

Gender in the Digital Age



Playtime is Ad Minoliti's first UK exhibition and is paired with a solo exhibition of two large paintings by Dale Lewis. Both exhibitions reference imagery from art history in order to address, in Minoliti's case, what it is to have a gendered or non-gendered body in the digital age. By utilising images of post-war Californian domesticity and the gilded imagery of consumerist driven American dream, the gallery becomes a postulated utopia where the white cube gallery formula is dismissed in a three-dimensional analogy. This is sparred with in a tit-for-tat discourse by the satirical and dry humour drawn upon in hedonistic subcultures that colourfully populate dystopian tableaux of London in Lewis epic' paintings.

Seen even before entering the gallery *Play-G* (2014) sits above the front desk, the only painting to be hung on a wall. A naked woman sits seductively on a dark green ottoman. Her legs are straddling a strange, vividly yellow shape that looks like a vintage arcade game where one would expect to see her husband lustfully about to embrace her. In the background, a salon style hang dominates the wall of a model living room. This is bleakly offset by the male to female transvestites in *Fruits de Mer* (2015). One in particular, dressed in black hot pants and stockings, on his hands and knees, reaches up towards two more who are undressing one another. What is fascinating is the way the characters in both Lewis and Minoliti's works are inhabiting fetishised scenarios yet at the same times brazenly unite all sexualities within society.

In *Play-G* Minoliti brings us into a world where 2.4 kids and white picket fences were glamourised in American lifestyle magazines. Gender roles were forcibly invoked through advertising: women should be homemakers and mothers please their men by providing their means of living and social status. Lewis takes us to a world of cross-dressing men in lingerie where one's own desire and socially deemed perversities are championed by hedonistic living. The viewer is reminded again of the constraints of gender roles that are still pressurised today; on one man a driver's L plate, a common novelty for stag and hen nights, the last sexually charged night before assuming a respectably place within an adult 9 - 5 society is mocked.

Both born in 1980, the artists have grown up in the tail end of Generation X where by sexual orientation and experimentation, drug addiction and violence have become commonplace earmarks within life to the point of almost being rites of passage into adulthood. This is captured in Lewis' mark-making which is sharp and unequivocally limited like the foggy memories of a hangover. In *Acid Man's Funeral* (2015) a carnivalesque burial becomes a 21st century rival to Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* (1849 - 1850) which at the time caused uproar due to its unflattering realism and vast scale which was usually saved for heroic religious masterpieces. Here, Lewis's tropes of Nike logos, cigarettes, lingerie and graphic sexual imagery acts within gay culture confront the audience. There will be no uproar. Instead, we have learnt, embraced and progressed. Minoliti's *Textile As Sculpture* series (2016) and *Vol Rasant - Kimono Printemps* (2014) are products of this. The idea of hanging art works on white walls within a gallery is pushed to include textiles designed by other artists.

These are dressed headless mannequins which are grouped around Minoliti's *Queer Deco* Series of paintings all of which are uniformed by a digitally and hand painted finesse that is both highly polished and highly attractive. The paintings are placed on carpets and leaned against the walls shattering the "fourth wall" segregation of the audience - a fundamental characteristic of modern and contemporary galleries. The audience's presence becomes the activating trigger of this trans-human utopia, where queer and feminist theories are applied to aesthetic language, design and architecture, continuously invoking the human body both through its insinuated presence and notable absence.

What these exhibitions so powerfully create for the viewer, is a double rootedness in the complexities faced by the flexibility of our evolving and progressing cultural understandings and identities. The potential openness of Minoliti's work is immediately at odds with limitations present in the assaulting imagery of Lewis work. And thus the audience is demanded to react with a sense of responsibility - to engage with it in their own lives.

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