

ArtReview

Josh Kline: Quality of Life

47 Canal, New York, 3 September – 13 October

By Laura McLean-Ferris



Quality of Life, 2013 (installation view). Photo: Joerg Lohse. Courtesy 47 Canal, New York.

Whitney Houston has been hitting the [Molly](#) at Brooklyn warehouse parties recently. So she says. She was clubbing in Berlin ten years before you even thought about it. Houston's face glitches and twitches, but she remains deadpan, bored, as though riffing on some kind of hymnbook that has been written about herself. "I've partied in every city in the world since forever," she explains with complete dedication to her vacant soundbite.

Josh Kline's video *Forever 48* (all works 2013) shows Houston interviewed by a talk-show host, and suggests that it might have become easier for the star, who died last year from drug-related problems, to party on every continent since she stopped having to bother with that niggling problem of, well, being alive; now she can dedicate herself to being pure personality. Houston takes a sip of green juice, the healthy New Yorker's refreshment *du jour*, and it slides under her mouth to another mouth behind: a face that flickers below her expressionless, glittery, heavy-lashed mask.

In this video, and in *Forever 27*, in which we meet a green-haired, e-cigarette-smoking Kurt Cobain, Kline has employed real-time imaging software, developed by [Arturo Castro and Kyle McDonald](#), to layer the visages of dead stars on top of live actors' faces. These moving digital masks are used as free-floating signifiers of celebrity 'personality' that can be detached from the star and worn by anyone as a kind of digital prosthesis. They are eerie, persuasive, memorable works.

While we are all increasingly in on the game of crafting public personas, we need to be wary of what we sacrifice: Houston admits that the only aspect of herself that she felt was truly hers was, in fact, the gaping cavern of depression that she tried to block up with cocaine; Cobain on the other hand offers us his stomach problems and the miracles of probiotics.

Quality of Life builds on Kline's recently curated summer exhibition [ProBio at PS1](#), which featured Ian Cheng, Carissa Rodriguez and DIS among others, and which excellently articulated a number of visions of bleeding-edge techno culture in ecstatic communion with the body. Kline's sculptural works here and there employ a clean Apple Store aesthetic that is both corporate and medical – in *Quality of Life* we are offered hybrid objects such as IV bags full of [Ambien](#) and chamomile for sleep, or spirulina and Red Bull for energy, or blood doped with Green Vibrance powder.

But wait, hold the iPhone: pharmaceutical aesthetics? White vitrines? A dead-eyed, sardonic view of the current conditions of labour? The physical impossibility of death in the mind of... right. Sculpturally we might have found our era's Damien Hirst (and I write this as someone who would defend Hirst's 1990s work). Kline's works are cynical blossoms grown from soils of bad economic policy, base desire and fear (and I write this as someone with no health insurance who bought a chia seed drink and a kale salad in the last 24 hours). But those slipping digital masks in Kline's videos gladly do far more than this, and suggest that Kline, as both artist and likely spokesperson for his scene, is moving beyond the diagnostic into a deeper philosophy of the surface.

This article was first published in the December 2013 issue.