

Art Habits

Art Habits is an exhibition that shines a light on the mechanics of the contemporary art world, while confronting my own position as an artist. Relying on humour as a liberating and disarming tool, the exhibition examines relations surrounding class, taste and power.

Art Habits is a knowingly ambivalent project that challenges public taste with a certain penchant for the absurd. The networks, channels, social media platforms and popular aesthetics a contemporary artist is compelled to embrace are all sitting ducks in my comical yet critical anti-brand. Although, it's quite likely I could be the turkey.

The works in the show include three large scale soft sculptures, an imposing multi-canvas text painting, a suite of enterprising meta paintings referencing various tools of the artist's trade and other objects, and a collection of painted newspaper art headlines selected from my archives.

Extending upon a recent soft sculpture titled *Thanks*, the new works using clear sewn vinyl are crafted into various symbols. For this series of wall mounted soft sculptures various Hobo symbols have been used. A system of communication developed by migratory workers or homeless vagabonds across the United States and throughout Europe. These fascinating symbols, or codes first appeared around the 1860's on the American railroading scene.

Usually scrawled in chalk or coal, markings were left for other Hobos on fences, posts, sidewalks, buildings, bridges etc. to assist others in finding help and safety. This coded means of sharing knowledge has been appropriated in *Crime Committed*, a large symbol filled with crumpled up colour prints of impasto paintings. Cheap replicas of the 'school of chunk' spar for the attention of the viewer, restrained by the skin of the *Crime Committed* sculpture as it hangs limply on the wall.

This notion of examining how meaning and value is attached to various branches of creative activity is sustained in the next soft sculpture of the trio. The signifier and title *Judge Lives Here* is filled in the same manner, this time with multiple prints of every person listed in the latest *Art Review Power 100* – "the most influential people in the contemporary artworld" published annually.

Depending on location, France or Sweden, *Easy Access or Resistance* indicates that locks on a building are easily picked or that resistance will be encountered. Containing printed profiles of several undisclosed local artworld figures, the work is a wisecrack guided towards structures of power. Or as Hans Haacke would declare, paying close attention to "the way things are done".

Measuring over 4.6 metres wide and 90cm high, **Cheese** is a multi-canvas text painting forming its title in an amusing cartoon cheese font. Uniting humour with the conceptual, the work is disrupted by the menacing tension and inherent danger of numerous set rat traps arranged directly on the gallery wall around the painting in a geometric pattern. Is the painting installation baiting an audience, acting as a trap? Or, simply acknowledging that someone or something is cheesy – overdone, boring and trite? Probably both and more.

Perhaps the most seductive works in the **Art Habits** exhibition are a series of vibrant delineated compositions on canvas titled **New Types of Art**. In part, the background colours of the paintings are inspired by the immediate palette of the Fauves, in particular Braque's **Paysage à la Ciotat** of 1907, from a series of paintings that have haunted me for some time. Featuring rhythmical shadows of various art making tools and other objects – Palette Knives, Ceramics Tools, Beer Bottle Caps, Paper Mache and so on. The paintings are also swayed by a visit to the Cologne Cathedral, with particular focus on the enchanting mosaics.

The **New Types of Art** series of paintings consider the creative process, meta paintings used as a strategic instrument with which to analyse cultural production. Titles for these paintings offer veiled guidance on the specific areas put forward for critique, celebration, or both – titles such as **Jesus Vibes**, **Cerebral Ceramics**, **Good Radical Pedigree** and **Self-Promotional Painting**, along with others.

A range of styles for delivery are plundered to accommodate wry throwaways and cultural barbs in the **Art Habits** presentation. Appropriated newspaper headlines realised as replica paintings form another branch of dissemination in the exhibition. These paintings lampoon the print media approach of negotiating and filtering culture for a broader audience.

Art Habits sets out to activate repressed impulses, embody alienation and parody structures of power with a certain self-deprecating humour. As both protection and weapon, humour is used as a mode in guiding the audience away from the trap of passive compliance with the art market. Embracing a wilful idiocy, **Art Habits** absurdly overlooks the artworlds system of inclusion and exclusion through an agitation of the expected flow of information, out of step with fashionable aesthetics.

Michael Lindeman | July 2021