

Guild & Greyshkul

28 Wooster Street, New York, NY 10013 | (212) 625-9224
info@guildgreyshkul.com Tuesdays - Saturdays 11 am - 6pm

For Immediate Release

Vaginal Rejuvenation

Amanda Ross-Ho and Kirsten Stoltmann

January 10 - February 16, 2008

Opening Reception Thursday, January 10th from 6-8pm

Amanda Ross-Ho and Kirsten Stoltmann have known each other for 10 years. They are currently based in Los Angeles and work in the same studio building. *Vaginal Rejuvenation* is a rarefied and specific presentation - a conversational project using their proximity and access to one another as a framework. Their longstanding friendship and points of convergence is in effect a particular strand of history, and the artifacts from this unconventional timeline are directly referred to in the work on view. Rather than simply a collaborative exhibition, it is a presentation of two individual practices that use response and appropriation as a primary medium.

In Stoltmann's tableaux pornographic imagery, stock images from American culture, and other dark possessions assume a position beside the decorative objects that are usually given pride of place within the home. Ross-Ho's installations have taken craft processes such as macramé and crochet to a monumental scale with large wall hangings and interventions into exhibition walls that dismantle modes of presentation. For both, the typically sentimental overtone of domestic arts is reformed into a dark comedy with a message of transgression. Through collage, installation and photography, their shared visual vocabulary is aimed at the implications of gender in relation to creative production. A dynamic barrage of imagery and information that explicitly and/or discreetly evokes femininity subverts traditions of materiality, the display of objects, and the use of empowered language. At the same time they confront the negative connotations of a maladjusted focus on the feminine, with the objective to re-invent.

Stoltmann and Ross-Ho chose to utilize the appropriation of themselves as a way to acknowledge regional perception, both in terms of their role as women and LA artists. Their cannibalization of residual, promotional, or ephemeral materials, in some cases literally 'vandalizing' or repurposing pre-existing artworks made by one another creates an uneasy but good tension. Embedded critiques of another and their working methods emerge to complicate the notion of collaboration, and point to the problems inherent to any form of partnership. Although the exhibition reveals an intimate exchange between two peers that is humorous and self-reflexive, it is more "about" ideas of collaboration, friendship, and a reactionary aesthetic, than actually embodying these things.

Amanda Ross-Ho received her MFA from University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She has had 2 solo exhibitions at Cherry and Martin in Los Angeles (2006, 2007), as well as 2 solo exhibitions at Western Exhibitions in her hometown of Chicago, IL (2004, 2006). Ross-Ho's work will be included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

Kirsten Stoltmann received her MFA from the University of Illinois. She has exhibited internationally. Solo exhibitions include *Worn Bush on the Horizon* (2007) at Sister Gallery, Los Angeles, *Rough Bush* (2007) at Allston Skirt, Boston and *I Know What I'm Doing* (2006) at Wallspace, New York.

Guild & Greyshkul is located at 28 Wooster Street, New York, NY, 10013. Hours are Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm. For more information, please contact the gallery at 212-625-9224 or visit www.guildgreyshkul.com.

My Friends

“My Friends, there is no friend!”

The love called ‘friendship’ is an elusive bond: it’s both private and public, social yet deeply anomic, generative but just as equally exhausting. So accustomed are we to see friendship as the result of common sympathy—as a bond defined by choice and untainted by any necessity—that we take amity as something intimate, a domesticated affect, an expression of *ourselves*. Yet in doing so we privatize friendship much as we have publicized intimacy. In a world infatuated with the disclosure of the personal, we look to the union of affection and quarrel that friendship provides us to authenticate our private lives, that is, against the failure of our public selves. If in the benevolence of friendship we disclose our weaknesses (why must this always be equated with intimacy?) don’t we bring ourselves closer to those who can so easily undo us, be it either “with counsel or admonition,” as Montaigne suggests?

Friendship has not always been such a private matter. As Adam Smith recounts in the *Wealth of Nations*, the interdependencies of feudal societies emphasized bonds that were neither freely chosen nor defined by mutual love. Hume’s beloved “pleasures of politeness” that engender friendship were lost in a complex web of social networks; largely instrumental bonds reinforced mutual aid and codependence based often on mistrust. It is the rise of new types of social organization in the wake of industrialization, the forms of civil society afforded by a contract-governed “commercial society,” that privatizes friendship, turns it into an exercise of private autonomy. Economic self-interest leaves friendship to wander in the private realm.

Yet friendship, for all its modern congruity, might still be decidedly agonistic. Is this what Aristotle means: “My Friends, there is no Friend!” Whatever intimacy the confessional of friendship affords, it is through a conflict-laden love that we begrudgingly overcome a defining solitude—our wish, as Aristotle claims, “to be loved rather than to love.”

But how do we love our friends, if we love them willingly? With “courage to give advice with candor”? Do we love them mostly for loving ourselves, that is, with the same narcissism through which we choose them? Do you, like Cicero, “love after having exercised your judgment on your friends, instead of forming your judgment of them after you have begun to love them?”

Perhaps we have lost the political and ethical tinge of friendship in our loving. But this merit of friendship lies beyond bonds of mutual usefulness, beyond pleasure, utility, conviviality or sham intimacy. For in friendship—Montaigne’s “wills working together”—we find a shared bond through which the notion of a common experience itself arises. In this, friendship shares something with politics and aesthetics. Politics itself only becomes a possibility with the institution of a shared community; and friendship is, after all, political from its origins, as the division between amity and enmity (Schmidt’s *Freund und Feind*) is perhaps the most basic political distinction. “If one would have a friend,” Nietzsche writes, “then must one also be willing to wage war for him: and in order to wage war, one must be capable of being an enemy.” Aesthetic judgment too shares ‘in the common,’ as it turns a subjective particular experience into a universal claim that ought and wants to be shared with all.

What can be made of this politics or ethics of friendship, this dialectic between private amity and liberal citizenship? The second-wave feminist ideology of ‘sisterhood’ turned an ethics of friendship into a political category. As these notions of friendship enriched feminism, so they enriched love by expanding non-gendered definitions of intimacy, much as third-wave notions of empowerment refocus the value of domesticity. But we must remind ourselves that friendship is not synonymous with politics or justice. Quite the contrary: as Aristotle tell us, “when men are friends they have no need of justice,” since only when two people cannot amicably resolve their dispute do they turn to law.

Friendship is thus suspect: it is incongruous with democracy, as the egalitarianism intrinsic to democracy is in conflict with the inherent bias towards the particular implicit in friendship. Yet how can a creative, fluid, and regenerative dyad not be socially productive? For *collaboration* is its close filial kin—and these two ‘wills working together’ dismantle the Romantic insistence on the expression of an individual will, that expressive monad that defines liberalism and finds its apotheosis in the mock-heroism of male genius, Wordsworth and Courbet as the chief examples.