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Alun Rhys Jones

THE ROLE OF branding and advertising within contemporary culture and its emphasis on celebrity, fame, youth and beauty is the focus of an exhibition of new work – 'Untitled 01' – at Sydney's MOP Projects.

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.

Psychologist Madeline Levine has criticised the increased dominance of consumerism especially within Western culture, writing in 'Challenging the Culture of Affluence' that it is creating "a shift away from values of community, spirituality, and integrity, and toward competition, materialism and disconnection". 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 dependent on consumer choice.

Advertising typically uses young models to sell products. The models are often depicted as being cool, happy, sexy and sophisticated, with the implication that if you buy these products 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 flyer to magazine to billboard), television, cinema, mobile phone 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 fictionalised photo shoots for non-existent products. The photos produced, based upon the posed images of these ad campaigns, are used as the basis for my work.

In advertising imagery the models become objectified, degraded, 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, consequently, 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 that is lost in advertising imagery. 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 paintings *Erika wears wool and angora-blend shift dress* and *Iya wears running T and double stripe beanie*, the models are present but their clothes are absent, a reversal of the traditional fashion imagery where the clothes and products to be sold are prominently featured. The models are distant, pensive and lost in their own thoughts. They and their humanity become the focus of the paintings.

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. ■

Alun Rhys Jones is represented by Iain Dawson Gallery, Sydney.

www.iaindawson.com

www.alunrhysjones.com

EXHIBITION
Untitled 01
15 November to 2 December, 2012

MOP Projects
www.mop.org.au

- 01 Iya wears running T and double stripe beanie, 2011, oil on linen, 184 x 134cm
02 Erika wears wool and angora-blend shift dress, 2011, oil on linen, 184 x 134cm
Courtesy the artist

PROCESS Alun Rhys Jones

