

conditions for coping — notes on the artwork

Although I can't remember what led me to Kayla Polan's work for the first time, I do remember the experience of watching the video which documents her performance, *Bruise/Heal*. A minimal set, a man and a woman sit across from one another, each with a cardboard box by their side, vegetal tips poking playfully out the top. The pair settle into their seats and don safety glasses and earplugs. For the next twenty minutes, each takes their turn hitting their partner in the face with a leek. The intensity and speed with which the slaps land increases, as does their apparent joy — Polan in particular makes plain the strange dissonance between pain and excitement which accompanies the hypnotic repetition of gesture. It's ridiculous yet euphoric, meditative and tender.

Polan and her partner of the time, Adam, took Marina Abramovic's performance *Light/Dark*, as a point of reference and departure, glancing at Feminisms' past as a way to look both backward and forward, engaging with the productive space of parody and humour. Polan grapples with the seriousness of power dynamics, gender roles, social issues, and kink/fetish communities in a way that strikes a balance between what may be dark and painful, making space for audiences to laugh, relax, and reflect. She describes needing "a way to cope with the unkindness of the real circumstance. A way to keep an optimism for the future. Humour is a way to breach emotionally or socially difficult subject matter, and it's a way to reflect on the human condition."

In considering the psychic and cultural shock prompted by the current political crisis in democracy, I have found myself looking to the artists you find here in search of new forms of criticality alongside coping strategies. This was my point of entry to the gathering of work for this year's Review. Lauren Pelc-McArthur's paintings embrace different aesthetic strategies than Polan, yet carry a similar sense of wry humour, emerging from a sustained interest in the "stuplime". Sianne Ngai offers the term "stumplimity" in her book *Ugly Things*, as a term to respond to contemporary cultural production (an alternative to the Kantian sublime) — astonishment is paradoxically tied with boredom, excitement with prolonged desensitization, exhaustion, and fatigue. How can we locate meaningful content amidst all this noise? Pelc-McArthur seeks to resist the pervasive creation of work for dominantly screen-based consumption through the use of holographic pigments, hidden iridescent paint which can only be seen at certain angles. The irony of printing reproductions of her work for dissemination does not escape me.

The work found in the pages of the Review by Jessica Groome, Kendra Yee and Mariah Hamilton lead me to a slowness and attentiveness that perhaps Pelc-McArthur finds difficult to locate. The minutiae of day-to-day life and the objects and people who surround us become fertile grounds for diverse imaginings. Groome's *Drawings for Soft Glove* are the result of a body of work created in Sweden during a two month residency last year, each drawing serving as a daily meditation during a period of isolation. These tender drawings act as preparatory works for the exhibition *Soft Glove* at ESP, which was accompanied by a beautiful text by Ella Dawn McGeough. McGeough lingers on the essence of the garment — its existence as an organized whole, more than the sum of its parts; its oscillation between what is interior and exterior. It is tied up in relationships of touch: it is protective, but also carries memories, and the transformation of wear and tear.

Could Groome's glove be one of the object-made-kin of Kendra Yee's world? In this comic, specially commissioned for this year's Review, a lone character tuning their ear to the quiet conversations between the objects that surround them, traces of larger stories. (The intimate whisperings between scissors and hair). Mariah Hamilton is one such character, attuned to the stories that linger through seemingly inanimate objects. Hamilton collects abandoned rolls of 35 mm film, developing and printing the forgotten or left behind film rolls and allowing for the material to act as stand ins for lost photographs within a lost medium. She arranges these prints alongside found consumer materials, mimicking the amateur aesthetics of yard sale and store window displays, or quirky online "sell-it-yourself" photography. Clothes pins, reflective papers, sale stickers, plastic packaging and brightly coloured backgrounds come together in playful assemblage.

Consumer products and methods of consumption lurk within cover artist Talia Shipman's photographic series *Meet Me In The Middle*, imagining a post-apocalyptic world where water and other basic needs are replaced by consumer objects. The unforgiving conditions of the static desert landscape provide the background for interventions of turquoise flamingo cups or a bright blue blanket which, on closer inspection, the names of Metropolitan centres. Beneath the surface of Shipman's playful and pleasing images lurks a concern for the ongoing global water crisis and a delicate capitalist world order. While Shipman looks into a speculative future, Darby Milbrath turns back to a fragmented past of her imaginative and haunted childhood, growing up on the Gulf Islands of British Columbia. After commissioning Milbrath to create a series of drawings for the Winter Supplement, it

gives me great pleasure to have here a selection of her expressionist paintings, a mode of creation which truly captures the vibrancy of her memories, dreams, and visions which inform her experience of the world.

Talia Shipman, Paris, New York, Barcelona, Milan (Blanket), archival photograph, 2016

Darby Milbrath, *The Reverie*, oil on linen, 2018

Mariah Hamilton, from: *Found*, 2014

Talia Shipman, Told You So (Cups), archival photograph, 2016

Darby Milbrath, *Still Life with Clementines*, oil on linen, 2016

Darby Milbrath, *Claire, Sick in Bed*, oil on linen, 2018

Talia Shipman, Security (Figure), archival photograph, 2016

Kayla Polan, *Are You Your Partner's Lover?*, oil on canvas, 2017

Kayla Polan, *6 Tips on DIY Pickling & Other Cleaning Conundrums Solved*, oil on canvas, 2017

Kendra Yee, *In A Room, With No One To Talk To*, mixed-media, 2018

Lauren Pelc-McArthur, *Trop Trop*, acrylic on canvas, 2018

Jessica Groome, *Drawings for Soft Glove*, coloured pencil on paper, 2017

Mariah Hamilton, from: *Found*, 2014

Mariah Hamilton, from: *Found*, 2014