

Lynne McCabe

Scottish, lives in America, born 1975

*I want to be misunderstood so clearly that there can be no question of my refusal to remain a stable investigable subject.*¹

Although Lynne McCabe creates videos, installations, performances, and photographs, it is perhaps most accurate to say that her primary medium is conversation. By facilitating seminars and events, studying texts, and conducting interviews, the Glasgow-born, Houston-based artist at once critiques and partakes in notions of relational aesthetics and community art. Throughout her 2007 residency at Houston's Project Rowhouse, for example, McCabe worked with the tradition of the "potluck" as a site of trade and offering. Here, she organized dinners for which she invited local women to contribute food and visiting artists to donate artworks. By facilitating an exchange of art for meals and vice versa, McCabe sought to examine and undermine entrenched economies of exchange and use value. The work underscored the value of interchange while simultaneously questioning the potential for activist art to allay lived injustices. In this sense, McCabe's practice reflects upon the possibilities and limitations of what artist Joseph Beuys termed "social sculpture." Dedicated to discussion and at times antagonism, McCabe relies upon conversation as an idea, space, and action for the possibilities it offers for dynamic negotiation and productive slippages in meaning.

Other works focus on these same questions more directly by drawing on her own narrative and working to balance and unsettle essentialized categories of artist, mother, woman, and performer. In her project *Vexations in the Kitchen* [Fig. 5], began in 2009, she invites women to her home for dinner, and in return, the artist asks that her guests perform French composer Erik Satie's circa 1893 piece for keyboard, *Vexations*, for as long as it takes her to prepare dinner for her visitor and son. McCabe documents each session, and in the resulting videos, viewers gain a glimpse into the artist's domestic existence, including her attending to her son's tantrums and needs, to the tune of Satie's austere composition. With this repetitive piece as the soundtrack to her responsibilities as a

mother and host, McCabe conflates the often monotonous, and sometimes very difficult duties of domesticity with those of highly regarded conceptualism.

McCabe's most recent project, *Becoming Two*, 2013 [Work 30], returns to the site of conversation in an effort to explore the dynamic between individuals in love. The work was inspired by the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, on whose writings McCabe conducted a seminar as exhibition entitled *Room to be (Ms.)understood: A Social Sculpture Workshop* at the Blaffer Art Museum in the fall of 2012.² In this workshop, McCabe sought to stress the manner in which genealogies of "relational aesthetics" have consistently overlooked the legacy of feminist performance artists pioneering relational forms dating back to the 1970s. For the Ackland, McCabe focuses on Irigaray's 2002 book *Way of Love*. In this text, Irigaray contends that love ought to be understood not, as Plato suggests, as a collapse of two individuals into one, but rather as the conjuring of a third, shared space between two.

By interviewing different kinds of couples, among them heterosexual and queer partnerships, as well as mothers and children, McCabe attempts to capture and sustain such a space, to explore the idiosyncratic "microcultures" that arise in intimate relationships. The artist presents audio recordings of her respondents alongside animated GIFs of their hands as they move throughout the interview, documenting an interstice between individuals that is suggestive not of distance, but endearment. *Becoming Two* summons this space between viewers as well. Situated within a stairwell—itsself a kind of liminal site between—the work's twinned headphones insist that audience members experience it in relation to another individual. Placing herself, her participants, and her viewers in conversation, McCabe attempts to disrupt static signifiers and to hold open a space where meaning might be made collaboratively.

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1. Lynne McCabe, "Overthrowing syntax: making an argument for being misunderstood." *Open Space: Art/Culture/Bay Area* (blog), SFMOMA, June 17, 2010, <http://blog.sfmoma.org/2010/06/overthrowing-syntaxmaking-an-argument-for-being-misunderstood/>.
2. Lynne McCabe, *Room to Be (Ms.)Understood* (2012). For more information, see: <http://blafferartmuseum.org.s158155.gridserver.com/curatorial-perspectives/>.



Work 30
Lynne McCabe
Still from *Becoming Two* (detail), 2013
sound and video installation

Fig. 5
Below, Lynne McCabe
Stills from *Vexations in the Kitchen*, 2009-ongoing
durational performance