

# Wit Love

## Danny Yahav-Brown's creative investigations will draw you in

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There's a sign on the side of the road in front of Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery -- it's a diamond-shaped metal traffic sign in a pale silvery-gray with white letters. It reads, "I WISH I COULD LOVE." The plaintive roadside declaration by Danny Yahav-Brown is part of the exhibition "**Danny Yahav-Brown: It's Like a Tiny Taste of Death**" on view at the gallery.



Yahav-Brown's message to passing traffic is absurd, funny and sad.

Where:

Devin Borden Hiram  
Butler Gallery, 4520  
Blossom,  
713-863-7097.

Details:

Through January 11

Subject(s):

["Danny Yahav-Brown: It's Like a Tiny Taste of Death"](#)

Declaring "I wish I could love" to passing traffic is absurd, funny and sad, all at the same time. Yahav-Brown's work is filled with this sort of quirky poetry. In *Where We Met* (2005), four aluminum squares in familiar yellow with black letters are propped up against one another to create a box. One says "DO"; the other says "NOT." You walk with your head down to read the next ones, which say "DO" and "NOT" as well. Suddenly, you realize that you're walking in stooped circles around an endlessly repeating work.

Yahav-Brown has a knack for effortlessly luring viewers into interacting with his work. In satisfying your curiosity, you suddenly find yourself doing something silly -- and start laughing. In a video work for a previous show at Mixture Gallery, Yahav-Brown silently mouthed "I love you" and "el-phant shoe," the disparate phrases causing his mouth to make similar shapes. The words appeared along the bottom of the video, and viewers found themselves mouthing "I love you" and "el-phant shoe" at the laptop screen to see for themselves. (Are you mouthing them as you read them?)

In other works Yahav-Brown has a playful approach to everyday objects and materials. *Reciprocation 1* and *2* (2005) are photographs of two ordinary wooden chairs, the kind you had in your junior high school library. But in Yahav-Brown's hands they have other connotations. They become stand-ins for the people who sit on them. One photograph shows a chair facedown on the floor while the other leans up against its legs at an angle; the other shows the opposite arrangement. The chairs look like they're mimicking sexual positions.

Quotidian material is the stuff of *It's the Very Same Moment (45 transparencies stack together until they stop being transparent and start being reflective)* (2005). The piece is a glossy, gray, eight-and-a-half- by 11-inch rectangle framed in white. As you gaze at your slightly blurred reflection, the work has a certain strange depth of surface, kind of like a dead LCD screen. The work is appealingly investigatory -- what's the tipping point of transparency? It's something you might do while you're bored at your office job.

*The Way Things Go (Backwards)* (2005) is another sort of exploration. Yahav-Brown takes the video of the same name by Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss and plays it backward. The original video was fantastic, a Rube Goldberg, domino-effect tour de force: One thing led to another and another through explosions, flames and physical and chemical reactions. Yahav-Brown reverses all that, and the sound becomes wonderful -- distorted and grandiose -- as chaos is reversed, flames disappear into themselves, chemical reactions condense, things fall up. It's a great twist.

In general, Yahav-Brown manages to avoid self-consciousness in his work. But a piece that seems affected is *Landing (tracing squares in my notebook during an aircraft landing)* (2005), a tiny page of graph paper with pen. The squares start out tidy and then get a little rough, which apparently happened as the wheels hit the tarmac. It's presented under a Plexiglas box frame and feels too precious and relic-like. It's too much of a fetishization of the artist's own experience.

Another work that feels off and too self-referential is *Bird (negative space of the artist's middle finger)* (2005), which rests on a pedestal in the middle of the room. With his middle finger up, he shoved it into a stack of cards, creating an indentation of the "fuck you" sign embedded in "a stack of invite cards that were printed (mistakenly) blank." Being pissed that invitation cards were misprinted doesn't really resonate with viewers in the same way as other work that's less specifically personal.

Ultimately, the personal is the impetus behind much of Yahav-Brown's work, but the pieces that are the most successful are the ones that extend beyond it. Whatever prompted the road sign *I Wish I Could Love*, the declaration is not specific to any one person. And his creative investigations into materials, objects and language draw others in as well. Yahav-Brown's missteps occur when his work is too centered on himself. But even though "It's Like a Tiny Taste of Death" is less cohesive and satisfying than Yahav-Brown's last Houston solo show, it still has more than enough of the artist's quiet and sometimes poignant wit to keep it going.