


ABSENTEE §1

ABSINTHE §1



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Editors Forward

Charlie Mills

*Green as the light decay has bred
From festering Death's the radiance shed
By her who dances in my head!*

Florence Folsom – *Absinthe*; Love Lyrics, 1899

Absinthe. Curious love of the sordid and the extravagant. Muse of the weird, twisted and eerie. Throughout its short history, absinthe has passed from antiseptic to vermicide, honorary salute to morphological being. It is ghostly and mutinous. It is no surprise that absinthe has long persisted in the underground, from Joyce to Baudelaire, Rimbaud to van Gogh. It was prolific amongst artists and writers of the boulevards of modern Paris: mystic visions of the Moulin Rouge, images that bled from their canvas with an emerald sorcery: hypnotic, aberrant and erotic.

The following publication has been produced in conjunction with ABSINTHE \$1, the first of 4 major exhibitions of emerging artists over the course of 12 months that draw from this rich history of fantasy and sedition. Comprising a hybrid, eclectic, and at points inexplicable presentation of the weirder side of London's emerging art scene, ABSINTHE \$1 evokes a mandala of artists that cut and splice between mediums and styles; a kaleidoscopic trip into the city's current alternative art practices.

ABSINTHE \$1 will present the work of 27 London-based artists, a fortnightly live events programme and an inaugural ABSINTHE publication. ABSINTHE is curated and organised by Charlie Mills, Billy Fraser & James Capper – it would not have been possible without the help of all those who have worked to make this project a reality. In particular, we would like to thank all the incredible artists involved in the first installment of the project, as well as Matt, Andy, Tim & Sean from the Spit & Sawdust, whose support and faith in the project has been invaluable.

To drink absinthe is to taste magic. To pull back the curtain and see the other-wordly, the hidden and the clandestine. It is the love-drunk clamour of a birdsong after dark; a trill screech of obscenity from deep within the jungle.



Small Change

Finnian Mckenna

Is it unusual that I can feel full blown,

(Pour Up)

The mechanisms of my heart

And the electricity buzzing away in an engine just outside the door

Like paranoiically, (Sniff - Blasted) it is my experience, too,
that never ending course.

The ticking of those clocks inside rooms - waiting periods

(It hurts so fucking much)

I pass the meeting spot and rush down a busy familiar road -

Then walk into a coffee shop: (substitute Sniff ahhh)

light settings on a Samsung colour wheel

Offering future complications... intricate sounds -

Violence and disconnection from people will always create a spiritual malady,
a divide

Yet I know

(All feuds will melt into nothingness).

In grand parks the sun strikes a smile on my cheek. (At last again)

I think to myself will I ever reach the top

Of the paper mountain of information?

A man once screamed at me: "This is, not yet!"

I screamed back: " We try though to love in a life where we live amongst pain and
obstruction. The self belongs to a false remedy,
Dripping from a sky of oppressive electronic impulses"!

I never seem to understand how it works -

Crossing the earth of this sloped hill

(Slopped head ugghh!!!)

With it's gorgeous, well-trimmed hedges, like cruft dogs or Edward Scissor hands'
garden;

Benches imbedded in between them.

I thought walking down this field again

Would snap me through some level of change.

(CLAP!!)

As I returned from this haze, my head

(Pour Some More and another)

within the shopkeeper's fridge. He reminds me that it

Is 12:45pm and I must get out of there,

He has to pray.

(And I have yet another appointment)

The metaphysical fizzle, gracefully roaming the air.

If it is a being or a product shareholder...

Their holographic flakes drop onto the pavement where our arms fail and our eyes
crash and slowly.

The beautiful sounds of Jazz Sanskrit.

She died of respiratory failure.

(Joyous and Free or not I will die this way)

She meditated on grass on hills, beautiful A. Coltrane - my surrogate auntie.

(My uncle, though died of a brain aneurysm in his sleep and was there 4 days
before anyone found him.

This disease runs deep)

Hold, my electronic arms

"What are you waiting for" Paul asks me.

"I am not sure, are you waiting?".

If I say yes, I must be waiting -

Then am I allowed now to go and sit in stillness and be ok with that?

Ah yes.

I think you are right actually when -

I think about it.

I dream with my head on - not today am I floating through another door,

Sitting with myself, I am not silent and I

Am not still, though some things are observed.

I think of scenarios that might have me dead

(Heart attack by crack)

And would my friends grieve me?

Ha, look at it go again, the head loves some Small Change.



Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Angel Fernández de Soto* (1903)

A Brief History of Absinthe in Art

Hector Campbell

Despite originating from Switzerland in the late 18th century, it was during the late 19th and early 20th century France that absinthe – or *a fée verte* (The Green Fairy), as it became known in bohemian circles – became synonymous with excess, debauchery and hallucination. The popularity of the mysterious green liquor intrigued many of the leading cultural figures at the time, and has therefore been extensively documented in the arts, with writers such as Arthur Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Oscar Wilde, as well as artists such as Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Vincent van Gogh and Pablo Picasso all chronicling their experiences with the highly addictive substance.

It is Manet who is considered to have produced the first great piece of absinthe-inspired art when, in c.1859, he painted *The Absinthe Drinker*, a full-length portrait of the local alcoholic 'chiffonnier' (ragpicker) Collardet, with an empty absinthe bottle rolling about his feet. Upon presenting the painting to his former teacher and mentor Thomas Couture, the master responded in horror: "My poor friend, you are the absinthe drinker. It is you who have lost your moral sense." This retort, as well as the painting's rejection from the Paris Salon of 1859 (garnering a single favourable vote from Eugène Delacroix) reflects the wider public perception at the time of absinthe as a dangerous drink, and of those who partook of it as being depraved and louche. Manet, however, embraced the criticism of his work, and in an act of defiance even made the late addition of a half-full glass of *a fée verte* beside the cloaked vagrant sometime between 1967 and 1972.

If Manet's *Absinthe Drinker* depicted the drink as purely a penchant of the homeless and destitute, Degas' *L'Absinthe* – painted almost two decades later in 1875/76 – charts the drink's increased popularity and acceptance by café culture. A fashionable dressed woman sits beside a man in the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes, a favourite of Degas, staring blankly ahead with an unfinished glass of absinthe in front of her. Despite perfectly capturing the inebriated ennui of the café's clientele, and it's

subdued original title of *Dans un Café*, the work was lambasted by critics upon exhibition and subsequently placed in storage until the early 1890s.

Having found its way to England the painting became one of the first Impressionist works ever sold at Christie's auction house, in 1892, where it provoked hissing and jeering from the crowd. Renamed *L'Absinthe* and displayed at Grafton Gallery in London in 1893, the work became synonymous with Victorian England's poor view of the French, with many considering the work to be a denunciation of absinthe and the French culture in which it was so popular.

Now, while many still consider Manet and Degas' paintings to be scathing indictments of the prevalence of absinthe, Toulouse-Lautrec and van Gogh would undoubtedly come to embody the bohemian vogue of the drink.

