



VISAGE

Jessie Brennan / Joni Brenner / Melissa Bugarella / Machiko Edmondson

6 – 23 May 2015

Notes on the artists

Jessie Brennan writes of her work *43 Strangers*: [it] is a video installation from a performance in which the encounter between artist and 'sitter' is explored. During the performance I invited members of the public to draw my portrait while I drew theirs, looking directly at each other without looking at our paper. A series of videoed portraits capture the intimacy exchanged between strangers, occurring as a result of the drawing process. The work playfully explores experiences of public and private space, challenging expectations of accepted social interaction through an invitation to engage the gaze. Participants become active agents in drawing and hierarchies - whether actual or perceived - between subject and object, artist and 'sitter' fall away.

This work was shown in previously in the Jerwood Drawing Prize, 2010-11 (exhibition and tour) and, in 2010, as part of the exhibition *And Then Again* at the Lisbon City Museum. Jessie Brennan is a graduate of the Royal College of Art and winner of the Jerwood Drawing Prize, and Celeste Prize (Rome). She lectures in fine art at Falmouth University.

Joni Brenner has worked within and against the genre of portraiture since the early 1990s. For seventeen years, almost weekly, she worked with only one model, Wilson Mootane. *"These are inter-subjective portraits – of both him and me; co-produced in the sense that they would not have happened, without both of us being there. They are of us, and they mark his life, and mine. In more general terms they attest to the importance of human bonds and shared realities."*

Mootane's sudden death in 2010 resulted in a personal and creative crisis; she has since extended her engagement with portraiture to include studies of two new regular sitters, and focused on skull work which has evolved alongside the powerful portrait paintings in oil on hard stone surfaces. These take on an existential immediacy and proceed from a rhythm of repeated looking that Brenner understands to be the crux of her practice, and point to her exploration of remembrance, presence and absence as an intrinsic part of portraiture. Brenner lives and works in Johannesburg, and is a lecturer in Art History at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The examination in **Melissa Bugarella-Lazarro's** series of 'heads' is no less intense, but more universalized. Her series of 'Heads' – glistening, ambiguous and asexual – are an expression of a deep interest in tracing out the 'essence' of her subject. She writes: *"In producing this series I wanted to explore the notion of a pure, visual and intimate representation of the self and I became interested in the idea of ectoplasm: a spiritual entity that is "exteriorized" through a physical medium and that is said to form when in a trance state. A strange material is excreted from the subject's body enabling them to interact with the physical and real universe."* Bugarella lives and works in Paris, having gained her MA at Goldsmiths University (2009)

Machiko Edmondson's extraordinary painting 'Pirouette', while the most outwardly representational of the works in the exhibition, is the least concerned with personality or the genuine 'self'. Edmondson refers to her practice as a representation of painting rather than as being representational. Despite the overt use of faces as her image source, she regards her work as neither figurative painting, nor as portraits of people. Employing the momentary seduction of fashion photography to lure the viewer into the world of idealised beauty, her painting mimics the styles and plays on the formulas of the desire industry to question the value of aspirational perfection.

Edmondson graduated from Goldsmiths University in 1995, and has shown extensively in Europe and the US. Her work is held in many prominent international collections, including the Frank Cohen Collection (UK) and the Walker Art Center (USA).