



Chris Drange

VANITY

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Text by Anika Meier

Selfies are now part of life like breakfast. Everyone makes and sends selfies, camera rolls and family chats are full of them, but they are as little socially accepted as smoking in closed rooms. You feel bothered by it, by people who take and post selfies, because it's a sign of vanity and self-expression. The profiles of influencers on Instagram show the same selfies with repetitive poses and facial expressions: pouty lips, big eyes, innocent look. Cute and sexy, that's how young women all over the world present themselves and attract followers. Likes and followers are social capital that is converted into financial capital through advertising deals. Selfies empower women and at the same time turn them into objects of desire.

Chris Drange, concept artist and student of Anselm Reyle, appropriates selfies from well-known influencers and transforms them into classic oil paintings. He doesn't paint himself, he lets paint, a manufacturer in China: portraits, one of the most traditional genres in the history of art, he remixes with emojis, a revolutionary addition to the written language in the digital modern age. Emojis and selfies are means of communication that are used like language to convey feelings and to provide a status update. They are quick and fleeting, whereas painting on canvas seems to be made to last.

With his works, Drange literally turns the idols of the smartphone generation into icons by snatching their selfies from the stream of images and placing them in a context that demands attention. Instead of fast scrolling, he calls for contemplation, which is missing on social media because the next selfie is always waiting. Kylie Jenner, the 23-year-old influencer from the Kardashian clan, made her fortune by selling cosmetics. "It's the power of social media." This is how Jenner explains her success, because she herself promotes her products on Instagram. Young women become entrepreneurs and brands, they advertise what brings in advertising money, be it luxury items or detox tea. "In the past, worshiping relics promised healing. Today, however, we no longer have healing problems, but rather validity problems," says Drange.

Drange understands his works as allegories of youth and beauty, but also of transience. At the beginning of the 15th century, it was suddenly not only saints and kings who were worthy of a picture, but normal citizens who could afford commissioning artists to paint their portraits. Even then, a portrait had to fit the image and fulfill the wish to make the person that is being portrayed look better than in real life. A portrait ensured presence and duration, the person being portrayed was supposed to live on after death. While Richard Prince uses the selfies taken by influencers for his own purposes, Drange exaggerates them in the medium of painting. And all of this without an order.