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REVIEWS NEW YORK

TR Ericsson

TOTAH

By Max Lakin



TR Ericsson, *Some of my mother's favorite books*, 2023, nicotine on paper, 22 × 30".

Letters Home (1986), Chantal Akerman's spare, sole attempt at filmed theater, conjured the intensity of Sylvia Plath's relationship with her mother, Aurelia, by having the actor kin Coralie and Delphine Seyrig recite the Plaths' correspondence to the audience directly, often in crosstalk, merging their voices in a dioramic sludge of memory. TR Ericsson has been attempting something similar for the past twenty years: With stark and often startling intimacy, he presents the personal documents—distressed letters and answering-machine messages, among other items—he received from his

Sam Gilliam, *Foggy* (detail), 2021, acrylic, aluminum granules, copper chop, sawdust, flocking, encaustic, and paper collage on canvas, 96 × 96 × 4". © Sam Gilliam/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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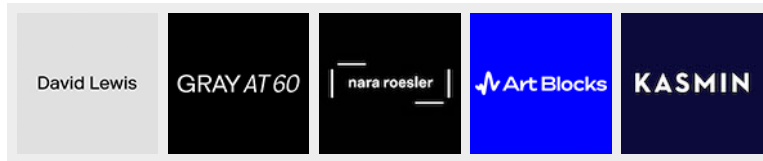


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madness, and how their aftereffects reverberate, like voices within an empty proscenium.

Akin to Akerman, who in her various cinematic works and writings tracked the on-and-off epistolary relationship she had with her mother, Ericsson repeatedly revisits a well that is never depleted, restlessly trying out different mediums in his explorations—including film, photography, silk screen, and sculpture—toward the same end, which, to my mind, feels like a form of exorcism. (THEY FUCK YOU UP, YOUR MUM AND DAD, Philip Larkin once wrote in a poem).

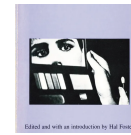


The show possessed the atmosphere of a haunted house: In the gallery were copies of Robinson’s handwritten letters, blown up and printed onto wall-size muslin panels; her youthful image rendered, like a Richter facsimile, in a small soft-focus oil; and her voice, recorded on cassette tapes nestled into bound books containing Robinson’s writings shelved inside a Plexiglas slipcase. Images of actual volumes struggled to materialize in the print *Some of my mother’s favorite books*, 2023, as if they were being remembered and forgotten at the same time. Ericsson made the work by lighting cigarettes under a photograph and silk screen, the smoke’s residue staining the image onto the paper. The intense (and metaphorically resonant) process can require thousands of cigarettes, often destroying the screen. The piece is a tacit homage to his mother’s self-obliterating habits (for a group of previous works, the artist soaked raw linen in the ingredients for a Long Island iced tea, Robinson’s preferred cocktail). Ericsson’s material permissiveness extends to four prints infused (to what degree we do not know) with funerary ashes, uniting their diffuse pictorial concerns with a maudlin flourish.

Taken as a whole, all of Ericsson’s experimentations with different media, regardless of their individual successes or failures, are an effective analogue for the way grief can move: It is slippery and restless, operating without much reason but always in search of one, changing shape to shoehorn itself into all manner of vessels and times of day. *Thanksgiving Day*, 2008, a slab of granite—engraved with an account of the namesake event written by Robinson in the form of a play—here pooled across the floor like both a grave marker and an architectural war memorial, consecrating the high drama of familial conflict with the compacted gravity of a tumor.

Similarly, the thrust of “WELL, THE WEEK REALLY STARTED WITH A BANG!” (*September 17, 1991*), 2023, is less the agitated text it reproduces than the painstaking efforts it took to make the work: The hand-drawn lines on this otherwise silk-screened piece are based on those from the ledger sheets on which the artist’s mother wrote the message; Ericsson even faded the muslin substrate in precisely the same spots as the original paper. How much any of that is apparent to a viewer is perhaps immaterial. The work is not sentimental. It’s presented dispassionately, as evidence.

The subject of Ericsson’s work is revealed to be his own memory. We see him casting about for catharsis that, if it comes, never sustains. Thus the artist’s



Edited and with an introduction by Hal Foster

practice becomes a kind of endurance art, embodying his continued possession by and repossession of his family history and by his trying to excise the pain of it—a rummage sale of the mind. MAN HANDS ON MISERY TO MAN, Larkin warned. IT DEEPENS LIKE A COASTAL SHELF. / GET OUT AS EARLY AS YOU CAN, / AND DON'T HAVE ANY KIDS YOURSELF.



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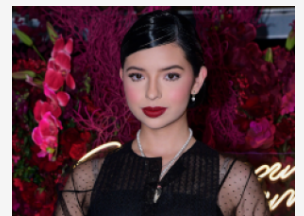
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