

# ARRANGEMENTS

## NATASHA HOARE IN CONVERSATION WITH LINDSAY LAWSON

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Lindsay Lawson, *Arrangements*, May 20 2016 in 1646.

This artist  
Lindsay Lawson

This correspondent  
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# 1646.

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Natasha Hoare [NH] - Lindsay Lawson [LL]:

Hi Lindsay, I hope this email finds you well. I've been invited to conduct an email conversation with you in the lead up to your show at 1646. It seems a dastardly format given how busy you must be with preparations, but happy to be in touch with you to trace your process and hear more about the exhibition. The title is *Arrangements*, which seems to be a spatial proposition and pointing to planning or laying down a grounds. Can you explain the choice?

Best wishes  
Natasha

LL - NH:

Hi Natasha,

Yes the timing is a bit tricky, hence my very late reply! I started drafting this email 11 days ago and got so busy with the show that I forgot to finish it.

So here we go...

I've started calling some of my works arrangements since I didn't find a better word to describe them. Arrangement can mean a spatial proposition like an arrangement of objects like flowers, for example.

A second meaning, which I find crucial here, is an agreement or understanding between two or more parties. I think the second meaning has a connotation of a compromise that could even suggest an illicit sort of deal while agreement is more neutral. An arrangement is something that "works" for all parties, but is probably not an ideal situation for anyone. I don't think this description is inherent in the meaning of the word arrangement, but it's a feeling of the word (in American English at least).

The main work in the show is a film I've been working on for three years, called *The Smiling Rock*.

To put it very simply, it's about a woman who falls in love with a stone she finds on eBay. The stone is unique because it is a geode with a smiley face in its façade, plus the eBay seller is asking \$10,000 for the small rock.

This part of the story is based on reality: there is an actual smiling rock on eBay, but it's actually priced at \$1,000,000. I've been "watching" the actual rock on eBay for years, made several solo exhibitions about it, a performance, a video, a text, and now this

film. I've also made a piece in which I borrowed this actual rock and showed it in a gallery (two galleries in two exhibitions, actually) along with a text about the relationship of myself with the rock and its eBay seller.

This work - which is the act of borrowing a rock from the owner/eBay seller, offering him a fee for loaning the rock, making a loan agreement, taking out insurance on the rock - was something that I had a difficult time categorizing. It wasn't a performance, nor was it a sculpture, installation, etc. I realized that it was essentially an act of correspondence, a legally binding agreement, an object, and a context. I eventually decided that this kind of work would be called an arrangement.

Although the works in my show at 1646 are not arrangements, they all originated from one.

My best,  
Lindsay

NH - LL: Hi Lindsay,

No problem!

The work *Smiling Rock* seems to have taken you in many directions. Does its resonance for you centre around its ability to trace the nature of value and exchange? Here an object with anthropomorphic qualities is elevated to such a high value despite its intrinsic material properties being of little value.

I'm reminded also of current theories, particularly object orientated ontology, in the depth and scale of your attentions to this object; its manifold manifestations both online and as a physical presence in your exhibitions.

Best wishes from Italy!

LL - NH:

The question of value is definitely one of the central points. The smiling rock is marketed as a natural phenomena and there are precedents of everyday items being sold on eBay as miraculous/divine because they depict an image. Probably the most notable early example of this was the grilled cheese with the face of Mary that sold for \$28,000 in 2004.

In that case the religious iconography was the cache, while the smiling rock only has the impish charm of its clownish smiley face. I quite like the idea that if the smiling rock is some kind of miracle of nature, then whatever higher being conjured its face in stone is trying to suggest that the joke is on us.

There is definitely a link to object oriented ontology in this work and other projects of mine. In fact I'm organizing a symposium about object oriented ontology in relation to objectum sexuality (more about that later). In some of recent works I do consider an object's

perspective, not necessarily as a sentient being, but perhaps just as organized matter that is subject to/experiences fluctuations of energy.

For me, the smiling rock is about the space between presence and absence, which has something to do with the online presence of an object (or person, artwork, for that matter) as an extension of a physical reality.

