

Cara Benedetto
'WGW'
10 May – 15 Jun 2024

Rose Easton

In the Palms of Their Pale Hands by Philippa Snow

In *Spencer*, Pablo Lorrain's 2021 biopic about the late Diana Spencer, an ill-fitting combination of star and subject unwittingly turns the film into a melodrama about white girl victimhood. Kristen Stewart, an American actress best known for her naturalism, transforms herself into an English princess and, in doing so, at once eerily replicates her subject, and lays bare that subject's mannerisms as a jumble of phoney tics. Here are Diana's famous eyes, as wide as saucers and as blue as Delft, and here are the fawn-long lashes she would sweep up as the shutter clicked; here is the lepidopterous flutter of her fingers, and here is the familiar coy twist of her mouth. In suppressing her most interesting qualities to play a dead, repressed royal, Stewart only convinces us further of the princess' half-shattered falseness: her status as both a victim of the patriarchy, and as an astute, sophisticated gamer of it who is smart enough (and white enough) to playact being guileless. The film's biggest fault becomes its greatest satirical asset: it showcases an impression of a woman who is also doing a sly impression of her own – one of childlike innocence in the face of all that cash and power.

The image on the poster for Lorrain's film showed Diana in a ballgown with her face resting sadly in her dress. It was meant to call to mind a shot of another American star, Jennifer Lawrence, taken as she fell down on

the way to collect her Oscar for Best Actress in 2013, and the choice of inspiration is intriguing: Lawrence was accused on social media of faking her own tumble as a way to make herself relatable, turning one of the least-identifiable moments possible – winning an Oscar – into a sly *who me, aw shucks* gag. (Jennifer Lawrence, at the height of her popularity, might easily have been described as “the people’s actress,” in a twist on Diana’s tabloid title). Two iconic white blonde women, and two possible styles of media training: whether we are looking at Diana’s mock flirtation with the camera or Lawrence’s clumsiness, we are never certain whether what we’re seeing is real. When Diana is actually shown on her knees in the movie, she is on the bathroom floor, giving in to her bulimia. That vomit feels symbolic: a symptom of the metaphoric sickness that infects rich, beautiful Caucasian women who are simultaneously offered some of the most enviable privileges on earth, and held captive by their own collusive placement in a system that still regards women – even actual princesses – as being generally second-class. There are no winners, only gradations of loss.

In internet slang, the state of being “white girl wasted” is one of embarrassing inebriation – perhaps one that also involves puking up your guts. The use of “white” in the phrase nods to privilege; it refers to the leeway that is given to white women when they are behaving badly, self-destructively, or wildly. All women are at risk by virtue of occupying their bodies out in public, but the level of risk varies depending on how that body

looks. Call it the *Fleabag* effect: there is only so much that is actually transgressive about the depiction of a thin, rich, pretty, well-connected, heterosexual white woman being, not to put too fine a point on it, a fucking trainwreck. When Margot Robbie, playing Stereotypical Barbie in the *Barbie* movie, was depicted having a depressive breakdown, it could scarcely be possible to imagine one that looked prettier: even her crying face is gorgeous.. The contradiction inherent in the image – that Barbie might be liberated by the pain of her newfound feminist consciousness, but that even the agony of her awakening looks picture perfect – was further embodied by the structural contradiction of the film itself: it was, after all, a politicised girl power comedy that also happened to serve as a longform ad for children's toys, critiquing the status quo and benefiting it at the same time.

Like Stewart, Robbie also played a British monarch, Elizabeth I, in the 2018 film *Mary Queen of Scots*, and there was something faintly absurd about this particular bit of casting, too – an off-key collision of beauty and power that felt incongruously modern, as if commenting on the idea that A-Listers get their own kind of media coronation. When we talk about beauty conferring power, of course what we really mean by “beauty” is a physical appearance that conforms to the prevailing white supremacist beauty standard. When female politicians and monarchs are depicted on screen the usual filmic softening and polishing of their appearances into acceptability feels even more amplified, even stranger,

for this reason. Intentionally or not, this style of casting acts as commentary on what we think women that wield power ought to look like. Whether all the white girls who end up holding the world in the palms of their pale hands as a result decide to use that opportunity for good, or to waste it, is entirely up to them.

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Cara Benedetto's *WGW* examines the construction of white victimhood in media. A series of prints combine images of popular US actors playing UK royals – Kristen Stewart as Princess Diana and Margot Robbie as Queen Elizabeth – with text describing the ontology of *White Girl Wasted*. The voices shift from someone who finds vindication, liberation, and joy in their debasement to apathetic or awkwardly analytic. *Yr hair is on fire*. White suburban women voted Trump into office in 2016. With a similar premise looming, Benedetto asks with urgency, why are white women so eager to self-destruct? *Do you know yr hair is on fire?*

WGW Merch includes puffy painted shot glasses as tear collectors, decorated with custom printed decals. A large vinyl depicting the conservative groups Moms for Liberty, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and members of the British royal family serves as a backdrop to a short PowerPoint video looping an exchange between Queen Elizabeth and Hilary Clinton at a raging kegger. *Fear My Tears*, a performance, will occur opening night.

List of works, clockwise from entrance

Cara Benedetto
Lol Kristen!, 2024
Dye sublimation print on
aluminium, gouache, oil pastel,
prismacolor and sharpie
41.9×41.9×5 cm
16½×16½×2 in

Cara Benedetto
Barbie Does Tina, 2024
Dye sublimation print on
aluminium, gouache, oil pastel,
prismacolor and sharpie
50.8×41.9×5 cm
20×16½×2 in

Cara Benedetto
frapped my pants, 2024
Dye sublimation print on
aluminium, gouache, oil pastel,
prismacolor and sharpie
41.9×55.9×5 cm
16½×22×2 in

Cara Benedetto
Don't Trust Kitty, 2024
Dye sublimation print on
aluminium, gouache, oil pastel,
prismacolor and sharpie
49.8×41.9×5 cm
19⅝×16½×2 in

Cara Benedetto
Jubs and Dubs, 2024
Dye sublimation print on
aluminium, gouache, oil pastel,
prismacolor and sharpie
90.5×62.2×5 cm
35⅝×24½×2 in

Cara Benedetto
*Moms 4 Liberty, United
Daughters of the Confederacy
and Royal family at the Queens
Jubby Book Banning Birthday
Parteeeeeeeeee*, 2024
Vinyl
Dimensions variable

Cara Benedetto
Hill and Lizzy @Kegger, 2024
PowerPoint Video
1 minute, 48 seconds

Cara Benedetto (b. 1979, Wausau, Wisconsin, US) lives and works in Richmond, Virginia, US. She received her MFA from Columbia University in 2009. Benedetto has had solo and two-person exhibitions at Chapter NY, New York; Night Gallery, Los Angeles; Michael Jon Gallery, Detroit; Art Metropole, Toronto; and Young Art Gallery, Los Angeles; among others. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; the Hite Art Institute, Louisville; The Pit, Los Angeles; The Blueproject Foundation, Barcelona; The Jewish Museum, New York; Art in General, New York; Cooper Cole, Toronto; and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; among others. Benedetto is the author of two romance novels, *The Coming of Age* and *Burning Blue*, and is the editor of *Contemporary Print Handbook*, published with Halmos. In 2020, Benedetto published her first collection of short stories, *Origin of Love and Other Tales of Degradation*. *WGW* is Benedetto's first solo exhibition in the UK.

Private View, Thursday 9 May, 6 – 8pm
Open, Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm

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