

Victoria Miro Gallery

Press Release

CHANTAL JOFFE & DAWN MELLOR

4 April - 2 May 1997

Private view Thursday 3 April 1997, 6-8pm

"The paintings are small format works with a figure or figures, usually partially cropped. I would like to think they are making something beautiful out of something trashy and perhaps something scary out of normality." **Chantal Joffe**, March 1997

"In the small paintings, female Hollywood stars of the 1930's to 1960's are placed centrally in fields of flat colour. The relationship between artist and female muse, self and desired other is investigated.

The body of the star is pathologically fetishised. The artist's pornographic eye lifts and removes the star's clothing, removes and replaces her limbs with mutated body parts. Arms, legs and long plaits of hair erupt from the vagina, anus and eye sockets, forcing the star to urinate, defecate and bleed. Eyes are hidden behind excessive coiffures which both impose blindness and decentre the expected viewer from the usual gaze of the portrait.

Although consumed or overtaken by abnormalities, the depicted figures seem to revel in their abjection. They become sexually loaded, disruptive, reckless and anarchic. They reveal themselves in a glorious display which is simultaneously seductive and repulsive, violent and violated, gothic and kitsch.

The figures carry a heavy gendering. The excessive constructed femininity becomes a perversion in itself used to devour the figure and seduce the viewer. It is simultaneously glorified and defiled.

Although the depicted figure does not gaze at us directly, the painting itself has two gazes: one that is joyful and seductive, another which is terrifying and threatening. These returned gazes position the artist in both masochistic and sadistic roles with the figure.

The figures are loaded with involuntary memories of past traumas and repressed states. Simultaneous life and death drives are linked directly with the artist's desire. The paintings which result are ultimately anxious, auratic and uncanny." **Dawn Mellor**, March 1997

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