

OVERDUIN & CO.

PRESS RELEASE

Eliza Douglas
“Orgy of the Sick”
June 27th – August 14th, 2021

Overduin & Co. is pleased to present Eliza Douglas’ exhibition titled “Orgy of the Sick.” The exhibition features a group of new paintings and will end with a performance at the gallery.

In an essay on Douglas’ work, philosopher and art historian Juliane Rebentisch has written:

The Commodity of Commodity Culture. T-Shirts are preferred products for merch. Merch Ts are commodities that advertise other commodities – music, films, video games, sport events or the brands of their sponsors for instance. But they also generate value, sometimes even more than the product they advertise. As products geared towards fan culture they document and project the affective potential commodities have for their consumers. They are markers of identity – a T has to fit its owner, but the owner must fit the T as well. Fitting is the adjective denominating the relation the subject of taste maintains vis à vis the objects of her choice; even in cases when the T is not supposed to display naïve fandom, but an ironic twist on it. It is well known that one of the main goals of commodity consumption in capitalist societies is to advertise oneself as a commodity (one’s labor). In recent decades, as originality, creativity, flexibility have become decisive social demands, consumer competency is less and less governed by predetermined social codes. Instead, the aim is to perform the greatest possible degree of independence from such external constraints. Under these conditions, the economy of distinctions works horizontally: The more comprehensive the cultural spectrum and the greater the financial abilities, the more convincing the impression of having attained confident mastery of consumerist taste. The more convincing the impression of a freedom of consumption no longer hobbled by the old distinctions between high and low, the more effective the demonstration that one is attuned to the most recent developments and therefore culturally flexible and marketable oneself. In contrast with the so-called good taste of the old bourgeoisie, this new one seems to be defined less by the ascription of value to the products themselves. Instead, it emerges in its own double-character: as choosing/adapting.

Pile. In her work *Pile* (2019) Eliza Douglas showed a huge heap of T-shirts, originally produced as merch or simply as byproducts of contemporary visual culture. Auratic remnants of what could have been clothing for herself the T-shirts were also displayed as what they potentially become once they are abandoned by their owners: worthless objects thrown on a pile of waste, exposed in their bad quality, as trash. It is because of this ambivalence as both attractive and repulsive, embedded in social relations and left behind in their thingly substance that these Ts became hieroglyphs of value. For what one could see in the oscillation between their appearance as epitomes of hipness on the one hand, worthless junk on the other, is that value is neither a property the commodity possesses nor is it a certain amount of labor stored in it but a dynamic social relation. If Eliza Douglas displays her own taste in this work, it is a taste not only for the instability of the objects’ value themselves, but also for their innate sickness unto death.

Distortions. The series of paintings on show transpose images of some of those Ts onto canvas. What we see is not the entire garment but details of its textuality, obviously not on anybody’s body but thrown flat on the floor, its motifs distorted through fold formations. The fascination of these paintings is not primarily with the folds themselves though. Neither do they illustrate the fold’s tendency to push the frame of painting towards the field of sculpture nor do they celebrate the multiplicity of its forms or the internal complexities of its curves. In short, there is no baroque drama happening here around the fold; it is flattened out by the style of the decidedly un-painterly paintings. Moreover, the motifs often produce an all over structure that counteracts the performance of the fold and redirects us to the painting’s surface. As an effect of this flatness, the fascination is, at least initially, with the distortions the draperies produce in the original motifs: logos, Disney and anime characters, skulls, dragons, wolfs, the virgin Mary, and the lettering of this show’s title: Orgy of the Sick – all treated on one plane, all subjected to the same artistic operation. With all the awe one might have for the painterly skills needed to produce this kind of realism, it is not least the spectacle of those distortions that holds the potential to immediately become sick content on Instagram.

Circulation. The paintings communicate with digital image culture not only in the sense that they are based on photographs Douglas takes with her smart phone – she takes hundreds of only one shirt, molded in different ways, until she gets a composition she finds satisfying – but also in the sense that they await their own being photographed and being shared on social media – which is also one of the most important contemporary forms of circulation for art as a commodity. Their measurements (210 x 160 cm) approximate the 4:3 ratio of the iPhone camera default setting. The movement of value in contemporary capitalism is an important theme not only regarding the subject of these paintings, but it also encompasses the paintings as objects themselves. Technically produced by Douglas' assistants – something that many contemporary painters employ as method without telling anyone –, these paintings don't make a claim on the authenticity of the painterly hand. To the contrary, they display technical skills that are, as Kant already knew, precisely not the decisive source of value when it comes to art. The art, here, is elsewhere. The actual paintings are exposed as the medium of an immaterial process that attaches itself to them. If it is a necessary illusion of commodity value to appear as property of the commodity itself, Douglas turns this illusionary character of value itself into the object of her art. This is demonstrated not least in the ways her paintings are installed in the exhibition spaces. Douglas dramatizes the material existence of the paintings as objects by hanging them on chains from the ceiling, signing their exposed backsides with a big black marker. It is the signature of a director of value dynamics as such.

Juliane Rebentisch, 2021

Eliza Douglas (b. 1984, New York, NY; lives & works in New York and Berlin). Douglas completed the graduate program at Städelschule in Frankfurt and her undergraduate degree at Bard College in New York. Solo exhibitions of Douglas' work have been organized by the Jewish Museum in New York, the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin, Air de Paris in Paris, Galerie Buchholz in New York, Nassauischer Kunstverein in Wiesbaden, and Museum Folkwang in Essen. Douglas' work is currently on view as part of "Nature Mortes" at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and her work has been included in the exhibitions at Foundation Vincent Van Gogh in Arles, the Castello di Rivoli in Italy, and the Tate Modern in London. Douglas' work was also included in "The Vitalist Economy of Painting" curated by Isabelle Graw at Galerie Neu in Berlin.

Gallery hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–5pm. For further information, please contact the gallery at office@overduinandco.com.