

NINA ROSS

Untitled #1, Pregnancy



'Untitled #1, Pregnancy', 2014, HD Video 16:9, 2 minutes and 30 seconds, looped, sound

Nina Ross's recent video works centre on the notion of motherhood. Addressing issues such as gender, breastfeeding and weight gain. Noticeably absent from all of these works, is the relationship between mother and child. Instead, Ross focuses on the anxieties that sit at the periphery of this relationship.

Speculation and uncertainty is at the core of each of these videos. *Untitled #1, Pregnancy* addresses speculation concerning the gender of the unborn child. Ross utilises a technique for resolving speculation that she discovered using online baby forums. Based in folklore, this particular technique involves holding a ring above the pregnant belly and asking a series of questions. The orientation of the ring as it rotates above the belly determines a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer to the questions asked.

Untitled #1, Pregnancy records, what appears to be, an empirical experiment to determine the validity of this technique. The video starts with a series of control questions that are reminiscent of those asked at the beginning of a polygraph test. The video continues with Ross applying the technique to her belly, asking questions regarding the birth and gender of the unborn child. As viewers, we are left uncertain as to the results of the experiment, and instead, attention is turned toward the comparison being made between empirical and intuitive reasoning.

Toward the end of the video a voiceover sharply breaks the continuity of the experiment, stating "You are obviously having a girl because your belly shape is so round". The voiceover indicates contempt for the suggestion made

by the experiment that the gender of the baby is uncertain and, by implication, demonstrates contempt for the empirical reasoning behind the experiment. The comment was a quotation taken from Ross's interaction with a stranger at her local post office. This jarring insertion into the otherwise straightforward flow of the video can be seen as analogous with the way well intended observations can disrupt a mother's established ideas, creating uncertainty. With this voiceover, Ross introduces an emotional context for the experiment, in which the uncertainties of pregnancy are potentially transformed into anxieties.

At the time of making the work, Ross felt that she already knew the gender of her unborn child, because she had been told at the time of her twenty-week ultrasound. However, this certainty regarding the gender of the child proved false when, hours before the birth, she was informed that she was not having a girl, as she had been told, but was having a boy. The feeling of certainty produced by medical procedures had given weight to the assumed gender of the unborn child, but as we know, the image produced by the ultrasound is subject to the interpretation of the viewer and is not scientific in its nature, despite the context in which it is produced. The omission of the ultrasound test from the structure of the video acts as an acknowledgement of this margin of error, making the birth of the child, which occurred outside the timeframe of the video, the point of certainty.

Untitled #1, Pregnancy, appears to test the validity of myth using empirical reasoning, but does not presume a definitive answer. The experiment that Ross performs is not scientific in nature, despite the use of test and control methods, after all it only has one subject. Instead, the experiment acts as a gesture that indicates a desire for an unattainable certainty. Furthermore, the viewer is given only the process of the experiment without the results, producing uncertainty within the work, replicating the uncertainty felt during the pregnancy. Ross's need to perform the experiment, knowing it to be futile, points towards the anxiety this uncertainty can evoke.

The sub-text of *Untitled #1, Pregnancy*, projects beyond the pregnancy and infancy, as speculation concerning the gender of the child suggests certain norms of polarised gender that may not be realised in the child. Even though Ross does not address the relationship between mother and child directly within *Untitled #1, Pregnancy*, we are left to wonder what the impact of gender would be in this relationship.

- Simone Hine

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