Having been left debilitated and crippled by health problems commonly attributed to his family's history of inbreeding (his parents were first cousins), Lautrec embraced the mystique of *a fée verte* not only as his artistic muse but as a way of life. Rumours abound about the artists appetite for absinthe; that he walked with a hallowed cane filled with the drink so as to never be caught short of an evening; that he invented the 'Tremblement de Terre' (Earthquake) cocktail consisting of one half absinthe and one half cognac; and that he had trained his pet cormorant to join him in partaking of the emerald liquor. Famed French symbolist painter Gustave Moreau is known to have remarked that even Lautrec's artworks "are painted entirely in absinthe". Finally, Lautrec is credited for popularising 'l'heure verte' (The Green Hour), a precursor to the contemporary 'Happy Hour', when – at 5pm – writers, artists and socialites would descend upon the local cafe to indulge in the addictive, hallucinogenic spirit.

The artist's 1887 *Portrait of Vincent van Gogh* depicts Lautrec's friend and drinking-partner seated in front of a large glass of their favourite intoxicant, and van Gogh's equalled love of *a fée verte* is evident in his own painting from the same year, *Café Table with Absinthe*; which lovingly portrays a glass of absinthe in the painters signature *peinture à l'essence* style of using thinned oil paint applied with fine brush strokes.

It could be argued that Lautrec and van Gogh's affinity for absinthe directly correlated to their numerous personal and professional struggles, as well as their repeated imprisonment due to mental illness, with Lautrec even admitting that "in the colour green, there is something like the temptation of the devil".

The tide began to turn against absinthe at the turn of the century, with its popularity waning and it's association with addiction and mental health problems becoming increasingly evident it seemed destined to return to being the drink of choice for the down-and-outs of Parisian society. This regression was noticed by Picasso upon his second trip to Paris in 1901, and documented in two work both entitled *The Absinthe Drinker* from that year. In these Blue Period works Picasso portrays solitary, emaciated women, arched over half-full glasses of absinthe, their inner loneliness evident through their contorted arms, crooked fingers and pained expressions. As art historian Wilhelm Boeck observed in his 1955 biography of the artist: "a Picasso absinthe drinker is a sufferer surrendered to mysterious powers, who cannot be judged by earthly standards".

Due to the heightened awareness of its adverse health effects, as well as the continued campaigning of the prohibitionist movement, the retail sale of absinthe was outlawed in France in 1914, with a complete ban on its manufacture and sale enforced the following year. As if to commemorate this final demise of *a fée verte*, Picasso created what would be his only free-standing sculpture made between 1910 and 1926, a series of six hand-painted bronzes entitled *Glass of Absinthe*. Reproducing the traditional tall absinthe goblet and customary sugar cube in his then Cubist style, Picasso also incorporated real, slotted, tin absinthe spoons, rendered useless by the prohibition, into the composition; marking the beginning of his use of existing objects as sculptural materials.



Artist Interviews with Hector Campbell

Mitch Vowels

HC **You recently completed your BA Fine Art from Chelsea College of Arts, having also studied abroad in Germany for a year at The Braunschweig University of Art (Hochschule Für Bildende Künste, Braunschweig). How do English and German art education compare?**

MV Braunschweig is a politically engaged and divided city. I was surrounded by a lot of artists escaping the overheads of Berlin, due to it only being a couple hours away by train, similar to how Margate is to London. The format of art education is fundamentally different in Germany, much more intimate in terms of student/professor relationships.

It felt as if the pace of London and the competitive nature of our art schools gave me a hyper awareness of my own personality, which eventually led to me to feel like an outsider. Not that that's necessarily a bad thing.

HC **Popular pub games such as Snooker and Darts are often referred to in your artistic output, could you explain the importance of these activities to you, and what they represent within your work?**

MV A snooker table for me is this glamorous step up from a pub game, it holds its own next to a pool table. I see a division in class and culture between the two tables, more than just in terms of scale, snooker has artistry.

My Dad had this $\frac{3}{4}$ sized snooker table that when boarded over doubled up as the dining table at our house in Edmonton. The objects I compose with now, I've always been surrounded by, so they have this sense of nostalgia that comes with them.

HC **'Toxic Masculinity' and 'Lad Culture' are common themes you explore in your artwork. What draws you to these**



subjects, and how do you develop the conceptual ideas which support your work?

MV When I received an award last October those were the two subject matters or 'themes' used to describe the body of work I produced at Chelsea. If you address masculinity in art

today, can it only be seen as toxic? I was raised in masculine domains. From my family, to working on building sites, through to dance music culture. In that body of work it was my aim to document these biographical environments, so I guess that's where these inherent themes of masculinity come from. My ideas come from all over, I just try to talk about history and how it relates to my psychology. Then I alienate certain parts to find out more about them, in turn producing a form of self-reflection.



HC **You recently guest-hosted an episode of Turner Prize-winning artist Mark Leckey's NTS Radio show, and sound frequently plays a part in your sculptural and installation works. Are you heavily inspired by music, and how do you**

look to incorporate sound into your artistic practice?

MV In a weird way, asking this question almost over complicates its involvement. Playing music to people was the first thing I ever felt real meaning in. It is such an integral part of the work, all I want it to do is be felt.

HC **This year you will be undertaking the Kahoon Projects/ Set Studio residency, where artists are invited to respond to the issues of class, particularly the understanding of a 'working-class', in today's society. How do you plan to approach a residency such as this?**

MV Class is something we all shy away from really getting our teeth into. It seems like at the moment more people in the art world want to have this conversation, although it might just be that I'm more aware of it now.

The space Kahoon has created enables us to begin to understand the contemporary definition of 'working-class'. I'll be working with another artist who's practice has a strong sense of community engagement and I'm really looking forward to getting the ball rolling as it's one of the subjects that gives real relevance to my work.

HC **Having previously featured in the one night only Absinthe 2018 exhibition, what are you excited about for ABSINTHE 2019? Can you give us an insight into the works you're producing for it?**

MV The work is a continuation of what I started in the first show. Both of them are variations of wall mounted snooker tables. Some materials have changed; it moved inanimately closer to the wall. Absinthe remains ambitious and experimental, concerned with maintaining culture and keeping us all in a job.

HC **The use of reactive materials, regularly pushed to the limits of their existing characteristics, is a frequent feature of your work. How do you select materials when creating a sculpture?**

NA I select materials whose physical properties naturally lend themselves to the kinds of forms I am trying to create. Materials which have a softness or resistance to manipulation engage in a reciprocal relationship with my impact on them, partially dictating the form of the work. Materials such as those used to create my 'beanbag' works are relatively unpredictable, dictating that I keep filling and emptying the sewn fabric shapes to edit their tailoring until I am satisfied with the overall form.

HC **Your sculptures often incorporate recontextualised andreappropriated everyday materials, however, with their more common functions evident to the audience. What draws you to the use of these quotidian materials?**

NA Many of my works resemble existing things and I use materials which are largely applicable to them. I explore the makeup of the kinds of things we use daily that directly relate to our bodies, such as clothes, furniture and luggage, and how they aid or direct our behaviour.

