

frieze

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TILL THE STARS TURN COLD

Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Glasgow, UK

Words, and how their meaning is mediated and mangled, formed the premise of this group show curated by Kyla McDonald and frieze contributor Laura McLean-Ferris, which was originally presented at S1 Artspace, Sheffield. Featuring six artists based in New York, London and Glasgow – most of them young enough to be described as ‘digital native’ - the work addressed technology’s role, both accidental and deliberate, in the dissemination and distortion of language. Through film, sculpture, painting, audio, and writing this glitchy, unpredictable relationship was sharply and entertainingly exposed.

The exhibition took its title from a scene in the 1952 film *Singin' in the Rain*, set in Hollywood in the 1920s, when silent movies were giving way to new-fangled talkies: ‘Our love will last till the stars turn cold,’ says actress Lina Lamont (played by Jean Hagen). Only she doesn’t, because her squawky tones have been replaced by the more appealing voice of Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds) - Lina’s beautiful face may fit, but for those words to really communicate their message, a warmer, more seductive delivery is required.

Josh Kline’s video, *Forever 48* (2013) also plays with the relationship between words and pictures. A restaging/reimagining of the infamous 2002 Diane Sawyer ABC News ‘crack is whack,’ interview with Whitney Houston, this short film scrutinizes the battle between public persona and private reality. The artist also adds a new layer of manipulation and story telling: footage from Houston from the original interview is digitally superimposed over the face of a young and healthy-looking actress. The words, too, are not all they might first seem - Kline has rewritten the dead popstar’s script so that Houston is nightclubbing in Berlin and seemingly carrying on as if her 2012 death had never happened. Well, don’t we all live forever in the digital space, our actions decontextualized and replayed, morphing and growing until we become unrecognizable to ourselves?

There was more slipper unreality on show in Megan Rooney’s *A Petit Maison* (2014), in which the artist created an island of pushed-together mattresses and couch cushions, the latter formed into cartoonish female dolls with fake hair, makeup and lashes. In this dreamy, comfortable setting, the viewer was invited to lie back and listen to a seven-minute audio work on one of the white CD Walkmans dotted around the installation. Consisting of a series of barely connected sentences, it formed a soft-focus narrative that could be read as either profound or totally meaningless - like a street of enigmatic Twitter posts, all lifestyle choices and signifiers of social status.



Josh Kline, *Forever 48*, 2013, video still

Cally Spooner has ongoing interest in lip-synching - her ‘musical’ *And You Were Wonderful, On Stage* (2013/14), originally presented at Performa 13 and then at Tate Britain last year, turned PR speak and social media chatter into songs for performers to mime to. Here, her essay *On Facilitation (The New Elvis)* (2015) - double-sided A4 sheets stacked on the floor - recounts the story of pop’s most notorious lip-sync pretenders, 1980s pop duo Milli Vanilli. Exposed as the pretty faces and dance moves for someone else singing when a technical problem cut short their performance at the 1989 MTV Awards, Spooner places the pair’s story in the wider context of our increasing reliance on technology to communicate our thoughts and desires. In her video, *Baby I got Better Things to Be Doing With My Time* (2014), played on a flat-screen TV above the printed essays, we see a dancer prone on the floor, unwilling to take part in the choreographed performance expected of her. The words ‘COMING SOON’ flash on the screen - an unheeded and unconvincing call to action.

There was more thwarted performance in Kathryn Elkin’s video, *The Passion, Collage #2* (2015), with its confused wordplay and continually rehearsing band, while Michael Dean’s sculptures of screwed-up dictionary pages and black concrete tongues suggested the physicality of speech and its brutal suppression. In Tyler Coburn’s poem *Somdomites* (2012) - the misspelled title culled from a note by the Marquess of Queensberry to Oscar Wilde - the unreadable, flame-like font evoked the destructive potential of language. This force was an undercurrent throughout the show and, by unpicking the way in which technology is increasingly turning private conversation into public performance, this small, tightly curated exhibition placed the very idea of ‘self expression under scrutiny.

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