

Time...Loose Change

Dawn Cerny, Steve Kado, Amanda Ross-Ho

@ Veronica

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“Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is THE BEST.” — Frank Zappa¹

I. Zappa

In earnest pursuit of knowledge, or, failing that, some kind of protective coating that could shield my brain from further degeneration at the hands of profit maximization and perpetual attention capture, I gave up Instagram for Lent. I looked up Lent in order to prime myself to explain what it is for the purposes of this text, and the autofill mechanism on my browser’s search bar surprised me: Lent is...*a fad diet that can be harmful to vital organs. True or false?* The authority behind this was a website of digital flashcards, and the correct answer, helpfully, was False².

At Veronica project space in Seattle, Steve Kado's *Fountain (TB)* is composed of taut steel cable which spans one of the gallery’s short walls, hung ten feet above the floor and pulled down at one end by a suspended water bottle, which is full. Threaded along this cable are small, colorful objects—baubles, trinkets, or charms, though they resist any single designation. They are small and bright, and in their synthetic gloss, almost edible. The cable itself reads like an eschatological timeline populated by a variety of end-of-the-world personalities waiting to spring forth at the right time, in all their textural singularity.

The water bottle acts as a ballast, and without it, the whole apparatus would come down — an apocalypse kept at bay, for now, or a generalized sense of catastrophe deferred. Through looking I am reminded of the writer Maurice Blanchot, marched in front of a Nazi firing squad in 1944 and...not shot. He set the scene down decades later, ending with a sense of distant bemusement as his recollection comes to a close: *What does it matter. All that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself, or to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance*³. The death did not arrive but by the same token, did not stop belonging to him.

A timeline is a line drawn away from a beginning and toward an end. Blanchot's iconic wartime memory, like Kado's cable, describes what happens when our prescribed ends don't arrive—the line stays taut and the beat goes on. This orientation is closer to how music handles time than to how prophecy or memory does, with recurrences at mysteriously derived but beautiful intervals, with a logic that is unknown to all except the real heads. Looking again at the cable, and the objects that are skewered through it, I see measures and moments that could potentially loop indefinitely. Music is the best.

All of this to say, I failed my Lenten promise to myself, and logged into Instagram several times over the 40 day period.

II. Barbara Payton

I was reared on screens and rendered helpless by them: computer, phone, and the oldest of them, the silver one, where Barbara Payton lived.

The actress Barbara Payton was born in Cloquet, Minnesota, in 1927. She arrived in Los Angeles at eighteen. In Hollywood, beauty and youth are currencies to be spent, and Payton was spent fast. Her first foray into pictures came in 1949. The often-purported highlight of her career, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, opposite James Cagney, was released in 1950. Shortly thereafter, she began a slide into low-budget pictures and tabloid covers for various scandals, including a highly publicized custody battle and numerous affairs. She was washed-up by the mid-1950s, while still in her twenties.

After being cast out, Payton was condemned to cycles of bad checks, booze, pills, and prostitution. What was wrested from the wreckage was a memoir, *I Am Not Ashamed*, ghost-written with the ultra-hack Leo Guild — also the author of *The Loves of Liberace*, a pulp bio that strained to prove the pianist was not a homosexual. Not long after this, Payton died at the age of thirty-nine. A face worth a studio contract at twenty-two was worth nothing to the same studios a few years later. Beauty is not love, and it is not tenure. Looking in the rearview, much like Blanchot, Payton writes about her lost loves: "When I married Franchot I thought it would be forever. Later when I divorced Franchot to live with Tom I thought that would be forever. But forever is just a week-end — more or less."⁴

Amanda Ross-Ho works time the way time worked Payton (and the rest of us, too), except she works to slow the pace at which it does its damage. *Untitled Crisis Actor (hurts as much as you can imagine, although you do not have to be crying to feel this)* is a nearly five-foot rendering of the weeping face from the hospital pain scale, the one-to-ten chart of cartoon faces you point to when you can't name what's happening inside — the indescribable pain beyond

language confined in the musculature, the bones, the viscera. Built in canvas, satin, sale-rack lace, and remnant sequin, the work is an instrument for measuring suffering as well as a plaintive portrait. Payton is a crisis actor in the classical sense — a woman who performed distress on a soundstage in black and white, then was made to live it until she was snuffed out, without residuals.

Untitled Opening (NOIR AND BLANC) is thirty-five wine glasses at 1:12 scale, red and white, glass and resin. Each is filled to a different level; some drained, some barely touched: the residue of an opening, evidence of a toast absent of its reason. The glass is an accessory to the celebration, but never its cause.

Miniaturization does something particular to time. It takes the transient — a room of people and objects, a night that ends — and arrests it, makes it graspable. What it cannot do is let the party end. Shrunk and fixed, the reception stops being an event. It is an opening held permanently in place, celebratory and, held long enough, a quiet terror — the party you are at forever. The forever that is not a weekend.

At the Hammer's *Made in L.A. 2025*, Ross-Ho ran the same operation in reverse. *Untitled Thresholds (FOUR SEASONS)* enlarged the door of her father's care facility to well past life size, four times over, each version accentuated with the similarly larger than life décor of a different holiday. Shrink a party or swell a threshold, the scale elects to freeze time, imperfectly, and to an eerie timeless effect.

III. The Musée Mécanique

The Musée Mécanique is a working arcade and museum at Pier 45 at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. Here, one can find the world's largest private collection of coin-operated mechanical amusements, one that is not relegated to a life behind velvet ropes. It is a living repository where visitors feed quarters into antique machines, some of which date back to the 1880s. A visitor can watch these machines jerk through a brief routine before the coin runs out and the action halts. In consulting the artist Alan S. Tofighi about visiting this place, he mentioned that he accidentally inhaled a lungful of early 20th-century dust from a diorama while there and suffered a ferocious allergic reaction.

Dawn Cerny's freestanding sculpture, *Monument to the Fourth International (key chain kiosk)*, is built from wire wrapped in yarn—a technique lifted from the domestic habit of decorating metal hangers to protect the garments they hold. The form is a souvenir keychain rack: a leaning red lattice about six feet tall, hung with laser-printed photo keychains. It quotes Duchamp's Bottle Rack, Watts Towers, and—most explicitly—the artist Vladimir Tatlin's

unrealized Monument to the Third International, which was meant to out-tower the Eiffel Tower. It also shares a lineage with flocked Christmas trees.

An arcade or fortune-telling machine holds its machinations secret until activated by a quarter. Cerny's kiosk holds photographs and craft materials in a form that quotes monuments while refusing the security of permanence. Both rely on the viewer's willingness to stop, to look, and really pay attention. The dust that my friend inhaled at the Musée is not unlike the dust that will eventually settle on Cerny's yarn and keychains: the accretion of ordinary time, the evidence that these things are not sealed behind glass but are alive in the world, waiting to be handled and breathed in.

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1. Frank Zappa, "Packard Goose," on *Joe's Garage: Acts II & III*, 1979.
 2. Lent is a 40-day season of prayer, fasting, and spiritual reflection that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter. During this time, you're supposed to give something up.
 3. Maurice Blanchot, The Instant of My Death, in Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of My Death / Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), pg. 11.
 4. Barbara Payton, *I Am Not Ashamed* (1963; repr., Spurl Editions, 2016), pg. 121.