while love is the healthy manifestation of a natural order, rearing its sentimental head as the need or occasion arises. This simple inversion of terms – that hatred is sustaining, in fact, “immortal” in Hazlitt’s words, and love a convenient fiction whose endless platitudes are trotted out like so many useless band-aids on a gushing artery -- was, as I continued to read, the kind of ideological kick in the head I was looking for. Or perhaps it was looking for me. Hazlitt is funny that way. Resistance to his insights is futile; the strong persuader’s inability to speak anything but truth to power kind of lulls you into a position where the heat-seeking missile always finds its target whether you were initially ready to receive his insights or not.

That one can derive pleasure from hating is less a curatorial provocation, and more an obvious statement of the blogosphere’s Tourette-like instinct toward knee-jerk indictment coupled with self-aggrandizement. First thought, best thought; never coiled, always springing. But to curate a show entitled “On the Pleasure of Hating,” which attempts to echo through idiosyncratic objects a generalized atmosphere of hatred recollected in tranquility might be provocative enough to put a knowing smile on even Hazlitt himself.

-David Hunt

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