I want the sculptures to be similar enough to what might be described as their real-world counterparts; that the differences are specific and the shift in context is key. I find it compelling how much expectation is communicated through the style and combination of materials when they are removed from their usual uses and often rendered useless.

Although the viewer is not allowed to touch my sculptures, the familiarity of the texture and weight of



materials like denim, faux fur, upholstery fabrics, PVC, plywood and rope, helps the viewer better ascertain the character of the works based on past physical experiences. There is a desire to reach out and touch the sculptures because of the tactility of their surfaces, causing frustration that may lead one to consider how we take the character and function of regular objects for granted.

HC **You repeatedly question the traditional qualities of sculpture within your artistic practice by imbuing stationary objects with implied kinetic energy, or allowing them to be influenced by external forces such as gravity. Could you explain more about this examination of traditional sculptural attributes, and how it has influenced your work?**

NA I have always been fascinated by the way sculpture demands a physical dialogue with its viewer, who must move around it, without touching, to try to understand it. The distance between the sculpture and the viewer for me is almost mystical, forcing you to draw on any experience you might have of the kinds of materials it is composed of, or imagine the gestures that could potentially have

brought it into being. Richard Serra's approach to material in both his lead pieces and prop series records the moments that made them, which are largely instantaneous and heroically macho. I am investigating similar concerns about how objects implicitly describe the time and labour that went into creating them, but reinterpreting the traditional masculinity of sculpture through 'feminine' processes.

Fabrics and pourable substances such as beanbag beans and sawdust are affected by gravity, hanging or pressing against the confines of their enclosing container. The hang of a material reaching as close to vertical as possible, or the flesh-like droop of a formless but contained mass has an innate tension that is 'performed' even though the objects are stationary. I think the continuing activity of the materials to hang, press or fold roots the works in the moment and highlights the performance of the viewer's posture, or perhaps reflects the fall of their clothes.

Some of my recent works suggest human interaction, featuring clasps, straps and armrests, transferring kinetic energy from the purity of material hanging in space towards the potential of human interaction.



HC **Sculpture, as opposed to two-dimensional artworks, invites a more physical viewing experience or interaction**

from the audience. To what extent do you consider the artworks final display during their creation?

NA The relationship between the physicality of sculpture and its viewer has always been a driving force for me, and I certainly think about the way a body will relate to the final work.

However, the way I make work is fairly intuitive, the combination of materials and the posture of the works' display often change during their development. I make drawings before working with materials, so I have a loose plan for how the work will look when it's finished, but sometimes the work changes fairly drastically, for example going from existing on the floor to hanging somehow. I am often unclear about when a sculpture is finished until I get there, so in that sense although I am always thinking about how the works might be when they are finished, I do not have a certain idea of what that will be.

I have always been fascinated by the idea of sculpture as a manifestation of the acts of labour that have brought it into being. Objects can reveal the ways in which they were made, or perhaps signs of use and age, and my sculptures wear the signs of their making as content.

HC **Finally, could you give us an insight into how you are approaching the Absinthe project, and what you are working on for the exhibition?**

NA The pub environment of The Spit and Sawdust presents a unique challenge for me as an artist whose works often evoke furniture-like structures. I feared sculptures similar to my recent 'beanbag' or 'cushion' works would be lost amongst the mass of people and furniture already there, so I have chosen to make work that suspends close to the ceiling. 'Absinthe' celebrates strange and subversive works and I am making something very flamboyant that draws on suspended tent structures and carnivalesque clothing!

I hope you understand. Sometimes I'm shite.
Sometimes I'm grand.
Harry Dickinson

*My doing has earnt this feeling of shite.
How I'll be today. How I'll be tonight.
How I'll be tomorrow. I hope also shit.
I've yet found the bottom of this soul
sunken pit. I was in a pub last week. It
was shite. Probably not at the time. But
looking back on the night. I was in a pub
this week. It was great. After drinking my
way through the thoughts that I hate.
How are you today? I'm fine. A sentence
I've perfected to conclude in one line.
How are you today? You tell me you're
great. By that time I'm back in my mind.
Close the gate. I've spent far too long in
the back of my head. This ceiling must
think that this body is dead. And though
some days I may leave for the gym. It's
only to lift up the weight of this sin. I've
said more just here than I have in a week.
My body just told me it's time not to
speak.*



Interview

Luca Bosani

HC **Whilst primarily based in performance, your artistic output also includes painting, sculpture and fashion design. Do you see your work in these other mediums as purely accompaniments to your performances, or as stand-alone artworks?**

LB Through painting, sculpture and fashion my live performances are expanded in time. These objects are carefully elaborated pre-performance and arranged post-performance. My work in these mediums is not only an accompaniment or a remnant of my live works but it aims to retain the same energy and intensity.

HC **Your performance pieces frequently address questions of gender, masculinity, identity and male stereotypes. What draws you to these themes, and how do you develop the conceptual ideas, which support your work?**

LB Where I grew up, a small town in the outskirts of Milan, I always thought that being a man meant hiding any insecurity and vulnerability. Proving your masculinity to oneself and to others felt like a command. This toxic pressure heavily influenced most aspects of my life until I moved to London where I encountered performance art, a medium that allowed me to decode my past and to reconfigure my future. My artistic practice is the result of an escapist strategy from a constricting situation, where gender norms and male stereotypical behaviours limit freedom of expression and the development of identity.

My work is constructed by dissecting and questioning masculinity. Boundaries of identity are stretched and re-imagined. After breaking down my own identity and analysing my recurring thinking patterns, I build an alternative visual and emotional vocabulary,



HC **Fashion and clothing play an important role in your performance work, often in the form of oversized sculptural shoes, hand-painted pairs of socks and performers in unconventional states of dress. What messages do these performance outfits aim to portray?**

LB For me, clothing has been the first tool to cross the boundaries that define what is generally considered normal and acceptable in western societies, and what is not. It has been a direct and spontaneous medium in the search of

diversity and personal transformation.

All my designs attempt to deliver a message beyond appearance. My oversized shoes function as a metaphor for masculinity, portrayed as uncomfortable, dangerous and ridiculous. With my hyper-visible garments I want to draw the viewers into my world, disorienting them, blurring the boundaries of gendered behaviours and provoking self-questioning. My jackets resemble uniforms, which can be perceived as serious and intimidating but are equally playful and fun, featuring both feminine and masculine identified visual references. The painted socks are for me the ultimate quest for freedom; mocking and challenging an existing florid market in contemporary consumerism that, in men's fashion, allows colourful socks but neglects any other forms of self-expression.



