

FRESH MEAT

*A GROUP SHOW OF NEW PAINTING
FEBRUARY 2008*

JAKE AIKMAN
JUSTIN BRETT
LISA BRICE
GEORGINA GRATRIX
REBECCA HAYSOM
TRASI HENEN
MATTHEW HINDLEY
LIZZA LITTLEWORT
LAUREN PALTE
LINDA STUPART
CURATED BY ROBERT SLOON

WHATIFTHEWORLD / GALLERY

A couple of young deer graze in the forestry undergrowth. The dappled light plays along their fawn hinds, as they browse on the fine greenery. Dreaming of happy deer things. A twig snaps. A panther, black as night, swoops out a tree and stalks away with a deer dangling by its throat. A trace of blood smears a leaf. A meal is sustenance for some, and gory death for others.

Painting has had a long and tiresome history. It has been the yardstick by which people measure art. It has moved in and out of fashion. At the height of the modernist movement it was declared dead, a victim of its own diminishing returns, on its last legs, eating its last dinner. Then a twig snapped.

This metaphor of life and death, destruction and creation, although sounding unfortunately like it could be sung by Elton John, moves in the paintings on this show too. It reflects on the vigour that contemporary painters have brought to the medium, having supped well. It also reflects on the themes many of the paintings work with. And it, perhaps, reflects on the time in which we live, where the world is not necessarily a safe place to hang out.

This can be seen in the work of Lizza Littlewort. Here we can observe a dark and despoiled earth. Dead fish litter the lakes; smoke billows over the Baghdad skyline and fields of GM grain loom in the haze. The only sources of illumination in the paintings are the flags of capitalism: glowing neon lights, spelling out words of greed and destruction disguised as salvation and liberation. The words also echo those used to describe food, cured, served, delivered, done. It is true, business feeds off disaster, but one is also faced with a moral dilemma. Our own ingestion is the only reason why business exists, and as the capitalist message of consumption spreads so do the disasters. As the title of the series confirms, the whole world will be fixed.

If Lizza focuses on the destructive side of the coin, Georgina Gratrix looks on the flip, but equally creepy, side. Watched over by the benign smile of Diana's ghost, young starlets cavort in the

flash bulbs, downing champagne and smiling at the endless dinner party of the rich. The paintings play with the bizarre culture of the useless, the celebrity photo. Every photo, as it captures that moment of youth, beauty or scandal, is a celebration of that moment passing. A little party for time passing, until like Diana or Britney, we crash. Everyone likes to see a good accident. The paintings however are not dour. They have a good healthy dose of absurdity and humour, which makes that accident a little more uncomfortable to look at.

The language of photographs, the deadliest of all media, also plays a significant role in the work of Linda Stupart. Deadliest because our continual image taking has accelerated our sense of nostalgia, till even ten minutes ago is an 'Ah, sweet, sigh,' moment. It makes us feel the weight of time. This series of paintings, entitled 'Where were you when the fun stopped,' depicts her close friends from photographs of them passed out after narcotic or other excesses. There is both an element of desire and of sadness. Desire for the youthful, reposed bodies, sexual in the innocence of sleep. Sadness for the impossibility of the fruition of that desire, because the fun has stopped and the time has gone.

Similar themes are at play in the work of Justin Brett. In his full-length portraits, the young men, eyes closed and at rest, look both erotic and eerily dead. The title, *Les Petit Morts*, is a play on the French, meaning literally the little deaths, but idiomatically referencing orgasms. Not necrophiliac or sado-masochist in outlook, the paintings rather examine the subtle connections between sex and death. It is the forces of Eros and Thanatos fighting it out, one life affirming and the other the impulse to turn life back into base matter. Jake Aikman's paintings, on the other hand,

THE LAST DINNER
ROBERT SLOON

are more forcibly erotic, using one of the most evident sexual symbols: the nurse. With a direct provocative stare, the nurse is the healer, the saviour of battle-worn soldiers. But she can also be the aggressor,

medically invading the body. When she pulls off the mask is it for a kiss, or to eat the heart she has just pulled out. Death it seems is inextricably linked to sex.

Rebecca Haysom's paintings take us into the jungle, where brave kids play. Looking like rare animals that have been hunted down by a tenacious photographer, they are not lost in the forest. This is their natural environment and they exhibit a calm strength of presence. However, they also show an incredible vulnerability. Their grip on their youthful identity could be quickly consumed by the wildness around them. Also playing with the motif of hunting, Lauren Palte, looks at the sexual and emotional politics of the family photograph. A young boy is dressed up, posing as a Zulu warrior, he grins at us while wielding a knife. A young girl looks nervous, while wearing cheetah print clothes. The fictions our parents created for us, the harmless dress-up and the significant act recording of it, which validates the fictions, mould our sexual identities. Boys must be the takers, the hunters, while girls must be the givers, the hunted. The man consumes, while the woman produces. But neither look particularly comfortable.

Lisa Brice looks at the domestic environment through two found paintings. The first is an old police shooting-target, painted and then printed, which shows a balaclava'ed terrorist menacing a family. The second is a calm household corner, in which she has painted in the outline of a dead body. The images look dated, like relics from the 80's. They seem to speak of how in the name of furthering the ideal of the white South African family horrible repression and atrocities occurred. And these are now coming back to haunt us. It is the irony of the fear that exists in contemporary suburban life. Trasi Henen examines suburbia in a different manner. Here roof beams are skewed, while windows fly out of the frame. The stairs climb to nowhere. The structures of where we live are torn apart, and empty of human presence. A great mass of construction is freed from constraints, and tumbles ominously in space, on the brink of collapse.

