

Adelaide Fringe 2011

Meaghan Coles - The Robin Hood Hotel

Reviewed by Christopher Rhys Jones

The Adelaide Fringe is one of the most successful artistic events of the year and without failure always proceeds to showcase artists from a large array of disciplines. This years Visual Art section merged a diverse combination of well-established artists as well as many up and coming artists all with the intention of displaying their unique talents.

A highlight of this years Fringe was the newly established artist just out of University having finished a degree in Honours at the University of South Australia, Meaghan Coles. Meaghan Coles is a contemporary painter that practices abstracted figurative representation, predominantly using oils on various surfaces in order to achieve a unique portrayal of the human face. Coles' current investigations have explored 'how the female face is objectified, within popular advertising'. Coles' practices also have an intentional strain on exploring the possible applications of oil paints to portray imagery as well as its application onto various surfaces.

Meaghan Coles' exhibition within the Fringe this year entitled 'The Face as an Object in Popular Advertising' displayed numerous paintings portraying photographs of models from various advertisements. Held at the Robin Hood Hotel, Coles has installed her imagery throughout the establishment, adorning the walls with beautiful imagery with underlying metaphors of ignorant beauty. The paintings themselves have been painted on wood with oils and a collage of newspapers shown mostly in the background of the composition. Interestingly enough the surface of wood was not primed in anyway but left in its natural state so that the grain and imperfections of the wood could push through the alleged beauty of the models painted. This technique allows the subtlety of her symbolism to be seen in plain sight, which is the imperfections of all people, including the women shown in advertisement that are supposed to portray flawless beauty. In addition to this Coles use of space in her composition, as well as her manipulation or distortion of the imagery, has effectively captivated the key elements of the model, particularly the eyes and the lips but also in some cases the hands as well. This washed over; abstracted approach has been well used in her paintings as it draws the viewer's attention to the focal points of the imagery rather than letting the eye wander across and away from the painting. Due to this the imagery and its beauty often captivates the viewer with its rough aesthetic finish but also with its bold lines and subtle skin colours.

Although as stated before, Coles certainly has underlying ideas behind her imagery, which explore the objectified use of the female face in advertising. This concept is well interpreted in one of her artworks titled '10 Rules of Beauty', which uses newspaper collage in the background displaying an article describing the ten rules of beauty. The concept is portrayed bluntly but effectively, which is exactly what the advertisement of beauty presents its viewers with. Advertisement will often voice that what they are selling will make you beautiful and then go onto say that this is why you should buy it. Coles painting in the same way displays this blunt form of advertising by pointing out how obvious it is that the media is trying to force beauty on today's youth. Coles painting simultaneously points out the beauty and imperfections of the subject with her use of positive and negative space as well as her application of mixed media.

All well presented exhibition, Meaghan Coles has created and revealed a well-executed portrayal of her skills in painting, whilst also tackling a concerning topic within our social culture. The objectified portrayal of women in advertisement is one of many interesting representations we are yet to see from this up and coming artist.