

Review: Pontoon Lip, Cell Project Space, London, 2014

Review by Ceri Hand

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Visitors to 'Pontoon Lip' are rather fittingly greeted by 'Shame', a seated, poised, fake flesh-toned Camel or Sphinx-like sculpture, seemingly ready for action. Two giant scrotums form its body, with the usual places for eating and shitting demarcated by daubed, charcoal black, grogged clay. The zoned neck stump and arsehole target us in on the body's potential entry and exit points, but also undermine our desire to conjure a cute creature. This silenced ceramic monitor has been literally fingered and pummelled into existence.

Trussed up by metal chains, 'Roman Fountain' nevertheless cascades from the ceiling in a silk orgasmic explosion of gloops, drips and stains, each colliding to create a sea of pulsating life forms, each riffing off the others, caught in an endless state of becoming, and together creating a giant, animated, sexy hand-made screensaver. A contrasting digitally printed silk square is hung or superimposed over the left hand side of this image; a legs-akimbo flag, complete with red throbbing genitals reduced to an abstraction. On the floor an oversized white turd-shaped chrysalis sits, a dormant emergent, cloaked by a vulva-like symbol printed on sapphire blue silk. The acid brights of the digitally printed silks suggest a cartoon organ logo, perhaps celebrating the slippery, shifting yet transformative qualities of sexuality and sexual relations.

'Exhibition' consists of a ceramic baby-pink painted torso sat crossed-legged on a painted bench, which in turn pins a silk rectangle – hand painted, digitally printed in an array of pinks – to the floor. The torso is punctured by small holes that let light in and disrupt our reading of the body as a complete image, whilst also reminding us of the contradictory durability/fragility of the material from which it's made. The silky pink floor painting also reminds us of how we construct images and images of bodies, a process which is inevitably informed by our relationship to the screen. Two cream painted lumps of clay form caplets on the top edges of the torso where arms would usually sprout, putting a lid on it, like a full stop to a sentence. The sculpture forms a pink snaky-mouthed smiley face from a distance.

The artists' joint colour palette throughout the exhibition is informed by Paolo Uccello's painting 'The Battle of San Romano' and the powdery dark pigeon grey used in the work 'Penumbra' was drawn directly from one of the fallen horses in the picture; a collapsing, yet still seductive image of nature defeated.

This faceless, genderless, child-size ceramic sculpture suggests a drawing of a Ghostbusters evil ghost, an omnipresent spectre in the corner of the gallery, with a human trapped inside, trying to force its way out. The powdery, pinched surface suggests somebody trying to get the measure of this person or

creature, as if repetitious squeezing, kneading, feeling, could release the contents or help to understand the insides better. At the feet of the swollen, lumpy figure are two ceramic, iron coloured weights, like potential hoof-like feet that once stepped into will only weigh this elusive character down. A colourful silk abstract painting of a pink phallus spills out of the hoof-weights, a joyous life-force leaking out to set the spectre free.

The figure is framed by patches of coloured wall like oversized pixels, dark and haunting, with a lighter pink break in the clouds steering us towards a temperature change in the final room.

The intense, overwhelming acid-green lit room housing 'Me As You' suggests incubation, but it also serves to physically alter how you perceive the work, as well as your own body, as a quick glance down at your hands will testify.

'Me As You' has as its centre a white U-shaped ceramic form, like an upside down section of bum and thighs, with holes in the top, which creates an alien, bemused face, with eyes on stalks. Sandwiched between its eyes is a painted pillow, with what looks like a nose and red mouth edging towards the middle of the legs or face, cheekily referencing girls masturbating with pillows privately exploring their own sexuality.

The green light literally changes the way we look, and on leaving the room the main space appears pink tinted rosy spectacle lit, with a warm glow easing us back into the real world.

Cuddon and Hempton's collaboration results in a seductive, darkly playful and witty exhibition. Their long, midnight conversations in their respective studios in Rome served them well for understanding and maximising upon their differences and meeting points, and their delight in touch and the hand-made aids to draw the viewer in beyond the wonderful surfaces. (Cuddon was Sainsbury's Scholar in Sculpture and Drawing, and Hempton was Sainsbury's Scholar in Painting and Drawing, 2008–2010).

Their time in Rome, researching and visiting sites such as Palazzo Massimo alle Terme has clearly continued to influence their dialogue. Sun drenched ruins, with faded wall paintings, naked, half-clad seated bodies, crumbling headless sculptures and the painted gardens from the Villa of Livia for example, with lush greens and a mix of enclosed spaces and rolling, open wildness have clearly been filtered into their exhibition at Cell.

They are aware of the performative nature of the works they have created together, but prefer to think of them as 'situations' rather than narratives. They were both interested in awkwardness, an unsettling and shifting between states, and this intensifies the longer you stay with the works.

They insist on a lightness of touch regarding sexuality and voyeurism, but combined with their suspicion and delight in image and object making, this reminds me of a child's encounter with a beached jellyfish – the urge to poke

this weird, fleshy, once beautiful creature is overwhelming, despite its obvious cruelty and possibility it might sting.