

trevor shimizu @ 47 canal reviewed
by F.T. Hinton on 13/07/2016



Trevor Shimizu, 'Jessica Alba', 2016 (detail) Courtesy 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse

“Try to imagine this abyss: dizzying visions. No identity lies therein. A mother’s identity survives only thanks to the well-known fact that consciousness is lulled by habit, wherein a woman protects herself along the frontier that divides her body and makes an expatriate of her child.” The subject of Julia Kristeva’s 1977 essay *Sabat Mater* is not the child —“irremediably alien” —but the mother-parent to which it only bears relation while carried inside of her. The *mater dolorosa*, merely signified by seven sorrows, weeping by her son’s corpse, is otherwise silenced, mute as she forcibly, indelibly, renounces her child to the social exteriors, which the immaculate womb once shielded against. It is this filial catastrophe, the fractures and abstract separation of parent and kin (however not rooted in Christian, woman-as-mother gender essentialism) that is explored in Trevor Shimizu’s solo exhibition *New Work* at 47 Canal, running from June 24 to July 30.

Immediately visible amongst the large canvas oil-paintings are a collection of comfort objects and icons: a teddy bear, a stuffed otter and companion starfish, the Dutch rabbit character Miffy —outside actors that facilitate peace for the parent to the extent in which they console the child. On the adjacent wall is ‘Baby Expert (Eating)’ painted with ill-defined, faint lines, vague silhouettes with blank-stares, exchanging tips (seeking relief) on getting their children to sleep. Two separate works depict sleep-deprived parents who appear as if they experienced forced-viewing torture à la *Clockwork Orange*: bloodshot, wilted eyes immune to stimulation. The bipedal robot-parent watching a video of robot fails before not-sleep is watching itself.



Trevor Shimizu, *New Work*, 2016. Exhibition view. Courtesy 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse

To what degree does a shirt collar or a nursing breast obfuscate the parent's face as the child is held? 'Breastfeeding in Public (1)' shows the parent nursing with closed eyes, nearly permeated by harsh, grey brush strokes. The public sphere, too, widens the abyss between parent and child, as Shimizu notes public nursing is a "common scenario that can go well or very poorly". The cultural submerges the natural, as it usually does. 'Breast Pump' elucidates another break, mechanizing nourishment, the silent child can be fed rooms apart from the silent mother after she forfeits milk to the machine. Kristeva promulgates that the classical, Christic Madonna's release of milk and sorrowful tears helps to reify the 'extralinguistic' complexity of her child while ossifying the mother-subject as non-verbal.

Shimizu's paintings of actress-model-businesswoman-celebrity Jessica Alba operate as a logical opposite of the aching, under-slept parent, showing one of the few human smiles amongst the works. Posing next to the company logo for her all-natural baby products, The Honest Company, Alba symbolizes the pathos of far-reaching materialist history (as objects are imbued with virulent sociability) that render our caretakers as ephemeral agents. The stalled logic of the maternity industry is that the FDA does not oversee pre-natal vitamins but is implicated in the pharmacological industry that manages our biology, beginning when the umbilical cord is cut.

The parent painted with weak outlines or sullen expressions, mostly obscured, delineates the conditions of their existence as one of servility to the outsides of the womb and child's home: stuffed animals, the celebrity-mother, self-help books, structures that negate *femmes* metastasize throughout. If not defined solely by tears as is the crying Madonna, then *New Work* suggests the parent-caretaker may grasp at preservation, but never without resignation to



Trevor Shimizu, 'Baby Expert (Walking)', 2016. Install view. Courtesy 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse

Trevor Shimizu's *New Work* is on at New York's 47 Canal, running June 24 to July 30, 2016.

NEW YORK- TREVOR SHIMIZU: “NEW WORKS” AT 47 CANAL THROUGH JULY 30TH, 2016



Trevor Shimizu, *Sophia's Teddy* (2016), via Art Observed



Trevor Shimizu, *Miffy* (2016), via Art Observed

Currently on view at 47 Canal, Trevor Shimizu has realized a swirling fantasia of parenthood, a series of paintings, sculptures, and video that turn the act of parenting into an otherworldly, almost surreal experience through his ragged, often comedic sensibility.

Shimizu's work here operates in a shared landscape of delirium, a mutual bending of reality that he seems to trace through both the developing motor skills and perception of a newborn, and the sleep-deprived, bleary-eyed mental landscape of a new parent.

His subjects are immense recreations of teddy bears, breastfeeding scenes, and wide-eyed parents, each turned towards caricatures by his aesthetic sensibility. As Shimizu notes in the comically precise press materials for the show, these toys and distractions are less for the baby themselves, as they are for the parents, a way of softening the blow of wailing children and perpetual exhaustion through bright colors and soft surfaces.

This fragmented reality, a domestic space twisted by the stress of raising children, is afforded additional expressive capacity by the sparse figuration that the artist has long used to impressive effect. His quickly-executed, almost slapdash approach leads to a wealth of material in the show, and series of variations on his selected themes that echo the aforementioned parental experience.

Stuffed animals and celebrity parents (Jessica Alba is a recurring subject here, thanks to her parenting goods company Honest Co.) are realized through quick, overlapping lines and blurred washes of color that make the images feel all the more foreign, and increasingly psychedelic, as if this self-contained world was slowly losing its coherence.

Shimizu seems to drive at the experience of parenting as its own self-contained universe, as a series of cultural objects and awarenesses that isolate the experience of parenting into its own universe. The show even includes a "Pro Shop," with a putting green and other works exploring the long-standing respite of the golf course for the average male. The rolling expanse of quiet, still green space marks itself as a private domain, away from the harried life at home, which Shimizu again subverts with his video PGA Tour Live, mocking the concept of the mid-life crisis through a series of videos implying a dad browsing through extreme sports magazines and catalogs. The work is also joined by a series of "limited edition" Trevor Shimizu branded Reebok polo shirts.

It's this constant inclusion and distancing of Shimizu from the landscape of fatherhood that gives the show its best moments. At its core, the works are as much autobiographical as they are snarky aesthetic adventures through the realm of modern parenting, perhaps best exemplified in one of the last works on view, *Domesticated Man*. As Shimizu draws himself, a shaggy, rough-shod self-portrait, his press release text challenges and mocks the concept of his role as civilized patriarch: "I looked in the mirror and made a face that I thought a domesticated man would make."

- D. Creahan



Trevor Shimizu, *Baby Expert (Eating)* (2016), via Art Observed



Trevor Shimizu, *Jessica Alba* (2016), via Art Observed



Trevor Shimizu, *Putting Green* (2016), via Art Observed