

SLEEK

Yves Scherer gets “Closer” to the truth

Text by Tomasz Kobialka – 10 December, 2014



On the surface of “Closer”, Yves Scherer invites us into the private lives of celebrity stars. Scherer exposes their personal vulnerabilities to the general public, reminding us all that celebrities are just as flawed, insecure, and self-conscious as you or I. But digging deeper, you soon realise that the truth is not so simple. The narrative behind the artist’s latest exhibition at Berlin’s Guido W. Baudach Gallery touches on something much sadder.

Throughout the space, statues of British actress Emma Watson stand in various poses of undress, exposing the female form in a state of vulnerability. Torn, ripped and burned Japanese-style Tatami mats hang from the ceiling, encased in clear acrylic vitrines. Like coffins, their materiality is indulged in through various processes of destruction, dissection and attrition. Britney Spears, Macaulay Culkin and Lindsay Lohan are shown smoking pot and misbehaving in voyeuristic photos taken by paparazzi. These stars of screen and sound are as much victims of their own success as they are beneficiaries.

The Emma Watson sculptures are particularly interesting. To try and make sense of them, it is worth starting from the processes used in their construction. The head was digitally re-constructed from various photos Scherer purchased of the actress online, and the digital work sub-contracted out to a 3D artist. The body is a stand-in, a default software object taken from the rendering application used in their construction. The sculptural body was then milled with the aid of a 5-axis CNC router, while the head was 3D printed. Once combined, these were covered in copper and polished. This process gives the sculptures a certain hyper-

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unreality; a software copy-paste made real.

This process is a mimic of something that happens frequently online: celebrity faces are pasted onto nude female forms to give the impression of intimate pics. When examined in the larger cultural context of celebrity nude leaks, of which Emma Watson was recently victim of, you begin to understand the power of the work. Scherer is touching on the social relationships and attitudes that give birth to exploitative online behaviors. The virtualised female body is a trope, through which values and intentions responsible for these images can be explored. The artist is more of a voyeur to these values than a complicit participant. Scherer elaborates on the sculptures:

“... there is something about her that is not quite right. I don't think she is a, if I can say that, a sexy figure or something. For me she really stands beyond it, for me it's not even a female figure. It's something like a computer generated idea of a female - but there is not really that much love in it.”



Indeed Scherer's sculptures feel impoverished and loveless. They are a reflection of feelings of loneliness, alienation and sadness, and these are the very feelings that can be seen as driving exploitative online behaviours, in particular towards female celebrities. This is a valuable and interesting insight worth reflecting on, especially if we are interested in understanding and preventing similar future scenarios.

Throughout the exhibition, Scherer zooms in and out of the real and virtual space. There is an interplay between these two worlds that is nuanced and well thought-out. Indulging in heavy materialism, while interacting with the virtual, his work can be seen as an extension of Post-Internet sensibilities, with a renewed sense of maturity. The work is as much 'of the Internet' as it is 'of the real world'.

By placing a lens to online values, we can begin to understand the motivations and the very real behaviours and consequences behind them. "Closer" certainly made me reflect on my own role in the celebrity leak scandal. By falling victim to online click-bait, am I a complicit participant in the exploitation and disempowerment of female celebrities? The increased accessibility to stars through social media acts to diminish their aura of celebrity but it's also a good reminder to us that they are human and not just objects for consumption.