HC **Collaboration is traditionally an important factor of performance art, and your work features sometimes up to four other performers, as well as direct collaboration with visual artists such as Alice Blackstock. How do you approach artistic collaboration? Is it hard to rely on other performers to enact your artistic vision?**

LB My works are an attempt to talk about groups and societies, not only about isolated individuals. By involving other people in my projects, I cannot fully predict their final outcome. Multiple identities coexist and react to each other, carrying different stories and past experiences. Collaboration is for me a unique occasion to meet with the unknown, encountering and negotiating with the other. In this exchange, my performances take a supplementary dimension beyond myself.

Working in a team allows me to revert and explore power dynamics, hierarchies and conventional roles. My approach to artistic collaboration is very direct; during a good conversation, emailing or calling I invite others to be involved in my works. I only contact artists, performers, designers and musicians whose work I admire, and whom I respect as human beings. It is not hard to rely on the other performers to enact my artistic vision; it is a necessity. The work requires their participation.

HC **Having previously featured in the one night only Absinthe 2018 exhibition, what are you excited about for ABSINTHE 2019? Can you give us an insight into the work you're producing for it?**

LB Absinthe 2018 was a very successful event, kindly hosted by James Capper in his Bermondsey studio. During this extravagant night, I was activating Tom Ribot's sculpture, serving Absinthe to the audience.

For ABSINTHE 2019, I am working again in collaboration with Tom, taking this first performance one step further. Three adepts will be performing the Absinthe ritual on the night of the 23rd February. If you are being approached by one of the adepts, it means that you have been selected to access the room. Be prepared for an otherworldly experience, a mind awakening, a journey in your own body and perceptions.

Interview

Alia Hamaoui

HC **Despite recently completed a BA in Painting from Camberwell College of Art, your work has moved away from traditional painting on canvas in recent years. How did you find the art school experience, and how did your work develop over the three-year course?**

AH I started the course wanting to be a real 'painter', oil on canvas kind of works - to me that seemed the pinnacle of being an artist. But I found that this language did not really support my ideas at all. I still like to consider my work in the expanded field of painting, as it does mostly deal with the surface and two dimensionality- so I think the course gave me a really good grounding in how to pull away from painting. I think my work has always been collaged based and really layered but throughout the three years it became much more inclined to deal with physicality.

HC **'Future Artefacts' and 'New Media Relics' are terms often used when describing your work, which combines traditional craft materials (tapestry, ceramic tiles etc.) with digital imagery. What are the conceptual ideas underpinning these works?**

AH At the moment I am interested in thinking about how we connect to our memories. By memories I mean not only on a personal level but also on a collective level. Often this is through objects, artefacts, souvenirs or images that are connected with a specific space in time. This happens both in a domestic setting (through things like souvenirs and trinkets) but also in the museum- a space where fragmented objects are often displayed in order for the audience to be transported to a specific historical moment. So, I have been thinking about how that corresponds to our digital era, where we now take lots of snapshots of



moments in our everyday life, and how these become our personal relics.

HC **Your work simultaneously contains strong emphasis on both physical and visual representation. How do you approach the selection, and matching, of images and materials?**

AH Sometimes the process of selecting images is very organic. I just scroll through my photos on my phone and decide what I want to use as a starting point. I then have to actively search out for images to then think about how I want to

tie things together more. My work often combines images and references from really disparate places, it's interesting how the context is almost stripped from each image by combining it with another image.

The material choice then adds a completely new layer of context, framing the images in whatever the material choice is associated with. The material and image choice is sometimes based on a metaphorical language, in that I try to use a material that is going to pull out an element of the image that I want to evoke. For example, an image depicting a steamy room printed onto mesh that creates a moiré effect, making it look like the image is shimmering. The material choice is also a way to provoke a sensory response from the audience.

HC **I'm particularly intrigued by your sculptural constructions involving soap, a considerably non-traditional artistic medium. How did you start using soap as a creative material, and what are its attributes that appeal to you?**



AH Originally, I started using soap because I was exploring how to include smell in my work, but then I became interested in the materiality of it, how you could shape it and use it

as a material in the casting process. What really interests me about the material is how it is extremely reactive to the conditions that it is in, It sweats when in hot and sunny conditions, and condensation forms on it in cold and wet conditions. I think that reaction to a space is very important as it simulates a sense of life in the work.

Soap is also extremely haptic, it is something we all use daily and universally to some degree. I really like that when a viewer knows it is soap, they are always inclined to want to touch it, as it's a natural response to hold soap in your hands. As a lot of my work plays with two dimensional images, an impression of a thing, and I really wanted there to be an element within the work that evokes a more sensory response from the audience.

HC **You've previously exhibited in experimental curatorial projects such as Extended Call (curated by Absinthe's Billy Frazer) and B(art)holomew Street Collective, what draws you to these projects? And can you give us an insight into the work you'll be exhibiting in Absinthe?**

AH In a way these kinds of shows make me think more, as I can't just be thinking about the work I make in the studio as a single entity. Instead, it has to respond or react to a very specific kind of space, and that poses new challenges. I don't naturally make work that is site specific, but by being involved in these shows, it takes me out of my own headspace and forces me to engage with a new kind of constraint, which I really enjoy.

For ABSINTHE, I have made some work that is functional and usable made from soap. I wanted to make something that seems like a cultural artefact while allowing the viewer to engage with it in a haptic and sensory way. I have also made a wall based work that considers connectivity in a different way, looking at how crests/ insignias are a symbol of how people group together and connect.



HC **In 2017 you graduated from the Royal College of Art with an MA Sculpture and Moving Image, having previously completed a BA in Painting at Camberwell College of Art. What was your experience of art school?**

