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Everything Becomes Form: Paul Pescador's *Crushes* and the Shapes of Amorous Memory

In a short sequence from Paul Pescador's multimedia project *Crushes*, our protagonist finds himself at a Korean spa. Amidst men roaming the spa in search of a sexual encounter he steps momentarily into a crowded steam room where a foggy embrace clouds visibility and the thought enters: "I can't really see much in front of me, as everything becomes form." This errant observation, however, could also serve as an artist's statement that captures the aesthetic preoccupations of his oeuvre. Throughout Pescador's wide-ranging practice—which includes photography, film and video, performance, collage, and writing, to mention a few—bodies and objects are often placed tightly within the frame. We are faced with a closeness in which the artist discloses and perhaps breaks down the boundaries between his inner-life and his physical apprehension of the world. Closeness for Pescador carries multiple meanings, from the touch of an object to the intimacy of a sexual encounter, each one remembered through its minuscule components, a collapse of the haptic and the affective that allows for recognition of our own ways of experiencing and remembering.

Paul Pescador's body of work investigates the detritus of memory, lingering on the abstractions of everyday interactions with people and things, an almost Proustian figure whose memories are triggered in the aisles of the supermarket rather than with the taste of a madeleine. His images and performances foreground the textural construction of experience, inviting us to *feel* the work through our own sensorial memories of a piece of fabric, or a first kiss. We can find genealogical strands drawn from other queer artists: his repurposing of found objects recalls Jack

Smith and Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta; the rendering of relationships through abstraction as in the work of Félix González-Torres; the disclosures of longing we find in Mark Morrisroe’s photographs. But Pescador’s work stands apart, displaying his insecurities and anxieties along the way. Indeed, Pescador often appears in his work masked and costumed, an act of opaque resistance against a world that insists on racial and sexual transparency. In her recent book *Blue Mythologies*, art theorist Carol Mavor describes “the gloomy contentment of a melancholic, the nostalgic who is joyful-sad.” I was reminded of Pescador as I read these lines, their description fitting of the paradoxical feelings one meets in his work, where it is impossible to separate the melancholic from the ludic, the awkward laugh in a moment of emotional devastation.

Crushes, Pescador’s latest project, includes a feature length experimental film/video hybrid, a photographic series, an unpublished novella, and an installation. Here we see an expansion of his formal and thematic preoccupations, perhaps the most revealing and personal of Pescador’s recent work. *Crushes* is organized around series of single or recurring exchanges with lovers and partners, each meeting rendered with a distinct formal gamble. Divided across three major sections, the film mixes animation, xerox art, found porn videos, and older as well as newly recorded footage of the artist. They interact as blocks of memories, accompanied often by Pescador’s narration of a particular point in time. The sequences function as marks, and yet they eschew representation, allowing the viewer to become caught up in the sensuality of the visuals. Although a work like this, in which the artist’s vulnerabilities become so exposed, can easily veer into the confessional, the commitment to form absorbs us into each affective remnant. In refusing to dramatically reenact these memories, Pescador presents these moments as impressions and abstractions, often equally comic and heartbreaking in equal amounts. He

couches the tension between the thrill and sorrow of amorous relationships among moments that highlight the quotidian boredom within which they move. We see Pescador dancing in his room, rubbing supermarket products against his crotch, staging conversations as two people whose emotions are shielded under the sheen of white fabric. In its iteration as an installation, viewers are confronted with a surplus of yellow stickers that saturate the walls of the gallery, revealing the accompanying photographs as vibrant flashes from which the imperceptible muscle-memories of past relationships emerge. The photographs themselves serve as performative extensions of Pescador himself, providing us with a heightened sense of how, in their aftermath, our attempts at connection leave indentations in the very surface of the skin.

Michele Foucault once famously remarked that the best part of queer love is when the lover departs in a taxi. The line is often referred to by queer theorists and artists to propose a radical notion of queer relationality that does not attach itself to the permanence of amorous relationships. One can move on to the anticipation of the next lover, the following encounter. But as I encountered Pescador's *Crushes*, I could not help but think of our protagonist, in the present, taking on the role of that lover in the cab, glancing askew at his phone, awaiting a text or another confirmation of lingering desire. The work before us offers the joyful-sad sensation of that aftermath.