Jackson Eaton is one of those artists whose life seems to effortlessly manifest as art. Although he also works across performance and installation, he primarily uses his camera to document the desire-infused quotidian. His work is diaristic and vulnerable, often exploring his relationship with himself and those close to him – it’s an introspective and intimate account of his unresolved place in the world. Given this, it seems as if, for Eaton, the gallery is both a sort of ‘nostalgia box’ for hoarding the feelings and paraphernalia that we think we’ll treasure in the future, and a psychological office where secrets and existential dilemmas are to be sired.

It’s no surprise that Eaton studied psychology at a graduate level. His self-referential entanglements carry a purpose: cathartic release. Through his work we become witnesses to his internal struggles as he dwells on what it means to be with someone, to break up, to be single, and even to become an awkward third wheel. Notions of self, romance, sex, intimacy and the complexity of familial relationships are revealed and dissected by Eaton in a humble and often humorous aestheticisation of the everyday. Eaton explores these concerns through a familiar photographic genre – the amateur snapshot. Washed-out colour, casual poses, off-handed composition and a calculated lack of polish are all part of his (paradoxically) self-effacing strategies as he attempts to resist the high production values commonly associated with art photography. His approach to image-making seems to invoke today’s photo-sharing paradigms – Instagram, Facebook and the like – that allow for a (supposedly) less-mediated experience that feels close to how we actually experience life. There is an easy grace and warmth to his images. Without his trying hard, they exude a romantic sense of nostalgia that appears almost accidental – they’re an Instagrammer’s dream.

For Primavera 2013, Eaton presents the work Better Half, comprising 16 pairs of photographs sourced from two different series. One of the series, called Jackson Eaton and Hasisi Park Were Never Married, captures the relationship between the artist and his then girlfriend over a period of nearly three years which they spent together in Korea. The couple are pictured reading, watching TV and holding each other in front of a scenic view; we can see their love express itself quite up close. The title of this series, though, was a premonition of what was perceived as inescapable by the artist, or at least showed the resignation of photographs sourced from two different series. One of the series, called Jackson Eaton and Hasisi Park Were Never Married, captures the relationship between the artist and his then girlfriend over a period of nearly three years which they spent together in Korea. The couple are pictured reading, watching TV and holding each other in front of a scenic view; we can see their love express itself quite up close. The title of this series, though, was a premonition of what was perceived as inescapable by the artist, or at least showed the resignation of the human desire to bond and connect with others.

The idea of doubling is also seen in other works by Eaton. In Rorschach Wetspot Tests (2013), for example, he photographs the imprints left on his bedsheet after someone has a shower and then sits on his bed. As the title suggests, the symmetry of the spots is similar to the psychologist’s inkblot test, used to examine a patient’s personality characteristics and emotional functioning. We are left wondering who the subject of this examination is. Is it the artist? Is it someone he shared intimacy with? Or is it their exchange that is being scrutinised?

In another series, Chris and Jack Do California (2012), Eaton and a friend travel through the US, each with their own camera, taking photographs of each other at various locations. As in Better Half, the images in this series acquire a new meaning when paired up, perhaps suggesting a process not too dissimilar to how we define our identity – by comparing ourselves to others and by seeing ourselves through someone else’s eyes. Although his images appear deadpan, emphasising the neutrality that can be achieved with photography, there is a strong performative and subjective thread running through his work. He recently produced a series called Melfies (which stands for ‘mirror selfie’), which ‘plays on that notion of the self as something based on how we see others seeing us’. In the work, the growing necessity of having to portray ourselves to others is questioned. Instead of actually taking his mirror selfie, he relinquishes power over his camera by handing it to others, so that society is his mirror. The result is a hilarious compilation of awkward moments in his everyday interactions. The titles of the images suggest the eye from which his identity is being constructed during the exchange – Mum Melfie, Curator Melfie, Friend Melfie, Op-shop Melfie, Massage Melfie… etc, are all facets of the artist that are constructed both individually and collectively through his interactions. This idea of doubling or mirroring goes back to Aristotle, who argued in his Poetics that ‘art imitates our shared reality and thus serves utilitarian functions in our process of learning about the world’. In this sense, Eaton also redirects the mirror towards us. By witnessing his intimacies, we, by proxy, conjure our own.

We see ourselves reflected in his experience and are reminded of our own internal struggles and vulnerabilities.

Ivan Muñiz Reed

1. Artist’s Statement, 2013
2. Artist’s Statement, 2013
3. Suggested in an email conversation with Robert Cook, 6 June 2013
4. Email conversation with the artist, 14 June 2013
5. Hearnean, Eleanor; Art & Today, Phaidon Press, 2008, p. 103
Left:
Jackson Eaton
untitled (couple, reading) from the series Better Half 2012, 2008
Type C prints
32 prints, each 30 x 45 cm

Right:
Jackson Eaton
Type C prints
32 prints, each 30 x 45 cm
Jackson Eaton
untitled (woman, stream)
from the series
type C prints
32 prints, each 30 x 45 cm

Jackson Eaton
untitled (couple, pool)
from the series
type C prints
32 prints, each 30 x 45 cm