

CESSPOOL OF LOVE

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**A Solo Exhibition of Works By Clint Enns
and Exhibition Essay by Leila Armstrong**

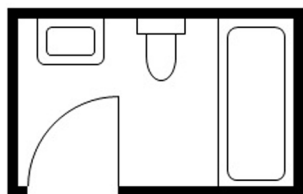
Curated by Nothing To See Here for Close Quarters

Friday, May 29, 2015 - 6pm to 9pm

By Invitation Only



video frame from "The Women of Dr. Phil," 2010



Close Quarters is a four-month series consisting of art exhibitions in private bathrooms. Instigated as a response to the increasing lack of viable space available to artists in Denver, Close Quarters seeks to offer an alternative exhibition strategy, offering an active solution for contemporary dialogue.

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images from top: *i'm too sad to tell you*, *Discovering Inner Beauty*,
Gleem, *Debbie Does Ascii*

#1: Fan Letter to Steve Reinke (2011, 1:17)

"A fan letter to video-artist Steve Reinke. Deep admiration is manifested in an unusual way." - Shahbaz Khayambashi

#2: Debbie Does Ascii (an ascii pr0n from a 1981 BBS) (1982, 1:20)

Debbie Does Ascii (an ascii pr0n from a 1981 BBS) is an ascii animation of a scene from Jim Clark's famous 1978 pornography *Debbie Does Dallas*.

In the days of the BBS, many people actually used images like these as a substitute for "actual" pornography.

#3: Gleem (2010, 2:00)

A re-make of a lost James Benning film titled *Gleem*, a sex negative film about maintaining those pearly whites.

"I wasn't entirely convinced I was straight until I saw this film." - Guy Maddin

About the original:

Gleem (1974, 16mm, 2:00)

Produced at the University of Wisconsin

This film is optically printed and interweaves two short sequences of tooth brushing on odd number frames and a close-up of a penis ejaculating on even number frames.

#4: Discovering Inner Beauty (2011, 2:32)

A self help video that lies somewhere between the realms of guide to spiritual awakening, hair colour analysis and cosmic speculation.

#5: The Women of Dr. Phil (2010, 1:28)

"Apparently, the Stepford Wives are big Dr. Phil fans. Why so little emotion, ladies?" - Mike Everleth

#6: i'm too said to tell you (1971/2012, 3:10)

Augmented reality is used to emotionally enhance conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader's 1971 seminal work *I'm too sad to tell you*.

Cesspool of Love, and exhibition by *Nothing to See Here*, is a collection of videos by Toronto based video artist Clint Enns. Enns' work is thoroughly postmodern in its use of pastiche and homage, but also digs deeper into contemporary issues, using ghosts of the past to haunt the present. Using both analog and digital technology, he creates videos that touch on desire, identity and media.

Most houses in America didn't have indoor plumbing until the end of the 1930s, but since then bathrooms have become one of the most important rooms in the house, though one that is rarely discussed in polite conversation. One statistic indicates Americans on average spend fourteen days per year in the bathroom. It is a space where we read, talk on the phone, ponder the future, and spend much time contemplating our appearance, fretting over wrinkles, weight, hair, etc. The bathroom is an intimate space, one where we both engage in activities that are considered outside the realm of civil conversation and where we spend enormous amounts of time and money in order to ready ourselves to engage with civil society (think of all the industries that would collapse if people were to stop buying products that promise to make us bigger, better, faster). These works by Clint Enns touch on the things we don't talk about, would rather not talk about, and the contortions we go through in order to conform to an ideal-I that is articulated through the spectacle of the media, all in the spaces of our bathrooms.

In *Fan Letter to Steve Reinke*, Enns has created a macro video that upon first viewing resembles hundreds, if not thousands, of images in which a camera lingers lovingly over the flesh of a fetishized and idealized body. In a voice-over, Enns reads his fan letter to Reinke, and as the camera brings into sharp, uncomfortably close focus flesh and hair, he says "in your work you're constantly revealing and making beautiful the part of people and human nature that are normally considered ugly or shameful". Though the images might call to mind idealized bodies in film, the video is of Enns' anus. The work then begs the question, why is flesh in one area, in one context, beautiful, and abject in another? The abject is the opposite of the object of desire; it is not something we decide individually, but rather it is imposed upon us by the superego. Here, Enns takes the opposite of the object of desire and gives it the treatment normally reserved for the beautiful object. In doing so, he has composed a work that is both homage to Reinke, and his own exploration and revelation of beauty in the parts of the body that are normally considered ugly or shameful.

