

# ARTslant

## Hidden and Haunted

by Georgia Fee

**SEAN EDWARDS**

galerie frank elbaz

7 rue Saint-Claude, 75003 Paris, France

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In 1999 I went to an opening at [China Art Objects](#) in Los Angeles. At that time, Chung King Road was deserted and the arts district that now populates LA's Chinatown was just starting to take shape. Frances Stark was presenting a number of new paintings – minimalist and underdone – along with a video piece in the basement of the gallery. The crowd was in the basement. A video that Stark had made of her cats was showing on a TV set in that dark room downstairs. Nothing spectacular or kitteny cute -- just a couple of cats hanging out doing the usual play-with-the-ball or something.

As often happens with Stark, the cool nonchalance and self-effacing egoism of her work captivated me with a stubbornness that was surprising and complex. In that home cat video lay the subversion of Dada coupled with the yearning of Romanticism, and in some strange way it spoke of an act of desperation and determination, emblematic of the tightrope walk the artist makes with each day in the studio..will it (the work at hand) be inspired brilliance or delusional failure? The genius or the fool - what's it going to be? By de-mystifying the act of creation with that superbly simple cat show, Stark made the mystery of it ever more profound.

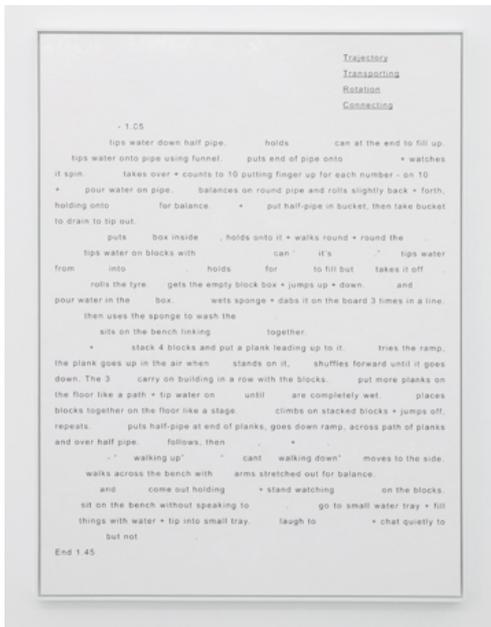
Walking into the Sean Edwards exhibition at [Galerie Frank Elbaz](#) in Paris, I experienced the same sort of incongruous reaction as that day in the Chinatown basement. I came, I doubted, I drank the Kool-Aid.

Shall we begin with the title of Edwards' show? *For her at this moment*. It reads like a literary dedication or the line from some song of which I am unaware. Teenage romance, earnest young love. By dedicating this exhibition, Edwards declares it to be a chapter from his own personal saga, as if his life and his loves are of such importance that they deserve to be put on exhibition. Girlfriend? Wife? Daughter? Unrequited love? Who is *she* and why is he dedicating the show to her? And what moment is he referring to? Then? Now? When? Will it last? The tragedy is already built in. The questions come with the rapidity of a tabloid journalist's interview, as I scanned the gallery looking for clues.



I am confronted with odds and ends, a bit over here and a bit over there. Text paintings and a triangle wedge of wood on the floor (is it art or a left-over from installation?). Studio detritus posing as sculpture, and vice versa. Near the front door is a photographic portrait of a hooded artist at work in the wild and an accompanying cast-bronze sculpture of the hood on a pedestal.

Nothing seems to relate; it's all helter skelter, confusing, and a bit suspect. As I look, things come into focus and I have to re-evaluate earlier impressions. Things that I had dismissed as part of the architecture became sculptural installations of a kind. Ahhhh, I surmise, Edwards requires attention and permissiveness.



Wanting a familiar anchor, I veer towards the paintings. Word paintings I have seen come to mind: John Baldessari and Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth and Robert Barry. Edwards' text paintings sit on the wall with a nice formality, the strong black and white motif compelling in its graphic boldness. Black machine-made text floats in a painterly white sheen, like islands in a sea. Comprised of dotted phrases and broken sentences with beginning and ending times (I assume) noted above, the text is apparently a description of the creative play of children. Cutting and placing and shifting and moving; these paintings are memorials to process, performative and documentary simultaneously. They reduce the act of creativity to an instructional recitation of activity. (I think to myself: cat plays with ball, child pours water.) The strings of words are not particularly memorable, not poetically profound or captivating in their content or language. Yet, like the cat video of Frances Stark, there is something arresting about this work. I want to loll with these paintings, absorb them as if somehow I could find that moment of creative magic hidden within the cryptic script.



I circle back to the front of the gallery towards the bronze sculpture, being careful not to accidentally kick the wedge of wood or cardboard box that hold the space as sculpture. The hood sculpture sits in front of the image of an artist at work in the hills above a lake with his hoodie shielding his face. There is interplay between the photo and the sculpture – hood to hood. I assume the photo is a self portrait of the artist, and am told that it is iconic Edwards. (Evidently, the hood has played an important role in his lexicon of symbols.) At first glance, I assume the “hood” to be a “hoodie” reminiscent of grunge or gangsta culture, but really it is a rain slicker – much less hipster.

Nameless, faceless, the artist in hood photograph conjures the asceticism of the monk bent over his studies. The artist sits with his small travel kit of watercolors faithfully working out his vision under a looming sky - through rain or sleet or snow the creative process wins out! There is something Joycean underneath this image, a fervor, a sincerity that is convincing and somewhat naïve that is undermined by the dark, brooding sky and the almost sinister negation of the artist hidden within the hood.



Trading on this portrait, the bronze sculpture reifies the hood further, as it rests heavy with tradition upon its pristine pedestal. Ironic and absurd, when I walk around this holiest of Hoods to finally peer at the face within its folds, I come smack up against a flat surface, a cold slab of disappointment. No artist at all exists within this hood. It is an impotent and unwearable hood.

As with the Stark show of years past, Edwards' work is about the Artist from the inside out – the process of creativity, the persona of the artist. More than anything I experience a sense of longing from each of these artists; a romantic nostalgia that must be denied, denigrated or debunked in order not to realize its absence. Whether it is home video cum high art, or Portrait of the Artist as Sunday Painter, each of these artists reaffirms that deep down inside, no matter how jaded or sophisticated, we all want to believe in the artist as hero.

--Georgia Fee

(Images: **Sean Edwards**, *Untitled*, 2008, Mahogany and household mat paint, 8x3.5x5 cm; Courtesy of Tanya Leighton Gallery; **Sean Edwards**, *We recall how starting with purely practical*, 2010, Enamel on Giclee Print, framed 114,2 x 84 cm, unique; Sean Edwards, *It's not what we wanted but we'll settle*, 2008, framed C-Type Print, 28 x 39 cm, Edition of 3; **Sean Edwards**, *Settled*, 2010, Bronze, pigment and graphite powder, 22 x 40 x 22 cm, Edition of 3; Courtesy of the artist, Limoncello, London, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin & galerie frank elbaz, Paris)

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