

# Be My Once in a Lifetime

Rachel Button Nick Mullaly Nabilah Nordin

Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery 10 March – 9 April 2022

{Insert heart emoji here}

I'm reading Badiou while listening to Bell Hooks when my deficit attention lands on a tweet that reads:

Love feels like a great misfortune, a monstrous parasite, a permanent state of emergency that ruins all small pleasures - Žižek <sup>1</sup>

It is Valentine's day, no less. I am currently sipping on Schloss waiting for a-not-date at a table that is only available for the next half-an-hour. The soft toy, red roses, heart shaped balloon version of love typeset in script reading *Be my once in a lifetime*. A phrase stolen, borrowed, begged for and used: One Direction, Talking Heads, Beyonce and Cher. In this instance, shared: from David Sequeira to me, embedded in the chorus of Lana del Ray's *Love Song* ...

Oh, be my once in a lifetime  
Lying on your chest, in my party dress  
I'm a fucking mess but I  
Oh, thanks for the high life... <sup>2</sup>

Žižek and Del Ray seem to agree. Love is a cosmic imbalance, Z says. I love you more than anyone else, and in this quite formal sense, love is a form of evil. We agree. Something has gone terribly wrong. We know it to be. Love hurts, it bites and it bleeds. Pop songs are the poems for a science we can't remember and don't have. Physics and physicality. Time and timing. Proximity and scale. Cliche and climax. Context and complexity. Polis and politics. Each "and" the intimacy between mis and its understandings.

Between Bell and Badiou, Del Ray and Žižek the parallels accumulate. In imagination love encompasses both violence and war; it is beyond the couple, difference, politics and the social. Something negotiated. Always negotiated. It lies between. As Žižek would put it, love without love. PIL, 1983:

I'm going over to the other side  
I'm happy to have not to have not  
Big business is very wise  
I'm inside free enterprise<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aspen Ballas, "Love feels like a great misfortune, a monstrous parasite, a permanent state of emergency that ruins all small pleasures." - Žižek I'm so happy I'm experiencing this nightmare with you, @tonyballas. ILYSM. Happy Valentines Day, 14 February 2022, <https://twitter.com/AspenTBallas/status/1493330537850810368>, accessed 14 February 2022. In messages upon my request to cite the tweet, Aspen Ballas writes: *If you're interested in a back story, my husband and I met at a Žižek reading group lol. By the end of the book, Violence, we were the only 2 left.*

<sup>2</sup> Lana Del Ray, *Love Song*, track 6 on *Norman Fucking Rockwell*, August 30, 2019. <https://genius.com/Lana-del-rey-love-song-lyrics>, accessed 14 February, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Public Limited Image, *This is not a love song*, track 2 on *This is what you want... This is what you get.*, September 5, 1983, <https://genius.com/Public-image-ltd-this-is-not-a-love-song-album-version-lyrics>, accessed 14 February 2022.

Aesthetics co-opted by a fast-moving market, the excess and or remainder of love and intimacy imaged in social media accounts posting captions ripped from quasi nostalgic films under the handle *at-cinema-dot-poetry*. From moving image to scrolling meme. Private pleasures in spaces pretending to be public; a gentle stroke of your heart emoji aligning your social imagination.

In CC Thomas' small book *In the name of ♥. Who claims love?*, they recall that in 2017 a Berlin based festival called Re:public introduced *Love out Loud* as its main theme as means for fighting the rise of the alt-right.<sup>4</sup> Turn the page. 2003. Thomas tells us Sara Ahmed's paper *In the name of love*, reveals how hate groups rebrand as organisations of love revealing the misconception that love is used by one side of politics, or belongs to one ideology.<sup>5</sup> {Insert heart emoji here}.

Nick Mullay, Rachel Button, Nabilah Nordin; a trinity of understandings relying on the mis. Recent graduates of the Victorian College of the Arts, their materiality of matter stumbling and fumbling through a logic of sense and sensibilities in surfaces of paint, the absurdity of narrative and abjectness of form.

Mullay's cinematic musings are becoming allegorical. Dismissing the language of the poetry that seduced you on Instagram, these paintings evolve from drawings, observations and notes. These paintings emerge sans-high-key-colour and some kind of new lamp light. Voids and shadows, the unclassified bird steals an un-tiffany-ed necklace, two lovers, crotches dancing. Still but montaged, there is an ambiguity of time and an ambiguity of gesture. This is an unsharpened reality of promiscuous possibilities. The freeze frame before their clothes come off stolen from a Tumblr of booze and broads. 1970's fuzz soft porn, public intimacy, leaking petals and a still from Mariah Carey cradling her guy. A Botticelli cushion from Etsy as Vis Merch in Caravaggio candlelight. *Be my once in a lifetime*, buy me with Afterpay, filter my face, data my points, catch my eye.

The Botticelli cushion from Etsy.

The clam shell sand-pit frames films-cum-collage, narrating the Button of a belly. A goddess of love, transformed, an ethic explored in the personification of the placenta. The individuality of love and singularity of experience beyond what is to touch, to touch is your screen. Rachel Button's seemingly absurd narratives echo Terry Gilliam's filmic collages asking questions to the order of what is usually presented satirically. Sincerely and intellectually salacious. Where does one subject end and an objective begin? In times of virus and atomised particles, what is it we share and what is it to choose? Info graphics and instructional videos: cut, zoom, paste. Shared cells and shares in cells; if Mullay's allegories align with in-between intimacies, Button dislodges dignity to rethink the public of our bodies.

From Badiou to Bell, Alain does say:

*The latent event emerges and, we might say, breaks through what you can see.*<sup>6</sup>

Constructions re-constructed in restoration. For Badiou it is Andre Breton who links life to love through an event that ruptures what was once thought common-sense. Beyond language, this event is saturated and intense. For Nabilah Nordin, it finds form in complicated growths surfaced in high-key colour and pattern excess. These forms hide an accumulative process: gloop, droop, stoop. An argument, an error, an infatuation: fast dates and day long messages. From simple us to Simple Minds, a *Love Song* seems:

In coats of many colour  
Reptile man drop  
Stay below it

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<sup>4</sup> CC Thomas, *In the name of ♥. Who claims love?*, Onomatopoe 192, 2020, p.17

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.18

<sup>6</sup> Alain Badiou, *In praise of love*, Flammarion SA, Paris, 2009, p.81. The full quote reads: *In politics, events are ordered by history in retrospect. But art is alone in restoring or attempting to restore completely their intense power. Only art restores the dimension of the senses to an encounter, an insurrection or a riot. Art, in all its forms, is a great reflection on the event as such. A great painting is the capture by its own means of something that cannot be reduced to what it displays. The latent event emerges and, we might say, breaks through what you can see. Breton reminds us, from this point of view, that art is very closely linked to love, since the latter is basically the moment when an event breaks through existence.*

Stay below it  
Stay below it  
Stay below it  
Temperature drop<sup>7</sup>

For Nabilah the debris of language is gathered in mouldable plastic and epoxy modelling compounds. Stinky, difficult, massaged. The modelling denies precision, the scale implies intensity. The dressage defying the indulgent interior.

Hey Badiou, we remember: *Love confronts two enemies, essentially: safety guaranteed by an insurance policy and the comfort zone limited by regulated pleasures.*<sup>8</sup> Flesh of heart, heart of steel, love song, on and on, on and on, be my once in a lifetime {insert heart emoji here}.

Dr Lisa Radford  
Research Convenor  
VCA Art, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

## Thank you

It is with great joy that the Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery opens its 2022 program with *Be My Once in a Lifetime*.

I thank the artists who embraced the idea for this exhibition so wholeheartedly. Allowing ideas around tenderness, romance, clumsiness and dagginess to bubble away and percolate within their studio practices, Rachel Button, Nick Mullaly and Nabilah Nordin have developed new video, paintings and sculptures that can be connected with the messy sweetness that we know as love. I can't help thinking about the awkwardness of relationships when I consider Nabilah Nordin's sculptural processes of pushing, pressing and embellishing. Often precariously balanced, the intensely worked surfaces give little indication of their underlying structural support. Rachel Button's video, positioned as a pearl within plastic sandpit/ wading pool clam shells alludes to the persistence of internalised monologues that seem par for the course of being in a relationship. For me, entering the warm glow of Nick Mullaly's dreamy imagery is like soaking in a visual love song. I am deeply indebted to Dr Lisa Radford for generously accepting the invitation to write about this project with such energy and enthusiasm. Who else would write an essay on Valentine's Day?

Special thanks to Gallery Coordinator Joon Youn and art installers, Ashley Perry, Zamara Robison and Michael Sandford.

Dr David Sequeira  
Director, Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery  
Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

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<sup>7</sup> Simple Minds, *Love Song*, from the album *Sons and Fascination*, July 1981. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love\\_Song\\_\(Simple\\_Minds\\_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_Song_(Simple_Minds_song)), accessed 14 February 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Badiou, *Ibid*, p.13