

DREI

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Cuckoo till I come back

Megan Rooney

2/2/18 – 31/3/18

A large grid of painted faces – animal human – human animal – other other – or is it mother mother, as in, of deep origin, essential: that which lies beneath the beneath. In *Cuckoo till I come back*, Megan Rooney's first solo show at DREI, paper commands – a sheer volume of faces rising above faces that swim across measures of white in paint greasy or silky or both. Eyes and teeth bared, lashes smeared and aflutter, one cannot help locking gazes. Who are these paper people? This is a cheap world; blackened and aflame. Paper towns and paper toys. Paper girls for paper boys. Paper animals that bleed eerie orange from the eyes, on the edge of immolation, on the eve of destruction, when the wind rises to a dull shriek.

Rooney's figures are at once specific and amorphous, friendly and threatening, powerful and injured – as though their outward forms have struck a bad bargain with the darker registers of the world. The paper people think that life is absurd, but they also know they are being rotted sickly sweet from within, hollowed out like a hollow drum, skin so tight, any tighter it might tear right open wide. The new reality? A clean slice with nothing and everything pouring through it like a river of paper tar.

As in: see how my face suffuses your mind, with its swollen cheeks that bleed out into white white, my dark eyes and bald seared head, my rosebud mouth, sooty with obscurities and fear, maybe, or complacency, disgust, longing. Creature feature. We are all different. We are all the same. The flesh of the mind is pink ochre, marrow bone, animated by a bruise-coloured heart. An ecology of care, don't care, always can't care, so much more than never enough. And not just because the smallest experiences are also the biggest.

As in previous work, the artist summons a cast of recurring characters that expand and contract, shapeshift across ephemeral incarnations: the self is not solid, nor are its narratives.

Rooney's references engage with materiality and the human subject, but they are also deeply invested in the present moment: the pervasive dread fostered by political ideologies that casually discard the human, the humane; and the laden violence of our society, so resident in the home, in the female, in the body.

To whom, Rooney's work asks, bare faced, does one owe allegiance in this razor-sharp, carious environment? How to tell the truth of it? To whom, and in what form? Here, she is a woman whose face is painted wrongly onto her own face; there, he is an elephant who sobs. A different she dissolves into body parts that twist and turn and cannot be recomposed; another he is a dark, faceless spectre dogged by grey shadows. We have jagged teeth, the result of pressure and heat on the psyche and the soul; we do not know who we are. It is a dream. No, it is not.

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Text by Emily LaBarge

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Megan Rooney, born 1986 in Canada, lives and works in London, where she graduated from the Goldsmiths College in 2011.

In 2017 the artist had solo exhibitions at Tramway, Glasgow (with Performance and public billboard works); Freymond Guth, Basel and Division Gallery, Toronto a.o. and contributed to exhibitions at the David Roberts Art Foundation (with Performance), London and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, where she created a monumental mural for *Ministry of Internal Affairs Intimacy as Text*, curated by Natalia Sielewicz. Furthermore the artist performed *Poor Memor* im Palazzo Trevisan degli Ulivi as part of the Swiss Pavillion's discursive programme in the course of the 57th Venice Biennial.