

ACE GALLERY LOS ANGELES

I N S T I T U T E O F C O N T E M P O R A R Y A R T

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JUSTIN BOWER

EMBEDDED

OPENING RECEPTION FOR THE ARTIST OCTOBER 23RD 8PM-10PM
EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH DECEMBER 2010

Justin Bower's portraits combine succulent impasto brushwork, with a Neo-Baroque sensibility folded into the aesthetic of the pixilated computer screen. Exuding jarring anxious energy, his vivid, large-scale, oil on canvas paintings are of full frontal close-up, anonymized faces, perhaps hijacked from Facebook or MySpace. Interested in the instability and turbulent nature of subjectivity today, particularly mediated through computer screens, he paints oil on canvas permutations of a specific photographic image, affected and infected with the tropes of our contemporary reproduction technologies. His paintings are reflective upon subjectivity today: mediated, indefinite, and in a perpetual state of boundless flux and transformation.

Through the use of a hyper-saturated color palette Bower weaves synthetic colors into the organic body, retaining a naturalness of flesh while suggesting an artificial origin, fusing the object and subject, wary that our own images have become objects of manipulation. He conflates the function of skin and flesh as a boundary between biological interiority and externalized technologies. In these paintings, there is a consistent breaching between the borders of physicality in the figurative, and abstraction: conscious of Francis Bacon's legacy and of Jenny Saville's voluptuous flesh, with oil paint, a substitute for the sensual human form. Bower's intent is to show that subjectivity today plays with the boundaries that separate the organic/synthetic, human/non-human, interiority/exteriority, self/other and finally between abstraction and the figurative. One of the artists' aims is to create the ecstasy coupled with the dread/terror that accompanied the historical sublime's overwhelming landscape, inverting this paradox to the overwhelming 'internal body-scape.'

Culled randomly from the Internet and reinterpreted in each painting, distorting any individual identity, the multiplicity and endless variation of the distorted facial image confuses an authentic origin, reaffirming the tension between the digital image and actual subject (real world counterpoint). But at the same time, his 'intervention' frees the connection and enables the artist to see the image as a free-floating signifier. Bower focuses upon two distinct areas of subject formation and de-formation. The first is a specific digital reference, the code through which these subjects emerge, are infected by, disintegrate and finally rest in their identity flux. The titles included here are *The Instability of Infinite Origin* (2010), *Spaceboy* (2010) and *Holographic*

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Introjections (2010). Through these paintings, the artist considers the inevitable reductionist instinct that occurs when any code (be it digital, genomic, anthropological) is applied to the human subject. This, according to Bower, is coupled with the anxiety of the possible infinite expressions of this code. The second area flows from the first, but the subject is interpreted in terms of contextual feedback loops. These paintings interpret the subject, through invasive linear abstractions into the face, particularly the sensory organs, i.e. exaggerated mouth and teeth. These feedback loops intimated in his accretion and build-up of paint marks (upon a structured armature), treat the subject as a weak operator formed and deformed by the institutional systems of knowledge folding back into the subject, echoing cybernetics' theory of feedback loop consciousness. In *Spaceboy*, Bower was conscious of the paintings of Caravaggio, re-conceived and filtered through the digital glowing interface of computer screens. Through the medium of his painting, he links the image to some alternate future, conveying a desire to understand the cultural and biological changes in subjectivity and identity.

Holographic Introjection is another exercise in the digital Baroque and its hallucinatory glowing color, where the artist sought to give a sense of mitosis (cellular) division. In *Architecture of Infection*, the paint leaks: disturbing, covering and revealing. It is within the sensory organs (eyes, mouth, nose) that the distortion is most exaggerated, violating the humanist locus of a singular sensory operator. Grids snap into power, digital pixels erode the flesh, forcing the subject into a state of flux, as it prepares to dissolve or become whole in some new form. In *The Geometry in Violence*, Bower somehow wanted to convey the dangers and potential violation to the individual, subjected to standardized, monotonous, institutionalized systems and rules, i.e. the schizophrenic antithesis between the academy and creativity. Within the institutional system, the flourishing of original thought and desire to break rules is circumscribed and held hostage. The rote-learning and rote-teaching methods of pseudo-academics, some professors who consider themselves to be intellectuals, are like characters in Dante's *Inferno*, caught up in their own endless cycle of rote-teaching and rote-learning in perpetuity, or the false sense of community in the privacy-less realm of Facebook where images of 'others' are probably the primary sources for Bower's manually wrought interventions.

In *Feedback Loop*, Bower specifically considers the cultural formations we establish that force a subject to create a false sense of identity. All of these paintings are contradictory, unstable, and in an un-fixed position (optically and conceptually) creating tension between rupture and rigidity in the construction of the painting. Bower uses the doubling of certain features on the face to optically play with this instability. Addressing androgyny, Bower postulates that figuratively, body boundaries are fluid (if not "leaking"), putting into question the stability of subjectivity, gender and sexuality. The regenerative traits and human coding's of biotechnologies, paranoia about DNA and genetic engineering, are suggested in his paintings through the grafting of superfluous body parts. An image without an original seen through a pixilated interface situates the subjects' context into an endless *mise en abyme*. The anxiety in the perceived 'loss' of self, generated by critical theorists, the reduction of all matter to 'code' and the tendencies of the biotech world to hyperbolize the redemption of the future, is exemplified in the status of his subjects to function as existing as in-between states.

Justin Bower was born in San Francisco in 1975 and lives and works in Los Angeles.
Source: Justin Bower artist statement June 2010

For further information or visual materials please contact
Ace Gallery Los Angeles at 323.935.4411 or email acegallery@acegallery.net
Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM