

COLOUR ARTIST STATEMENT

Sydney-based painter Alun Rhys Jones depicts the melancholy, alienation and detachment that lie behind the glossy veneer of consumerism. The images are clean and precise, while the painting style is physical, loose and expressive.

Through the use of high key, luminous colour he exploits the language of fashion, branding and advertising in order to subvert it. His painterly hand references his desire for a return of humanity and spirit to a consumerist world.

Recent work has been concerned with the power of branding and advertising within contemporary culture and its emphasis on celebrity, fame, youth and beauty.

"I have been making large-scale objective depictions of people using supersaturated CMYK colours. The images are monochromatic and painterly, as a means of communicating the counterpoint between consumerism and disaffection."

"The Last Days of Dionysus" II will continue my investigation into the use of the body, celebrity, form, language and colour in contemporary consumer culture.

We live in an age of image proliferation. Visual media constantly bombards us across multiple platforms, from print and television to computers and mobile phones. Images are consumed and discarded within seconds. Products are consumed and discarded almost as quickly, as soon as the newer model arrives. Advertising, marketing and branding surround us creating a colour coded, kaleidoscopic, design experience from birth to death encouraging us to consume more and more.

iThink, iPhone, iView, therefore iAm has become the mantra of the day and the way we live our lives.

Young beautiful models and celebrity endorsements of products and services encourage us to consume with an aspirational fervour to belong. If we look/ act/ feel a certain way then we have succeeded, and with the right product we can! This

relentless drive creating a conveyor belt culture of consumers hell bent on “Living the Dream”.

The upcoming show explores these ideas with four separate but connected series of works.

Untitled ® is an exhibition of new work at MOP Gallery in Sydney. The show is an ongoing exploration into the role of branding and advertising within contemporary culture and its emphasis on celebrity, fame, youth and beauty.

Advertising has become increasingly sophisticated and used to target niche demographics. Its appeal lies in encouraging an individual to identify with the products or services they consume. Nonetheless, the perceived status and acceptance that advertising purports to deliver is both illusive and transitory.

Madeline Levine has criticized the increased dominance of consumerism especially within Western culture for creating “a shift away from values of community, spirituality, and integrity, and toward competition, materialism and disconnection.” [1]. Consumerism’s constant and relentless message to devour ever more products and services aided by the tools of branding, marketing and advertising have created an emotional abyss within culture and a fractured sense of self within the individual.

We are constantly inundated with a pervasive array of images and a glut of consumerist product. As such our sense of self is in constant flux as we position and reposition ourselves in terms of what we are, what we would like to be (shaped by these images) and what we are not (recognition of this disparity leading to internal conflict). In this context we are reduced to marketing statistics where our value is based upon our buying power. Personal happiness becomes dependant on consumer choice.

Advertising typically tends to use young models to sell their products. The models used are often depicted as being cool, happy, sexy and sophisticated with the implication that if you buy these products then you will obtain these characteristics too. Moreover, due to the nature of these images they can easily be distributed across a number of media: print, (from the flyer, to the magazine to the billboard)

television, cinema, mobile phones and the Internet. The same image can be broadcast intact to a huge audience and its message is not diluted by the medium utilised. Its purity and irreducibility is only diluted by its quick replacement by another message.

This exhibition examines the language of advertising, its promise of happiness and the illusion of "living the dream".

As such models, scale, colour, layout, and composition are subverted to illuminate the alienation and emotional detachment underlying the glossy veneer of consumerism and the repetitive consumption of goods.

My process involves choosing and casting models and creating fictionalized photo shoots for non-existent products. The photos produced, based upon the posed images of these ad campaigns, are then used as the basis for my work.

In advertising imagery the models become objectified, degraded and consumable throw-aways in a disposable culture. Their humanity and sense of self is lost in the process of selling product.

My work seeks to redress this imbalance and as such the style and use of colour are important aspects of my practice.

The painting style is physical, loose and expressive with the people unraveling, disintegrating and dissolving into the surrounding space. They appear isolated, dislocated and bereft of context. The gesture and painterly mark indicate a return of humanity and spirit in the work that is lost in the actual imagery of advertising. This loss of identity and individuality in the face of the immaculately formed worlds of advertising and design are themes that I am continually exploring.

