



Ruth Novaczek, *Footnote*, 2017, video, color, sound, 10 minutes 17 seconds.

NEW YORK

Monica Majoli and Ruth Novaczek

QUEER THOUGHTS

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Absence, as many a Frenchman has theorized, is fundamentally linked to desire: It is the *idée fixe* of “all amorous sentiment” (Roland Barthes) as well as the force that propels desire forward (Jacques Lacan, per Freud). The legacy

of this psychoanalytic sentimental education serves as a kind of mental background for Ruth Novaczek and Monica Majoli’s recent exhibition here, which ties together several conceptual strands in their respective bodies of work: love, loss, memory, and artifice. At the exhibition’s fluttering, fickle heart is a disquieting question: To what extent is desire rooted in fiction?

Novaczek’s film *Footnote*, 2017, splices documentary footage from the artist’s life with found footage of celluloid starlets, excerpts from Franz Kafka’s love letters, and letters to her own lovers. Chris Kraus and Eileen Myles, two specialists on the subject of thwarted desire as well as friends of Novaczek, make cameos, waxing poetic in grainy cell-phone footage. The effect, with shades of Sophie Calle, is a sort of fantasy-home-movie homage to the subject of love itself, one that is only further enhanced by the pairing of Majoli’s suite of photographs *Primary Materials for Black Mirror*, 2009–12. For these crepuscular portraits, which served as inspiration for a later body of work, Majoli asked former lovers—some of whom enlisted decades after their relationships with the artist had ended—to pose nude in the privacy of her Los Angeles bedroom. Like the flickering images that compose Novaczek’s film, these intimate moments are fragments, parts of a larger narrative that lie in the head as well as the heart.

— Tausif Noor

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