Farrah Karapetian: Collective Memory

5 January – 24 February, 2019

* Opening reception with interactive negatives: 6-8 pm, 5 January, 2019
* Club Shine, photogramming: 6-10 pm, 12 January, 2019
* Opening reception with photograms from Club Shine: 6-8 pm, 19 January 2019
* For photogram sessions throughout the duration, please contact the artist.
* Closing reception: 6-10 pm, 23 February, 2019

Dear Tarrah,

You told me a story the other night about a place with a bathroom so small the water heater warned of fire in case of hairspray, chairs from which the chasers watched you, and a stripper pole that swayed under the weight of its dancers since it wasn’t attached to the ceiling. It was a place where you first started to mingle with the trans community in LA, as yourself. Your friends remember these things too: each other, first of all, and mirrored walls near the DJ where ladies danced with their reflections. Club Shine may no longer exist at the Oxwood Inn, since LA’s last lesbian bar closed its doors, but as far as I can tell from listening, you ladies are the club, and you can’t be erased.

You told me you that you want your gallery, your practice as a gallerist, to return to first principles of community engagement, that you want the spaces you program next to feel social and stimulating. You want experiences filled with art and sound and conversation, different from the #stunning pull of Instagram and more satisfying than the overpriced booths of art fairs into which we’ve all allowed ourselves to be drawn. You want people to, yes, buy into your program, but also to linger with it, and with you. The gallerist’s life is a big part of what happens in a space and to an artist in her care. I admire you for your capacity to shapeshift; I hope this project reveals both of our vulnerabilities and strengths.

I have the floorplans that you, Dena, Cetine, and Zackary drew of Club Shine, and together with Imerio, I’ll reconstruct the elements that overlapped most in your memories, using the language I’ve developed that works according to the logic of light. I’ll give you back some of that place’s spatial and visual cues, but you’ll be the one to make it live. The Club will be lit with red spectrum lighting, so that I can photogram your friends as they congregate over the course of my occupation. The exhibition will open, then, as a space, with sculptural negatives of the objects you remember – yes, one can use the stripper pole – and some photograms as well, of the parts of the space that do not include your bodies, but the exhibition is cumulative, and the body of work will culminate as the show closes.

This is the spirit with which I’ve approached most of my projects: motivated by narratives with which I’d like to live a little. Maybe a photograph is not just “taken” nor even just “made”, but “given”, in what some would call relational exchange. Usually that dynamic is suppressed because I exhibit only the finished artifacts of the process. This show’s for you and everybody who remembers Club Shine; for the rest of us, it is a chance to inhabit the role of listening author, contending with memory, loss, fascination, transition, and love, through not only our own experience but that of others. This kind of transference is what creative work is for, no?

You and I have told one another many stories in the time during which we’ve been friends. I hope this makes another good one.

Cheers,

Farrah