

Like A Little Disaster, Online

**The eye can see things the arm cannot reach (<http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/the-eye-can-see-things-the-arm-cannot-reach>)**

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Title : Virginia Lee Montgomery, HONEY MOON, 2019, Installation view

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12 Sept 2020

Review by Tom Lordan

Before the pandemic, Julie Grosche and the collective Like A Little Disaster (founded in 2014 by Giuseppe Pinto and Paolo Modugno) had organised a large group exhibition to take place in a 17th century church in Polignano a Mare, a beautiful town on the coast of southern Italy. Once Italy entered lockdown, the curatorial team reconfigured the show as an online exhibition and I'm glad to say that their commitment has paid off handsomely – 'the eye can see things the arm cannot reach', presented by the website Sajetta, is a thrilling cocktail of contemporary video work. There are 27 videos in total, which range from under a minute to 30 minutes in length. The works are listed on a hidden link embedded on the main webpage, which acts as both a threshold and a space you can return to if the cycle of videos begins to feel overwhelming. Originally, the exhibition was designed for each video to project sequentially on a single screen. In between the individual projections, a soundscape composed by Stephen Vitiello was to occupy the spectator's attention. Hypnotic, compelling, and interwoven with readings of a text by Diderot, Vitiello's composition has been repurposed to play on the main webpage, contributing substantially to the show's overall aesthetic.

THE PANDEMIC, JULIE GROSCHÉ AND THE COLLECTIVE LIKE A LITTLE DISASTER (FOUNDED IN 2014 BY GIUSEPPE PINTO AND PAOLO MODUGNO) HAD ORGANISED A LARGE GROUP EXHIBITION TO TAKE PLACE IN A 17TH CENTURY CHURCH IN POLIGNANO A MARE, A BEAUTIFUL TOWN ON THE COAST OF SOUTHERN ITALY. ONCE ITALY ENTERED LOCKDOWN, THE CURATORIAL TEAM RECONFIGURED THE SHOW AS AN ONLINE EXHIBITION AND I'M GLAD TO SAY THAT THEIR COMMITMENT HAS PAID OFF HANDSOMELY – 'THE EYE CAN SEE THINGS THE ARM CANNOT REACH', PRESENTED BY THE WEBSITE SAJETTA, IS A THRILLING COCKTAIL OF CONTEMPORARY VIDEO WORK. REVIEW BY TOM LORDAN)

According to the curatorial essay that accompanies the work, the show is devoted primarily to the experience of love. Interpretations of this experience are guided by the themes of “romance and intimacy, as well as female gaze and body.” Grosch’s own entry, ‘Tender Isolation’ (2020), stages a romantic dialogue between two bacteria named C and A. Their conversation unfolds as one bacterium presents the other with an image of their likeness, a reproduction created organically by the cell. The pair speak like recent acquaintances separated by the pandemic, their desire amplified by the previous total embargo against physical contact and nearness; overcoming their initial awkwardness, they fuse in mutual contagion. The other works were made before the outbreak of Covid-19, though knowledge of the global pandemic does change their resonance in hindsight. In particular I was struck by Cécile B. Evan’s prescient ‘A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle’ (2019), which utilises the medicalised imagery of molecular biology and has the character Albrecht, the duplicitous seducer who breaks Giselle’s heart, admit to being “the source” of some unknown transmissible entity. The narrator reports that “it spread slowly in the beginning; a few friends, and then friends of friends, then somebody’s sister, their family...”

Grosche and LALD’s selection, though persuasively coherent as a collection, demonstrates a remarkable versatility of tone and aesthetic. One of my favourite pieces is the comically surreal ‘Cooking with the Erotic’ (2016) by Ilana Harris-Babou. Harris-Babou and her mother, a frequent collaborator, take turns presenting segments of a cooking show that adroitly captures the low-fi glamour of popular YouTube channels, even as the footage of their dishes generates profound disquiet. On the other end of the spectrum, Farah Al Qasimi’s ‘Dream Soup’ (2019) manages to be at once contemplative and forensic, carefully documenting the different stages involved in the manufacture of perfumes that are sold across thousands of small, Muslim-owned outlets in the United States.

British artist Hannah Black is as impressive as ever, delivering a pair of remarkable works. In ‘Aeter (Jack)’ (2018), her affable and intelligent young subject, bathed in lurid pink and yellow lights, describes the obsessive eating of his fingernails and skin in pleasingly ritualistic terms: “I chew and I bite the whole edge of my finger off sometimes... it doesn’t hurt, it feels great.” In ‘All my love all my love’ (2015), Black takes Harry Harlow’s psychological experiment in parent-child attachment theory, which paired infant rhesus monkeys with inanimate surrogate mothers, as the starting point for a profound meditation on pain, love, and simulated intimacy. A scene involving a humanised robot dancing and singing, supported by live dancers, is particularly memorable.

Besides its selection of predominantly female and BIPOC artists, one of the strengths of the show is the range of durations on offer. If you have only moments to spare, I recommend Virginia Lee Montgomery’s tactile and symbolically charged ‘Honey Moon’ (2019). For those of you with longer train journeys, Jen Liu’s ‘The Pink Detachment’ (2015) and Tabita Rezaire’s ‘ASS 4 Sale’ (2015) are particularly rich and imaginative artworks. Each deserves to occupy an entire feature, even if this is not the place to do it.

That said, you can rest assured there are no bad choices – pick a video at random and enjoy.

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