



FALL 2016

# Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: So Far, It's The Same Problem

# ALEESA COHENE AND BENNY NEMEROFSKY RAMSAY: SO FAR, IT'S THE SAME PROBLEM

OCTOBER 7 TO DECEMBER 4, 2016  
CURATED BY BLAIR FORNWALD, ASSISTANT CURATOR

## The Gift of Frustration

BY BLAIR FORNWALD, ASSISTANT CURATOR

*The Same Problem* is a series of collaborative works by artists Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, addressing not one, but a potentially-limitless set of philosophical and psychological problems characterized by disillusionment, entitlement, and frustrated ego. Working within the framework of an evolving methodology that responds to these problems – which, although deeply-felt, can also be vexing and effuse to describe – the artists have created works in diverse media, which together form “loose, unstable portraits of a character suspended in a series of frustrations and wrong choices.”<sup>1</sup>

To date, the suite of works contains three videos. *The Same Problem 1* (2009) introduces our protagonist, here performed by Nemerofsky, who stands along a shore and sings a melismatic lament of oohs and aahs culled from pop songs both recognizable and

obscure. A call-and-response cycle ensues; the voice is echoed back from found video footage of Friedrichesque scenes of crashing waves and stormy seas. In *The Same Problem 2* (2014), the protagonist emerges as a composite character, whose narrative is constructed from scenes from film and television, of different actors performing a linear sequence of actions, so that they collectively move and respond as one. This found footage is interwoven with original footage and audio by the artists. In it, the protagonist lies in bed, struggling to decipher a strange message:

*It is not your intelligence that is in question, nor your motivation. You've come a long way. However, you go no further until you throw off the psychological shackles that bound your lives.*

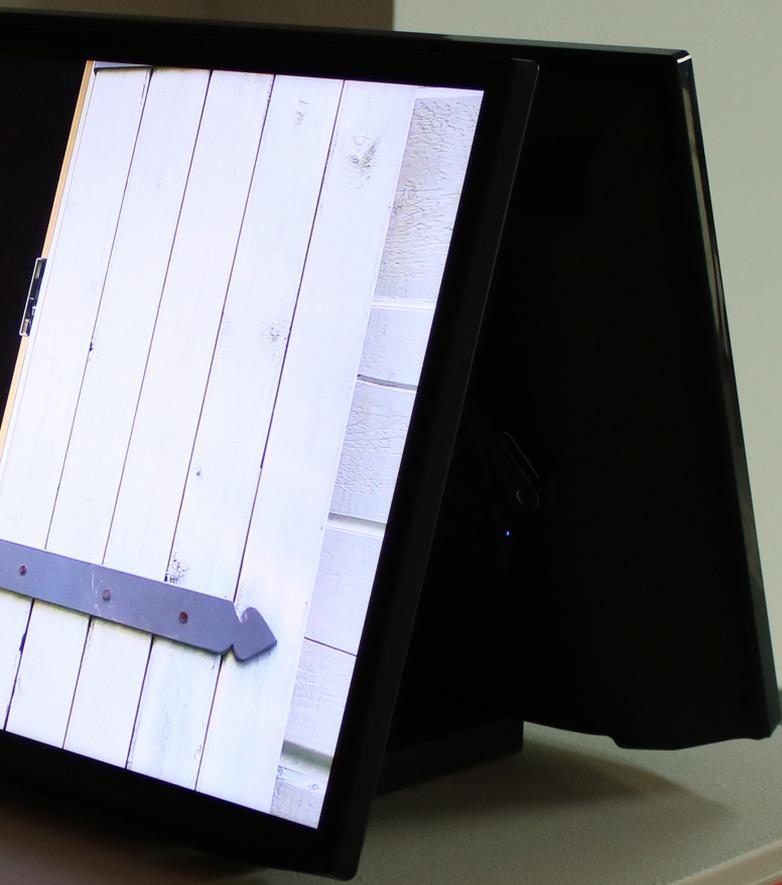
He is then interrupted by a wordless, disembodied voice that draws him



Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *The Same Problem 4*, 2014, text, and *The Same Problem 1*, 2009, video.  
Photo: Don Hall.



Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *The Same Problem 2*, 2012. Photo: Don Hall.





Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *The Same Problem 3*, 2014-2016, scent, Boston fern. Photo: Don Hall.

out of his introspection in search of its origins, but he cannot find its source. *The Same Problem 5* (2015) sees this composite character wandering through a castle and gazing out at its lush surrounding grounds, in a state of brooding introspection. A song from *The Slipper and the Rose* plays; its lyrics describe the frustration of a prince who longs to be two people – one taciturn, responsible, and adherent to the protocols expected of his position, the other romantic, carefree, and jovial. Near the end of the video, our protagonist tenderly kisses his own reflection in the mirror, echoing the Narcissus story and symbolically becoming, and subsequently uniting the two selves.

The impulse for the viewer to narrativize these vignettes may be quite strong, given that they are largely comprised of video clips from narrative formats. But the character's motivations remain oblique and largely internal, and his actions do not follow a narrative trajectory that reaches a resolution. Rather, the works seem to draw out or dwell within the protagonist's interior states. The possibility of ascribing narrative logic to the work is also challenged with the inclusion of works in media more resistant to this tendency. *The Same Problem 3* (2014), for instance, is a scent "designed to reflect the ego struggle of *The Same Problem's* hero."<sup>2</sup> Olfactory memory bypasses the thinking brain; it is subliminally conjured. Along with this scent, choreography, sculptural objects, and non-diegetic audio that permeates the gallery create a disconcerting psychological space that extends

beyond the screen, surrounding us like a miasma.

*The Same Problem* addresses altogether human problems, byproducts of our complex and extraordinary cognition. Difficult as they are to process or alleviate, states of disillusionment, entitlement, and ego struggle also have tremendous generative potential. Here they serve as catalysts for collaboration, risk-taking, production, and reflection within a shared artistic practice. Our frustrations rouse us from complacency, compelling us to change course, to let go of what we cannot handle, to consider what might be possible. Action is the gift of frustration.



Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *The Same Problem 6*, 2016, choreography for solo dancer, plisséd polyester  
Performed by Mairi Greig 7 October 2016. Photo: Don Hall.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Aleesa Cohene is a Vancouver-born artist based in Los Angeles. Her work has shown in festivals and galleries internationally. She has participated in artist residencies in Canada, the Netherlands and Denmark, and in 2010 completed a fellowship at the Kunsthochschule für Medien in Cologne, Germany. She holds a Masters of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto. Her work is in the permanent collection of Oakville Galleries, Canada and in numerous private collections.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay is an artist, diarist and correspondent. His work in video, sound and text has exhibited internationally and is part of the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada, the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna and Thielska Galleriet Stockholm.

Cohene and Nemerofsky's practices have overlapped with each other since 1999. Their collaboration was formalized in 2009 when they began the ongoing project, *The Same Problem*.

<sup>1</sup> Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, unpublished artists' statement, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Aleesa Cohene, "The Same Problem 3," artist's website, accessed 8 August 2016, <http://www.aleesacohene.com/thesameproblem3.shtml>



Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *The Same Problem 7*, 2016, oil and gouache on canvas, acrylic and gouache on linen.  
Photo: Don Hall.





Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *So Far, It's The Same Problem 7*, 2016, installation view. Photo: Don Hall.





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### COVER IMAGE

Aleesa Cohene and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *The Same Problem 5* (detail), 2016, video. Image courtesy of the artists.



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