Matthew Hindley's approach is reflexive, as he breaks down the structures of painting itself. In a cannibalistic moment, he paints paintings themselves arranged on a wall. It is an exploration of the spaces painting provides, both formally and fanstically, while looking too at his own path as a painter. They appear to be looking back, history paintings, over how he got to where he is. Looking back, of course, is one way to move forward.

These painters, as a vastly incoherent group, linked mostly by their location in Cape Town, are eating well. They have passed the last dinner and are now enjoying breakfast, hopefully not in some greasy spoon on the outskirts, but right in the centre.



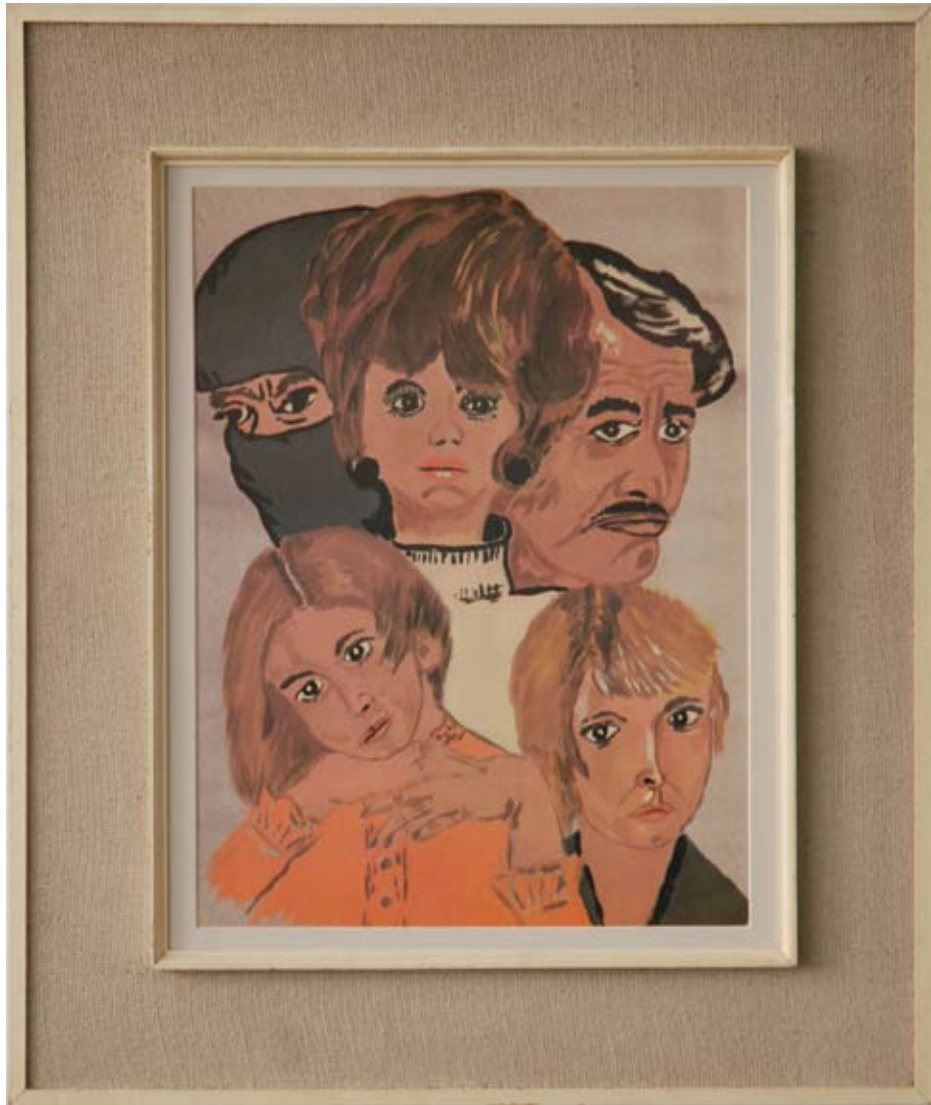
ICU 3
Oil on canvas
800 X 1000 mm

JAKE AIKMAN



Les Petit Morts (and details)
Watercolour on Paper
550 X 1050 mm

JUSTIN BRETT



Family Pack ST-2 (Shooting Target)
Found Object
700 X 810 mm

LISA BRICE



Party Girls (Lindsay and Samantha)
Oil on Canvas
600 X 800 mm

GEORGINA GRATRIX



Eat Your Friends and Family
Oil on Canvas
1200 X 800 mm

REBECCA HAYSOM



Untitled (and detail)
Mixed Media on Canvas
1100 X 3000 mm

TRASI HENEN



Untitled
Oil on Canvas
1600 X 2100 mm

MATTHEW LUKE HINDLEY



The Whole World Will Be Fixed
Oil on Canvas
Various

LIZZA LITTLEWORT



Cheetah, Hunter and Seapoint Granny
Oil on Canvas
Various

LAUREN PALTE



Where Were You When The Fun Stopped III
Watercolour on Paper
710 X 1000 mm

LINDA STUPART

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