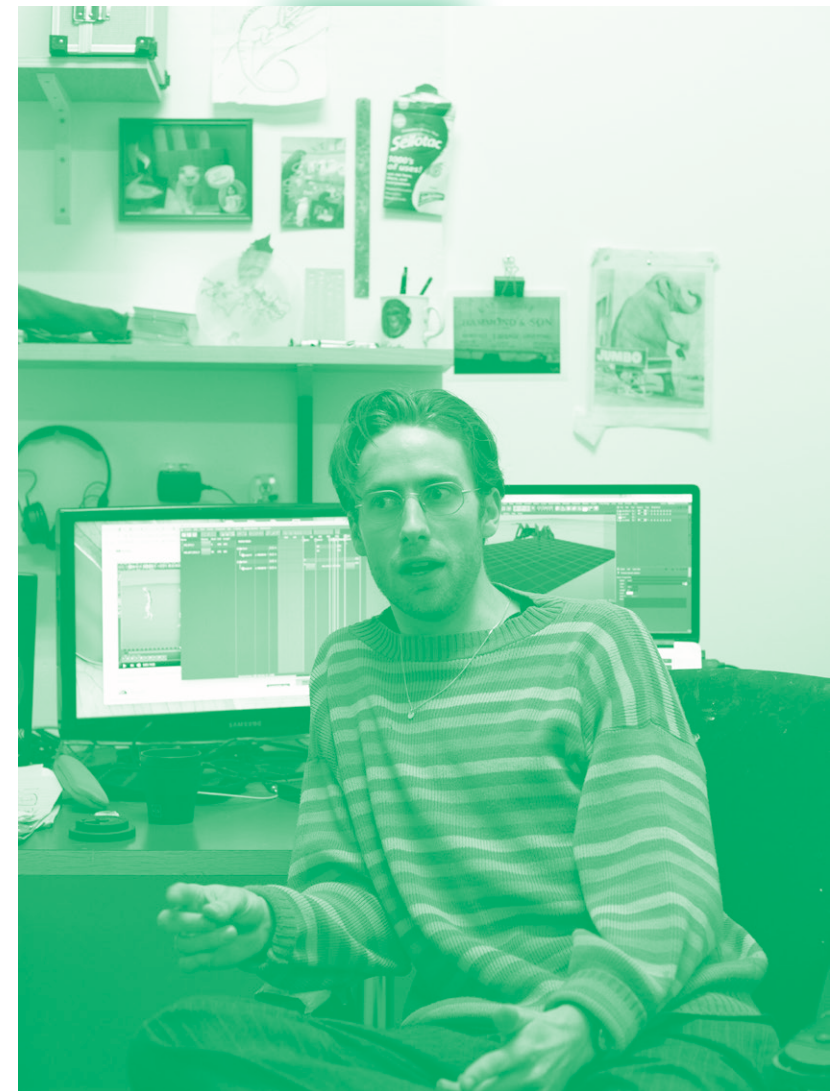
OD Camberwell was great, I loved how at the time it felt like a proper “art school” whilst a lot of the others didn’t really have that. It was also an amazing time to be in that area, the community was great because people studied there, lived there and went out there.

The RCA was a complete shift, I think it’s just a totally different environment and more about finishing your practice into something more professional, it was good to really develop a work ethic and just refine things both practically and critically.

HC **You presented the video ‘A Thin Line (Between Love and Hate)’ as part of your MA studies, marking the beginning of your interest in the practices of zoos by featuring an animated environment modelled on London Zoo. What triggered your investigation into this theme that has since recurred within your work?**

OD ‘A Thin Line’ was definitely the first work I made after really trying to investigate the nuances of the zoo in dense detail, and also the first work using more footage I had shot in the flesh. But, in actuality, zoos became a motif for me unconsciously in the earlier work ‘Smashing Windows’ featuring footage of an aggressive silverback gorilla, slamming his body against the glass of the enclosure until eventually causing a crack in the facade.

At the time I was really trying to reflect the attention economy of the Internet, I would essentially find footage that would lead to more footage, and then edit



and shaped this disparate concoction into something that reflected a feeling. The zoo found its way into my work because it was this prevalent thing on the Internet, or at least my Internet. There was this wealth of clips of people looking at animals in this environment and it really forced me to think about our contemporary viewing habits in relation to technology, and how the zoo was this very analogue example of this. A space to look at things in these fabricated structures that were acting as screens.

Go
Binge.



you'll
packe

HC **'Of Landscape Immersion', an installation comprising sculptural and video artworks that was first presented at the Edinburgh Arts Festival, was recently been given a second life through a new iteration at the Zabłudowicz Collection in London. Do you see this as a natural endpoint in your study of animal captivity?**

OD I have been looking into this topic for roughly three years now and this particular project was the most intensely researched and thorough in its conception, so in many ways I do see it as a full stop of sorts. However, its installation aspect is something that comes to life only at the very end of the project. In that sense I'm still excited by it and reconfiguring it for the Invites was great as I could play with and perfect those aspects, whilst being safe in the knowledge that the research and film side of things were taken care of.

I didn't ever want to make works solely about zoos, but rather use them as a metaphor for thinking about how humans look at things, and create structures for in which things can exist as images. These core interests such as representation and artifice in image production and the dissemination of images via technology are how the zoo projects will live on and hopefully evolve over time.

HC **Audience participation and interaction is often a key feature of your artistic output, and 'Of Landscape Immersion' places the visitor inside of the animal enclosure before presenting them with a mirror, creating a forced viewing experience as they become both spectator and spectacle. What is the purpose of this confrontational viewing experience? Is it your intention to unnerve and unsettle the audience?**

OD The installation uses two-way mirrors to really try to echo a very particular feeling I found present in zoos, visible for me in the simultaneously reflective and translucent materiality of the glass facades in the enclosures. As a viewer you are

trying to look at this otherly thing but constantly confronted with your own image. I feel like this summarises the zoo, a place one goes to look at things that will ultimately only ever serve as a reflection of the human condition, and that often can be unnerving and dissatisfactory

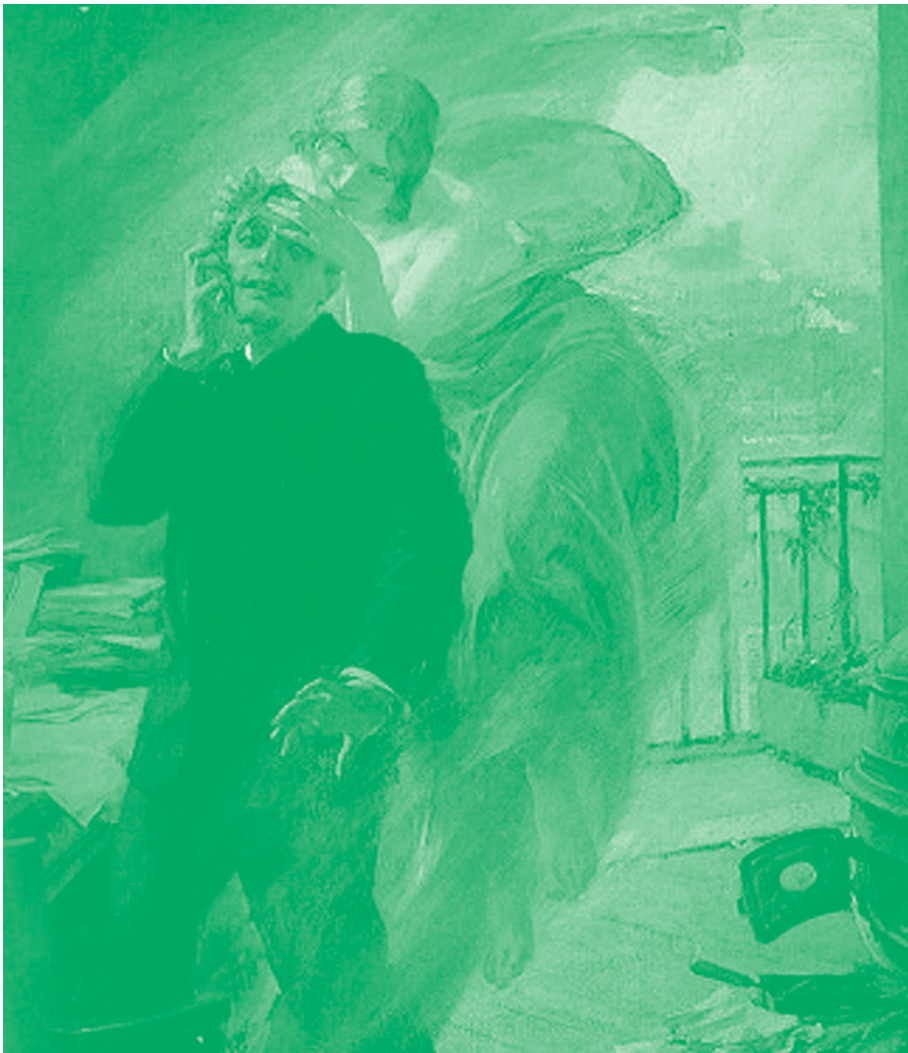
However, the main difference in my exhibit being that the viewer is only confronted by the flesh of themselves and the other bodies in the room, essentially experiencing the position of the animal. I wanted the viewer in my work to leave feeling unsettled or uncomfortable much in the way they might from leaving the zoo.

