

## ***Killing Time***

Oscar Perry's work *But if I climb over first who's going to help Benson get over the hedge?* looks like a toppled bird bath from the '90s.

Oscar, tell us what this is? 'It's *just* a party ashtray'. I almost feel dumb for asking, as if I should be more intelligent than to address the artist with such a basic question.

A mound of butted cigarettes fill it, made from goops of coloured Poly filler. Brad, concierge from the Westin hotel is having a short break in the laneway after hours. I ask him what he thinks. He says that it looks like an ashtray except for when you get close to it.

When you're drunk, everything looks like an ashtray.

Brad is puffing back what I now like to call a 'factory' cigarette (a tailor) which should really be the name we use for a 'rollie' as it implies that it's a custom-made niche item, fit for your fingers and your desired lung capacity. Between inhales, he comments how he quite liked the 'stir fry'.

The stir fry? He's speaking of Kirsty Budge's *At least it makes you look like you're thinking about something* which is an oil painting made from a sequence of panels. The work depicts an adult Mary-Kate Olsen, Pablo Picasso's thumb, literary journalist Joan Didion, 'huge babe and actor' Ben Mendelsohn, a scene from an American reality TV series *Vandapump Rules*, and the absence of Vic – Kirsty's co-worker. Vic is an infamous stretcher at Chapman & Bailey who has a prominent smoking spot right next to a bin.

Kirsty's work is a complex puzzle piecing of human emotions from sarcasm, humour to fear, and includes observations of daily life, reality TV and art history. As she makes this painting, she picks up smoking again, in an old-fashioned lady way, one cigarette per day with a cup of tea.

The work also depicts hands without cigs that we recognise as a form of social sign language. An impression of coolness, confidence and power is often depicted by smoking posers: things we all desire but rarely grasp in a consistent way.

Colleen Ahern smokes. She uses the temporality of smoking in a recent series of portraits as seen in *I John Player #4* where she completes a painting in the space of a cigarette. As she smokes, Colleen observes her own reflection, painting quickly and freely. Yet *I John Player #4* still looks remarkably fluid and confident, and many would labour for hours to achieve the look of effortlessness that she obtains. Colleen is an exceptionally talented painter. It goes without saying. Her smoking self-portrait is paired with *MacGowan* (2007) to show the artist's oeuvre

and to remind us that she has painted for years with the cigarette theme in mind. Her long history of painted rock and roll fame including Shane MacGowan lead singer and songwriter from Celtic-punk band *The Pogues* serves as proof of her dedication.

Dan Moynihan makes a singular smoke stick the equivalent length of 'a pack a day'. The work is titled *Horizon*, and it hovers over Kate Just's *Feminist Fan #42 / An Unofficial Smoking Hot Extra* (Sara Lucas, *Fighting Fire with Fire*, 1996) and Colleen's *MacGowan and I John Player #4*. All I think of is watching the sunset and engulfing the beauty of something that could occupy my hands and thoughts in a prolonged state of mindless enjoyment. I feel the desire to take up the habit: to empower myself with what the women's liberation movement described as 'torches of freedom'. Light up my life.

The work of Kate Just, an influential woman and Feminist artist sits just beneath *Horizon*. Kate's knitted wool work depicts British artist Sarah Lucas' moody smoking portrait titled *Fighting Fire with Fire* (1996). Kate's body of work, entitled *Feminist Fan*, features 42 knitted portraits (to this date) and was supposedly complete prior to the making of a 'smoking hot extra' for this exhibition. Feminist artists who challenge gender stereotypes and build awareness through art and music are a constant source of inspiration for Kate and this feeling is shared and circulated on her social media.

Toby Pola's *Suffer Cunt* is a carved balsa wood and gouache painted sculptural relief that is both gritty and youthful. He has exhibited with Colleen on multiple occasions, including in a smoking themed show *Smoking Gun* (2011) at *Death Be Kind*, a gallery on top of The Alderman, a bar in East Brunswick. That exhibition theme was centred on the artist who smokes as a 'rebellious defiant'. But for this exhibition at Chapter House Lane we look directly at our unintended audience for inspiration and of course, validation.

**Louise Klerks**