

Communicating Friendship

Tomashi and Ally I and Tomashi and Ally II, Elle Pérez



Left: Elle Pérez.
Tomashi and Ally I.
2019, printed 2021.
Inkjet print. 61 x 47.5
x 2 in. Courtesy of the
artist and 47 Canal.
Right: Elle Pérez.
Tomashi and Ally II.
2019, printed 2021.
Inkjet print. 61 x 47.5
x 2 in. Courtesy of the
artist and 47 Canal

What does trust feel like? Perhaps comfort, familiarity, calmness, love, and safety come to mind. For Elle Pérez, photography is a process built on a genuine connection between the artist and their subjects.

In *Tomashi and Ally I* and *Tomashi and Ally II*, Elle has created a diptych, an artwork made across two panels. In each portrait, Tomashi and Ally are physically connected, their cheeks gently touching. Even the way Elle has cropped these works, right to the edges of each figure, emphasizes the sense of closeness between the two friends. Comparing the two pictures, there are small differences in the positions and expressions of each figure. In *Tomashi and Ally I*, Tomashi leans her head back, her gaze barely visible through nearly closed eyes. She appears even more relaxed in the companion portrait, held by Ally's presence. Ally leans forward, her eyes gazing outward, seemingly allowing the viewer into their shared moment.

Elle, who uses the pronouns they/them, is intentional about their relationships with those they photograph. They are emotionally close to both Tomashi and Ally, so they record a scene of intimate friendship between the two, as well as being present in it. In this way, trust between the figures is extended to the photographer and, perhaps, to us.

Classroom Activities

Elle views the creation of these artworks as an act of devotion, inviting us to engage with their subjects multiple times and compare and contrast them.

Have students look at these portraits individually first and discuss the relationship between Tomashi and Ally. Then have them view the photographs of the diptych side by side. What more is revealed when looking at the photographs in relation to one another? Using their expressions and body language as clues, encourage the students to write a story about their relationship. Pair and share to see how different students interpreted the portraits.

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Tomashi and Ally I and Tomashi and Ally II, Elle Pérez

Left: Elle Pérez. *Tomashi and Ally I*. 2019, printed 2021. Inkjet print. 61 x 47.5 x 2 in. Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal

Right: Elle Pérez. *Tomashi and Ally II*. 2019, printed 2021. Inkjet print. 61 x 47.5 x 2 in. Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal