

11 Juliette Blightman
Femme Maison
 26.10.–30.11.2019

Femme Maison consists of three large-scale paintings and seven photographic prints of female celebrities, along with their children. All the images, except for the hamster, are sourced from the internet. Whether or not the viewer can identify and name the individual subjects is irrelevant because they seem so familiar. Around the gallery small abstract explosions are contained on square canvases. Much of Blightman's work and research examines the boundaries of mental and physical space, specifically in relation to creative production and motherhood.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) discusses the historical treatment and disadvantages of women. In the book de Beauvoir criticises the few who persevered as artists and writers, claiming they wrote or painted for vanity. De Beauvoir calls French Renaissance painter Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (b.1755) a narcissist, who 'does not tire of putting her smiling maternity on her canvas.'¹ In 1787 Vigée-Lebrun painted a portrait of herself and her daughter causing minor scandal when it went on display at the Louvre in Paris that same year. Lebrun had painted herself showing her own teeth. Showing ones teeth was controversial in 1787 for a number of reasons, dentistry not being what it is today, and many people had black or stained teeth (including those from the French court because their diet was high in sugar), the subject for a painting not being able to hold a smile during the sitting for a painting, and that teeth insinuated sexual reference.

In the autumn of 1787, gallery-going Parisians didn't know where to look. On the walls of the Louvre hung a self-portrait by the eminent artist Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. In some ways the painting was deeply conventional. Mme Vigée-Lebrun was dandling her infant daughter on her knee in a gesture that managed to invoke both the Virgin Mary and the new bourgeois ideal of „natural“ motherhood. The problem was her mouth. It was smiling. Not just an enigmatic Mona Lisa smirk, but a proper one which showed her teeth. Was Vigée-Lebrun mad, a slut or some kind of wild revolutionary? The only thing to do was rush past, and pretend you hadn't seen.²

Femme Maison is the third and final part of a series of exhibition that have taken place over the last year. The first was *RELATIONS* at O-Town House in LA, the second *This One's For You* at Maureen Paley, London hosting FELIX GAUDLITZ.

RELATIONS consisted of portraits of male friends, as well as portraits of Blightman's daughter and interiors of where they live. *This One's For You* consisted of portraits of female friends and her daughter, portraits of landscapes and domestic interiors. Each of the paintings acted as a visual diary, hinting towards an 'outside world' whether that is an internet hub with a view on to the street, a smart phone in someone's hand connected to the Internet or a pine tree in a forest - asking the viewer to think not only of the interior but also beyond the intimacy of the subject and the architecture, outside, in the world.

Since 2005 Blightman has been making portraits, whether they are of someone's toilet, someone's face or of her own daughter. With the film *2012* (2014) she documented her life for a year and all the places, people and artworks that she and her daughter experienced. This film along with *Time and Death (and some say sex)* (2015) and *Portraits and Repetition* (2017) depict Blightman's life through montage enabling her to include films, text, photographs, paintings and drawings. *I Will Always Love You* (2019) creates the soundtrack for the exhibition *Femme Maison* as Blightman continues to move

around the world documenting her life. As an artist and a mother, her modes of existence run parallel and split over many different levels, inside and outside cannot be separated.

¹ de Beauvoir, S., 2015. Extracts from *The Second Sex* (Vintage Feminism Short Edition) (Vintage Feminism Short Editions): Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, Sheila Malovany-Chevallier: Page 61

² Hughes, K., 2014. *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris* – review. The Guardian.