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'On Feeling' Is a Reflection on Generational Difference

Curated by artist and lecturer Peter Davies, this intimate exhibition at The Approach highlights a vibrant moment in London's art scene



Curated by the painter and Slade School of Fine Art lecturer Peter Davies, 'On feeling' brings together works by 11 emerging artists, most of them born in the 1990s, who live or have studied in the British capital. This intimately scaled exhibition is, in part, a reflection on generational difference, an attempt to both measure and learn from a perceived cultural and psychological gulf between Gen X and Gen Z. As Davies writes in an accompanying text, during his own studies at 'Goldsmiths in the mid-1990s, just after the YBAs [...] there was a prioritizing of criticality and [...] certain things felt forbidden to discuss, particularly emotion. Self-expression seemed embarrassing and subjectivity had to be rhetorized.' In contrast, he notes how art students today place great importance on their 'lived experience' and are unafraid to discuss the way 'an artwork has made them feel'. Exposure to the practices of the artists in this show has, he writes, 'changed me in how I understand the world'.

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Cosmetically, at least, there's little that unites the works in Davies's exhibition. Lara Shahnnavaz's *A Premonition* (all works 2024) is a jewel of a painting, in which hooded monks and a bearded cleric converge on an apricot-hued temple, which rises above a dream-like city of steep stepped streets and suffusing, pink-tinged fogs. Nearby, Ruoru Mou's sculpture *greasy film* recalls a Carl Andre floor piece, had the American minimalist employed not flat metal tiles but curling sheets of translucent gelatine, anointed with restaurant grease, leather dust and mould blooms scraped from tanned hide. Multiplying organisms also feature in Areena Ang's canvas *I, I, I, I, I...*, in which a series of androgynous clones practice what looks like ecstatic barre exercises against the walls of a subway tunnel that curves into infinity. The reclining female nude in Gal Schindler's painting *No Explanations* is a more pensive figure. Scratched into a field of wet, mint-toned pigment with a few swift, consummate strokes, she seems to contemplate whether she constitutes a pictorial addition, or subtraction.

Questions of absence and presence also haunt Alex Margo Arden's *Perfume said to have belonged to Amy Winehouse*, a bottle of (rather nasty) scent connected to an automated pump, which spritzes unwitting gallery-goers at regular intervals. Winehouse died in 2011, when Arden was in her teens. Here, the singer – or at least her olfactory ghost – lingers on. The only artist in the show born, like Davies, in the early 1970s, Anderson Borba presents *Selfie*, a deft sculpture that resembles a member of a cargo cult's attempt to fashion a cell phone and a selfie stick from foraged driftwood. In Okiki Akinfe's *Your my favourite, Joe*, a canvas that channels Francis Bacon by way of Euan Uglow, a young Black woman gazes down into what might be a mirror, or else an abyss, in which she glimpses a gruesomely dismembered body. Like many of the works in 'On feeling', it is preoccupied with the making and unmaking of a self.

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Anderson Borba, *Selfie*, 2024, wood, wood stain, wood paint, paper, oil stick, oil paint, lacquer, wax, and gilt cream, 95 × 27 cm. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London; photograph: Michal Brzezinski

The best-known of Davies's own paintings is probably *The Hot One Hundred* (1997), which takes the form of a wobbly lined, highly chromatic spreadsheet, ranking a hundred artists – among them Bruce Nauman (1), El Greco (29) and Sarah Lucas (98) – in the manner of an adolescent pop fan listing their all-time favourite acts. Rather than 'prioritizing criticality', it is a statement of personal affinity, something that's rooted in subjective emotional response. The curatorial offer of 'On feeling' is, in essence, the same as that of *The Hot One Hundred*: here is a selection of artists to whose work I, Peter Davies, find myself drawn. Some might think this slight. To me, such unguarded generosity feels refreshing, precious and uncommonly moving.

'On Feeling' is at *The Approach*, London, until 3 August

Main image: Gal Schindler, *No Explanations (detail)*, 2024, oil on wood, 1.2 × 1.8 m. Courtesy: the artist and The Approach, London; photograph: Michal Brzezinski