HC **Finally, could you give us an insight into how you are approaching the ABSINTHE project, and what you are working on for the exhibition?**

OD I aspire for the work to always acknowledge or have some harmonious aspect with where it's exhibited, and the pub is such a specific place with such mixed emotions linked to it. I guess the hard thing was working out what aspects of the pub echoed with my own sentiments and current interests, but to also make something that didn't completely destroy what the pub is there to do in the first place, somewhere for people to spend time and enjoy that time spent.

I had this particular scan from an advertising campaign by Three Mobile staring a mythical Dolphin/Sloth hybrid creature that carelessly flows through an endless ocean of data consumption. The tagline 'Go Binge', combined with this surreal and seemingly irrelevant image, chimed with me. Mainly for the reason that it was such an explicit use of the animal image for it's meme like quality. I then linked it another famous use of animals in advertising, the Coca-Cola Polar Bears. I loved this idea of the polar bears sitting on an icecap sofa looking at the Three Mobile advert in bemusement. I think this work is indicative of my continuous paradoxical position in relation to these things I reflect on, it's definitely ironic and cynical but maybe a positive cynicism. Just GO BINGE. Enjoy your vices.





Albert Maignan, *La muse verte* (Detail) (1895)

Gnnnerghghgh, Ach-ptuil ...Jesus that tasted foul. What the hell was that? Dram tastes like liquorice anaesthetic, like sugar-coated fungus.

Oil! What is this goddamn drink you're serving here?!

The bartender has vanished, my lips feel dizzy, and my eyes bloated

like eggs. Plus my gullet is on fire. What is this goddamn place? How did I get here?

Last thing yrstruly remembers was some kind of buzz—or buzzing. A thousand wasps converging on my brain—then black out. Now this place – a bar of some sort, flashing with eccentric faces, bizarre ornaments and industrial scraps – and this drink, this delightful, abhorrent brew. I must explore this vicinity. One must always know their entry and exit routes; it is only cautionary.

Across the bar there is a man (or is it a woman?) sat with a crooked grin, skin bleached jaundice and eyes like date palms.

Psssssst... Hey, do you know where I can smoke a fag in this joint?

Their eyes are stagnant but deep. Why don't they move? As I trail my eyes to the left a flutter of large sparks glimmer across their face. I snap back my vision to theirs. Their grin has turned to a smirk. They are silent.

To hell with this bastard, I will find my own way to the terrace. I place my hands on the green Chesterfield beneath me and push. My palms melt. Pink rubbery silicone engulfs my fingers like rinds of thick magma, coursing over my hand like a organism.

What the... Urghghhh--AHh!

I rip my hands away and jump to my feet. Slender worms of bubblegum slither back to the seat beneath me, a chuckling and sinister chaise longue cast in steel and oozing a putty-like substance. Is nobody seeing this?

Jesus, that drink--what was that? My mouth is tingling, as if a fairy were dancing Adagio across my tongue. My mind too, filled with vivid hallucinations. Thoughts that are not my own: flashes of chandeliers bathed in emerald, animals petrified and gaunt, transparent orbs filled with an infinity of alphanumeric code.

I open my eyes. I am sat downstairs in a soft leather Chesterfield, the same one from earlier. It is calm. People are walking through the bar and chit-chatting. The football is on. I look to my glass and see the remnants of what seems a thick, jade liqueur. I place the glass on my coaster and look to the bar. A fair-skinned girl with red hair and freckles looks back at me. She has a small pair of fancy-dress wings on her back. She winks at me and looks away. Confused, I take a cigarette from my pocket and leave. Never to return.

Interview

Byzantia Harlow

HC **Much of your work is heavily research-based, and to prepare for your latest solo exhibition 'From the same source I have not taken' at Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix (April 2018) you spoke to members of various spiritual, religious and psychedelic groups. How do you use research to develop the conceptual idea that support your artworks?**

BH I have a long-term personal interest in alternative societies, groups exploring the spiritual/supernatural and healing practices. For 'From the same source I have not taken', I spoke to people from various groups – including current / ex members of what some refer to as 'cults'. I experienced and continue to experience the recruitment efforts of some of these groups. This embedding myself within a context is how I have always worked as an artist. I suppose like any artist I make work about subjects that interest me but perhaps I immerse myself within those worlds more than some. I think this is because I am interested in creating forms of communion.

The inherent processes I explore are: repetition, replication, diffusion, distortion, transcription and transubstantiation. There's an emphasis on re-enactments of a genuine encounters laced with fictitious elements. Centering on interchanges between true experience and embellished recollection, I am interested in the gap between source and sample, re-assembling these fissures to create veneers of truth – where the effigies may have become more meaningful than the originals.

HC **You work across a wide range of artistic mediums, including performance, installation, sculpture and video artworks. How do you approach the matching of concept and medium?**



BH I think in general there is a leitmotif of permeability and transformation in my work and the materials are part of that, not just reflecting that concern but a process in it themselves. My first thought is always how best to articulate something through the work and therefore the medium is totally reliant on what I am exploring. Video is useful when dealing with time based concerns or recollections. For projects that were investigating spiritual aspects I projected the video onto metals so that the images were given this glowing materiality that was shifting, fleeting and enigmatic. When you project onto metals the image is never static and is experienced differently depending on where you position yourself, the projected surface absorbs the light and the image, holding it, but it also bounces it back around the space.

I think a love of materiality runs as a constant through my quite divergent work. I'm interested in how materiality can be utilised to convey the immaterial. I also like shifting the usual experience of a medium through materials – for example the projection onto floating metal panels that I mentioned makes the video installation much more sculptural as an encounter.

HC **Your work often questions the symbiotic relationship that exists between an artwork and the viewer, or performance and the audience. Is it your aim to encourage participation, and elicit interaction, from those who encounter your artwork?**

BH I think there needs to be a willing suspension of disbelief when viewing artworks and I like to position the works just on that line, the thin veil between belief and disbelief, truth and fiction, observation and participation. It is human to seek out states that elevate us out of the everyday. We all want to experience and believe. Some constructs offer us access to experiences at a safe enough distance, others offer the illusion of unity. In the moments of realisation the audience may become complicit in their continuing deception. It is about how long we wish to believe the lie in order to experience the effects on offer.

