

The Record Shop: Kevin Ei-ichi deForest
January 26 – March 30, 2018

Our likes and dislikes go a long way into creating our personalities. From favourite colours, to music, movies, books, foods, artists, family, etc., there are a lot of variables to take into consideration when regarding an individual. When meeting someone for the first time they are *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, to us. People are unlikely to offer up in depth personal histories to an utter stranger, and even some of our closest friends may withhold some of their narrative from us despite knowing them for years. We tend to fill in these blanks by making sweeping assumptions about an individual. There may be visual cues which help us to formulate our opinions, from religious iconography on their person, to their clothing or style of dress, to language or accents they may use or have, and so on.

For Kevin Ei-ichi deForest these assumptions frequently challenged his embraced identity as a suburban Canadian from the mid-western prairies, of Japanese and European decent.¹ For his part deForest reveals in his mixed heritage, embracing the identifiers 'mixed', 'hybrid', and 'Eurasian'. As with many people born in his generation, music has always been a significant part of his life.

The Record Shop embraces deForest's passion for music and collecting, the vinyl record jackets offering themselves as the perfect medium for his artwork. Using these pop cultural cast offs, icons of an almost forgotten era in an increasingly digital age, deForest alters them, sometimes a little, other times a lot, to make them reflective of an identity that is never stagnant and always changing.² The obsolete is once more made relevant and engaging, recycled into a new life in deForest's capable hands.³

When tackling the complex issues of racism and the fundamental differences between people music culture can do what the visual arts cannot.⁴ The audience can recognise some of the artists whose albums have become the canvas for deForest's expression. This adds a different dimension to his work; it plays intimately with the visitor's own understanding of the individual albums before them as much as the creative alterations to them by the artist.

The Record Shop, currently comprised of some 298 record jackets, is set up to immerse visitors in an authentic experience. Records are displayed across the walls of the gallery and in several milk crates placed upon pedestals where the audience may flip through the jackets, experiencing the nostalgia of browsing through an actual record shop. Many of the labels, terms, and politics of deForest are poignantly displayed across the jackets, little Kevin's carefully inserted into the album art. Visitors are encouraged to look over each album with care, the changes at times are radical or at times subtle.

Each jacket is a thread of the richly diverse tapestry of Kevin Ei-ichi deForest. Each carefully altered jacket is a deliberate stroke by deForest. These album covers vibrantly scream out aspects of identity, blatantly challenging these societal expectations, these marginalising, reductionist views of an individual are rebuked and openly refuted by his work.

This on-going body of work, first shown in 1994, is a living reflection of the man behind the art. *The Record Shop* has changed and grown over the years, some pieces being lost to collectors, but the body is always growing.⁵ The records are personal reflections of deForest's interests and ambitions.⁶

The genius of *The Record Shop* goes to show that the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts. Our identities are comprised of a multitude of things. We are more than what we initially present ourselves to be, and so are those around us.

Sarah Durham, Curator of Collections, January 2018

¹ DeForest, Kevin Ei-ichi. About/Conact/CV. www.kevindeforest.ca/contact

² Western, Jenny. "Kevin deForest: Fake ID", pgs. 12 – 15. *Kevin Ei-ichi deForest: FAKE ID*, Exhibition Catalogue, 2006. Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba.

³ DeForest, Kevin Ei-ichi. Personal interview. (E-mail). 15 January 2018.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sirmans, Franklin. "Fear (and not quite loathing it...)." Pgs. 18 – 19. *Kevin Ei-ichi deForest: FAKE ID*. Exhibition Catalogue, 2006. Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba.