

Dane Lovett

Slow Rise / Burning Up

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**CREATIVE
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*Slow Rise / Burning
Up*
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You used to tell the truth

The uncontained body is a mis-behaving one. Pregnant women and perhaps acne-ed teenagers possess an archetypical unruliness, compelled by unseen forces. The rest of us manage other kinds of emotional infringements, for which we are chastised. We are called 'hyper', 'over the top', 'hysterical', 'nuts', or worst of all, 'childish'. We inhabit all kinds of 'too much'. Baby looks to mother's face for comfort and prelinguistic guidance, practising giving and receiving 'the right way'. So it follows that we mis-step and distort what we have so carefully mirrored when under duress. Instances of extimacy offer an insight, saying so much more, in the wrong-way.

So, express yourself - but how? German Austrian sculptor F. X Messerschmidt (1736-1783) made serious and stately imperial portraits, but he is best known for a series of 64 sculptures known as the "Character Heads". Each head is an examination of the torturously felt. These "canonical grimaces" were made as protective statues in response to paranoid hallucinations and nightmarish fantasies of torture that plagued the sculptor. The series was intended as a visual encyclopedia of human expression, each

bust exploring a full engagement of the facial musculature. A way of working it out of the body and through the portrait. Messerschmidt makes the material misbehave and unlike the expressionless official portraits he also made, the “Character Heads” provide insight through fixation.

Burning Up was released in 1983 on the same day as the opening of this exhibition. The music video begins with a series of jump-cuts between shots of a goldfish in a bowl and a marble bust. Because of her parted wavy hair this bust is likely a representation of Hera, the Greek Goddess of women, marriage, family and childbirth. Hera possessed a complex duality: blessing married women, but unhappy in her own marriage to an unfaithful Zeus, she took revenge on other men. In the music video the telegenic 25 year old Madonna is dancing, in a white dress, mostly on her knees on a darkened road. Later, cutaways to a man who we presume is her lover suggest he is driving towards her. At the end of the video Madonna is in the driver’s seat wearing a kind of self-satisfied, knowing grin, with her male counterpart presumably left behind.

Burning Up was the second single from Madonna’s eponymous debut album, released just prior to her breakout hit, ‘Holiday’. But this song and music video featured uncompromising symbols of where she was - losing her virginity as a career move - and where she was destined to go (over-hyped and elusive, saying so much, yet speaking so little). The video and her music at the time subverted the sexualised construction of female victimhood and recast female sexuality as powerful, performative and provocative. The Madonna cliché is that she is the great reinventer. With each album or tour,

she dies and is mythically reborn. But this is no biblical death, it is entirely sexual; it is the little death. And we have to ask: will she ever stop coming (back)?

Dane Lovett’s series of paintings fixes on close-up stills of Madonna’s face from the music video *Burning Up*. This face in motion, stuttering between frames should be unrecognisable, and yet she is still there. Lovett has engaged in a painterly distortion, stretching the portrait’s proportions, side-swiping her teeth, working loosely over eyes, cheeks and nose. The series should reflect a violence in this kind of necromancy, and it isn’t romantic or nostalgic either. Instead, Lovett holds her both as a dream and a culturally metabolised symbol. The paintings are moving in two opposite directions at once, adding layers to undo the surface of these carefully appointed expressions. Despite this, her image is stubbornly fixed.

These paintings speak to both compassion and critique, and the way that a studio practice such as Lovett’s is compulsive iteration, because you never know what subterranean forces will emerge. The practice communicates a submission to the cult of the image and a desire to strain and stretch it. Lovett is exploring what these images can hold and bear. In the repetition is a search for instances of truth within the performance, and the series is a test of how we can look again and again at what we think we know and own. At this strange moment where public interest has waned and Madonna isn’t forgotten but has been culturally absorbed, Lovett seems to discover her image is both endlessly true and a total fiction.

Amita Kirpalani
2019

Dane Lovett has been based in Melbourne working as a painter for the past 12 years. He received his MFA from the Victorian College of Art in 2016, his BFA (Honors) Victorian College of Art in 2007 and a BFA from Queensland University of Technology in 2005. Recent solo exhibitions include *Dog Show* at STATION, Melbourne (2018) and *Nightshades* at Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney (2017). In 2018 he completed a residency research trip to the United Kingdom and Iceland supported by the Australia Council for the Arts. He was also awarded an Australia Council Tokyo Studio residency in 2011. He was winner of the Royal Bank of Scotland Emerging Art Prize for 2010, the 2009 winner of the Clayton Utz Emerging Art Award and the Qantas Spirit of Youth Award (SOYA) in 2005. His work is held in a number of public and private collections including Artbank and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. He is represented by STATION in Melbourne and Sullivan+Strumpf in Sydney.

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