

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.

Josh Kline

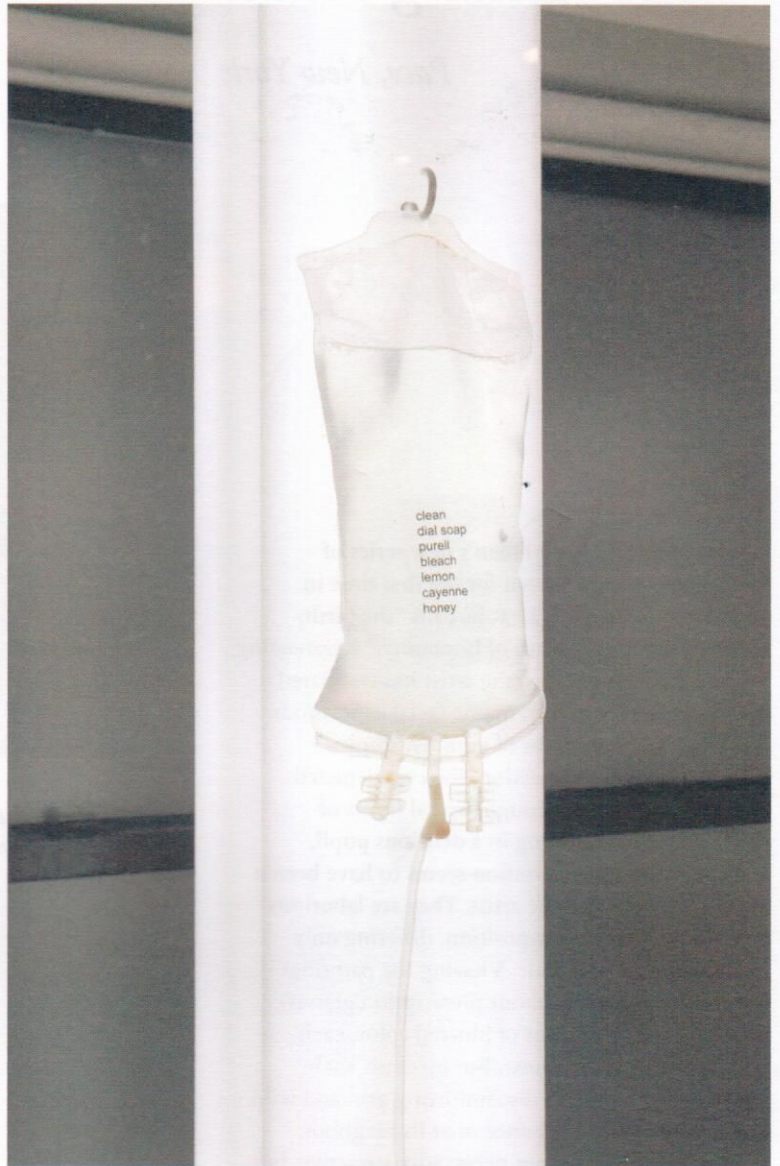
47 Canal, New York

The theme of Josh Kline's exhibition is youthful desire, as promoted around the world by the narcissistic American pop culture media machine — the preeminent cash crop of the USA nowadays. Whitney Houston and Kurt Cobain have been singled out as subjects that exemplify this for their success and subsequent self-destruction. Both are portrayed here by actors in video interviews.

A green-haired Cobain looks grungy in a torn plaid lumberjack shirt. His whining voice mingles with that of the belligerent Houston character across the room. As one or the other loop reboots, various phrases are isolated. When I arrived, Cobain's mimesis was explaining his position on suicide and firearms. Kline scripted eighty percent of the verbiage, while the rest is taken from actual quotes. The shots of the musical pop stars are choppy and distorted like skipping vinyl, while interviewer Diane Sawyer is smooth as silk in her designer garb and annoyingly patronizing mellifluous voice. Yet neither interviewee masticates and spits out Sawyer in the way that a sadistic young Bob Dylan might have in real life or in Todd Haynes's movie *I'm Not There* (2007). Rather, they mostly complain about the trials and hardships of fame and fortune.

