



Robert Brambora

Lucy

28.02-12.04.2025

MAMOTH, 3 Endsleigh Street
London, WC1H 0DS

www.mamoth.co.uk
contact@mamothcontemporary.com

MAMOTH

Robert Brambora *Lucy*

28 February -
12 April 2025

MAMOTH is pleased to present a solo exhibition *Lucy* by German artist Robert Bramora which is on view from the 28th of February until the 12th of April 2025.

Where am I exactly? And what am I doing here? Wait, is this a gallery? It seems to be Lucy's place. But who even is Lucy? And where has she gone? Does she work or live here? I can see traces of her; sense that she was here just a moment ago. Yes, see, she was sitting over there, writing at her desk. "Lucy?" I crane my neck to peer deeper into the room. It looks dark. Maybe she's back there. Yes, I think I can hear her. "Excuse me, Lucy?"...

Robert Brambora's exhibition at MAMOTH is intimate and yet strangely unnerving, in part because of a sense of familiarity that is never fulfilled. There are hints of the eponymous Lucy, though while the viewer has been invited into this protagonist's space, she is nowhere to be seen. Lucy has disappeared. We piece together

fragments that point towards who this person may be, how she lives, and what she feels.

Why should we care about Lucy; why should this complete stranger matter to us? Brambora wants "to show the invisible," weaving into existence a character who may or may not be fictitious, who we may or may not ever truly know. His interest is not in the big reveal of who Lucy really is, or where she has gone, but rather, in the idea of searching for subjectivity in the ineffable, amid the facelessness of the urbanity. Can we ever really know someone, anyone – even ourselves?

I think of Hannah Arendt, in her belief of never confusing biography with the life of the mind, that we are two-in-one, and as such, the search for identify is always futile: that even with the work of constant reflection, questioning, and perplexity, we ultimately remain a mystery to ourselves. Fast-forward over half a century, and the complexity and perplexity, we ultimately remain

a mystery to ourselves. Fast-forward over half a century, and the complexity of selfhood is now increasingly being swallowed by big data. We are converted into extremely large and diverse collections of structured and unstructured statistics that grow exponentially over time. Brambora asks, who are we, really?

On the ground floor of this Gesamtkunstwerk, Brambora presents a scenario that interweaves painting with furniture and light sculptures. The atmosphere is intimate, channelling the warmth and imperfection of the lived-in environment. In a space lined with thick black curtains, a gentle, pulsing light is emitted by Brambora's lamp sculptures; black storage boxes are haphazardly stacked in corners atop another. Lucy's presence is felt through these objects, reflecting the overlapping facets of her life and creating a sense of interiority of the untapped psyche and subjective memory.

As its own form of stage design, there are dramaturgical aspects to every object in this room: small ceramic scenes are illuminated beneath the lamps, speaking to the uncanny nature of fantasies and dreams, of the violence that Lucy encounters in the city, of the loneliness she feels. Household items are arranged idiosyncratically and handled with Lucy's individual care. Winking at modes of existential theatre such as Samuel Beckett's absurdism, Brambora has a desire to knock at the symbolic gates of the inner self, at the irrational will to find meaning within a seemingly meaningless world.

Another aspect of this *mise-en-scène* is the paintings that line the walls, though it's unclear whether these are by Lucy or if they depict her – if she is the muse. Perhaps the desk is where she works: the chair is left slightly askew as if she was just here, bearing a sense of her absence. Brambora emphasises that Lucy is at once a “co-worker, acquaintance, artist, tenant, ghost”: she

is multidimensional, and a spectral, layered narrative is established within this environment to convey the merging of Lucy's personal and professional life, as well as her inner and outer worlds.

One painting depicts a cityscape at night, bathed in hues of scarlet red. High-rise buildings consume the surface plane, illuminated windows doubling as pixels, row upon row of small geometric forms that glisten within the dark surround. Perhaps there is a person behind each tiny pane of glass, but to us, they are invisible, existing only as light and obscured by the structures holding them. Vast billboards slice into the scene, revealing close-ups of someone's eyes – Lucy's? Her irises are pale and yellowing, and with a ghostly sense of disassociation, her face stares straight out at the viewer, though vacantly, obscured as a half-reveal.

Brambora considers the relationship between the individual and society

and is interested in how the former is clouded by the latter, obfuscated by a system that asks us to perform robotically. He wants to get under the skin of societal expectations and asks how “the demands, the things you have to do impact your personal aims, your personal interests.”

There is also another dimension symbolized in the painting, comprised of language that is printed in different sizes and floats as geometric forms. I strain to read. Some is so tiny as to be barely legible, a rambling flow of information that speaks to everything and nothing at once. Brambora gathered these lines from a website that holds thousands of data sets. In these, people are reduced to language, their subconscious complexities distilled into facts, figures, numbers, and statistics; their existential questions and fears sifted through as part of wider commercial analysis. We are quantifiable as pure data. Brambora considers our different levels

of perception amid such systemic detachment: he gets closer and closer, revealing the intimacies of ambitions and anxieties, and then zooms out again, switching between registers and intensities.

On the lower ground floor of the gallery, a starker white cube space is encountered, one in which another painting of an urban metropolis is, this time, tinged with darker notes of purple and yellow. It is a strange doppelganger of the work upstairs, reminiscent and yet somehow new, different, and uncanny. A discomfiting sense of repetition ensues: of the inescapability of becoming lost within the crowd, of the unknowability of the self, of our ultimate insignificance.

A row of ceramic sculptures listens intently from the wall. These giant ears are glazed in shimmering gold, and within their gentle folds, smaller ears are nestled in a surreal *mise en abyme*, hearing fainter and fainter sounds as we

go deeper and deeper into this organ. It speaks to the silence of introspection and of searching for our own interiority, as does the painting’s opposite: shaped like the silhouette of a head, it reveals the inner imaginings of a perfectly serene landscape, a place of escape or freedom, complete with lilac clouds and rolling fields.

In the pursuit of Lucy, Brambora asks the audience to navigate the different roles that we play in our own lives, distilling the small moments of schizophrenia that we may feel when these don’t fit together. What happens in that disjuncture? He establishes an atmospheric space in which he calls for not only for our curiosity but, ultimately, an embodied will to try and unpick what he sees as the “individual alienation, social masks, and the spectral residue of capitalism’s influence on personal identity.”

—Louisa Elderton

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www.mamoth.co.uk
Instagram: _mamoth_
WeChat: MAMOTH

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