

candy, cakes, purls and pixels**- a small text in four tiny chapters -**

To accompany Rachelbeth Egenhoefer's exhibition of new work, Lighthouse, Brighton, 2008

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hard candy

There's an image on RB's website of a framed series of nine little sugary prints made from suck-wetted 'life saver' sweets. Y'know the ones: little sweetie-sharp rings of fruity sugar, rock hard, in glassy green, purple, red and yellow, the kind you put in and take out of your mouth for an hour until the ring finally dissolves away thinner and thinner like a sucrose wedding ring into a saccharine nothing...

Just like love (serious line).

There's an equally serious line on RB's website that tells us she lives and works in San Francisco where she "bakes banana bread, collects snow globes, and likes to swim". Her University of Brighton residency statement proclaims her "Commodore 64 Computer and Fisher Price Loom to be defining objects of her childhood". And her current project title is the sweetheart gorgeous *Code, Candy & Craft...*

There's an RB cutesy project on her suga-surfer www.cableknit.net called *You are my friend*, a limited edition of stickers for friends as a "small reminder that you are my friend". We're urged to "spread the love", and there is the possibility of a kitty-little knitted sweater for my ipod (or my friend's), or a pocket sized creature-friend (for me or my...)...

Words like 'quirky', 'dabbling' and 'cozy' are there on *cableknit*, and *I am deeply darkly afraid...*

Afraid (in my chilled and fearful Northern soul) of drowning, diabetes, headaches, sugar rushes, furry tongues, flushed necks, and (awfully) sticky fingers...

wires and cakes

Rachel Beth Egenhoefer is, thankfully, a grown up artist, with a solid and impressive record of educational achievements, international exhibitions, residencies, presentations and publications, laudable awards and notable plaudits, and considerable professional experience¹.

Her resumé history and her present application both assuaged my fear and affirmed my work ethic. It isn't sugar-free, but it's good stuff, and her courageous, intelligent, playful and winsome West Coast soul won over mine...

The exhibition was scheduled for the mid-point of Rachel Beth's residency at University of Brighton, Lighthouse Brighton, and Furtherfield London, and she wisely chose to identify it as work-in-progress. Being in fragment, en route, partial and just underway is, I believe, a hallmark of genuine enquiry, characteristic of research driven by curiosity and enthusiasm, and symptomatic of subject immersion.

Ephemera, nonsensical 'bits', sweet wrappings, and 'notes to self' are grouped as they were in the studio as testimony of days spent three-dimensionally doodling and digitally day-dreaming, figuring out and playing, having fun and 'doing serious art'. What I might call 'reverie research'...

And, fundamental to her systematic (but not over-so) investigation of code and candy (but not over-sweet), knit and purl, cakes and wires, zeds and noughts (but not over-paired), though, is the binary potency-potential of the conceptual-actual gap between 'hand digital and 'digi-digital' (yes?)...

¹ www.rachelbeth.net

Jell-O baby

Rachel Beth describes the imagined indulgence of being in a room full of Jell-O (should I put ™, RB?).

I feel that scratchy rash again; I'm breathing kinda funny: am I gelatin-allergic? RB? RB?

But, this fine (and she is) artist uses something of that sticky-icky description to inform a strange, much cooler, plastic work: a casting of the familiar space between herself and her computer. An object that literally fills the digi-gap... a polished and raw chunk – or lump – of resin that captures – like a plastic-age fly in prehistoric amber – the absolute essence of this practice and its wider theoretical and conceptual domain...

So the sweetness crystallizes for me, hardening into an amber knowing oeuvre. Now, I've always taken knitting seriously: certainly since I read about tight Shetland knitted *gansies* causing ear bleeds²; absolutely after the guerilla knitters punctured the UK's Crafts Council³; definitely *après* radical lace makers' intercouring with knit-subversives at NYC's aptly titled MAD⁴; and positively post-Freudian conceptions of intermeshed textile fibers being some substitute for the much desired phallus...⁵

These are hot: bloody, aggressive, perverse, confrontational, and embodied or at least somatic instances of knit. For RB, however, the plasticized void between hand and keyboard is as near as the actual body gets...

² Christine Grey (2006) *Mapping the Gansey*. MA dissertation, Norwich School of Art and Design (quoting Mrs Bishop of Sheringham)

³ www.craftscouncil.org.uk/exhib/k2together/

⁴ <http://madmuseum.org>

⁵ Freud, S (1933) *Femininity in New Introductory Lectures* (Standard Edi. Vol. XXII)

purls and pixels

Cool and conceptual, Egenhoefer's engagement with knitted form acts as a kind of post-9/11 post-trauma post-craft surveillance exercise, mapping the body's movements with coded techno-scripting in motion-tracked sensor-led and algorithmic poetic dance, *avec du sucre...* Cultural observation of human movement is ubiquitous: coded candied loops of our every blink, twitch, shriek and quiver populate an expanding digital universe. *Cogito, ergo sum* (à la Descartes) spoke Rosemarie Trockel's machine knitted "shaky signature"⁶ in 1988, then rupturing demure domestic femininity. 'I blink, therefore I am; I make banana bread, form codes, eat candy' speaks a 21st century techno-babe. We are in a new provocative and performative practice that is troubling in its apparent naïvety, blandness, cuteness, and saccharine content. This criticality is veiled in spun sugar, and all the more potent for it.

Knitting is body-monitored via digitized ceramic needles that become crafted prosthetics of the most benign kind – who could object to morphed arms and hands that extend the body and brain into binary language and (e)motional digi-drawings? Who would dispute a fake zoetrope with a university-department knitted interior and a static, just potentially-mobile form? Who could be bothered by crafty cuteness? Who could be annoyed by pixels and purls? Who?

Pearls of wisdom here, my dear, purls of wisdom...

⁶ Jefferies, J. (1997) *Autobiographical Patterns* n.paradoxa No.4 web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/index2.htm