

Lee Edwards in conversation with Loredana D'Andrea
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When I came across Lee Edwards' miniature works what drew me in was the absolute beauty, the delicate aura of a lost time, and the seemingly understated skill involved in creating them, what drew me in further was when I discovered the concept behind these stunningly intricate works. The tiny oil paintings on different types of found wood are portraits of the unrequited loves or ex-girlfriends Edwards' has encountered throughout his life, as with past romantic acquaintances, each one demands attention, but when viewed together it is as if they are an illustrated composition of modern love.

In Edwards' work space we concentrate on the pieces he'll be showing in his May show at Domobaaal Gallery, neatly laid out on a small desk in front of a window, from a quick glance the objects look like treasures a little boy has collected on his adventures in the garden, riches from a woodland. There are conkers, acorns, twigs, sawn off discs of wood but there is also a face barely visible glaring from the knot in a piece of pine, and a beaming smile coming from a tiny disc of oak on the wall, and a slice of blonde hair peeping out of a plank. A certain effect of the work, as with miniature paintings is that they are infinitely more overwhelming in life, a photograph cannot possibly recreate them with the justice they deserve.

Edwards' tells me that they are vaguely based on Elizabethan miniatures, relating to the traditional aspect of miniatures of secret admirers, they seem to be just that but without the finery, and with a loose aspect that suggests how it feels to be young and desperately in love. It is this personal subject matter that drives Edwards, "There's an intimate aspect in the fact that they do relate to something like mementoes or something ornamental maybe....There's an anonymity about them as well, some of them are slightly unrecognisable, i.e. the ones without hair or the one in the knot, so it's just in the shadows, there is a certain train of thought...it alludes to someone but there's a certain mystery involved in it as well." I consider how it must feel to relive past relationships in such a measured way as concentrating on them for a time long enough to paint them, and see a slight glimpse of the effect of this when I ask Edwards about the names of the works. Whilst thinking of the answer he picks up a conker, looks at it thoughtfully and says, "Sometimes it's how maybe I remembered being, feeling. This one's called, 'I Was Too Shy' because I was too shy to tell her I fancied her." He goes on and places it back on the table, "I've only showed it once, that conker piece, and I had it on the ground, I had it hidden away in a window frame in the corner of the room. In terms of installation it's quite a quiet piece and it's away from prying eyes. If you come across it, it's something a bit more special, so it plays with the idea of, 'I Was Too Shy' in terms of the way you see the work as well."

When talking about the fundamental wood bases of the works Edwards tells me that this is the first time he has painted for a few years, "I've always had a problem with conventional shapes, like a rectangular canvas because I find it hard to define the scale or find it quite a restricted shape to work on." And with that, this comment strikes me, because I find that the objects themselves seem to set out their own requirements in the way nature takes on all sorts of uneven contoured forms. With Edwards' work it is interesting to note how the images merging with the wood is all alluding to the

same point about love and life, "There's some sort of incorporation with life and what you're painting on and what you are painting, and trying to make the two relate to each other. There's a lot of associations with wood, the rings, the history, that sort of thing as well. I quite like making something happen from the bare essentials."

So I ask the obvious question, do the girls know they've been painted?

"Um...no! One person does, I told them."

What did she think about it?

"She was very, very flattered. I'm not sure everyone would be flattered...but I don't know...we'll see..."

Edwards enjoys getting different people's perspectives, "You can tell the question always is, 'Who is this?' there's a lot of relevance in that." From the reactions he has encountered so far the main issue is whether Edwards should tell the subjects or not. It then becomes terribly interesting for me to find out what men say about the idea as coming from a woman's perspective I find the whole concept touching, and the secrecy romantic, "Ah, it is a bit of a mixture, 'I've heard you're playing with fire mate' is one. Another is 'fuck it, do it mate, that's a great idea' and then there's some guys who are like 'whoa ok, quite a few should be interesting' and then the whole 'have you told people' thing, I've got quite a mixed bag for that. A lot of blokes have said, 'no, why do you have to tell them?! This is your life; it's to do with you.'"

"I've thought that 90% of the people that come to this show, actually 98% of the people that come to this show won't know anybody. They'll have no idea who these people are or their relevance." And that, I would say, sums up the beauty of Edwards' work, because the fact that we do not know these women, have only a slight indication of how they look, have no idea what their relationship with Edwards was like, denotes the beauty of the intimacy they evoke, so much so that even displaying past loves in a gallery space is not actually exposing them to the world.

Before I left I asked Edwards if he'll create a painting of his girlfriend for the show, "No" he said, "This is all about my past."

Lee's solo exhibition, 'How to Disappear Completely' is at Domobaal Gallery from the 12th of May to the 11th of June.

Field notes:

1. Lee has a live/work space provided by Bow arts trust. He shows with Domobaal, London.
2. He believes there is not enough honest art being made today.
3. He loves smelling the print in books.