

OLIVER CLEGG: LIFE IS A GASSSSS
APRIL 9 – MAY 7, 2016

*You're so vain, you probably think this song is about you
You're so vain, I'll bet you think this song is about you
Don't you? don't you?*

...Plays at half speed from a battery-powered tape recorder in the corner of an old garage space outside the normal confines of the Erin Cluley Gallery. In the center of the room spins an 18 inch disco ball, but as my eyes acclimatize to the dark space inside I realize that it isn't the normal squares of light that spin on the walls of the small annex space. Alternatively it is thousands of repetitions of the word "me" written in the handwriting of the British artist Oliver Clegg.

As I begin to circulate the larger and inversely brighter space of the actual gallery space the pieces of the puzzle begin to slowly come together. With the neon quietly glaring behind me, two elements are clear in the paintings that populate the gallery walls painted importantly by an artist born in 1980: they are balloons and they are of well-known popular icons. As I look closer I start to see that the balloons are actually deflated and by looking at all the characters I grasp that they are also characters belonging to a generation that precursors the 21st century in which we now stand. There is no bob the builder, Pepper Pig or Rasta mouse but instead we have Snoopy, Kermit and Mickey mouse. For almost any viewer old enough to engage with the work there cannot fail to be an immediate sense of nostalgic familiarity that is simultaneously balance with sadness – the characters that we have all loved and grown up with are now seemingly in decline.

As I'm standing there in the middle of the gallery I look down to check my phone and realize that I have received 5 emails and 3 text messages, 10 likes on Instagram and someone has commented on a photo of mine on Facebook. I've also been invited to 3 events around the world and my sister is contacting me on Whatsapp. I flick through a few of the messages and get lost in Instagram for a few seconds but still manage to look at around 20 images before putting the phone back into my pocket and looking upwards at the work again. In an instant I am able to see with clarity the striking polarity between our engagement with images, and in this case cultural icons, before and after technology became the lynch pin around which our every day revolves. I question myself immediately: do cultural icons even exist anymore? With great sadness – perhaps for the generations that followed us diving head first into a seductive pool of technology – is this idea that culture has become an unregulated platform in which generations are being fostered by not only too many choices but with such incredible efficiency that there is now no time for either real engagement or any opportunity for engagement on a profound level. In my generation this was different – you had options but the options weren't so multifarious that you would end up not giving thought or care to any of them. We now seemingly live in a culture of options with no guidance on offer. Mickey is no longer important and Kermit's interest in Miss Piggy is completely irrelevant to a generation of cyber-worldly individuals brought up not to believe in something but to believe in almost nothing.

I now see the eponymous neon piece that writes "LIFE IS A GASSSSS" again in the artist's own handwriting - in a different light. Firstly I have now seen the artist has made two texts pieces that are hand written – a casual and somewhat humorous nonchalance that now propels me to think about an era where the computer was just a clumsy and useless addition to our methods of communication and where qwerty was more often confused as dance move than the definition of Latin script on the keyboard. But what is interesting about this piece is also this balance of humor and seriousness that we have seen in the paintings and the disco ball. The expression itself is celebratory. It reminds me of my 20s and a carefree attitude. It reminds me of the 90s and MTV music videos. It reminds me of an adolescent apathy that was simply mirroring the apparent naivety of a pre-digital cultural climate. But the 5 s's suggest that

this phrase, like the deflating balloons, is also fizzling out – perhaps both in the hands of the adult as he grows from the idealism of his 20s into realizing the actual mortality of his existence but also culturally as we begin to live in a confusing world of unregulated systems where freedom of speech is married with freedom of information.

I decide to go back out to the small annex again and re-consider the disco ball having now seen all the other art works. In a culture of too many options where we are forced to look at ourselves more is the only way to deal with this by coming more narcissistic. Is introversion now exemplified by a false extroversion or have we just all become apparently obsessed with ourselves in order to give some order and stability to the system in which we have to navigate? Or perhaps we are searching for a goal that doesn't really exist like a golden carrot that is actually made of brass.

Text by Oliver Clegg

"Life is a Gasssss" is Oliver Clegg's first solo exhibition with the gallery and his first solo exhibition in the US.

About Oliver Clegg

Oliver Clegg has shown internationally since graduating in 2007 in Rome, Czech Republic, South Korea, Australia, London, New York, Hungary, Milan and has been included at the Prague, Busan and Venice Biennales. He has also been included in Museum shows at the Reykjavik Museum of Modern art, Dox Centre for the contemporary Art, The Saatchi gallery and The Busan Modern Art Museum amongst others. Last year he showed again at the Venice Biennale in a group show curated by the Hermitage Museum in Russia at the Palazzo Franchetti and this year will be included in group show curated by Susanne Van Hagen at SI2 Gallery London. His work is included in many private and public collections including the Getty family, Anita and Poju Zabludowicz, David Roberts, Charles Riva, Fatima and Eskandar Maleki and Deutsche Bank.

About Erin Cluley Gallery

Erin Cluley Gallery is a contemporary art gallery representing emerging and mid-career artists from Dallas and the United States. The gallery presents a provocative program of artists working in both traditional and alternative forms including painting, sculpture, new media, photography, sculptural installation and public intervention.

The 2000 square foot space joined a creative movement in the West Dallas/ Trinity Groves development at the foot of the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge in West Dallas and has been in operation since 2014.

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