we know nothing about people who don't cry
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Gina Fischli, Naomi Hawksley, Tiziana La Melia, Craig Jun Li, Siyi Li, Tasneem Sarkez, Issy Wood

We know nothing about people who don't cry takes its title from a 2016 pop-science article discussing ancient beliefs about why we cry, like expelling tears as love vapor, and more recent theories like, "crying [visibly] signals to yourself and other people that there's some important problem that is at least temporarily beyond your ability to cope." This show brings together works that cope with reality through self-presentation and aesthetic registers of emotion that refuse to be entirely known, holding back tears as hyper-mediated branded tech and Instagram economics wiretap our brain synapses and capitalize our feelings for their own use. Throughout the exhibition, affective ambiguity cloaks despondence in blank stares, winks, and innocence in order to evade overdetermined identities and commodification of experience. In *Sad to see you go*, Gina Fischli presents a cake smeared with imitated icing in plaster, equally sweet and absurd and disheveled, while her slumped rodents resemble love-worn stuffed animals crouching in fugue state with pronounced futility. Tiziana La Mela's nightlight sculptures decorated with gift-wrapping ribbons and butterfly adornments also traffic in the language of celebration while functioning as a source of haphazrd childlike comfort and tenusous efforts at self-soothing. This is not a "Let them eat cake" scenario, but a consideration of how to attenuate emotional pain when finding a total way out is impossible.

In doing so, these works collectively suggest that protecting raw emotion through unknowability is necessary to seek comfort and escape, or an antidote to institutions that co-opt vulnerability. Part of this means keeping each artist's cards and critique close to the chest. Plays on protective obscurity and calculated disclosure define Naomi Hawksley's spectral graphite drawings cented on woman and her reflection, or empty closet, where text spelled out in tear-like dots reads: "How will I be myself today?" with both sincerity and melodrama. In Issy Wood's *For Attention*, a flying Mercedes becomes a prop of self-performance, a hiding place for a father's mid-life crisis, and a symbol of American Dream's delusional claims.

Other works reference cultural vernacular intended for only specific audiences to understand. For Tasneem Sarkez, the car functions as a roving signboard for projecting individual identity and its legibility or illegibility, when drivers mark their possessions with decals and signage – and where roses are signifiers of Arab identity throughout her practice. Reproduced across commercial signage and packaging in Arab cultures, roses are often superimposed on objects to signal elegance and care, while the painting's intentional sleekness interupted by scuff marks suggest meaning and hybrid cultural identity breaking down. Craig Jun Li's basement installation also reflects on image circulation as a means by which aesthetic forms produce distorted conceptions of "Eastern" or "Western." Embodied in abstract architectural models of their childhood home from memory, their work is characterized by material degradation and modes of ethnographic display where images function as materially real as cultural mythologies inscribe belief systems into our private experiences of the world.

The result ironically leads to a new understanding of authenticity by asserting the validity of emotional smoothness or trickery, of negotiating what to reveal and conceal, as a means for safe-keeping the innermost self from systems of power that ultimately flatten us all. Siyi Li merges phone snapshot and glossy fashion photography to construct an image of a projected self with self-aware cringe, accompanied by advertising billboards for a European fashion retailer that reads in German: "What do I wear to my ex's wedding? The other ad reads, "Was sind das für Zeiten?" (What kind of times are these?), promoting an exhibition at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. But even as these the works on view present a covert facade, they also acknowledge that we're all really just held together by plaster and tears. Unlike Pictures Generation riffs images as construct as critique, these artists are working in a context where construct and facade approach a survival mechanism amidst institutional fictions, near-invisible algorithms, and platitudes of the corporation as family.