

Susannah Bielak
Artist Statement: Bus Parts
(2001)

Over the past four seasons, I've talked to a foster mom about tough love, been thrown off my seat by a James Brown flirt, and sung country with an ex-trucker. These were all my drivers. I've waited through windstorms with old ladies in rose-colored glasses, and watched boys kneel down to pray on concrete under bus signs. I've stared at arthritic fingers, quilted jackets, pierced veins, bloody knuckles, toy dolls, bruised children, décolleté. Today I saw two satchels smaller than my two fists, a man in culottes, a woman with a full mustache and salmon colored lipstick.

Welcome aboard.

Reflecting on the communal and sensory experience of mass-transit ridership, *Bus Parts* is comprised of four components: *Passage*, *Literal*, *Visceral*, and *Conversation*. All senses are engaged in each piece exploring issues of privacy, perception, and public personae. *Passage* is a large-scale installation made of four bus doors and a backing wall. In *Conversation*, amalgams of image and handwritten text are rendered on individual pages that may be shifted and mingled like random thoughts and bits of overheard conversation; each series is housed in fluid hinged boxes. Using the font and format of existing bus transfers, *Literal* is a moveable 'Jacob's ladder' book, creating endless possibilities for conceptual interaction. Fabricated of aluminum bus metal, *Visceral* is made up of four machine-engraved boxes; each one telling a story through text, scent-impregnated wax, and found objects.

In *Passage*, sketches and text edited from two years of bus observation are amplified onto bus doors and a backing wall, generating a narrative that physically surrounds the viewer. Each door focuses on the manifold relations formed on the bus, ranging from appraisal to rote conversation. *Passage* reads both forward and backward on the continuums of public and private, literal and abstract, textual and visual.

As much of the interaction that occurs on the bus is unspoken, the fluid hinged *Conversation* boxes contain handwritten interviews with drivers and riders. Individual pages may be shifted and mingled like random thoughts and bits of overheard conversation. *Landscape* deals with the general social fabric and routine of the ride; *Eavesdrop* covers more intimate ground.

As a contained public space, the bus plays host to the senses. People leave remnants for each other, like the smudge of hair grease on a windowpane or the lingering scent of perfume. Proximity creates a vantage point for question and observation. *Visceral* describes four distinct characters through interactive boxes fabricated of aluminum bus metal. Each box tells a story through text, scent-impregnated wax, and found objects.

Literal describes the interpersonal interchange implicit on the bus via altered bus transfers, printed and weathered to convey stories and sentiments of individuals and couples on the bus. *Literal* is a moveable 'Jacob's ladder' book, creating endless possibilities for conceptual interaction.