



ROMANCE DIED ROMANTICALLY

CURATED BY AMY MARJORAM

DORD BURROUGH
KEVIN CHIN
CYBELE COX
MARIANNE DIAZ
CLINTON HAYDEN
YVETTE KING
IRENE HANENBERGH
GEORGIE MATTINGLEY
AMY MARJORAM
GRANT NIMMO
INEZ DE VEGA

Romance Died Romantically

The more marginalised and awkward romance seems to become, the more it locates the perfect place to hover. If romance is dead it haunts us.

Across the gallery there is a sense of intangibility, of chimerical imagery dissolving and hovering. We have inherited the seductive vapours of romance. A woman floats as though on a hill of incense, painted to the brink of excess by **Dord Burrough**, she levitates –a beckoning goddess with the lure and sting of a surreal dream. Dord is a painter of “speculative and introspective visions”¹ that Saskia Edwards suggests are a “kind of psychedelic fantasy somewhere between a pastel Elysium and a hallucinatory nightmare.”² A surreal and psychedelic air weaves along painted rivers and mountains, and into the scattered daisies and cartoonish plumes in the nearby works of **Grant Nimmo**. A murkiness always exists within the symbolic realm, dragged in by emotional complexity that clings to everything like cheap body-spray. Here we have Grant’s painted daisies, an oracle flower that if consulted about love probably means the real answer is ‘not enough’. “To be romantic is to exist under the sign of longing.”³

Romance Died Romantically is an invitation to pine and swoon. **Irene Hanenbergh**’s paintings entice from a distance, yet the promise of perfectly bound, coherent wonderlands retreat into a fantastic waver of brushstrokes as the viewer approaches. Charlotte Bronte wrote that “certain points, crises, certain feeling, joys, griefs and amazements, when reviewed, must strike us as something wildered and whirling, dim as a wheel fast spun.”⁴ Hanenbergh’s “windows of longing”⁵ strike at the heart of this; as mired exaltations and unfurled expectations combine.

Yvette King’s *Untitled, 2004 Luisiana nickel* shows a handshake, palms merged in a transaction touch with nothing else except the exterior slither of the coin that contains the gesture. Yvette writes of the exacting process to highlight this handshake, “it was a drunk and miserable thing (I just started with miserable, I added the drunk as I went) with my head phones on and a repeat list of sad songs with every skin fold sweat.”⁶ Like, *Untitled (confetti machine)* there is a sense of sadness intermingling with triumph, the bitter and the sweet. Yvette’s art seeks out “that weave of stupid and hilarious and painful and lovely.”⁷

Andy Warhol wrote, “During the 60s, I think, people forgot what emotions were supposed to be. And I don’t think they’ve ever remembered. I think that once you see emotions from a certain angle you can never think of them as real again.”⁸ This era still carries a chill towards intense emotions, towards euphoria and the gulf of hysteria –perhaps the sense of digitized life designing and recording every urge, and the frenetic pace and immediacy of communication, has led to a more calculated approach; or perhaps it is the other way around with the calculation in the lead. Either way, in the current wake of emotional containment

1 Edwards, S., *Dord Burrough’s ‘Feelers’ exhibition and the psychedelic unknown*, Aesthetic Fixation website, March 2014, unpaginated

2 Edwards, S., *Dord Burrough’s ‘Feelers’ exhibition and the psychedelic unknown*, Aesthetic Fixation website, March 2014, unpaginated

3 McGann, J., *Introduction* in *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002 p.xix

4 Bronte, C., *Villette*, 1853, Penguin Classic, New York, 1985, p.586

5 Edmond, M., *Irene Hanenbergh Dada-Roman*, Primer Magazine website, May 2015, unpaginated

6 Email communication with Yvette King, 2015

7 Email communication with Yvette King, 2015

8 *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back again)*, Andy Warhol, New York, 1975, p.27

and stringent life-curation, confessional art is on the out. Act cool, ignore the rising damp and don't spill emotionally all over the place. Be succinct.

