

## felt cute might delete later

*I encounter my image in a mirror and, despite the many times I've met only displeasure there, I find this time something beautiful: myself beautiful.*

*The beautiful creature in the mirror has come over me like a visitation. She looks so much like a person, so much more real than I do, more myself than me. She is a me reiterated: a me me.*

*Familiar with the visitation and its significance, I make haste to capture her with my phone's camera and upload the selfie to Instagram.*

What does it mean to title an exhibition after a popular meme?

In some way, it declares a correspondence between these seemingly disparate practices: the production of these silly internet pictures and the serious labour of art.

In fact, many of the works of this exhibition pose initially as something silly, *cute*, even. We have the wonderful 'girly pop' gel collages of Theresa Weber; a painting of Nijinsky on a cookie box; a sculpture, in the style of a video game, of a gauntleted hand cheerfully rendered in clay; and a humorous painting of a pot boiling, but apparently, from the POV of the pot.

A common witty sensibility runs through these dozen or so artworks, one which seems sometimes aloof, aesthetically careful of identifying with extreme states of feeling. Emotion, if it is being expressed, is held back.

*She (my beautiful selfie) excites me with a peculiar pleasure. Fulfilling, overflowing excessively the cup of my desire: to be seen as 'other' in the eyes of others. The lack of what I possess, my own desert, is what suffuses her in equal measure with desire. In a word, she is full of what I want: a want of presence. She is full of absence and this palpable impalpability, her bodiless body, is what we call a ghost.*

*She places her hand on the balustrade, the wrist arched, an indian silver bracelet worn loose.*

*I suckle at these thick honeydewed signs; symptoms of a person, so real, hard and glimmering. I want to say to her, to this beautiful ghost -teach me how to live! I am a dumb porcupine with rank spit, hot rapine on my breath. I snuffle her velveteen slippers and gob the white stockinged feet inside: The Image Repertoire, lays heavy over my eyes like scales.*

One painting shows a man pumping up the tire of a MINI Cooper while a woman stands behind him twirling the keys, smoking a cigarette. In glittery purple text the word 'hot' captions the painting.

Many of the pieces evidently enjoy kitsch, excessive stylisation, and anti-aesthetics: likeness in unlikeness, Camp, internet culture. It's the form itself, *how* something is represented and seen rather than *what*, which gives meaning and nuance to the subject matter. And behind the apparent lightness or 'cuteness', there is a vulnerability, at times, almost surprisingly, a despair. A plaintiff longing for something lost, which is often marked by the evocation of the ancient or mediaeval, myths, legends, fantasy worlds and idyll pastoral scenes. A desire for a past, an innocence, with full knowledge of it never having existed except as light emanations of a screen.

*I imagine myself as seen by your eyes. Therefore, I only imagine an aggregate, a conglomerate, a glut of images. A self of images, made up of the Other. I have seen, and heard the clicking of your long acrylic nails, how you hold your cigarette, and when I bend to light my own this is the mould I pour myself into. I hear the ease with which you say the words 'home', 'history', 'self', which in my voice ring with affectation: 'my soul frets in the shadow of your language'.*

*All I can see in the image of myself are the inconsistencies when compared with the beautiful ghost, which, despite my attempts to be her, like Walter Benjamin's hunchback, by the nature of its hidden machinery, its artifice, its trickery and deceit, wins everytime.*

Beneath the frivolous humour of memes, too, is a similar pathos, a disquieting nihilism can be discerned.

By their nature, memes are always already proliferating and changing. 'Felt cute, might delete later', was first used as a caption to reframe a 'cute' selfie. A way to mitigate the inherent vanity (the cringe element) involved in posting a picture of oneself in the throws of attractiveness. The caption therefore performs, or signals, a degree of self-reflexivity. Whether the selfie is 'deleted later' or not becomes of little importance. What is important is the performance of this reflexive signalling. A meme, like a painting, is constantly rewriting itself, undermining, even annihilating itself. It is never a fixed or finished product but constantly in a state of becoming.

*Therefore, when the beautiful creature leaves me, as all spectres must dematerialise, I am returned to the corporeal reality of my cattle-heavy flesh; the brute substance, the object of myself as far away from the beautiful version of myself as I have ever felt: I feel hideous, a failed object, a broken door handle, a fallen christmas tree, but more disgusting: a cum sodden sock, a bin oozing foully into an alley.*

*And so I reject myself, spit myself out, vomit it up, find myself abject. What a visceral reaction! To Cringe! And so, in a moment of symbolic and real suicide, I delete the selfie I had posted earlier. I delete myself, I delete the smallness of myself, my reduced self.*

This constant re-writing of the meme corresponds to an idea of art making that I believe is shared by the artists of this exhibition. Namely, that art is procedural, made up of many erasures and reiterations. In the end, though, nothing is lost because a colour removed, painted over, remains as a trace, readable in the paint or returning in an entirely new work. Each instance of reflection, removal, restatement reflects the tiny life of the soul. Every day we too assert and delete many selves and reinstate older ones in a kind of loop, which perpetuates, or maintains, *now* [*maintenant*], who we are.

There is a liberty in simply producing despite the 'might delete later' which hangs threateningly on the horizon. In the face of catastrophe there comes a politics in simply continuing, proliferating, spreading.