LOVE AND ART

A Cinema of Immediacy and Intimacy
With *Love and Art*, I was shooting little things all the time, and shooting at many art fairs and galleries. And in this I wanted to know, what is it that the artist does, what is it to make art, what is art?

So somewhere between documenting the art world, asking people what art is, and seeing myself in this world, I worked toward inventing a small fiction, just to the side of the real, about an artist who looks at himself and his wife to ask what love is, what is it to love—so love and art, all shot with a small camera with video capabilities of 640 x 480 and smaller.

I had begun to clearly see that film or narrative and its event in recording wasn’t over there, it was simply the frame to contextualize what was right in front of me. It was a way to see the narrative I was writing here and there and in my thoughts in real time, at select times. I would be at an opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and since I knew a number of artists there I would ask others to video me with them, give them my camera and instructions such as, “Follow me as I walk up to so-and-so and talk to them.” I would interview people, or follow someone who was officially interviewing people, or stand around and film people and artworks, and, well, things would happen as I continued to view and arrange things in this directed narrative sense.

I began to call this narrative desktop, or network, cinema. I call it that because of the immediacy and intimacy of the video medium in the environment of network culture. This is a different kind of video than explored by earlier video artists, though it takes many cues from them about the body, documentation, presence, play, and duration. It is also a different kind of video than an HD feature. It’s a new dogma, I suppose, and suggests a new kind of mise-en-scène, a new kind of recording event, a new kind of sound, one that anticipates recording in the moment just before the advent of Web 2.0 and social media. One that accepts the societal condition of software and the network, reception in the network, a production whose raison d’être is not Sundance nor Toronto—nothing wrong with that—but this is something scaled to a different kind of recording event, with very different set of demands.

*Love and Art* was made at the moment when the network seemingly promised the filmmaker an audience. And though this promise is fulfilled in some cases, getting an audience outside of presenting your films where the audience is can be almost as tricky an affair as raising money. But it is also something more, it was made at that moment just before the ubiquitous recording of ourselves, that moment of the continual narration of ourselves for social media consumption. It was made just before we were always recording, where this always recording by everyone would change the image of ourselves, our media, our narratives, and film.
“It Is Love; It Is Art,” a review by Daniel Coffeen

There are at least two threads that run through Marc Lafia’s film Love and Art. On the one hand, there’s a love story, a sensual, sentimental tale of two lovers. On the other hand, there’s the world of art: artists, openings, museums, seeing and being seen.

These two threads—love and art—are absolutely distinct and simultaneously one and the same thing. Both are forces that act upon us just as we act upon them: we don’t quite choose to love, just as we don’t quite choose to make art. And yet to say that we do not choose is not right, either. Love and art happen. They are forces that take us up but that don’t exceed us, per se: we become their equals. The lover becomes love, is love; the artist becomes art, is art.

And both birth and are birthed by a supreme generosity. It is a generosity that this film not only captures but also performs. For this film is itself supremely generous. It never seeks to reduce the world of love or the world of art; it is never didactic. And even when letting academics speak, it is never academic. Rather, it indulges its world—love, art, and the viewer alike.

The two threads of love and art find themselves taken up by an eye that sees multiply, that allows both love and art to go as they go, in all of their texture, ambience, play, ambiguity, pleasure. This film makes us privy to the clamor of gallery voices, the not-so-subtle scent of cheese meeting not-too-expensive wine, the pitter-patter of museum shoes, the intent looks of befuddlement, interest, and boredom, the whispers of tongues, the grace of a metered caress, the drive to live well.

This is the rare film about art that is itself art. The camera here does not just capture the world; it makes the world by letting it happen in all of its teeming multiplicity. Just as the lover becomes love and the artist becomes art, this film is not really about either love or art. It is love; it is art.