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Thank you

Ross Simonini

curated by Evan Reiser

August 11 – September 15, 2019

Exhibition Text:

Café Gratitude

on Ross Simonini, *Thank you* at Catbox Contemporary

text by Evan Resier

Ross Simonini's solo show at Catbox Contemporary, "Thank you," takes its inspiration from the structure of Catbox itself: the interconnected scratch posts, platforms and other accouterments which are regularly occupied by both Hinge's cat and contemporary artwork.

To remedy some health issues, Simonini recently traveled to Bali, Indonesia for a month-long ayurvedic treatment. His itinerary involved eating progressively larger amounts of ghee, bathing in sesame oil, and scrubbing his body with sugar. This intense experience was designed to purge illness and "reset" his body.

When he wasn't suffering from ghee-induced headache, Simonini explored the island's ubiquitous *pura* shrines. Balinese Hindu *pura* range from elaborate temples to ramshackle constructions placed casually in the corner of a shop or outdoors in the street. These small *pura* are sometimes filled with offerings such as rice or cigarettes.

Given that Catbox functions primarily as cat furniture and secondly as gallery space, it isn't difficult to see the entire project as a shrine to Hinge's cat. Inspired by the ethos of the *pura*, Simonini did just that. He filled each receptacle in Catbox with foodstuffs, treating each chamber less like a miniaturized white cube and more as if they were networked parts of a digestive system. The tallest chamber received a cup of white rice, whereas the lowest received a pile of pan-chakarma tea seeds (coriander, cumin, fennel) which had been pre-steeped and dried in the sun. A cat-sized basin near the bottom of the structure was filled with Indonesian bank notes and psyllium husk powder, a product primarily consumed as a dietary supplement.

These various bodily allusions only further emphasized the formal similarities between the Catbox and a standing figure. The Catbox is just taller than a person of average stature, a Boccioni-esque abstraction of forms in space all covered in a high pile taupe carpet.

On the hips and shoulders of this figurative shrine Simonini placed freshly cut flowers and candles and tied vertical lengths of thin, colored hemp rope from different vertices on the Catbox to the ceiling. Hanging plastic “THANK YOU” bags, like those one would receive from a NYC merchant, were folded to display just the repeated all-caps text and tiled together.

A series of line drawings adorn the Catbox, drafted by Simonini onto blank, prefabricated “Thank you” cards. They are themselves shrine-like compositions, created by repeatedly writing-drawing the eight letters which spell “Thank you.” These constellations do not overlap, like alphabet soup, but branch outward to form limblike forms which themselves mimic the “architecture” of the Catbox.

Simonini continued to draw each composition until he himself felt thankful. This exercise loosely aligns with the concept of chaos magic, or results-based magic, in which the belief and psychological state of the practitioner is tantamount to the success of actualizing a desired outcome. It is the power of doing and feeling a thing to achieve a goal. It is a completely sincere means to telegraph the gratitude felt by Simonini — who, by the way, is now feeling much better.

Ross Simonini is an artist working in visual art, literature, dialogue and music. He has shown work with Jack Hanley Gallery, Escobar, Shoot the Lobster, Kimberly Klark Gallery, Vacancy LA and the Sharjah Biennial. His first novel, *The Book of Formation*, was published by Melville House and he regularly contributes interviews to *ArtReview* and *The Believer*. Simonini makes music as ROOS and with NewVillager, who will release a suite of new music in the fall. He is a professor at Columbia University, where he is currently teaching a seminar on experimental process.

Evan Reiser is an artist and curator based in New York. He previously founded and operated the galleries City Limits in Oakland, CA and 100 in San Francisco, CA. He is currently a director at Bortolami, New York.