

## EMBARRASSMENT 2: THEORY

Gallery KM is pleased to present EMBARRASSMENT 2: THEORY, the second show in a two-part series featuring work by Michael Dopp, Liz Glynn, Peter Holzhauer, Whitney Hubbs, Laura Kim, Juliana Romano, Frank Ryan, Lily Simonson, Caleb Waldorf, and Jessica Williams. The first part of the series was entitled EMBARRASSMENT 1: VULNERABILITY, and featured the same artists. A reception for Part 2 will take place on Saturday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, from five to eight in the evening.

Part 1 of the series explored the emotional experience of embarrassment as a potential location for the recognition of the difference between self and other, and the corresponding desire to overcome that difference. In EMBARRASSMENT 2: THEORY, that original moment of recognition is activated and reconstituted as an opportunity for narrative reconstruction and control.

Embarrassment is an individual impediment, and yet also a societal necessity. It is an emotional experience that performs a risk management function. The higher the stakes, and the greater the risk, the greater the potential for failure and subsequent embarrassment. We internalize our fear of disappointing societal expectations, and that fear transforms into a self-regulating behavior modification tool; to put it simply, we play it safe. Embarrassment—or the desire to avoid it—is what keeps us in line.

But what if, instead of viewing this experience of discomfort as motivation to keep ourselves in check, we perceived it as a potent opportunity to claim agency in the social dialogue? If an embarrassing moment is one in which the social script breaks down and reveals its surprising fragility, then it is also a moment of great potential through which, if only for a short time, the script can be re-written. What if we choose to harness this powerful interruption and reflect it back outward? What if we change the audience instead of ourselves?

In terms of allotted societal roles, this kind of re-writing of the social script is exactly what we ask of artists. Art production and art viewing are designated locations in which we look for, and often find, a challenge to our daily language of social actions and its corresponding complacency. And yet, within an artist's practice, certain rules apply, and parallel risk and discomfort accompany the disregard of those rules. One of the most visible of such rules is that of stylistic consistency, or at the very least, stylistic continuity. One of the artists in the show, Frank Ryan, breaks that rule for us with stunning liberation. Ryan, who is known for intensely articulate and realistic painting, presents us with three abstract paintings that display his sophisticated visual vocabulary in an entirely different form, while also showing us a new sense of frustration with the confinements of his own artistic practice. In doing so, he brings

into question his own desire towards figuration, as well as our reluctance to follow his practice as it shifts across styles and modes. The implied question materializes: is it really too much to expect that we, his audience, be able to shift our mode of viewing to accommodate, not something as divergent as a new medium, but a simple a variance in style?

While Ryan's work activates the transformation possible when an artist takes narrative agency within his or her own practice, other artists in the show actively represent the possibilities of narrative construction and control in an illustrative manner. Lily Simonson displays instances in which her semi-terrestrial creatures provide confrontational stances, even in situations that our human sensibilities might see as warranting a bit more modesty. In "Yeti Spawn," we discover a crab swimming upright with belly exposed, spewing forth eggs in a manner that re-constructs birth as a moment of powerful force and momentum rather than one of vulnerability (and does so with almost reverent humor). Jessica Williams, alternatively, gives us the choice in paintings like "Makeup and Perfume," and "Karaoke," to move past the easy directing gaze of the subject, and create our own narrative out of inanimate tools that imply a subject without actually providing us with one. Juliana Romano's "Animal," on the other hand, very powerfully directs our gaze through figured subjects that resist confinement to the narrative in which they have been placed, and offers us a potent scene that leaves us anything but comfortable.

Whitney Hubbs' contribution to the exhibit provides both an illustrative approach to narrative agency, as well as a resistance to the linear history of her own artistic practice. By revisiting and newly printing a photograph she took when she was in high school--a shirtless young man, on his knees and with his back facing the camera--Hubbs shows us her subject's unwillingness to submit his vulnerability to the camera on anything but his own terms, as well as her own refusal to view her work as subject to any classic linear progression.

Laura Kim takes on embarrassment and theory from a material position, asking us to revisit our expectations and refuse the initial disinterest directed towards unintended, or nonessential, visual information. Kim's "Artifact Drawings" beautifully articulate and map the movement of her hand through a digital light scan, as she first removes clarity from the image and then creates new detail through the formation of artifacts, generally considered to be undesirable byproducts of digital compression. Kim's "Drawings" show us the way in which we can find the trace of organic human movement in digital language, while creating their own narrative; every layer of visual information she removes paradoxically acts to create new detail and new directions for the story of the drawing.

Michael Dopp, too, accesses the theme from a material perspective, resolving a small abstract painting by disregarding the confines of the canvas and drawing on the wall

that surrounds it. Here, he bridges the distinction between display surface and art object, and allowing a diminutive piece to extend its reach and command the respect of an entire wall.

Liz Glynn and Caleb Waldorf fold their contribution into *Embarrassment : Theory*, the second part of their two part publication, created to correspond with the two parts of the exhibition. This second collection of texts and diagrams ranges from critical analysis of Facebook culture to more personal musings of self-analysis offered by a group of writers, artists, and theorists.

Finally we come to Peter Holzhauer's "Tournament Room," a photograph in which we are left with the disorienting sensation of gazing upon an unoccupied casino room. We are faced with two rows of empty chairs and slot machines, which are then reflected off of the mirrored ceiling in a way that calls to mind and lightly mocks the phrase, "make your own luck." Here, Holzhauer emphasizes the difficulty of finding ones way in a setting that is known for purposefully confounding occupants, and challenges us to resist the temptation posed by the mindless levers before us--to create our own narrative by refusing to play the game.

Michael Dopp, Peter Holzhauer, Whitney Hubbs, Juliana Romano, Frank Ryan, and Lily Simonson all recently received MFA's from the University of California, Los Angeles. Liz Glynn and Laura Kim received MFA's from California Institute of the Arts, Jessica Williams from Columbia University, and Caleb Waldorf from the University of California, San Diego. The individual artists are involved in such various pursuits as The Public School and Telic Arts Exchange, the Census of Marine Life Symposium at the Royal Society in London, teaching at a variety of universities and museums, and writing for publications such as Triple Canopy and blogs such as Art: 21. Their work is included in collections from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to the Boston Public Library and Whitney Library in New York, and they have been featured in ArtForum, Papermag, BlindSpot, Angelino Magazine, as well as many other publications. They have exhibited throughout the United States and Europe.