

FEBRUARY 11 TO

MARCH 21 2009

### with projects by

Akay	Carson Mell
Kyle Alvarez	Amber Morris
damali ayo	Kel O'Neill
Rachel Dengiz	& Eline Jongsma
Shaina Feinberg	Scott Patterson
Chelsea Hodson	Jessica Sanders
Marc Israel	Dan Tice
Chris K	Nicky Verdoodt
Sarah Locke	AJ Wilhelm
& Ghostshrimp	& Jason Orfanon
Brett Loudermilk	Lev Yilmaz
David Meiklejohn	Jenny Owen Youngs

reception feb. 11, 6-8 pm

### apexart

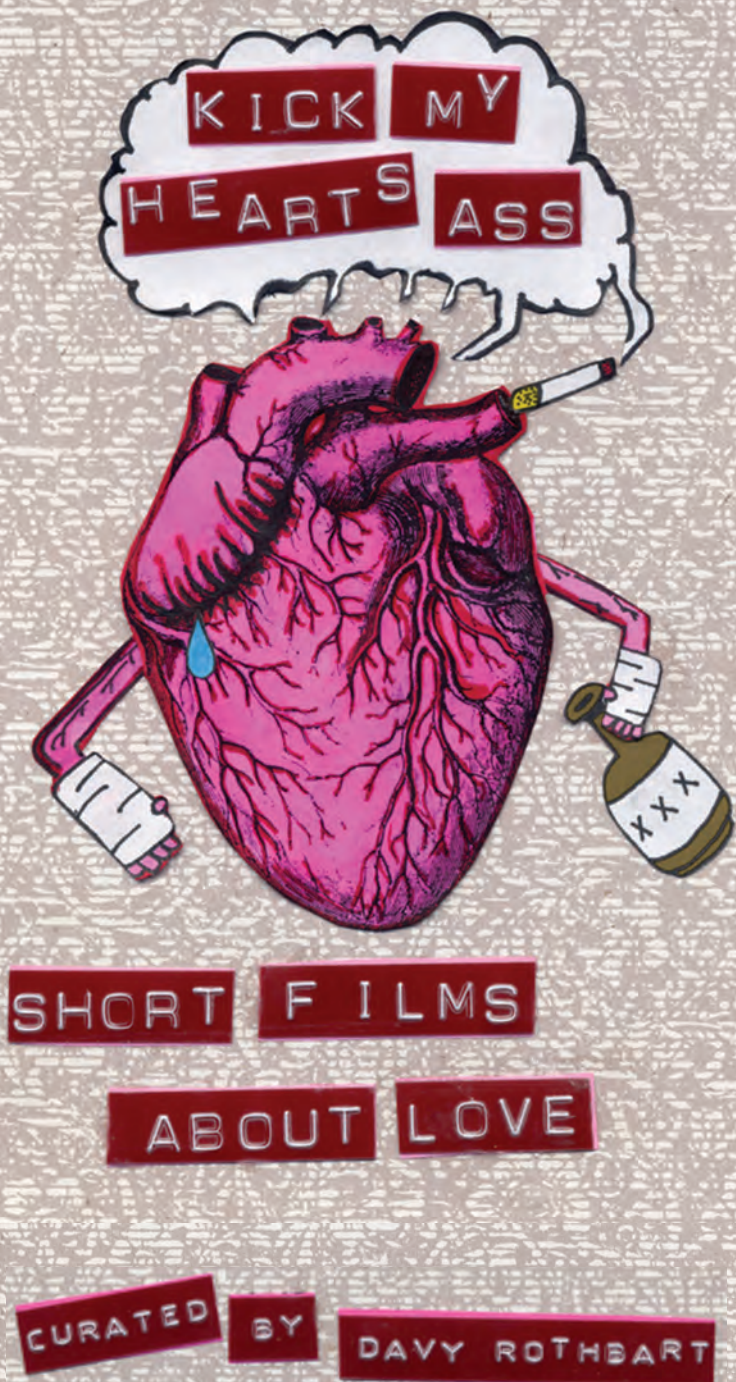
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### NO MORE TEARS

It's six A.M. I've just spent the last four hours holed up in my bedroom in my house in Ann Arbor, watching old, battered VHS tapes of myself, thirteen years ago, holed up in a bedroom in another house in Ann Arbor maybe twenty blocks from here, crying over two girls (depending which tape is playing), one named Rachel, one named Maggie. In these tapes, I'm not only crying, I'm... well, it's a little embarrassing... my twenty-year-old self is sobbing, staring deep into the camera—looking directly at myself right now—and singing along to a song on the radio: Ozzy Osbourne's "No More Tears." Watching these old, forlorn tapes is deeply eerie and painful and uncomfortable; there's also something weirdly captivating and pretty fucking funny about it all. Even though I've been logging these tapes all night, it's hard to tear myself away.

