

ARTFORUM

Dario Robleto

D'AMELIO TERRAS

For an “abstract” medium composed of invisible sound waves traveling through air, music generates a considerable number of fetish objects. The idea of performing can itself become a substitute for direct experience: Even the shyest individual may harbor secret fantasies of rock-star success, of driving countless fans to a near frenzy of adulation and identification. But as Houston-based artist Dario Robleto’s recent show, using records, audio tapes, posters, show flyers, and handwritten lyrics demonstrates, it doesn’t take a psychotherapist (or a semiologist) to explain that any projective aspirations on the part of the fan say more about fantasy and possibly fanaticism than about the tangible satisfaction of desires. For *Candles Un-burn, Suns Un-shine, Death Un-dies*, 2010, Robleto digitally removed the bodies of now-deceased performers from their live-concert album covers, and created a composite from the residual constellation of stage lights and tiny pinpricks of lighters held aloft by fans. The piece is an eerie portrait of absence: Once the gravitational pull of a star is removed, the light flares appear like so much brilliant but evanescent intergalactic dandruff. Robleto attempts to capture the ineffability of stardom, the way in which the reflected light of the star inevitably comes to us as a parallax of some distant and mysterious event.

Indeed, even as we try to possess a little piece of the star through the consumer objects the music industry sells us, a central fetish object of twentieth-century music—the LP—has receded into obsolescence and is now an antiquarian artifact. Much of Robleto’s work has used the materiality of this and other music-related ephemera to test the way in which the idea of collecting is always charged with a kind of temporal delay, imbued with an elegaic sense of the outmoded. His diminutive sculpture *How to Resist Nothingness? (I Don’t Wanna Let You Go)*, 2010, incorporates another technological relic from pop music’s past—magnetic audiotape, which he unspools and re-forms into tiny leaves wrapped around willow twigs. Suspended in clusters inside of a mason jar surrounded by mirrors, the handcrafted leaves are precious, vulnerable, and anthropomorphized, though endlessly duplicated in reflection. The audiotape from which they are fashioned contains transfers from 45 rpm singles whose titles feature women’s names—Dion’s “Run-around Sue,” Ritchie Valens’s “Donna,” Roy Orbison’s “Leah,” for example—which makes the leaves a strangely recursive *mise en abyme*: Their spindly veins are formed by yards of tightly wound magnetic tape that we cannot hear, and contain fifty-year-old proclamations of love for

Dario Robleto,
*Candles Un-burn,
 Suns Un-shine, Death
 Un-dies*, 2010,
 digital composite on
 photographic paper
 mounted on Sintra,
 46 x 65½ x 2".



unseen women who were just girls when the recordings were made, if the women ever existed at all. It is particularly poignant that the source records for this piece belonged to Robleto's mother, she who most likely saw herself interpellated by these pop stars' love songs. Fandom's obsession with presence is revealed as the ambition to suture time and space in an impossible dream of immediacy, always tempered, however, by the passing of time, by the aging of the star, by the aging of the fan.

Robleto's meticulous labor parallels a fundamental asymmetry of pop music—the way audiences spend far more time and energy parsing details of the star's life than the star will ever return to them in kind. A pair of text pieces proclaim the one-name monikers of soloists “Dusty” and “Muddy” (as in Springfield and Waters)—spelled out in cursive script with thousands of minuscule pale pink clamshells. But *ceci n'est pas une pipe*: These adjectival nicknames do not describe what they depict—the nacreous seashells are neither dusty nor muddy (though the singers' last names both refer to water). The intricate collectivity of the shells hints at the complex affective bonds of the crowd; though the members of the group are joined laterally to one another, they ultimately exist in a hierarchy, fused together beneath the larger-than-life, highly cathected star.

—Eva Díaz