



Chloe Wise, *Getting rid of evil would be boring*, 2019, Oil on linen, 182.9 x 152.4 cm
Courtesy the Artist and Almine Rech. Photo: Melissa Castro-Duarte.

Tissues for Your Issues **Exhibition Review by Adrian Coleman**

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Chloe Wise, “Not That We Don’t”
Almine Reich, London

The arch paintings of Chloe Wise are at once sumptuous and crass, mesmerizing and yet vacuous. I left her recent exhibition unsure if I had been seduced or repelled. Wise is a darling of Instagram and the fashion world. Her photogenic work displayed in “Not That We Don’t” depicts staged groups of twenty- or thirty-somethings. They wear outfits and handle incongruous props - hand sanitizer, boxes of tissues - that recur throughout the series. The Almine Reich gallery regards these pictures as portraiture, but their overt theatricality and the manner in which Wise crops figures in and out of the frame suggests still-lives with bodies. They are like Benetton advertisements painted by Philip Pearlstein, if Phil could get down with the kids.

That is to say, Chloe Wise is a very good painter. Her pictures reproduce as sweet, slick images on the screen, but you have to see them in person to appreciate her craft, especially the different thicknesses and translucencies of the paint, the places where she has allowed the underpainting to come through. At times, the materiality that Wise conjures is stunning. The rubber glove in “Tormentedly Untainted” wraps the hand tautly and elastically. In “Getting rid of evil would be boring,” the diaphanous lime shirt is sublimely weightless.

The figures themselves are beautiful, as both models and as renderings of rosy flesh in paint. Yet they are utterly enigmatic, not in a beguiling way that draws the viewer in but in a remote way that keeps the viewer at a distance. In “The Tedious Matter of Will,” the sitter’s doe-like blue eyes are painted exquisitely, as is the luster on her green-blonde hair and the way her neck is carved from pockets of shadow. Nevertheless, nothing about the actual human being is revealed. Her icy expression communicates little about any interior life. “You definitely lied to the right person” is presumably a self-portrait of the artist, and the young woman’s face projects a kind of stoic defiance. Her earnestness is in contrast to various sophomoric props, her t-shirt which reads, “SPERM: Society for the Preservation of Equal Rights for Men,” and a roll of plastic shrink wrap.

There is a sense that the figures themselves are props, signifiers rather than individuals, mannequins peddling a brand of disaffected hipness. If the show were in east London, Peckham, or Brooklyn, one might judge the paintings to be a reflection of the artist community. This is Mayfair, though, and there are Porsche and Bentley dealers within a short walk from the gallery. Dutch Golden Age still-lives were famously about prized possessions, demonstrations of wealth and status, and Wise’s paintings are about ownership of a different social cachet. To accompany the exhibition, Wise has designed a number of bespoke benches with built-in tissue dispensers. Combined with the sanitary accoutrements within the paintings, Wise seems to be giving us a knowing wink. These are icons for antiseptic masturbation. The tissues may also be provided to wipe away your tears.