In addition, we are presented with the trappings of medically sustained false youth. A couple of IV bags are suspended on glowing pillars with facetious contents printed on their skin. There are also three cases on pedestals — they look like lunchboxes and contain blood doped with an anti-depressant. A few hollow heads festooned with patterns from fashionable designers are presented atop acrylic cubes filled with their favorite liquors. So, all in all, we have remedies for the pains and truths of aging, and statements from two of history's good-who-died-young. It's a deservedly contemptuous critique of what is marketed as important to our society as a whole because, well, it *is* what is important to our society as a whole.

by CHRISTOPHER HART CHAMBERS



Josh Kline, *Clean Drip*, 2013. IV Bag, Redbull, Yerba Mate, Emergen-C, sugar, spirulina, Provigil, gasoline, lightbox column (plexiglas, LEDs, wood).

Courtesy 47 Canal, New York.



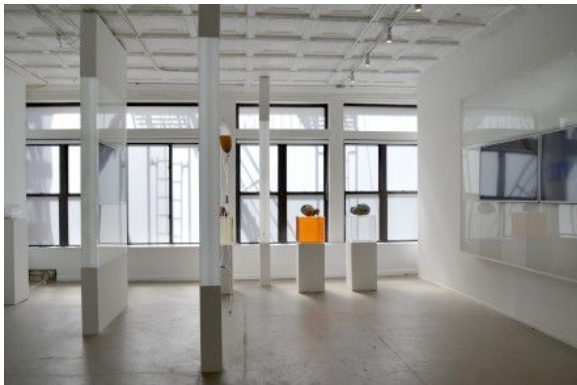
NEW YORK – JOSH KLINE: “QUALITY OF LIFE” AT 47 CANAL THROUGH OCTOBER 13TH, 2013

October 2nd, 2013



Josh Kline, *Forever 27* (2013), Courtesy 47 Canal

Quality of Life is Josh Kline's first solo exhibition since 2011, and directly follows his having organized this summer's high-profile *Pro-Bio* group show at MoMA PS1. The exhibition acts as something of a statement of intent for the New York artist and deals with themes increasingly familiar within Kline's growing body of work, looking at the commodification of identity and youth, alongside the forging of new, posthuman understandings of the body.



Josh Kline, *Quality of Life* (Installation View), via Sasha Patkin for Art

Observed *Quality of Life* is distinctly future-gazing in its orientation, drawing on the present day lifestyle economy's obsession with youth to offer a vision of prosthetically-enhanced young creatives. Through canny plays on the likes of social media branding, health food trends, and dead popular culture icons Kurt Cobain and Whitney Houston, Kline articulates a world in which commodification is dramatically extending into our very understandings of ourselves.



Josh Kline, *Energy Drip* (2013), via Sasha Patkin for Art Observed

Among *Quality of Life's* installations is a series of IV drips with names like *Energy Drip* and *Sleep Drip*, which are filled with combinations of health food ingredients, energy enhancements, household cleaning products and pharmaceuticals. They seem like the next logical step for diets that increasingly blur the distinction between the natural and the synthetic. Similarly, tucked away in the corner of the gallery are three semi-transparent coolers containing blood doped with Welbutrin, Green Vibrance Powder, and Agave Nectar, respectively. Also notable is the re-appearance of Kline's famed 3D-printed sculptures, taking the form here of molds of designers heads wearing Eckhaus Latta, Gerlan Jeans, and Tim Coppins, an allusion perhaps to the interchangeable and self-generating characteristics of cultural capital.



Josh Kline, *Forever 21* (2013), Courtesy 47 Canal

Forming the centerpiece of *Quality of Life* however is a series of three video installations, “Forever 21,” “Forever 27,” and “Forever 48.” “Forever 21” sees a version of the youth clothing retailers logo disintegrate into a swirling mass of pills, suggesting the manner in which youth has become a marketable, saleable commodity, whether that’s in the form of a look, a lifestyle, or a pill.

“Forever 27” and “Forever 48” are perhaps the exhibition’s most conceptually realized and fascinating works.

Mapping Kurt Cobain and Whitney Houston’s respective faces onto those of actors, the videos depict mock-television documentary interviews with the dead singers, as if they were still alive today. The videos are rich in present-day signifiers and wry details, with Cobain smoking an e-cig and discussing his discovery of probiotics, while Houston describes going to illegal Brooklyn warehouse parties.



