

**DAMIEN
&
THE LOVE GURU**

Jared Madere & Mathias Toubro
Floor Pal V

20 January – 1 April 2023

Artists – I’m sure you’ve heard this too – like to gather in certain cafes and bars. It’s where they form their “community”. We imagine it’s very fun and rowdy, but also intellectually riveting and completely instrumental to their artistic genius. Artists meet in the cafes as lovers hold hands across small tables and walk along the Seine; meet at park benches to exchange sweet nothings and desperate everything. All of it’s a kind of love story, epic and evergreen, complex but never not beautiful. Or what? Is being in love and being an artist not more like being subtly always hangry?

Floor Pal V is an exhibition about the combustion of the myths around romantic twosomeness, artistic community, urban chic. It’s like Nigella Lawson’s worst nightmare: serving quail to large numbers of people and realising that it’s mostly carcass, what she calls ‘itsy-bitsy and failed nouvelle’. Here, in the harsh light of the morning after, witness the breakdown of pretension, a source of energy exhausted, some grand notion fallen flat on its face: the corniness, the filth, everything that’s left over – quite a lot, actually.

I’ve often stood in one of said artist-troughs and wished someone would spike the prosecco-on-tap or distribute MDMA via the AC, maybe then people would finally just chill. Because the reality, as we see it in Mathias Toubro’s scenes from *Les Deux Magots* in Paris, is low blood sugar, anxiety, ugly dogs. A couple on a romantic get-away wonder if they should go in, and you almost hear the audience scream (like parents when their children announce they’re going to art school): *DON’T!* But they do. And what follows is a *Kammerspiel* along the lines of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* except the conflict is less opaque, more directly attributable to: a vulnerable ego, saggy pommes frites. Some works double as terrace heaters because – guess what – this is what we’ve got. *Les Deux Magots* and its likes make up the infrastructure that allows things to go on; we must love these places as we must love our equally unlovable selves and our weird art. Looking at Toubro’s works – muddy views onto the quiet intimacies found amidst boredom and banality – there’s some beauty, some charm in that, after all.

Jared Madere’s work exudes another kind of attitude, another type of ugliness – that of youth, its blindness and its privilege; the unhinged opulence that comes with not giving a shit about anything – money, the future – other than love. I devise a script from the titles: *I’m going to keep coming back no matter what you do*, says the boy who introduced himself to the beloved with a “lip trick”, innocently vulgar; who hasn’t washed his hair in weeks, wears pearls and a shark’s tooth around his

neck, his skin poreless and freckled and glowing. The faces of these youths are deformed and yet stunning; got the Picasso-treatment by a combination of some glitched-up AI and West Coast weed, and still they shine perfection through glitter and tattoos and smears of makeup.

The sculptural installations are spacious in the way that clouds are, or how posters used to fill entire walls in a flash, and clothes seemed to explode from out of suitcases. There is recklessness in zeal as there is abandon. The world Madere exhibits is messy and mutilated like dreams are, or how youth itself can seem like a dream, in hindsight or in others. A sleeper catches fish in their sleep; a boy cries as he draws stars on the ceiling: what is at one time a somnambulant quality in the works – the lack of agency and intention of not being awake – is also what enables their chaos and extraordinary energy. The tragedy of youth is that there is simply no way that life could provide the infrastructure to accommodate such copious amounts of energy, such hope. Youth, like love and avantgarde art, is a fiction with nowhere to land.

And yet it does, here, *Floor Pal V*. The debris of what remains sits on a spectrum between the stolid acceptance of Toubro's cafe-patrons in washed-out brown interiors and the careless inhibition of Madere's motley and hopeless dreamers. We could say it is a kind of definition of art: the parts of youth that life could not sustain, the promises of romance love, as it plays out, could not continue to make good on. It was a beautiful idea to serve quail for so many people, but ultimately too itchy-bitsy, just bones and failed nouvelle. But what, if we really think about it, would be the alternative? Would we really rather do without?

Kristian Vistrup Madsen