But let me back up a second. I never planned to make a movie about love, especially a personal documentary about my own love life. What happened, though, was this: I invited my friend David Meiklejohn along with me and my brother Peter for a couple of our cross-country *FOUND Magazine* tours in the fall of 2005 and spring of 2006, and asked him to bring his video-camera along, with the idea of taping some of our *FOUND* events and other adventures on the road. Like any dutiful documentary filmmaker, David kept the camera running, even when the *FOUND* shows were over. We ended up with 150 hours of footage, the lion's share, it seemed, revolving around my continual struggles with love and relationships. As we pored through the tapes, we realized that what we had was not a documentary about *FOUND*, but a documentary about my fucked-up love life. We decided to call the movie *My Heart Is An Idiot*, and got to work editing it.

But it was harder than I'd thought to work on a personal documentary when the people featured in the film were an ongoing part of my life. My relationships continued to shift and evolve; the story

kept changing. The project itself became an issue in my relationships. For a while, it was easier to focus on other work that wasn't so damn intertwined with everything.

Then one night, digging through the attic of my parents' house, I found an old box filled with VHS tapes—World Series games from 1987, James Bond movies taped off of TBS, and a bunch of unmarked tapes, which I soon discovered held dozens of hours of footage I'd shot during high school and college—footage of me, for the most part, sitting alone in the basement of my parents' house, or in a sad dorm room or college apartment, bawling my eyes out over a girl (okay, a couple of girls). It struck me that I'd been documenting my struggles with love for nearly two decades, and that there was something in this old, bedraggled footage that was critically linked to the stuff that David had shot with me recently. I began sifting through the tapes one at a time, logging each strange, haunting moment in a little composition book. Yeah, I've got good friends who teach at inner-city schools, work as public defenders, and fight for environmental justice across the globe, and here I am, every night, watching ancient videotapes of myself crying and taking notes. It's one thing to spend your nights staring at pictures of an ex-girlfriend, it's another thing to spend your nights watching decade-old videotapes of yourself staring at pictures of an ex-girlfriend.



Chris K., *Lovebirds*

And yet I've become oddly transfixed. I can't look away. There's something disconcertingly similar between the footage of me crying over girls in 1993 and crying over girls in 2006. You think you learn something as you get older, but shit, not so much.

At some point, I end up sharing some of the old tapes with David, and we agree that bits of them belong in *My Heart Is An Idiot*. One phenomenon I notice: when I watch the VHS tapes alone, they seem really sad; when I watch them with David, they seem really funny. In fact, we discover a few favorite, strangely hilarious crying moments within the river of tears—moments when my crying is momentarily derailed by some other thought or something in the room. There's a moment from 1992, an early morning in my freshman dorm room, where I'm crying over Rachel, my high school girlfriend; in the background, my clock radio is grinding out traffic reports and blizzard warnings from an AM talk station. Then, mid-sob, I suddenly take notice of some cornball pun from the morning DJ, and seize into a smile, then immediately resume crying. It's a small but amazing little moment. There's another one from 1995: I'm on the sofa in my parents' living room, wailing—I mean flipping the fuck out—still over Rachel (we'd gotten back together and broken up several times). I'm beating my chest, pounding sofa cushions, screeching, when all of a sudden I pick up a copy of *Sports Illustrated* and stop crying just like that; I flip through the thing for about thirty seconds, then drop it and start crying again as though I'd never stopped. It's good shit, no doubt, another golden moment. Then, in our recent footage from the *FOUND* tours, there's a matching sort of moment: A relationship of mine has just come to a surprising and devastating end, and I'm stumbling with David down a weedy, overgrown street in Baton Rouge, sobbing so hard I can barely breathe. Then all at once I spot something in the distance and wade free of the darkness for a second. "See that tower?" I say to David. "That's the only non-domed State Capitol building in the country." "What?" David asks. "Did you say that's the only non-domed Capitol in the country?" "Yes," I manage, melting back into tears. It's horribly sad and at the same time fucking hilarious.

