

Laura Bartlett Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Michael E. Smith, Ruairiadh O'Connell, Stewart Uoo and George Henry Longly.

Prodigal in Blue presents a group of artists whose work reflects on corporeal presence, an acute relationship between sensation and thought. A shared interest in the balance and conflicts between the natural and the synthetic is evident: with technology secondary to human intervention, any dystopian tendency is countered by the savour of closeness and touch. Process is visible and the hand can be detected in lingering marks and imprints, whilst bodily shapes and substances are cited, incorporating objects that would be otherwise cast off as detritus. Humour, sexuality and intimacy prevail; yet references to vanity and material wealth educe a contemporary state of longing. The human as a homogenous being is rejected. Rather imperfections are celebrated, echoed in seemingly bruised, unfinished surfaces.

The works of Michael E. Smith are imbued with an acute physicality weighted by the relationship his materials once had to the human body. Deflated fabric is suggestive of movement whilst rough, jagged textures appear to bear injury. Recollective of lost limbs or organic relics, the works appear as fragments of a whole. With an almost archaeological approach to medium and matter, Detroit-born Smith employs discarded materials such as used car upholstery or wax which lends these objects a presence that speaks of a sensitivity in an age of decline and insecurity of self. Society is mirrored in the disturbing potential of things.

New York based artist Stewart Uoo, questions the social, technological, and cultural forces in relation to the contemporary "self." Uoo's sculptures explore the collision of sensual imagery with the notion of the commodity. Displayed in sequence, the shopping bag becomes a relic of our age, as Abercrombie & Fitch's model assumes a status of a Greek Adonis, obscured yet transfigured by layers of epoxy resin, pigment, human and synthetic hair, maggot cocoons, flies and dust. The male idyll is humanized as the image is used as a means of expression for the individual in an age of often overbearing homogeny.

In the work Five, Jessica Jackson Hutchins locates the 'absent' human in the ceramic and plaster forms atop a plaster-cast of a sofa. Meanwhile the fragmented human body is prominent in her strewn acid-washed jeans and the collaged surface of the sculpture. Shapes at once appear to engulf one another whilst being moulded in harmony, a romantic tenderness is presented between the two objects as they survey the scene from the living room couch. For Hutchins the persistence of the personal is a means of resisting commercialism: her absurd take on everyday rituals refuse straightforward signification.

Held in a precarious balance, the corporeal and the psychological are central to the work of Ruairiadh O' Connell. Silkscreening images of carpets in Las Vegas casinos onto molten wax, O' Connell is interested in the strategies of design intended to continue the buzz of gambling, despite physical tiredness. When the pigment coloured wax is still pliable he applies a massage technique to the surface, rupturing the overall pattern and creating a bridge between painting and sculpture. Originally shot from a gamblers' perspective, imagery is stimulated by the artist's choice of colour and manual distortion of form and medium, expressing a kind of psychedelic bodily nostalgia: the feeling of being there, without necessarily being 'present'.

George Henry Longly's body casts function as the most 'present' human form in the exhibition. Fluorescent pigment activates the muscular torso and thigh, historical readings transcended by their physical immediacy within the space. Glass, neon and references to popular culture reflect a buoyant enthusiasm to a medley of styles through form and medium. Yet residual wadding leftover from the casting process is suggestive of comfort and care, whilst the mirror further grounds the work in the realm of humanism through implicating the viewer. Favouring fragility over frivolity, Longly's use of ephemeral materials gives way to questions of fleeting identity.

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