Interaction need not be a physical thing. All artworks are participatory and interactive on some level. Spectators are transcribers who can actively interpret and translate what they view with their own perceptions and distortions. Looking, as an action, even in the shortest aspect of gaze, is not passive, it is context based. The act of looking at an external object animates it in the mind. Our looking is dominant and active, rather than passive and we are implicated.

HC **Collaboration plays an important part in your artistic output, and you regularly work with filmmakers, cinematographers, songwriters and composers. How do you approach artistic collaboration? Is it hard to rely on others to enact your artistic vision?**

BH I do whatever's best for the work and if I don't have the skill set to articulate the work as it needs to inherently and intrinsically exist I will collaborate with someone who can bring these elements. Also collaboration is fun, I find



working in isolation boring. I'm not very good with keeping clear boundaries, and like to position myself in the middle, so collaboration with a partner is also just part of that aspect of my personality. It is always nice that you can look back on something beautiful if the relationship fails too.

I suppose in terms of how I approach collaboration, it is very organic usually. With what I would define as 'my work' (which is the work on my website and that I show in the whole) the idea originates with me, then there are parts of the production that are collaborative. The work usually becomes articulated and may live in ways I hadn't anticipated and often its dissemination and distribution become collaborative also. There are usually satellite elements to the work, which exist in the 'real' (i.e. not art world) public domain. These are distributed in collaboration with members of the general public.

HC **Finally, could you give us an insight into how you are approaching the Absinthe project, and what you are working on for the exhibition?**

BH I was quite taken with the haunted quality of the Spit and Sawdust pub. It has an energy to it and many stories surrounding it, such as the brothel that used to operate upstairs and a dog breeding racket in the basement. I think this was what I wanted my work for the show to touch on – hauntings, delusions, the erotic and the abject.

The first is a physical work previously I made a sculpture of a bronze hand emerging from an apparent fungal patch of wall and I wanted to expand on this and have a sort of figure emerging for this project. Hauntings for me are like realities that get stuck on a loop – something happens at a point and then time gets stuck on echo mode. This made me think about using a repetitive casting process to distort the figurative parts, which would be apparently emerging from a wall.

I also wanted to have other less obvious apparitions disrupting the general day to day running of

the pub. I have a consumable work which will blend into the daily pub operations, a special Absinthe cocktail.

The final element is a sound haunting. I'd met avant-garde saxophonist Ben Vince a few times and had played one of his music collaborations on my radio feature 'The Monthly Howl' on Soho Radio. I asked him to suggest a track of his that could exist in the day to day pub operations and jar with usual pub music. The track will haunt the space, coming on in the pub playlists and also being blasted out of unexpected places. He suggested 'Flotation' which is looping and beautiful and totally perfect.



Interview

Ralph Hunter-Menzies

HC **You've spoken before about the idea of 'creation vs. destruction' within your work, as well as influences such as graffiti removal and Robert Rauschenberg's 'Erased de Kooning Drawing'. Could you expand more on that idea and its influences?**

RHM Ideas of the ephemeral have always interested me. There is something to be explored within painting around ideas of authorship too and that is the beauty with the Robert Rauschenberg work. It's fulfilling both import interests I have within my practice. Can eraser (destruction) be creative? This sentiment is present across any urban landscape and I began to notice surfaces across London that echoed a similar relationship between mark making (creation?) and removal (destruction?).

I started taking photographs of graffiti removals that primarily manifested themselves as blocks of colours – usually different to the main surface – and power washed marks. The thing that makes me still reference these moments within my paintings is it encapsulates what it means to live in a city. Everything is so planned and regimented within these spaces that I guess these little moments that break you out of the expected, are to be cherished. The accidental, the non-planned within a cityscape is a revealing barometer of how we shape and are shaped by our cities. Essentially – formalism aside – this is what my practice focuses on.

HC **The 'hand of the artist' is often left evident in your works through the exploration of mark-making and the painting process. In the digital age of highly polished super-flat artworks, why is this exposure of authorship important to you?**



RHM The questioning of authorship within the digital age is important and within my paintings I endeavour to make it difficult for the viewer to always be sure whether it is my mark or a printed mark or a mark left by a substance. The relationship between deliberate and 'accidental' marks is very interesting to me. Complete mark making autonomy can never be fully realised and the history of marks – how they came to exist – is as important to me as the final mark.

HC **The marriage of both surface and image has become a signature characteristic of your paintings, and creating on your own hand-sewn canvases an integral part of your practice. When did this fascination with surface begin, and how has it developed within your work?**

RHM I was painting for a period of time in a conventional sense, on a pre-stretched canvas and it left me feeling unsatisfied

with the process. You make marks on canvas and never really question the actual structure you are painting on. I guess it came from this and also a practical and formalistic approach to composing a painting. The way I now make works is an incredibly enjoyable process and the physicality of the primary processes (spray painting, using acetone, power washing, acid washing and using oil sticks) is offset against the slower more pre-meditated secondary process of cutting up and sewing these surfaces together into compositions. My works are now expanding and exploring the relationship between surface and form through the inclusion of printed surfaces.

HC **You've had some experience of organising and curating exhibitions, including last years 'The Unlimited Dream Company' at Hannah Barry Gallery as well as an upcoming group exhibition at The Dot Project. How have these curatorial projects informed your own artistic practice?**



RHM I think it informs my works in many ways, some that I am aware of and probably far more that I have yet to recognise. Primarily, exposure to as many different art forms and ways of working and thinking has expanded my horizon

exponentially. Also, by meeting other artists at similar stages in their careers and becoming close friends with them and having discussions/looking critically at each others practices means you begin to lose the solitary perspective to the whole journey of being an artist and begin to witness other artists success in a collective manor.

HC **Last year you collaborated with Amba Sayal-Bennett to install artwork on a billboard in London, with another billboard project planned for Nottingham this year. What interested you about creating these billboard artworks, and how do you approach a unique project like that?**

RHM Amba and I's approach to the billboards was fairly similar. We wanted to create a work that looked like there had already been an intervention, like a tag or random gesture. It strikes at the heart of what was of interest for Amba and I, an idea that there isn't ever a static surface within a city and to question the artists creative and mark making autonomy.

HC **Having previously featured in the one night only Absinthe 2018 exhibition, what are you excited about for Absinthe 2019? Can you give us an insight into the works you're producing for it?**

RHM I will be making a painting that will hang within the recess of the pub's ceiling. This is expanding on ideas I am having within paintings as situational objects – almost like a fragment of another space, urban or otherwise. I will be using some of the techniques I have been exploring within my work already as well as experimenting with dyes, masking off areas and removal of vinyl. I aim for the works to present fragmented areas in a whole, focussing on isolated marks.

