

Soft Off (but I love it when your mouth is a little shut)

By Robin Peckham

Serious people do not visit galleries in summertime. Sundresses and air conditioning, natural light and white walls, sandals and shortened hours; that so many summer shows happen to be about sex should come as no surprise.

Art tries so hard and fails so often; its rare glimpses of anything that gets the heart beating happen at the edges, around corners, behind doors, through tinted windows. Objects that obscure or act as obfuscations of desire—sculptures—are totems to this fact.

Whereas summer is about bodies on display, any experienced reader of erotica understands that it is the hidden corners that excite the most. Art, when it is not explicitly pornographic, is often given over to reflections on the failure of pornography. This is life in a glass house with no curtains, full of maddeningly acute corners and painfully faceless inhabitants.

Voyeurism is most rewarding when its object is aware of its situation but something less than generous in its performance. This is a strongly gendered relationship, albeit one that need not be reduced to a binary power dynamic. Instead, the objects of art are allowed to float relatively freely and buoyantly in this fluid space, locating pleasure in the indeterminacy and sheer aesthetic presence of the gendered archetype.

It has become a platitude that online relationships have changed the way we relate; media studies has become a popular creed, particularly in how projected imagery of sexual or romantic relationships has come to define lives in the flesh. After a point, however, our images take on lives of their own, and come to exceed ours in certain ways. We become voyeurs of our inventions.

Everything is reduced to a faux naivete. The ignorance of real actions and intentions comes to stand in for desire; we become objects of our own projections. It is the object that takes on the properties of flesh, enacting a more perfect performance of the human ballet than we could have dared imagine. The body becomes a legacy of the object. All sex is cybersex. Criticism happens in GChat. We are archiving out realities, and our pleasure is all the greater for this.

In experiencing gender dynamics and bodily pleasures vicariously—as text and images—we allow ourselves the possibility of reliving our desires, experiences, triumphs, and sensations forever. Or at least until they disappear. Our objects contain feelings we can barely conceive.

This project is a softcore proposition. It is the erasure of the penis but not the sausage; it is the cloaking of the picture but not the flesh; it is a grainy teenage love scene; it is the shadow of a leathery net; it is the sex organs of a strawberry; it is dancers on bedsheets; it is high heels on canvas; it is sugar on the tongue; it is thongs on a wall.

With work from Jennifer Chan, Jeremy Everett, Johan Grimonprez, Donna Huanca, Mak Ying Tung, Max Maslansky, Martin Soto Climent, Clarissa Tossin, and Amalia Ulman.