

## We Are All Cats

ZURICH, SWITZERLAND  
Karma International



Trevor Shimizu, *sexy cat 4*, 2014,  
Oil on canvas

Are we all cats? We are all internet users, and therefore know that at times the web's primary use seems to be the distribution of images of them. Mieko Meguro, artist and director of New York's 3A Gallery, and her husband Dan Graham may not have had this in mind when they conceived this group exhibition (a smaller version of which was shown at 3A in 2014) yet it is well nigh impossible not to view the show through a http filter. Particularly when it includes Trevor Shimizu's work *CatTime* (2014), a small canvas on which the principle element is a print of an Instagram image of a handsome cat looking at another image on a smartphone. If Richard Prince needles by reproducing the everyday sleaze of social media, here, in contrast, was a volley of screen-standard cuteness.

Meguro's interest, the press release explains, grew from observing a boy playing for many hours with an animal sticker book, and she subsequently created a zine with illustrations of lions, tigers, cheetahs and the like, explaining that they are, indeed, all cats. This whimsical tone pervades the show, in which the zine and a hair-filled brush become her installation *May 19th, 2014, a day with cat* (2014) alongside works including eight ink drawings by Wineke Gartz entitled *How to Draw a Cat in Political Meeting Rooms* (2015) or several black and white ink, pencil and acrylic cat head portraits by Paul McMahon, all but one from 2015. There are some vanilla hybrid catwomen sketched in oil by Shimizu and his swiftly painted diptych *Kinky Cat* (2013): one canvas depicting a sitting cat, the other the reverse perspective of the animal watching a woman giving oral sex. And a face-off staged by Frank Sturmer between cats filmed in repose with a soundtrack of birdsong that plays on two monitors entitled *Untitled (Utopia concreta)*, (2012).

Yet for all the lightheartedness, collectively this made for a dispiriting exhibition. Is it a perspicacious observation of how the internet homogenizes information and renders its users idiots, or is the show itself just creating more clickbait? The numbing effect of thematic exhibitions that are this literal seems accentuated; works that in isolation would engage become mere wallpaper. Meguro's oils on canvas nearly disappear, which is unfortunate as each of her largely black and white cats with bright single-colour backgrounds, *Nevada 1-4* (2014) is quietly unnerving. These works combine an economical line in a Japanese ink style with contemporary snapshot framing and fills of colour from a design vocabulary. They hint at a human-feline relationship of mutual reliance and mistrust. Watching Sturmer's installation, even accepting the dramatic license of his setup (the cats were filmed in isolation, the soundtrack is unrelated), one can marvel at the animals' ability to be concurrently relaxed and attentive, or at their skills of contortion. Yet en masse, these works only allude to the more complex interaction, or lack of it, between them and us. There is little sense of how we anthropomorphize these animals, interpret their silences, cope with their loose loyalties, admire their athleticism, or how (some of us) can be delighted by them. Not to mention the cultural history of the animal. If this exhibition deliberately eschews a more complex engagement with its topic, then perhaps it is a fitting metaphor for the fathomless superficiality of the web.

—by Aoife Rosenmeyer