

Optimal Prime Time

Mia van den Bos, February 2017

Ashleigh and I have often talked in an effort to elucidate the state of ‘nowness’, discovering a sense of what makes our historical period aesthetically and culturally singular. I guess it comes from a sense of urgency, the will to contribute meaningfully – that is, what needs to be said now and what new ways has our time allowed us to say it? The artists we have curated in Optimal Prime Time represent exciting developments and tendencies in global contemporary art, they make work that needs to be made, now.

Madison Bycroft’s work is layered like the stratified rock Noah gently traces with his finger. At its deepest stratum it is philosophical, dealing with the Great questions: How do we relate to one another? And how will the world end? At its top sediment her works are funny and engaging. *Noah’s Archaeology* playfully champions the deconstruction of the anthropocentric worldview by questioning the conceptual boundaries between human, animal and matter. This origins of this worldview have been linked to the Judeo-Christian Creation Story, which the story of Noah’s Ark mimics. This story of creation, destruction, and re-creation as punishment for humanities misdeeds is painfully remembered by a contemporary Noah. Noah can’t forget the last global natural disaster and as our world is on the brink of a climate crisis, he is powerless to prevent the next.

Grace Marlow’s practice similarly examines the bounds between human body and other matter. Marlow is adept at creating sculptural ‘like bodies’, often out of forms and materials that engage the liveness of the body such as fruit, silicon and found objects. For *Optimal Prime Time* Grace has experimented with creating a full-size model, and one with attitude. Marlow uses paper mâché, a material most of us have had experience with as children, dipping crisp paper into gluggy flour-water and it coming out smooth and malleable. The work’s texture elicits tactile memories and provides a familiarity. Like the skin of someone we once knew very well but perhaps didn’t part with on the best of terms.

Alex DeGaris creates sculptures that explore the three-dimensionality of digital space. With most of us physically coexisting with equally valid online lives, this work acutely presents the visceral, tangible and bodily experience of networked existence. DeGaris’s work specifically draws upon the importance of these parallel online lives for queer youth, providing a safe place to find community, however presents this as another simultaneous closet for those who cannot be themselves physically. The nondescript bodies that multiply and morph and are severed and become one speak of the Janus-faced nature of identity on the internet. We are self-promotional and disposable, anonymous and constantly surveiled, connected, alone and scattered and whole.

Alex Perisic’s work also focuses on the construction of contemporary identity, primarily constructed gender. Perisic’s work is often conceptual, presenting tongue in cheek visual puns containing strong and often political statements. For *Optimal Prime Time* Perisic comments on

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the stigma surrounding female genitalia. Who with a vagina has not been made to worry about it emanating a fishy odour? And what menstruating woman has not paid \$8 for a box of emergency tampons at a convenience store? Perisic's works are as exacting as they are minimal.

Isabella Mahoney's work at first glance can seem wholly unpretentious. It could be the result of a gentle and feminine respite, possibly undertaken for self-care. However something betrays this earnestness, Mahoney's is a singular vision that is concerned with the tension between honest and contrived forms of representation. Mahoney's *Pure Shores* began as a repeated drawn motif of an abstracted ocean tide covered in floating roses, a threshold environment that encapsulates an in-between-ness between neoliberal borders and languages. The artificial roses, constructed of found newspapers, form a boundary around the seascape that is the exact size that the whole work can be taken as an Instagram photo. This consciousness of how contemporary meaning is constructed and its limitations is a key focus of Mahoney's thinking and practice.

Nerissa Kyle's practice has recently moved away from materially-traditional abstract painting to three-dimensional expanded paintings using raw copper. Painting as a discipline, steeped in fine art tradition as it is, has taken a slower route to the 'expanded field' than sculpture. Works like Kyle's form a strong juncture between established and experimental modes of painting. The forms of the *Copper Paintings* series mimic the distinctive facture of an expressive paint stroke or charcoal mark. The copper oxidises where it is touched, showing the marks of Kyle's hands at work. The works brim with potential action and hold the energy of a discipline that has become a vital contemporary discipline once again.