



JON HORVATH

What's in a Name?

I never reached Bliss. I got close once, travelling along Interstate 84. With an eye towards expediency, I had opted for the very type of roadway whose formation served as a catalyst for the demise of many small towns like it. Fortunately, however, Jon Horvath made it there. Weighed down by shattered personal expectations and faltering dreams, the discovery of a place named Bliss proffered a warm flame to Horvath's moth. The question, What is bliss? began to swirl in his mind. What he discovered nestled within Idaho's Snake River Valley, a twenty-four-hour drive from Milwaukee, was a town born out of the American Dream, a remnant of Manifest Destiny performing the final words in Samuel Beckett's 1953 novel, *The Unnamable*: "I can't go on. I'll go on."

Horvath's practice is rooted in a space where burdening myth and stark reality coexist. Motivated by a yearning for what he describes as "unfixed photographic experiences," he adopts conceptual rubrics to propel his practice. With *This Is Bliss*, he has crafted a collection of episodic vignettes set deep within the withered dirigible that is the emblematic American roadside town. Each piece dwells atmospherically within *l'heure entre chien et loup*, an unsettled juncture when the line that differentiates the familiar from the foreign; the safe from the threatening; the true from the false—the dog from the wolf—is blurred, creating a new whole. A study of dichotomies, *This Is Bliss* presents what once illuminated the western landscape with splendor boiled down to its essence, a husk of its former self. There, within a setting draped in bleakness and melancholy, Horvath uncovers the warmth of our humanity.

Permeating *This Is Bliss* is the lingering grace of a gesture and the enduring yearning to connect. Through performance and documentation, Horvath traces the residue of failure. We witness him continuously circling a dirt road at night, never getting beyond where he started; reenacting Evel Knievel's famed attempt to jump the Snake River by skipping stones across the river's surface; and painstakingly redacting every word in J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, leaving just a single passage legible that speaks to the promise of a new start out west. Each stop in the artist's travels through Bliss explores the attempted, the futile, or the unrequited. If Horvath's performed solo acts tend toward despondency, he counterbalances them with documented encounters he has with the citizens of Bliss. There is Cndrlla, who pours Jon his first beer; Pastor Greg Wood, who offers salvation in the form of freestyle rap; and Buck T. Hall, who shares his million-dollar idea with him. Through these rituals and exchanges, Horvath discovers—and shows us—the kindness of strangers. This is Bliss.

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Easter Vase, 2014-2016