

Anonymous Glossy: Five Observations.

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1. The Glossy as Cartography of a City and of an Artistic Practice

In many ways, the *Glossy* can be read as a kind of subjective atlas or cartography of Rotterdam and its inhabitants. The individuals and their stories are all residents of Rotterdam, people whom Efrat meets. It is just as much a portrait of a city as it is a portrait of its inhabitants. And as we continue to read - and look at the city through the eyes of those who are portrayed but particularly through Efrat's eyes - notions like home, belonging, identity, trust, recognition, attachment, self and the other, but also distrust, alienation and fear, become increasingly blurred and complicated.

Within this framework Efrat tries to position herself, while equally urging the reader to do the same. I would even say that this tactic of mapping as you go along - the gradual mapping of something even though it is not entirely clear what that something might be - is a crucial part of Efrat's artistic methodology and practice. It is playful, curious and discovery-driven. This openness is crucial in the *Glossy*. The artist takes on the role of witness, documentalist, and participant observer, but she does not keep her distance. To the contrary, she is right in the middle of it. At the same time she is the one making a confession, documenting her own life and experiences, just like the individuals she interviews and who are in search of all kinds of things.

2. The Glossy as Bildungsroman

We could read the *Anonymous Glossy* as a *Bildungsroman*. We come across dozens of portraits and stories, but the person we get to know best in the end and whose voice and biography remain present is Efrat's. It is a *Bildungsroman* that poses to be as a self-help book, which most *Bildungsromans* covertly are. In other words: part therapy for the reader but also part self-therapy for Efrat, or maybe even for those whom she interviewed. In and by itself it is an interesting strategy: conversations with others, the confessions and testimonies of others as a basis for self-questioning and getting closer to oneself. Perhaps it is also a collective self-help book.

And this in turn contains an ironic reference to the glossy as we know it; just think of *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan* or *Marie Claire* and all their tips to become a successful career woman, perfect lover, or fabulous hostess in 10 steps. Continuous self-improvement. It is striking, by the way, that a whole industry exists so that women can continuously improve themselves. In the *Anonymous Glossy*, however, everyone can be who they truly are, with all their flaws and talents. Here the picture-perfect photoshopped illusions offered to us in regular glossies is countered by the very imperfect messiness of real life, in which anti-heroes are heroes.

3. The Glossy as Anti-selfie

Efrat fashions portrait sculptures out of clay during conversations with people she has met. In a way, it is a tactile interpretation of her interlocutors. Her subject becomes, as it were,

malleable and makeable. This involves a slowdown and a time lag, especially when compared to the speed of today's omnipresent self-portrait: the selfie. The selfie is a quick and immediate way to capture presence; to prove "I was here". The selfie has become the symbol of a hyper-capitalist consumer society obsessed with the self, individualism and (the performance of) one's ego.

Besides, the selfie lacks uniqueness and singularity. In the end it is quite replaceable: you make one, then another and another, and so on. But Efrat's portraits are unique and carry the distinct signature of the artist. The portraits are literally hand-made. They are material manifestations. In many ways, the *Anonymous Glossy* is an anti-selfie.

The portraits are marked by their vulnerability, which undoubtedly derives from the material used, but can also be sensed textually. It is within that vulnerability that we find an enormous strength, as well as recognisability. It is far removed from the superficial and ostentatious smartphone selfie that usually has only one message: "Look how fabulous I am!"

4. The Glossy as a Decoupling of Image and Text

In the ordinary glossy, image and text reinforce one another unilaterally. The photos are illustrative to the story. This is not the case with the *Anonymous Glossy*. There is a uncoupling between image and text, and the project moves in a grey zone between fact and fiction, documentation and interpretation. Time after time the reading flow is subtly interrupted by the so-called advertisements, Efrat's story, the story of Others, and by portrait photographs that are not connected to the stories but are placed elsewhere in the publication. It remains somewhat ambiguous and a puzzle, however it's that very ambiguity that makes it an interesting work of art. After all, this is how we should view the glossy in the first place: as a work of art. A work of art in which the parameters of seeing, being seen and having a voice, are questioned.

5. The Glossy as a Self-made Archive

Finally, we could see Efrat's artistic practice here as an open, living and generative collection of stories and portraits. As a chronicle of a city and of a zeitgeist. As an artist Efrat is a producer, but she is also a collector, an archivist and in a way, a curator. The *Anonymous Glossy* is a splendid tool to perfectly fulfil and enhance all these roles.