I've thought a lot about something called the "idealization of the sender" that happens during computer-mediated communication. Oneself is the receiver and whomever he or she communicates with is the sender. Due to the lack of context clues like body language and tone of voice, plus the possibility of asynchronous communication and anonymity, I (the receiver, oneself) must more actively (creatively?) decipher incoming information than I would during face to face communication. In any situation, whatever information a person gleans from communication is necessarily inflected by one's own perspective, but computer-mediated communication leaves a wider gap for interpretation.

I can't believe I typed this all on my phone!

NH - L:

Very well i-phone typed indeed!  
Rather fitting given the medium of our conversation as "computer-mediated communication"...

I was wondering also about the role of humour in your work. I've been thinking of Pierre Bismuth's work *Where is Rocky II*, which is a very different piece of course, but is a humorous one in that it spins an elaborate chase or search around object that must be impossible to find - a sort of poke in the eye to conceptualism perhaps. You mentioned in your last message that the smiling rock has a humour to it, directing us to the manifold instances that circulate online of 'Jesus in toast' - wilful moments of seeing the sublime in the mundane.

Is humour important to you, and does the smiling rock manifest a specifically contemporary form of digitally distributed humour?

LL - NH:

Yes, I love the concept of *Where is Rocky, II*! There are many parallels to what I am doing here.

And yes, the smiling rock is humorous. It's always smiling. But like the miracle toast, its humor also comes from the absurdity of value. For me humor functions to highlight the depths and desperation of desire, which is actually kind of a sad thing. The wish to experience something that is impossibly out of reach is a problem that is compounded by our increasingly digital lives. There was a phenomena of people becoming depressed, even suicidal, after watching the movie *Avatar*. Audiences fell

in love with the idea of living amongst the Na'vi on the planet Pandora, which the disabled human protagonist can do by means of a giant blue avatar body like those of the indigenous humanoids. Some people wished so desperately to live on Pandora that they were crushed by the reality that (for now) that is not a reality, although the movie's premise that a person can be uploaded into an avatar seems just on the fringe of possibility.

NH - LL:

Extraordinary! Reminds me somewhat of 'Paris Syndrome' - a condition that has affected Japanese tourists visiting Paris. They are so disappointed on visiting this actual city, with its rude waiters and litter, that they fall into a catatonic state and have to be evacuated home by the embassy. There's something inbuilt in us which ensures projected fantasies are strong enough to elicit a physical response, from heart break, to spending money on things that have no 'real' value, to falling into a Paris-induced coma.

That brings me to exhibition making...what kind of spatial experience do you create for viewers? Film installations and performance lectures would seem to suggest that you want to create an immersive space, one in which the viewer is more likely to make their own emotional projection or have physical responses?

LL - NH:

It seems that Paris Syndrome produces quite intense physical symptoms. It's understandable to have culture shock that is amplified by expectation, but such an affliction makes me wonder if a person who succumbs to Paris Syndrome must have some need to believe a perfect place (like an imaginary Paris) exists somewhere in the world. I've been slowly writing a play based on the parable of Plato's Cave, in which a cave dweller who has only seen shadows cast upon the back of the cave wall is suddenly able to leave the cave and see the true reality outside. I imagine that the cave dweller would experience a similar kind of shock as Paris Syndrome, but as the inverse: to expect an impossible world versus to discover a world you didn't know was possible.

The film I'm presenting at 1646 has many scenes that are 3D modeled digital animations. They are very spacial experiences from the point of view of the main character navigating these virtual realms, so it is certainly immersive, while at the same time these rendered spaces can defy physical laws since I am able to create any kind of space I can imagine.

NH - LL:

The Plato's Cave play sounds really interesting, would that be in an art gallery context or a theatre? Do you seek other contexts for your work? Film Festivals and

the like?

Given your work across sculpture, film, choreography and animation it seems as if it can stand the stretching of being shown in different ways and to different audiences.

Also, given it's only a couple of days before the opening of the show, what is your process now?

LL - NH:

I imagine the play would be suitable for either a gallery or theater context, but I would hope it fits somewhere in between. The film I'm showing here at 1646 will likely be shown in film festivals as a revised edit for that context.

I'm still finishing a sculpture that has a print applied to the surface. It's this crazy process called water transfer printing in which a thin printed foil is laid on top of large water bath and the object to be printed in is submerged in the bath, which forces the print onto its surface. We've set up a temporary pool in the back yard with about one cubic meter of water and a team of us is dipping the sculpture to print. It's a bit of a complicated process and everyone is soggy.

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