

September 13, 2012

# Deconstructed Mixtapes and Narrative Tapestries: Visual Chronicles in Laguna Beach

Evan Senn



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The chronicles of my youth are strewn about my mother's attic; scrapbooks, posters, pictures, and mementos hold significant amounts of memory within objects, telling a story without words. Some people choose to write in diaries or journals to record their experiences, but sometimes tangible things can tell your story. Objects, places, scents, colors, imagery and sensations; these elements evoke thoughts, feelings or memories. Sometimes words aren't enough.

Salt Fine Art's new exhibition, Visual Chronicles, focuses on this interaction and creative expression of images, objects, and experiences without words. The fundamentals of words are simple; they are symbols, that are meaningless without ideas ascribed to them. Text carries baggage with its readers. It does not exist without them, but each person has their own set of feelings and thoughts associated with words, phrases, ideas, and so on. Without the familiar simple words to guide us through experience or understanding, we are left to our own devices. With so much digital expression, programming, tweeting, hash-tagging, embedded coding, barcodes, and scannable iconography, our visual language is changing alongside our shifting verbal language; we are being forced, in a way, to live more visually. Some contemporary artists are spending time on this subject, and this is only the beginning of the major evolution in our visual and verbal communications. Art belongs in the forefront of most new media movements, and some of today's artists are on top of that game. Laguna Beach's contemporary art gallery, Salt

Fine Art, is taking charge of their sleepy beach town and bringing our ever-changing art world to this coastline community through an extensive experiential visual language and artworks.

"The word is not enough," writes critic, poet and curator, Peter Frank wrote about this exhibition in an essay about Visual Chronicles for Salt Fine Art. "The image is not enough. The book is not enough. The Internet is not enough. The breakthroughs of the past, driven by an ideology of change and experimentation, paved the direction and built some prototypes, but today's artists want to crawl into the very impulse to language that drives human perception and bring forth some different, perhaps new sort of effect or concept or engine that rewires, and thus reveals, the mechanisms of meaning,"

Six artists take on the purely visual expression of communication and guided chronicling. Guillermo Bert and Rebecca Lowry are two of the artists that interpret new media in a novel way. Guillermo Bert has a fascination with coding and the language of semiotics. His new work fuses ancient tapestries and modern QR code technology. Bert created pieces that transform indigenous patterns into interactive coding that allow the viewer to become a participant and listener, hearing the long forgotten ancient poems and sounds of the Chilean people when scanning the ancient-looking textiles. They are created in the tradition of the Mapuche people and bring a new take or passing on traditions within a culture and within art. Bert's work often synthesizes such opposites together. Some of his past work utilizes barcodes to create a relationship with traditional religious art implications to express the modern idolizing of technology while embedding them with important identity-based imagery.



Guillermo Bert and his QR coded textiles. Courtesy of Artist.

Bert is also being featured in soon-to-be released, *Coded Stories*, a documentary film that weaves together contemporary art with indigenous rights to convey the struggle of the Mapuche people of Chile to preserve their culture and way of life. The film follows Bert, a Chilean-born, Los Angeles-based artist and focuses on how Bert's art evokes questions about identity, globalization, modernization, and the challenges that are faced by indigenous cultures in the Americas. The film aims to bring awareness to the public, but also to reflect on possible solutions of everyone's struggle with growing and homogenizing yet still wanting to preserve the cultural history in new ways.

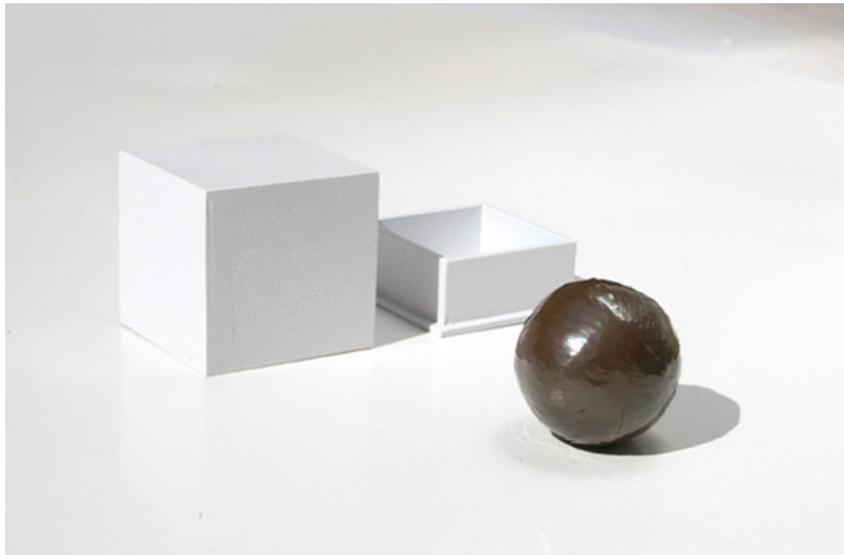
Artist, Rebecca Lowry also creates relationships between text, objects and actions as a means of modifying and reinforcing the common associations inherent in them. With a strong background in architecture and theory, Lowry aims at touching on aesthetic concepts but inspiring viewers to question larger abstract issues and ideas. Lowry displays two different bodies of work in the *Visual Chronicles* exhibition. Book-based sculptural objects, consisting of girls' romance Japanese comic books constructed in a way that they read as one single book without a beginning and without an end. They are visually striking small works, but evoke the cyclical nature of romantic relationships. Her use of foreign language text seems a way to disarm the viewer so that they cannot rely on the words to guide them. Her other series shown in *Visual Chronicles* include sculptural objects made of cassette-tape that had been previously recorded. These pieces contain poems read by their authors, cheesy love songs, and dramatized Shakespeare plays.



Forgotten Love Song, Rebecca Lowry. Courtesy of Salt Fine Art.

"These pieces, though very simple in their physical realization, are dense with the content buried in the cassette tape and are charged with the intensity of human emotive

expression, beauty, tragedy held within but rendered inaccessible," Lowry says. The magnetic cassette tape is used as a conventional material for the sculptural work by Lowry. Lowry speaks on her art practice with great charisma and intrigue: "Art is a forum more for posing questions and making theoretical proposals. In a way art is the purest opportunity to pursue that interest I'd had all along." Lowry's pieces seem sentimental and romantic, though visually they are cold and very simple. I look at Lone Ranger, a round sculptural ball of the magnetic cassette tape as it sits next to a white cube box with a lid off to the side and I feel so much. I feel the intention, the huge amount of information stored on that cassette tape that is balled into this perfectly round shiny object, and I feel the exquisite care taken in its crafting and its inherent power. I want to pet it and kiss it, and put it in a safe place where no one can hurt it - as if it were my pride and my heart, I adore it.



Lone Ranger, Rebecca Lowry. Courtesy of Salt Fine Art.

Visual Chronicles Curator, Delia Cabral spoke with me about her ideas about Visual Chronicles as just a brainchild, "I wanted to invite people to explore different ways visual art can address literature. I wanted to go beyond text painted on canvas. I put together a group of artists that discuss the many different relations we have with literature." The six artists certainly do give Salt Fine Art some contextual baggage and fascinating artworks on the subject of visual expression and communication, but I think two of these artists exemplify modernity at its core, with relevant themes and interesting contemporary communicative tactics. Peter Frank wrote in his essay on the exhibition, "These artists do not privilege the image, and/or the object, over the word. But neither do they subject visual practice to verbal. They regard the two realms of human expression as equal - and as congruent, the borders between their practice shifting and perhaps arbitrary."

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*Top Image: QR Textile, Guillermo Bert. Courtesy of Salt Fine Art.*