"It's been a taboo in art to be autobiographical,"¹ suggests Ralph Rugoff, but it goes further than that; being emotionally dishonest is the dominant art form across most daily social exchanges. The acute self-consciousness this demands is the enemy of the romantic impulse. But romance haunts, it gets under our skin and in to our bone marrow. Regardless of how much romance is maligned, as ditzzy and clichéd and confected with sweet artifice, it remains and as long as it remains there will be some artists who rush towards romance, leaving the cool and calculated approach to others. **Inez de Vega** does this, committing to her confessional practice across video and live performances. *Suite* sees Inez plaintively sing, "No one even knows my name." This relatable sense of invisibility, sung against a backdrop of romantic cinematic fantasy, highlights the way depictions of romance and our own genuine feelings merge. Genuine tears can romantically fall whilst awareness of the timeless theatricality of doing this hums through the brain behind them.

The romance rush is in the confected deathly embrace within **Georgie Mattingley's** large-scale photograph. Death, love and longing in a bed of artificial flowers. It is across the shimmering lenticulars of **Marianne Diaz** and it is in **Clinton Hayden's** *Amoureuse* alter, where an arum lily penetrates a sex toy and a resin skull grinds its jaw. Romance is in the clinical concept of a 100 hour artificial candle and in every talisman we have ever grasped. It is all a set-up, except it isn't. Seeking out things that resonate, which is really what all artists do in their own way, is ultimately a romantic act. Then there is the concentrative trance of art making and the belief that it all matters. Clinton tells me he wants to play a mixed tape of love songs. I hope my favourites are on it. They probably will be, because we all sit alone in our rooms listening to the same songs.

For me romance is located in the red flowers that beckoned me. I photographed them, then nearly dragged the whole vine down as I drunkenly grasped to take the blooms with me. Intoxicated enough to not notice the thorns that scratched over my arms as I tussled to break the stems away. These barbs carved countless light crosshatches over my skin as I walked vine-laden down the street. This was the right moment for some cinematic rain to appear. I considered abandoning the floral vine but we had come too far together. Part woman, part vine, under a slick of pink dots of blood-tinged rain. The next morning the flowers had withered in disgust and my arms bared witness to their theft. Photography is to capture, to take; the images cling to me years later.

Romance is everywhere, but it is especially concentrated in certain areas. **Cybele Cox's** *Three Legged Column* appears like a fantastical transplant. Aspects of the commanding sculpture like the soft flesh of the sculpted knees and the ancient caryatid motif suggest something known, yet there is an intense strangeness, an enigmatic quality. Cybele's stated

1 Pollack, B., *Love Potions: Art and The Heart*, ArtNews website, February 2013, unpaginated

wish is to “create an atmosphere of expectant wonder.”¹ We are all tourists within the realm of romance. Kevin Chin’s painting *Out To Dry* shows a figure dipping a net into a pond, while another walks past, staring skyward. The fractured image suggests the moment of touristic transport, the romanticized ‘escapist fantasy’. The tourist attraction, like the romantic narrative, needs to be exotic enough to appear exciting whilst accommodating familiar expectations. We all visit the same ‘undiscovered’ places.

Succumb to the romantic impulse. The cynics went home early, our reverie won’t be disrupted.

“I experienced a happy feeling –a glad emotion which went warm to my heart, and ran lively through all my veins. For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live; not a mess of that manna I drearily eulogized awhile ago –which, indeed, at first melts on the lips with an unspeakable and preternatural sweetness, but which, in the end, our souls full surely loathe; longing deliriously for natural and earth-grown food, wildly praying Heaven’s Spirits to reclaim their own spirit-dew and essence –an aliment divine, but for mortals deadly. It was neither sweet hail, nor small coriander-seed –neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful and life-sustaining.”²

—Charlotte Bronte, *Villette*

Amy Marjoram, 2015

Image credit: Inez de Vega, *Suite*, 2012, Single Channel Video, 1:58 mins

STRANGE NEIGHBOUR
395 GORE ST FITZROY AUSTRALIA 3065
03 90418727
INFO@STRANGENEIGHBOUR.COM
WWW.STRANGENEIGHBOUR.COM

¹ Stromqvist, N., *The Golden Flower Pot: Cybele Cox and Ali Noble*, Das Platforms website, 2015, unpaginated
² Bronte, C., *Villette*, 1853, Penguin Classic, New York, 1985, p.318