

CHARLIE DUTTON GALLERY

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Unknown Sitter DOS

3rd to 20th July 2013

**Virginia Verran, Dallas Seitz, Galen Riley
Damien Meade, Cathy Lomax, Marcus Harvey
Kirsten Glass, David Dippé, Marianne Basualdo**



Curated by Covadonga Valdés

This group exhibition combines painting, installation and sculpture to explore various anonymities of the portrait. Playing with ambiguity, these works call into question the meaning of 'non-identity' in portraiture that comes about perhaps as the result of a suspicion of its true intention or as a consequence of a disguised or even rootless origin.

Focusing on the tangible and three-dimensional aspects of the portrait as it unfolds towards a disarrangement of its theme, the sitters become subject to question. Habit and recognition fade, at times through the ability of the skill which manipulates or moulds its three dimensional aspect, at other times when the subjects turn inward to perform something imagined or felt, or to view at their own self-reflective narcissism through playful painterly techniques or ghostly installation. 'The Unknown Sitter DOS' performs as the disk operating system, excavating body parts to reassemble them as a contemporary portraiture of unflattering and unsentimental figures which participate in the uncanny dislocation of their narratives.

An essay by Alex Veness featured in the on-line anthology 'Knowing the Unknown Sitter' accompanies the exhibition.

Knowing the Unknown Sitter (2005-2010) was an on-line anthology of texts relating to ten unidentified portraits, selected from a wealth of material found in national collections across the UK. Through the discussion of these portraits, knowingtheunknownsitter.com raised questions about the nature of identity, representation, and the role of the observer in interpreting visual images. The result of an initial collaboration between artist Nicky Bird and art historian Lara Perry, the project brought together writers from a range of disciplines as well as portraits - some of which have never been published before - to explore the problem of the unknown sitter, and the value of their portraits, once identity has been lost

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Once pulled into the heady centrifugal force of **Virginia Verran's** work, it becomes apparent that one is inhabiting the realm, not only of space but of the body. Figures appear either as large ominous, hinted-at forms, sometimes as weighty and lustrous orbs or tiny frames which people the landscape living amongst its gleaming painted lights. The spectral world of the paintings is one filled with contradictions, which live together without discord. The works are both visceral and other-worldly, they are emotionally charged and cheekily playful, conjuring up at once a sense of mortality and elation, the microscopic and the infinite. The suggested traces of skeletons and unknown spectres make us aware of our transience. The paintings have a heroic and sublime aura, unknown vistas peopled with a million tiny details, which glimmer like the fairground or the dark metallic radiance of a space station. There is a tenuity to the work alongside its incandescent strength and the confidence in the looseness of the paint handling sits comfortably at odds with the deftly, intricately realised drawn line. **Clare Price 2013.**

Dallas Seitz unapologetically utilises the poetry of objects to combine his interest in collecting, museology, colonisation, personal history and the falsity of representation. The often absurd works expose an awareness of the thinking process while recalling museum collections and relationships between display and life.

In the work "Ruby Slippers" Seitz simply uses found objects; a pair of Mexican border crossing slippers (found on the Arizona /Mexican Border) and an empty Jose Cuervo Tequila bottle (a popular export from Mexico). When sneaking across the border into the US, Mexican men, women and children cover their feet with foam and carpet to avoid leaving identifiable tracks in the desert sand. Often their journey ends less than the American dream they anticipate. The work investigates the complications of Mexico's political relationship with the United States while constructing a portrait of the Mexican border crossers known to the locals in Yuma Arizona only as "illegal's".

Galen Riley having previously translated the hobby of a relative into her own, Uncle Bill's porn collection into an origami island of half-made and complete creatures, Galen continues to use this source material in Bone Dry. Here she has reconstituted body parts into a mass of movable creatures. By reanimating the inanimate flesh she has freed them from their repose, while at the same time highlighting the dehumanizing effect of pornographic imagery, which reduces people to semi-conscious automata to be manipulated into any desired pose.

"The paintings of **Damien Meade** depict hand-rendered heads modelled in clay, tape and wire. Although we are aware of their lifeless materiality these subjects seem unnervingly alert. The heads' fabrication might appear to be crude and improvised, however, there is real craft in their painterly representations. These paintings provoke an empathy in the viewer through our recognition of this most human of subjects. We recognise the inanimate nature of the model heads but their pictorial representations provoke a sense of uncertainty, as they hover between still lives and portraits, inert matter and sentient beings." **Geraint Evans, Turps Banana issue eleven, May 2012**

Cathy Lomax's work is rooted in the romance of popular culture and its impact on the retelling of history. She assimilates media fictions and mythologies of fame and juxtaposes them with personal identities to create seductive visual narratives. Lomax sources imagery from films, fashion magazines, newspapers and the history of art. She then isolates, crops, re-configures and re-presents this imagery in installations of paintings and other media to create new taxonomies which hint at a curious contemporary longing for something unobtainable.

Marcus Harvey's work explodes a new energy into overdetermined media images. From the feral gestures of his "Reader's Wives" paintings, employing a quotidian genre of pornography, to the children's handprints making up his famous appropriation of Myra Hyndley, to recent overpaintings on gigantic black and white photographs of the British coastline, Harvey takes familiar symbols and transforms their meaning through an electrifying gestural energy. His recent ceramic sculptures employ a degraded figurative vocabulary, sometimes involving parody and political caricature, which is then reanimated through a raw physicality and sensuous materiality. These transformative processes infuse his subjects with an ambiguous political urgency and a raw, human power. **Dan Coombs 2013**

Kirsten Glass. 'Sea Wall' comes from a series of single-figure paintings, which all begin with a magazine model being cut out and re-employed by me as a template and a hostess. Models are young and perfect and blank for projection and they are meant to be copied so I take the image and I make it mine. This is an act of possession, like taking a photograph, but, through the painting process, the copied model gets 'lived in' and, through dreaming into her with these materials, she emerges as an unplanned character or presence. Overall, the transformation is from a simplified ideal image into something which is at once less knowable in its unexplained subjective narrative and more particular in its physical presence; something more awkward and emotional. The move is from Classical to Romantic, post commodity.

David Dipré's 'Head Piece' comes from a recent series of self-portraits where the painting, subject and surface have become physical objects in themselves.

'With each painting the aim is to remember and remake the experience of a subject. It is an act of recalling, noting down and inevitably reworking, in order to escape the obvious, easy or derivative. The working process is a balance between defining the subject and stumbling upon unpredicted visual references.

I use portraiture as my main area of exploration, challenged by its rich history and the apparent impossibility of saying something new within this tradition. The aim is always to make visual statements that have the ability to last, and to add something new to the language of painting.' **John Moores Catalogue 2012**

The subject in **Marianne Basualdo's** painting looks out at us or perhaps regards himself in a mirror (it is, in this instance, unquestionably a man; white, European in origin). The subject seems quite pathetic; draped in a soft silver milky light, trapped on the other side of the mirror; it appears that he has possibly lost his nose, or perhaps never had one- A birth defect? Leprosy? A war wound? A burn victim? Tarded and feathered in some disturbing retributive act of humiliation? A shaving session gone wrong? A custard pie? Or more innocently, finals day at university?

It could just be shadow- but it's the most defined cavity in his head since the eyes are closed and mouth is shut in silent acceptance of his fate. He seems to face us and himself; in the midst of this random awfulness, he quietly looks out stoney statue-faced, corroded and rooted to the spot- like he will always be here when ever we happen to pass. **Neal Tait 2013**