Enns continues his theme of homage with his 2012 work *I'm too sad to tell you* (1971/2012), based on Bas Jan Ader's 1971 work of the same name. The original is a three-minute silent, black and white video of Ader crying, for which we are given no context. Ader's work has served as inspiration for a number of artists, including Alexander Brandt, David Horvitz, Hugh O'Donnell, and Vic Muniz. In most of these works, Ader's original served as inspiration, but here, something different seems to be at play. Ader is weeping in the video, an emotional display not generally acceptable for men. In Enns' work, there is both an element of homage and parody, as cartoon-like rivers of water spray from Ader's eyes. Perhaps Enns is parodying the self-serious melancholy of the older artist, pointing out and revealing the trope of the tortured artist.

Sexuality has long been something we cannot sublimate, and the film *Debbie Does Dallas*, which Enns has translated into ASCII for his *debbie does ascii* (an *ascii prOn* from a 1981 BBS) was a flashpoint for controversy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was included in the Meese Report (ordered by the Reagan administration and largely criticized for its blatant attempts to outlaw pornography), and held up as an example of the obscene. Pornography in America is taboo, transgressive, and suppressed. It is taboo because it seems to transgress the boundaries of good taste (a taste which few of us have had any hand in making), and thus it is suppressed by a society which denies any base materiality in life. By recreating the film in ASCII, Enns has hidden the original perhaps not under a veneer of civility, but certainly under a veneer. The sound brings the images out for the viewer, which might otherwise take more work to understand, and the requirement of the aural and visual is an interesting component to the work.

Gleem, another homage, this time to a lost work by artist James Benning, is a video with rapidly intercut images of a man brushing his teeth and ejaculation. There is a visual and textual connection made between the pearly whites the man is brushing and the pearly white of the ejaculate, and the toothbrush itself can be read as phallic, and thus the act is redolent of fellatio. Another reference to transgressive sexuality, Enns again confronts us with things that are typically hidden by civilized society. *Gleem* is a video that would certainly be considered pornographic in some circles, but is also exposes something that is quite common (perhaps making a correlation between the common place-ness of the act of brushing teeth and intercourse) and asking why is one so mundane and the other obscene?

Another thread in the videos shown here is the concept of the spectacle. The idea of the spectacle goes all the way back to Plato, but had its fullest expression in Guy Debord's work, where he described the spectacle as something created by the bourgeoisie to "stupefy the proletariat", in that it operates to keep us from engaging in revolutionary ideas. Daytime television is a perfect example of the spectacle – it contains nothing of value, and generally serves to make people feel more comfortable with the mundane nature of their everyday lives. In *The Women of Dr. Phil* we are confronted with a particularly compelling example of the superficial ways in which Capitalism seeks to give us a simplistic balm to ease the pains brought about by it. Dr. Phil's advice is neither sage nor particularly useful, it is entertainment rather than psychology. The music reinforces this notion, a feel good love song that is neither deep nor profound. As the camera pans over these women's faces, one is struck by the sincerity of their emotions, as they soak up the spectacle disguised as self-help.

In *Discovering Inner Beauty*, a series of images of the same woman, each with a different hair color/style - coming from common hair salon books from which we can choose our best selves - forms the foreground of the work. As the video continues, the background slowly changes from flat white to cosmic swirl, ending on an image reminiscent of the big bang or the implosion of a star, while a voice discusses vanity and desire: the desire for a house, for money, for beauty, and that if I simply work harder I will achieve these things. Desire is a complex mechanism that has been discussed in numerous ways. There is commodity fetishism, in which we have an obsessive desire for an object that, via capitalism and the creation of commodities, holds a god-like power over us. We desire the object (the I-Phone, the BMW, the house with a white picket fence) in lieu of a social relationship with those around us, and in turn our relationships with people become more thing like, the social bond severed. There is also Lacan's theorization of desire: Our entire concept of self is based on a misrecognition of ego and at its very conception, our ego is split into ego and ideal-I. We constantly seek to both fill the emptiness which this split ego leaves us with and to live up to the ideal-I. As the voice narrates the desire for things, it brings to the fore the idea of commodity fetishism, while the ever changing images of the woman, seeking perhaps some form of ideal beauty to make herself feel whole, touches on Lacan's notion of desire. Both are rooted in capitalism, and the idea that if we buy more, we will be whole. The video points to the fact that no amount of buying - be it beauty products, houses, or cars – will ever make us feel whole, no matter how hard media tries to convince us otherwise.

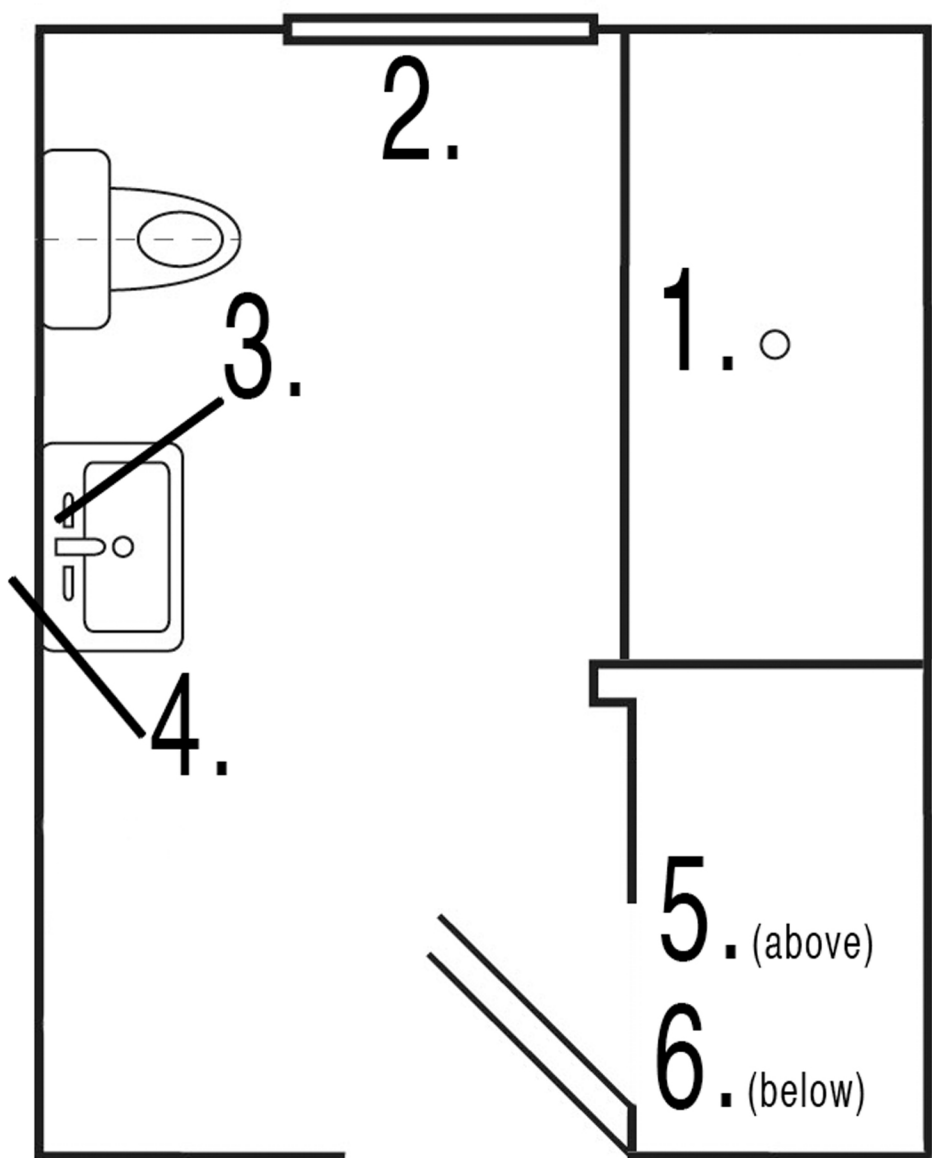
The bathroom is the space where we engage most closely with the abject and with our desire. The body as abject, its processes and its waste are tucked neatly away into this little room. Desire for a better self – as shown to us through the media spectacle – is enacted and performed within the bathroom. We clean, we primp, we worry in the bathroom. Each of the videos by Enns connects on a profound level to one of the most base and everyday rooms in our house – the lowly bathroom.

- Leila Armstrong

Clint Enns is a video artist and filmmaker living in Toronto, Ontario. His work primarily deals with moving images created with broken and/or outdated technologies. His work has shown both nationally and internationally at festivals, alternative spaces and microcinemas.

He has a Master's degree in mathematics from the University of Manitoba, and has recently received a Master's degree in cinema and media from York University where he is currently pursuing a PhD. His writings and interviews have appeared in Millennium Film Journal, Incite! Journal of Experimental Media and Spectacular Optical. [www.clintenns.tumblr.com]

Leila Armstrong received her MA in Art History from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2006. She has taught at several colleges and universities in the Denver area and has begun working on curating exhibitions. Her research interests include Premodern Islamic art, contemporary art, and critical theory.





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