

DAMIEN JUILLARD: *LIMINAL TEARS*

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In her book *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today* art historian Claire Bishop argues that the digital age with the internet, smartphones and social media is changing the way we look at artworks.

Since the Enlightenment, the ability of concentrated attention has been cultivated. Bishop describes this mode of attention as the “deep model of culture”. The gaze is focused on individual objects and works of art, dwells on them for a long time in order to grasp the depths of their meaning.

With the rise of digital technology and the penetration of networked technology into our lives via the smartphone, Bishop argues that a new pattern of attention has emerged: a fleeting, rapid capture in cyclical sequences. Our gaze is constantly jumping back and forth between different contexts. We read the news, scroll through social media and research the internet all at the same time.

While some critics consider this fragmented perception problematic, others see it as a new form of understanding.

Liminal Tears

In his installation *Liminal Tears*, Damien Juillard combines both forms of attention. By stimulating an alternation between disordered attention and contemplation, he allows us to experience the different forms of understanding that result. Through the fleeting, quick glance, the image panels of

Liminal Tears become recognisable as part of a panorama with repeating motifs of the fleeting digital image culture and other images recorded in the physical space of his studio. Concentrated attention, on the other hand, focusses on the painterly quality, details and anecdotes of the works and attempts to understand their meaning.

Divided attention: skimming and swiping

Entering viewers are guided into the depths of the room by an aligned row of black, mirroring acrylic glass boxes. The corridor-like arrangement of the larger-than-life sculptures creates a pull that entices the viewer to walk through quickly - comparable to a fleeting skimming or swiping in digital space. The boxes can be associated as elements of server farms. At the same time, their form alludes to the notion of the black box: They refer to the opacity of complex systems such as artificial intelligence or algorithmic processes, which remain inscrutable to human users and have a potentially manipulative effect.

The impulse of movement is further stimulated by a small tile (3 *Sebastiane*) at the vanishing point of the corridor. Further tiles (1 *Kit*, 2 *Nico*, 4 *Bella*) are set as accents on the wall of the room as a second layer. They only reveal themselves as you come close and pass by - through the physical movement of the viewer. To make out the motifs on the tiles requires a focused gaze to piece together the image from the abstract, shimmering fragments.

Fragments of images from Google search, Instagram scrolls, paused videos and movies are manipulated, zoomed-in, re-photographed and cropped before being printed on the manufactured tiles. Models, celebrities, actors or influencers taken as motives.

By using silkscreen print, the artist mirrors the motifs of bodily fluids on the tiles. We can make out a bleeding ear (2 *Nico*), a reversed shadow reflection, a paused video (3 *Sebastiane*) or the staged tears (4 *Bella*). With the dirty beige and grey tones on the manufactured tiles, the artist creates a counter-image to the clean body staging both online and offline, on advertisement as well as on social media.

At the end of the corridor, a gateway opens up to the right. It leads into the room within a room, where elaborated compositions unfold on the inside of the acrylic glass boxes. The fleeting, constantly changing images that were captured with the scan confront us here as larger-than-life pictorial bodies with a painterly quality.

Through the mode of gliding, divided and flowing attention, the 8 panels are recognizable as parts of a panorama through their black and white tonal values. The relational, simultaneous view also reveals the continuity of the editing, the image processing and the recurring motifs. Small cameras from Instagram are repetitive elements.

Focusing and dwelling

Once the spatial structure of the installation has been explored through a quick, sweeping glance and physical movement, the individual acrylic panels now attract focussed attention with their complex compositions, depth effect and painterly gestures. In deep culture mode, you can dwell

for a long time in front of each panels and engage intensively with their pictorial spaces. In a digital attention economy characterized by speed and a flood of information, conscious, slow viewing enables autonomy and agency.

The artist has assembled and edited the image compositions on the individual panels using elements from his scan library. This archive, which has grown over the years, is constantly being updated with new scans. The artist takes scans from his smartphone, flowers, rings, drawings, objects that are close to the artists in his studio, easily accessible and not really modified.

During the 20-minute scanning process, Juillard holds a mirror at different angles over the smartphone and the scanning table. This creates complex mirror effects and doubling of the subjects. Sometimes he also positions the scanner near a window, so that sunlight effects flow into the image as diary-like traces of time. With the scans, Juillard has developed his own visual language. They form a modular archive from which he can constantly generate and assemble new works.

Through the manipulated scans on the eight panels, Juillard transforms the fleeting, ever-changing image culture of the digital age into painterly compositions - slowing down our gaze while paying attention.

Similar to Wade Guyton, Juillard uses technical means such as scanner, smartphone and network technology as tools for his artistic production. While Guyton emphasises the mechanical process, Juillard makes visible the traces of his hands and fingers as direct reference to painting and the physical gesture of creating.

Damien Juillard lives and works in Basel. He completed a Master in Fine Arts, at the Institute of Art, at the HGK Basel in 2021 and a Bachelor in Fine Arts, at the HEAD in Geneva in 2019. In 2018, he was an exchange student at the KUAD Kyoto University of Art and Design. His work has been shown at Kunsthalle Basel; Haus der Elektronischen Künste, Basel; Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich; Kunsthaus Baselland; Reaktor 19, Zürich; Amore, Basel; LiveInYourHead, Geneva; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva.

2023 shortlisted for Kiefer Hablitzel Göhner Art Prize

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