Interview

Rhiannon Salisbury

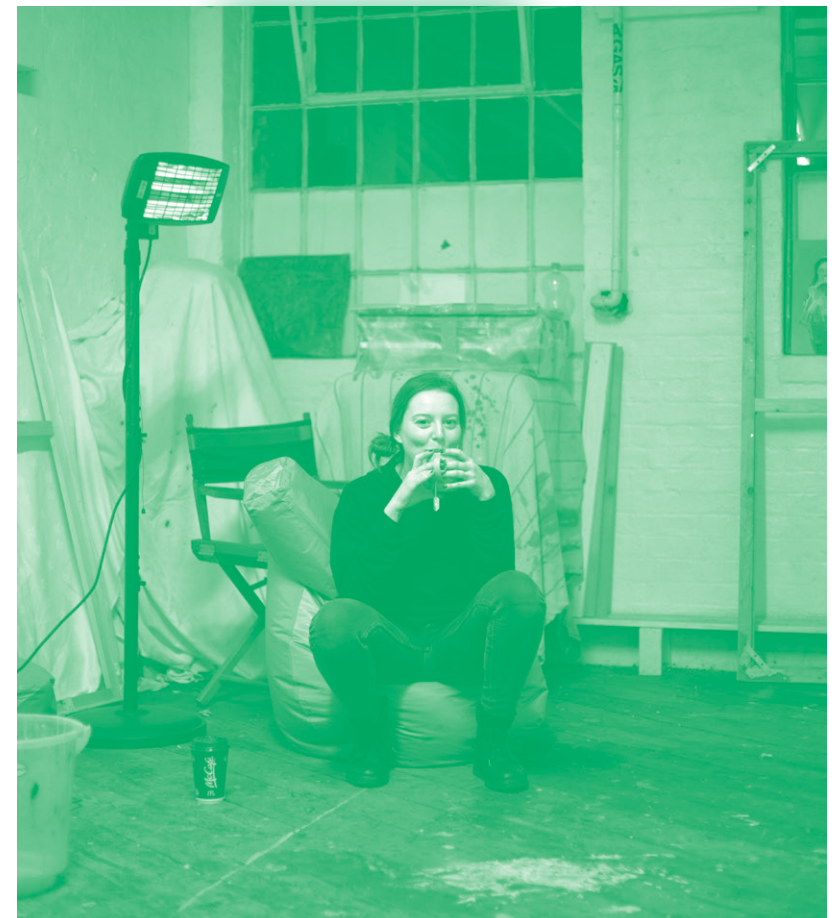
HC **Having graduated from specialist painting school Turps Banana Painting Program last year, after previously completing your MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art. How are you finding the transition from art school to the wider art world?**

RS It's been a whirlwind. I was dreading finishing Turps, I'd had so much fun over both the MA and painting program, I was scared it was all about to come to an end. However, I had such an intensive three years of study that I really am enjoying the silence of my own studio practise. My head is still reeling with all the information that has been crammed in from recent years, but what is happening now is that I am slowly setting my own parameters and rules about painting anew and for myself.

Education is invaluable, but it is hard not to be overly affected by all the opinions and critiques you receive about your work at art school. You crave attention but need to learn to trust your own instincts.

HC **You've talked before about how your work explores themes related to advertising, media and the fashion industry in the contemporary "Society of The Spectacle". Could you expand on this, and explain how you develop the conceptual ideas that underpin your artworks?**

RS In Guy Debord's text, "Society of The Spectacle", he describes a modern society in which authentic social interaction has been replaced with its representation: "All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.". I feel that his assessment of "the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing" is a condition that is even more apparent in today's society than it was in 1967, and it resonates strongly with my reasoning for producing paintings.



When deconstructing advertisements I am asking myself: "What are these ideals they are manufacturing that we are subconsciously buying into and trying to embody?" My work tends to stress the relationships between people, focusing heavily on isolation and detachment.

"The spectacle is not a collection of images," Debord writes, "rather, it is a social relation among people, mediated by images." Debord encouraged the use of détournement, "which involves using spectacular images and language to disrupt the flow of the spectacle." Maybe I am using painting as a tool for détournement. I am trying to subvert the language of advertising through reinterpretation. Painting is a tool to reclaim the image.

HC **Alongside the imagery taken from fashion magazines and advertising photo shoots, your recent paintings have seen the addition of animals (tigers, lions, flamingos) interacting with the women depicted. Was this intended as a critique of the animal print clothing that's become commonplace in today's clothing lines?**



RS In part, yes. The first thing that drew me to the subject was the fetishistic nature of commodifying the "exotic". When I made the painting "Accessorise With A Tiger", it was meant to be an ironic title, but I have since found out that some people in parts of the world like Russia actually order tigers as pets on the internet. Wealth can lead to a grotesque level of absurdity where wild animals are reduced to fashion accessories. I see it as part of a sickness of our time where we reduce animals to material items, and as an extension of this women too. I started to include animals in the work because I am interested between the relationships created between the women and the animals who are often both objectified for the purpose of the advertisement.

HC **As well as your own artistic practice, for the last five years you've been supporting younger artists as both a teacher**

and a mentor. How do these experiences impact and influence your own work?

RS It's really grounding to work as a teacher and mentor. It breaks me out of my bubble and helps me reconnect with the wider world, and more specifically it helps me to engage with a community of artists. I am quite happy to be isolated in my studio, stuck in my head for days on end, so when I do teach it is always something that I am surprised I continue to enjoy. I think there is so much self doubt tied up with spending so much time working in isolation as an artist, that doing something practical like teaching and seeing that you are helping other people directly is like receiving sustenance. It's a great experience.

HC **You've previously exhibited in experimental curatorial projects such as Extended Call (curated by Absinthe's Billy Frazer), what draws you to these projects? And can you give us an insight into the work you'll be exhibiting in Absinthe?**

RS The main draw of these projects has been their open and experimental nature. "Extended Call" took place in a host of unusual venues, starting with phone boxes in Soho, moving to "The Parasite", (a purpose built vitrine by artist Victor Seaward), and then finally had a very avant-gardé incarnation at Subsidiary Projects. I love showing work in unusual spaces outside of a conventional gallery format because it creates a new and more provocative context for viewers to experience art. It was also a challenge to design artworks that would function in each space.

The theme of "Absinthe" has been really good in reconnecting me with the weirder and slightly darker side of my subject matter. So far these projects have really created a space for me to rethink and challenge my creative practise!



ABSINTHE §1

23 February – 11 May 2019

Curated by Charlie Mills, Billy Fraser & James Capper
Published in collaboration by Kronos x Elam Publishing
Edition of 300 copies printed by Side Quest

Edited by Charlie Mills
Graphic design by Stephen Dalley
Interviews & Essay by Hector Campbell
Poetry by Finnian Mckenna and Harry Dickinson
Studio Photography by Brynley Davies and Hugo Lami
Event Photography by Kit Harwood and Leo Taylor
Installation photography by Billy Fraser

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