

BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

ArtSeen

February 3rd, 2016

SHARON LOCKHART *Milena Milena*

by Simone Krug

BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

DECEMBER 12, 2015 – JANUARY 23, 2016

In the final scenes of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), twelve-year-old Antoine Doinel escapes from a reform school soccer field in the middle of a game. While his fellow delinquent peers tread up and down the demarcated terrain, Doinel cuts loose. Wide shots track him as he darts through a forest, emerging from a clearing at the sea. Alone in this vast world, he wades into the water, finally—or supposedly—free. Sharon Lockhart's ongoing exhibition project *Milena Milena* sinks into a similar site of adolescent sulk and ennui. The show culls from her eponymous "Milena" series, wherein the artist shadows and documents biographically, the life of Milena, a young Polish girl she met in 2009 while filming in Łódź. Photographs and video of Milena appear alongside re-photographed snapshots from the artist's own family albums. The exhibition is at once arresting and enigmatic, piecing fragments from a larger narrative. Together, these works salute childhood, autobiography, and the collapse of time.

Lockhart expertly restages Truffaut's iconic final scene in her video installation *Antoine/Milena* (2015). A teenage Milena jogs through a densely wooded Polish forest until she, too, reaches the sea. Wading into the water, Milena mimics Antoine's movements. Hers, however, is a non-fiction performed as a fiction, a tightly choreographed reproduction that obscures the real and the performed. This work echoes Lockhart's 1994 "Audition" series, in which the artist photographed public-school children enacting the awkward embrace of a first kiss from Truffaut's *Small Change* (1976). The "Audition" series films are powerfully sentimental as they chronicle the bumbling gestures of a



Installation view: Sharon Lockhart, *Milena Milena*, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, December 12, 2015 – January 23, 2016. Courtesy Barbara Gladstone.

first embrace. In their repetition—and more importantly, in their awkward familiarity—the original filmic reference becomes secondary. In contrast, the connection between Antoine, the fictional character, and Milena, the real person, in *Antoine/Milena* (2015), is more urgent. Even their names are connected in the piece's title, separated only by a slash. What becomes of Milena's identity when it is transposed onto that of a fictional character? How does her escape complement—or complicate—Antoine's? Lockhart leaves room for conjecture. Here, she layers the real onto the cinematic, conflating space and time, the real and the performed to great effect. There is a graceful depth in these layers.

Milena appears as herself in the photographic paneled triptych *Milena, Jarosław, 2013* (2014). In each portrait, she covers parts of her face, exuding blasé indifference. Her demeanor is decidedly adolescent. In masking her face, the young woman's surroundings and accouterment take on greater significance. There is a monotony to the room, whose dark wood panels and lace tablecloth bisect the space of the photograph, revealing little of the specific location. Hunched over, eyes rolled, and turned away, Milena's teenage affect unfolds. The sole figure in this series, she seems intent on setting a barrier between herself and the camera. Milena is distant even as she is closely cropped. Lockhart toys with occlusion: does a portrait necessitate a face? Hidden behind her hands, these depictions of the fourteen-year-old girl are studies in slinking away.

Milena, however, has been present since she was nine. Lockhart met Milena in Łódź while filming *Podwórka* (2009), a film about the community courtyards where children gather to play. While Milena does not appear in *Podwórka*, she helped Lockhart direct the other children. Her creativity inflects the film despite her physical absence. Lockhart and Milena maintained a friendship, and Lockhart continues to visit and collaborate with Milena in Poland. Like Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* (2014), Lockhart revisits the same character as she grows. This small gallery show maps passing time through Milena's body and fashions. Over the course of two years, Milena's girlish ponytail in *Milena, Jarosław, 2013* (2014) is replaced by a sophisticated dyed black hairstyle in *Antoine/Milena* (2015). In the latter, Milena sports an eyebrow piercing, a stereotypical signifier of teenage rebellion. Her body, further, is now that of a woman. These changes are most apparent side by side. The character Lockhart returns to again and again is always in flux. Her depictions of Milena become a composite, chronological depiction of childhood and transition.

The artist returns to her own childhood in *Untitled Study (Rephotographed Snapshot)* (1994 – present). This series takes on a haunting intimacy even as the characters in the photographs are anonymous. In one image, two small children, likely siblings, stand before a carousel. The girl holds out her hand, reaching for her brother as they wait their turn. Tender moments surface throughout. Lockhart delves into a specific choreography within her family's archive—the placement of children's bodies in relation to relatives, friends, and expansive spaces. She imbues this series with a sense of wonder. The artist's interest in childhood, inspired in part by the midcentury Polish doctor, educator, and children's advocate Janusz Korczak comes to the fore. In many works, young subjects appear from

behind, allowing viewers a glimpse of what the subject sees. Often, they stand before a landscape, looking out toward vistas, but more than anything, toward the unknown.

Past, present, and possibility converge in this show in ways both compelling and elusive. Lockhart treads lightly on these worlds, lifting the cover ever so slightly to reveal glimmers of information. Memory—real, imagined, and recreated—materializes. For Lockhart, we are always in motion, through childhood and into adolescence or through the woods right to the sea. The end is never quite clear.

CONTRIBUTOR**Simone Krug**
