



Flash Art

01 – 02 / 2016

“Review: Liz Magic Laser - Mercer Union”
by Sam Cotter



From top, clockwise:

Camille Henrot

Killing Time (2015)

*Courtesy of the Artist and
Metro Pictures, New York*

Oto Gillen

“Raisin on the Vine”

*Installation view at Tomorrow
Gallery, New York (2015)*

*Courtesy of the Artist and
Tomorrow Gallery, New York*

Liz Magic Laser

Kiss and Cry

(video still; 2015)

*Courtesy of the Artist and
Mercer Union, Toronto*



Oto Gillen

Tomorrow / New York

Tomorrow, the site of Oto Gillen's "Raisin on the Vine," is one of a crop of galleries to have relocated or newly opened in Lower Manhattan's Chinatown. The topic of urban renewal is inescapable for the exhibition, which is made of materials, both photographic and sculptural, that witness New York City changing. Gillen, who grew up in New York City through Giuliani's cleansing of it and the attacks on 9/11, demonstrates the ability of artwork to generate affectively potent narratives when artists render material from their own biographies. In the exhibition, resolutely vertical photographs that track the Freedom Tower's construction commingle with fresh produce sourced from shops in the neighborhood and with images of ad-hoc objects composed of things that have congealed in the hurried flow of the city.

Ripe daikon radishes, lotus roots and potatoes are arranged along hand-carved cardboard boxes that line the gallery's floorboards. The bounty is an eclectic sampling of autumn's harvest that highlights the visual pleasures of biodiversity and, also, of foreign culinary habits. "Raisin on the Vine" traverses the uneasiness of the art world's complicity in Chinatown's gentrification by insisting on the centrality of the artist's biography to his artwork.

The disparity of scale between the monumental and the quotidian that is at play in "Raisin on the Vine" marks an attempt at giving form to the structures of feeling that link particular sights, sounds and smells with the experience of history. *World Trade Center 3, 2011* (2015) shows the Freedom Tower in progress, from its conception by architect Daniel Libeskind to the 1,776-foot-tall skyscraper depicted in *World Trade Center 30, 2015* (2015). Images of the Freedom Tower counterpose a set of pictures portraying unintentional objects: a stem of grapes, a Brita pitcher and a hairball. These forlorn objects occupy compositional space with a rakish disrepute that heightens their censure from the official history as represented by the Freedom Tower.

by Max Smith-Holmes

Camille Henrot

Metro Pictures / New York

Cartoons in the *New Yorker* don't change much over the years: nondescript figures, just as likely to be human as they are to be anthropomorphized animals, enact slight comedies of manners and modern *faux pas*, often frowned upon by their psychotherapists or colleagues off to the side. Light and humorous even when addressing political or difficult topics, these characters address the slight malaise and resentments that contemporary life leaves anxiously unresolved.

Transcending the weekly's grayscale palette and passive-aggressive politesse, Camille Henrot's first exhibition at Metro Pictures begins with a foyer circled with mounted telephones, each one unique but united in their nouveau riche '80s aesthetic, with extended ovals and angular details in electric pastels, as if picked from a Bang & Olufsen catalogue geared toward teenage girls. Each phone delivers a psychiatric intervention, whether in the form of a little video on the base's screen, with audio on the receiver, or a direct line of questioning from the other end of the line; hotline options include "Enough is Enough" and "Bad Dad & Beyond."

Next, a cupcake-batter-yellow room is lined with figurative, gestural, spare paintings of animals in absurd situations, seemingly unaware of each other when not attacking one another. Retreating several decades in display, the next room, pitch black, holds a zoetrope, a spinning, multi-tiered layer cake of slithering and swimming cigarettes, body builders lifting and resting weights, maidens bowing in angst then gathering themselves together again, and lotion squirting out of tubes.

Taken together, these three chapters seem to progress from the artist's earlier works, which surveyed the results of deep anthropological and sociological research. If these larger questions have been addressed, modern banalities and uneasy niceties should be easy fixes, but these stylized neuroses show an emotional terrain that leaves us exposed to dependency and deception — a terrain with no order or exit.

by Jennifer Piejko

Liz Magic Laser

Mercer Union / Toronto

Continuing her recent explorations into children's rights, child-adult relationships and the intersections of fiction and documentary, Liz Magic Laser's *Kiss and Cry* follows two virtuosic child figure skaters, a brother and sister, in rehearsal under the direction of their mother, a professional figure-skating coach. Over the course of the twenty-minute video, the kids run through warm-ups and skating exercises while asserting the need to forge a revolutionary class consciousness for children.

Laser sets her revolutionary drama within the familial relationships and real-life activities of the actors. In the film it is often unclear if the children and mother are acting or engaging in regular rehearsal protocol — a dynamic further complicated by the performativity of coaching and stage-parenthood.

Laser composed the script, delivered both on camera and in voiceover, from excerpts of texts on children, childhood and children's rights from sources including William Wordsworth, Richard Evans Farson, Emil Hirsch and current Republican presidential candidates. The protagonists advocate on behalf of a collective "we" — a class of voiceless children oppressed by the very concepts and ideology of childhood, which frame children as innocent and in need of protection while stripping them of rights and freedoms. Additional young voices join in the collective voiceover that is perhaps best distilled in an altered Lee Edelman quote: "Fuck the Child in whose name we are all terrorized. . . Fuck the future that serves as its prop. The Child as emblem of the future must die."

Not far below the surface of Laser's work — perhaps made more evident in the strangeness of watching a children's class struggle articulated through quotation — is a tension common in revolution: How does one fight for self determination when the only means of communication is the language of one's oppressor?

by Sam Cotter