



MARIE SHANNON – LOVE OUT LOUD

Picasso famously declared "Sex and art are the same thing", and if you reflect on recent art history you might well agree. Indeed, untrammelled affairs and dangerous sexual frisson seemed to fuel the 20th century avant-garde. But what about love? What about art created not from tumultuous desire but instead from intimacy in all its different forms – romantic love, or the love between parent and child? This is the subject of a 2005 photographic series titled *Love Notes* by artist Marie Shannon.

Moving around Auckland in July 2019 are electronic billboards featuring five images from the *Love Notes* series, tender communications between Marie Shannon and her late husband the artist Julian Dashper. Originally conceived as unique, intimately-scaled silver gelatin prints, a selection of photographs has been combined and vastly enlarged for this exhibition in the public realm. With their hand written messages marked out in simple, delicate lines on gently creased sheets of paper, the photographs convey a profound sense of intimacy. But this evocation of affection and tenderness is in jarring contrast to its public location – a billboard along some of the city’s busiest thoroughfares.

‘I love you and sorry for being grumpy’ reads one billboard, while at first glance the cluster of notes on another are more cryptic. People on the daily commute or those in the street see only the initials ‘I L Y’ repeated across several notes but meaning starts to fall into place thanks to a generous trio of kisses that finishes one, or the reassuring ‘always’ added to the end of another. These notes feel intimate and tell of the private shorthand between lovers, their hastily written but heartfelt abbreviation a code, a visible form of the minute gestures and behaviours that shape the vocabulary of emotional intimacy. Shannon’s work has long been intimate, her autobiographical practice embracing the moments and spaces of everyday life.

Artists, who understand the economics of attention better than most, have a long history of playing with scale to affect impact and understanding. High above the streets Shannon’s notes are vast, yet also vulnerable. *Love Notes* has been exhibited before – to the typically small and self-selecting audience of galleries, and on lightboxes in Wellington’s Cuba Street – but never so boldly as this. Reconfigured for this presentation, the collage of notes forms new synapses and explores the urban media-scape as a site for art. In reclaiming these advertising sites as creative space, Shannon’s work becomes a poetic musing on connection and communication across the most publicly extreme of mediums. Vastly enlarged to billboard format and with their private messages now public, the work’s reading alters. It

Subject

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2

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may seem a small gesture, to take these notes and re-present them larger and in a different context, but changing their size disrupts their interpretation. The tender words of Shannon's *Love Notes* give materiality to the vulnerability required to make a success of relationships and the love or rejection we might receive. It is a metaphor for the same vulnerability art making demands. Romance, like art, impacts the way we think and the way we see. Pursuing either brings uncertainty and risk. Strong personal emotion is often expressed behind closed doors but presenting the work like this renders these private communications monumental. 'A whisper has become a shout', the artist observes.

Kelly Carmichael / July 2019

Artist: Marie
Shannon

Art
Ache

TRISH
CLARK
GALLERY