Why, though—why did I fill so many videotapes in my late teens and twenties, filming myself

crying? Who was I crying to? A lot of the time I'm addressing Rachel or Maggie, begging them to come back to me, or to understand that we're meant for each other. But there was no fuckin' way I was ever gonna share those tapes with them. And yet, there must have been some kind of comfort, some kind of sympathy that the camera was doling out—a sense that I wasn't crying alone in bed, but crying to someone, even if I didn't know who that someone would be. And now it's come full circle. The person watching those tapes—the person I'd turned out to be crying to all those years—was me. And maybe even back then some part of me suspected that this would be the case. Maybe staring into the camera's dark eye, I'd sensed that gentle, compassionate, sympathetic presence of myself, ten or fifteen years later, barely—but noticeably—wiser, a bit more stable, and definitely healed of the heartbreak of that time, if not of all the heartbreak that's socked me in the years since. Watching the tapes, I hurt for the crushed kid I was back then, and reach out a hand of love and support. And I know I felt that inexplicable wave of comfort even back then, alone with the camera, because every crying episode caught on tape—

Jessica Sanders, George & Brad: *In the Bedroom*



Scott Patterson, *Foreign Bodies of Water*



Sarah Locke and Ghostshrimp, *Opposite Others*



Kel O'Neill & Eline Jongmsa, *The Transformation of Genesis P-Orridge*

no matter how intense—after a time subsides. It's rare that you get a chance to reach into the past and give a gift to yourself; it's like the moment in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* when Keanu Reeves hides his dad's jail cell keys for himself to find when he goes back in time.

Meanwhile, David Meiklejohn and I have continued to plow ahead with our documentary. We're not finished yet, but we're within striking distance—it'll be done this year. Questions never quit popping up—film-making questions, and questions about love. If the secrets to finding true love are often elusive, well, so are the secrets to making films about love. How do you inject humor into a film about heartbreak? How do you portray a happy romance without being too saccharine and oversentimental? What's relatable about our own stories? How do we make the personal feel universal?

I rarely know the answers to these kinds of questions, but I thought if I asked a bunch of my incredibly talented and wonderfully demented friends to produce short films about love, I could learn a lot from the approaches they took and the choices they made. I holla'd at a bunch of folks and gave very few guidelines, simply challenged them to make a 1- to 10-minute movie illuminating some aspect of romantic love. Narrative or documentary, actors, animation, claymation, whatever—I left it up to them. And the films they came up with—in their beauty, sadness, sweetness and wild variety—are simply stunning. Academy Award-nominated

director Jessica Sanders profiles the relationship between actor George Takei (*Star Trek's* Captain Sulu) and his husband and lifelong partner by chatting with them in bed on a Sunday morning. Singer/songwriter Jenny Owen Youngs interviews fellow musicians about the practice of injecting stories of their own romances into their songs. Brett Loudermilk,

sideshow phenom, discusses love with a pair of death-defying sword swallows, and legendary photographer AJ Wilhelm investigates the cures for a broken heart, while Kel O'Neill and Eline Jongmsa trace a love that endures even after death. Carson Mell and Lev Yilmaz contribute striking animations, punk rock wanderer Chris K bumps into the newly-in-love at an *American Idol* audition, and my friend David Meiklejohn creates a new piece, observing strangers as they plan out the things they want to tell their loved ones but never have. These and a dozen other short films will be featured at **apexart** in a show we'll call *Kick My Heart's Ass*.

Watching these gripping (and often quite funny) films, it's clear: The personal is universal. Other people's stories are our own. The joy and heartbreak that comes through the characters in each of these films is in tune with my own joy and heartbreak. When I extend a hand of comfort to a stick figure cartoon whose relationship's gone belly-up or a gutsy transsexual mourning the passing of her soulmate, I'm really reaching out to myself, because, fuck it, I've been there, too. We've all been there.

Thank you so much for checking out this exhibition. I've been so thrilled by the films that folks made for this show, I've decided to extend a wider invitation to everyone out there: Yup, that's right, I want to see your short film about love. We'll find a way to share it with everyone. Check out **www.KickMyHeartsAss.com** for lots more details.

Okay, it's back to work for me—I've got plenty more footage to watch of myself crying, and right now my twenty-year-old self is singing along to Smashing Pumpkins, which means I better sign off. My advice to all the lovers out there: Be brave, never stop falling in love, and if your heart's ass gets kicked, look for the nearest non-domed State Capitol building.

And I'm out.

DAVY

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