By way of example in the painting "Erika wears wool and angora-blend shift dress" and "Iya wears running T and double stripe beanie" the models are present however their clothes are absent, a reversal of the traditional fashion imagery where the clothes and products to be sold are prominently featured. The models appear distant, pensive and lost in their own thoughts. They and their humanity become the focus of the paintings.

Furthermore these paintings use glazes of transparent, vibrant colour that have a quick, moment in time feel to them mimicking the transitory nature of advertising imagery and its relentless, visual bombardment. The use of high key, luminous colour acts as a metaphor for the excessive, image heavy society we now live in and the highly saturated nature of mass media culture.

Fundamentally I see these works as a celebration of a shared humanity; far greater than a demographic range or series of consumer choices.

1. Levine M, Challenging the Culture of Affluence, Independent School. 2007, p28-36.

Untitled ® is an exhibition of new work by Alun Rhys Jones. The show is an ongoing exploration into the role of branding and advertising within contemporary culture and its emphasis on celebrity, fame, youth and beauty.

The exhibition examines the language of advertising: models, scale, colour, layout, and composition are subverted to illuminate the alienation and emotional detachment underlying the glossy veneer of consumerism and the repetitive consumption of goods.

Seductive, transient perfections mask the contemporary melancholy and malaise of modern consumer society where aspirations are continually updated but never fulfilled.

My current body of work investigates the effects of consumerism upon identity and the emotional void this creates in the consumer.

Consumerism equates personal happiness with consumption and the purchase of material possessions. Ironically the instant high of buying can create a contemporary melancholy and attitude of disaffection in the consumer. This cycle

of economy driven instant gratification leads to a culture of people purchasing goods and consuming materials in excess of their basic needs.

Madeline Levine has criticized the increased dominance of consumerism especially within Western culture for creating “a shift away from values of community, spirituality, and integrity, and toward competition, materialism and disconnection.” [1]. Consumerism’s constant and relentless message to devour ever more products and services aided by the tools of branding, marketing and advertising have created an emotional abyss within culture and a fractured sense of self within the individual.

In this context we are reduced to marketing statistics where our value is based upon our buying power. Personal happiness becomes dependant on consumer choice. Consumerism tricks the self into detaching from any real emotional engagement and instead opts for artificial simulation and endless reproductions of fundamentally empty appearance. We become stranded in a hyperreal world.

My recent work focuses on depicting a sense of the personal alienation and contemporary melancholy of the individual in relation to the constructed images of branding, marketing and advertising used in the service of big business to promote consumerism and conspicuous consumption.

Advertising typically tends to use young models to sell their products. This is clearly evident in the advertisements for Calvin Klein, Nike, Benetton, Apple and Adidas and a plethora of other brands. The models used are often depicted as being cool, happy, sexy and sophisticated with the implication that if you buy these products then you will obtain these characteristics too.

In advertising imagery the models become objectified, degraded and consumable throw-aways in a disposable culture. Their humanity and sense of self is lost in the process of selling product. My work seeks redress this imbalance and as such the style and use of colour are important aspects of my practice.

Firstly, the painting style is physical, loose and expressive with the models unraveling, disintegrating and dissolving into the surrounding space. The gesture and painterly mark indicate a return of humanity and spirit in the work that is lost in the actual imagery of advertising. Moreover the spontaneous style comments upon

the speed with which advertising imagery is generated, consumed and quickly discarded.

Secondly, the use of high key, luminous colour conveys a sense of the spiritual. Roland Barthes elaborates on this "Colour ...is a kind of bliss...like a closing eyelid, a tiny fainting spell". [2] Furthermore the saturated colour reflects the highly saturated nature of mass media culture.

The subjects of my work dwell in shifting worlds, caught momentarily between the flat, two-dimensional surface of the canvas and a three dimensional illusion. The loose style and use of colour will convey a sense of spontaneity and chance and by implication an implicit humanity for the individual in these paintings, feelings that are lost in mass-produced advertising campaigns that they mimic. The individual quality of the painting technique will imply the individual nature of the consumer and convey a return to the spiritual, the existential and sublime in art.

1. Levine M, Challenging the Culture of Affluence, Independent School. 2007, p28-36.
2. Batchelor, D Chromophobia, Reaktion, London 2000, p32.