

NEIL GOLDBERG

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Short, But Powerful, Love Notes

George Robinson

The Great Mogul diamond weighed 793 carats before it was cut. That is less than six ounces, but its worth is not, obviously, measured in terms of quantity.

Video artist Neil Goldberg works as well as any diamond cutter. His new installation, which goes up at The Jewish Museum on Saturday, comprises a trilogy titled "Love and Loss," in a total running time of under 20 minutes.

Goldberg is a minimalist, to say the least (no pun intended). These three videos — "My Parents Read Dreams I've Had About Them" (1998), "A System for Writing Thank You Notes" (2001) and "My Father Breathing Into a Mirror" (2006) — are filmed with stationary camera, each in a single uninterrupted take with direct sound. The action, such as it is, is as simple as the titles of the videos indicate. But the impact of these little videos is enormous.

Watching Goldberg's parents reading aloud his quirky, funny dreams about them, we become attuned to the faintest flickering changes on their faces — Mom's seeming disapproval of the entire process, Dad's wry amusement. For the one-minute running time of "Mirror" we are acutely aware of the rhythmic rise and fall of Dad's breath on the mirror and, gradually, of the loving look he is giving the son behind the camera, of the ties that are only superficially severed by death. (Goldberg's father died this year.)

And "Thank You Notes," which has been playing the Jewish film festival circuit for a while to great acclaim, shows Dad giving an explanation of his system for generating the 97 notes that he had to send out after his wife's funeral. As he rattles on, the system becoming comically over-elaborate, one becomes painfully aware of the way in which the "system" is designed as much to insulate its creator from his terrible sense of loss as to make it easier to observe basic courtesies.

These three videos are, both despite and because of their brevity and understatement, powerful testimony to the lingering sense of loss that follows a death in a family, and a warm and dryly witty love note from Goldberg to his departed parents. It is hard to imagine any son doing more.

"Love and Loss: A Video Trilogy" by Neil Goldberg opens Aug. 18 and runs through Oct. 12 at the Jewish Museum (Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street). For information, call (212) 423-3200 or go to www.thejewishmuseum.org.