

Josh Kline

47 Canal

Typically, when an art work is referred to as being ‘of the moment’, it’s meant derisively. Our romantic ideals require art to transcend culture and time, to live on eternally rather than in a fashionable present. ‘Dignity and Self Respect’, Josh Kline’s first solo exhibition in New York, unapologetically did none of this. His objects (lit by the cold glow of the kind of LEDs often seen in shop displays), photographs and videos are time capsules of this very moment, of New York, of Kline’s circle of collaborators and friends born in the mid-1970s and early ’80s. The caustic press release adeptly described his world (that of creative sector workers with multiple jobs) as fighting a losing battle, both economically and psychologically, with the city’s increasing championing of celebrity and commercial endeavours: ‘James Franco holds down 19 careers. Why can’t you?’

And, with the variety of products offered by a typical American pharmacy chain-store, why can’t we? *Sleep is for the Weak* (all works 2011) comprises three Bodum cafetières filled with Red Bull, DayQuil and Coke Zero, and ‘infused’ with Vivarin, Dentyne Ice chewing gum and Ibuprofen. Composed of mass-marketed products, this homemade yet utterly artificial combination carries a quiet threat of the next iteration of hyped consumables to come. A similar message comes with Kline’s portrayal of the millennial generation in the video *What Would Molly Do?*, which documents interviews with potential interns for Kline within a constructed set. The process takes place in front of a green screen intercut with flashes of fans or props being adjusted. Self-awareness (and any inkling of professionalism) is mostly absent here; one barely audible candidate’s only enthusiastic response is when asked if he does Molly (a term for MDMA). Perhaps these subjects can get a boost of inspiration from trying on the antibodies of the creative professionals they aspire to from *Share the Health (Assorted Probiotic Hand Gels)*, where cultures swabbed from a Uniqlo store and iPad app developers are cultivated in soap dispensers. Or they could pick up one of the silicone surrogates of *Creative Hands*, in which each cast clutches a contemporary token of its profession. From the retoucher with her Apple mouse,

About this review

Published on 01/02/12

By *Lumi Tan*



Sleep is for the Weak, 2011, three cafetières filled with Red Bull, DayQuil, Coke Zero, Vivarin, Dentyne Ice chewing gum and Ibuprofen



through the studio manager with a bottle of Advil, to Kline's own hand (identified in one of his other roles, that of a curator) with Purell hand sanitizer, these creative producers are often those whose work it is to be the invisible support behind the star artist or global advertising campaign. Presented in multiple editions, these are bodies reduced to occupations, permanently wedded to their tools.

Kline exploits the relationship between our physical failings in trying to keep up with New York's 24-hour work-cycle to the product lines we create and desire – the aura of simplicity and purity as evolved through focus groups and market surveys, the perceived antidote to our daily lives. Even our celebrities now receive this cleaned-up treatment; in *Absorbing the 90s* and *Haunted Deodorant*, part of an ongoing photo series in which Kline switches pairs of celebrity eyes, their existence as images is unnervingly unreal. Both the gold standard of authenticity, Kurt Cobain, and the proudly caricatured Nicki Minaj, manage to look equally out of time and place, becoming flattened objects of our own design.

Beyond the gallery, the Occupy Wall Street movement was dominating much of the daily conversation between art workers whilst Kline's show was up; talks of union organizing, eliminating unpaid internships in commercial galleries, and artists being paid fairly for exhibitions were beginning to become an identified right rather than merely a complaint. With luck, 'Dignity and Self Respect' will become a relic of a transitional time; for now, it has been one of the sharpest mirrors of the present.

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Frieze

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