Josh Kline, *ThinkStrong* (2013), via Sasha Patkin for Art Observed

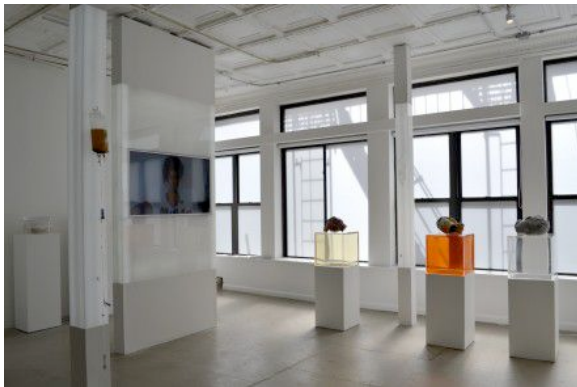


Josh Kline, *Quality of Life* (Installation View), via Sasha Patkin for Art Observed

The exhibition has the feel of a particularly hip juice bar or a lifestyle brand flagship store, one of those disorientingly futuristic spaces that blurs one's sense of both time and place. Kline explores the hold that youth culture has over our lives and aspirations with an uncommon deftness, and sheds light on the intertwined cultural and biological demands of the endless commodification of the present.



Josh Kline, *De-friending Knives* (2013), via Sasha Patkin for Art Observed



Josh Kline, *Quality of Life* (Installation View), via Sasha Patkin for Art Observed



Josh Kline, *Designer's Head in Eckhaus Latta* (Mike) (2013), via Azra Bhagat for Art Observed

—T. Gentles



DIScuss | Josh Kline's Quality of Life



October 2nd, 2013 by Lorenzo Durantini

Lorenzo Durantini is an artist, curator and writer working between New York, London and Florence.



Josh Kline, Quality of Life installation view, 2013

Press releases are terrible and awful things; especially when written in hollow International Art English, that peculiar mistranslation of French philosophy mixed with mondegreens of 19th century German ideology as misinterpreted by Eastern European intellectuals. A pleonastic meatloaf usually cooked up by the ever growing cognitariat, that particular class of underpaid yet overachieving cultural workers that go radical enough to hit overtime but not far enough to throw a wrench into the assembly line.

Josh Kline is one of the few artists who has succeeded in resurrecting this staid grey medium into a tight and crystaline fighting form. Mini-manifestos without Oedipal complexes.

Let's start with a mini-mix then, you can download the full release online.

Youth is the ultimate commodity in a society of dying people.
Inside your body, youth is a nonrenewable resource.
You're either in the desirable demographic or you're not.

Once youth starts slipping away—at a glacial pace in the beginning and then like a horrible rampaging avalanche—aging becomes a battle of attrition, a chilly arthritic retreat from Moscow in your telomeres and mitochondria.

Companies sell you back your own youth, preserved in deadstock eBay amber or reissued and updated in this season's colors

Generational opposition is a built-in feature of our economic system. Planned human obsolescence.

Aging generations are the failed states of the future.

I will always love/drain you.

Kline's second solo at 47 Canal Quality of Life is open until the 13th of October. It includes video interviews with Kurt Cobain and Whitney Houston, reappropriated Bank of America branding animations, doped blood in clear acrylic cast iceboxes, UV drips, 3D printed heads of fashion design atop their favourite tippie all held together by luminous airport/hospital/retail plinths that glow a cold corporate radiance.

Open until the 13th of October at 47 Canal.
All photos Joerg Lohse.

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CRITICS' PICKS New York

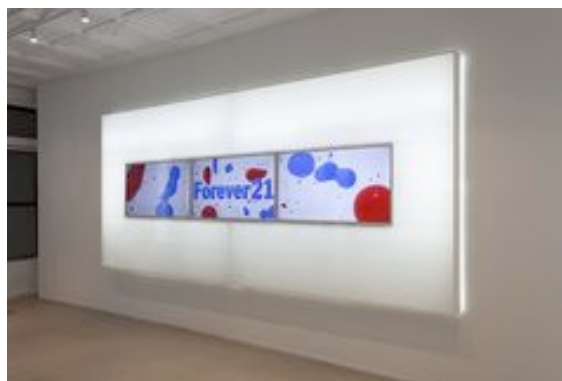
Josh Kline

47 CANAL

47 Canal Street, 2nd Floor

September 3–October 13

“Quality of Life,” Josh Kline’s second solo exhibition, feels like a culmination of sorts, certainly in regards to the resurgence of posthumanism in contemporary art—in the context of his work, bodies that have surpassed the human condition and its inherent weaknesses—the discussion of which Kline has galvanized by his corporeal artwork and unflagging curatorial endeavors. Two years after his solo debut at 47 Canal, Kline’s new installation trades the sterility of a Duane Reade for that of a cryogenics lab, replete with glowing walls, sardonic empowerment cocktails hanging in minimally branded IV bags, and refrigerated coolers containing blood transfused with twenty-first-century “necessities” like Wellbutrin and agave nectar.



View of “Quality of Life,” 2013.

Hyperbole is at the root of Kline’s work, so it follows to compare the urgency of “Quality of Life” to the canonical series of social critique, Martha Rosler’s “House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home,” 1967–72, though the space of Kline’s political crisis is more interior than Rosler’s domestic rooms: Our bodies as a site for branding, consuming, and the pushing of biological norms.

Masterfully unsteady, Kline’s videos quietly pull the rug out from under us as viewers by indirectly addressing our complicity in seemingly benign societal behaviors, whether unpaid internships or attempts to remain young. Within the installation, two videos-cum-sculptures, *Forever 27* and *Forever 48* (all works 2013), take the form of interviews between a Diane Sawyer-type journo and the late tragic icons of generations X and Y, Kurt Cobain and Whitney Houston, who are here both alive and well (despite a few bumps along the road). Spry models pose as the eternal stars, their familiar faces digitally composited onto the actor’s, in part underscoring our society’s celebrity fixations and the hierarchy of contemporary consumption (e-cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, and so on). *Kurt & Whitney (Extras)*, the most compelling (and anxiety inducing) work in the exhibition, documents Kline unflinchingly posing a slew of personal questions to the off-duty models—still clad in celebrity simulacra—ranging from supporting oneself financially to juicing. Perhaps too far gone, identity politics in 2013, Kline seems to lament, is no longer defined by one’s form of protest; it begins with the supplements you pick to get you through the day.

— Beau Rutland

Josh Kline

'Quality of Life'

47 Canal

47 Canal Street, between Orchard and Ludlow Streets, Lower East Side

Through Oct. 13

In Josh Kline's latest exhibition there is no such thing as aging gracefully — mainly because, in his dystopian universe, there is no such thing as aging. Mr. Kline recently organized a group show about the "posthuman" body for MoMA PS1's "Expo"; in his latest solo outing, he evokes this not-too-distant future of robotics, prosthetics and bioengineering with conceptual sculptures and videos. Some of the objects come across as bad one-liners, but the overall mood is deeply unnerving; here is a young artist telling us that youth is for sale and, as he writes in the news release, that "aging generations are the failed states of the future."

Overall, the installation suggests some combination of a juice bar, a human growth hormone clinic and the Staatling-Wapachung Corporation from Gary Shteyngart's novel "Super Sad True Love Story." Intravenous bags hold concoctions like "Energy Drip," which consists of Red Bull, yerba maté, Emergen-C, sugar, spirulina, Provigil and gasoline. Meanwhile, three refrigerated cast-urethane coolers hold blood "doped" with agave nectar, Wellbutrin and something called Green Vibrance Powder.

These futuristic cocktails set the scene for two darkly comic videos, which posit that Kurt Cobain and Whitney Houston are still alive and have made themselves available for interviews on daytime television. This odd premise allows Mr. Kline to explore the idea that pop culture is in a state of arrested development, and that our rock stars can neither burn out nor fade away. "Kurt" talks about shopping at



47 CANAL

Some of the works in Josh Kline's show at 47 Canal, "Quality of Life."

the food co-op and taking up painting; by the time he jokes about getting a tattoo that reads "Ars longa, vita brevis," it's clear that the reverse may soon be true.

KAREN ROSENBERG