

rendered meaningless, even ridiculous, by the artists' act of fragmentation and decontextualisation. Their rigid authority becomes flexible and manipulable when reprocessed as flat images within the image machine.

Henkel & Pitegoff are clearly interested in hierarchies of image-making and dissemination, yet it is ambiguous as to whether the constant feedback loop of their installation enacts a dissolving of the photographic stream into obsolescence or whether the artists are attempting to create their own, idiosyncratic mode of image production. The speed of the motor is important here, which substitutes for the sheer velocity of our everyday circulation and consumption of media an oddly measured parade of images. Perhaps the intention, then, is for us to slow down and focus on each image rather than to perpetually disregard and move on to the next.

The question of our attention span is also raised by the cyclical movement of the conveyor-belt band. A closed-circuit network with its own intrinsic process of revealing and obscuring, the conveyer not only makes it difficult to photograph, capture and consume each image, but it also sets a limit on our viewing time before we must wait for the same photograph to return. This collapsing of presentation, anticipation and expectation is part of the artists' potentially endless performance of this image stream; it only stops once the motor is switched off.

This sense of continuous movement, of entering and exiting, is similarly present in the photograph that is displayed on the opposite side of the gallery, which blurrily depicts a copy of the German newspaper *Bild*. This and two other photographs will be hung in rotation in this same spot throughout the exhibition's duration, a direct reference to the location where each photograph was taken: a bar in Berlin that has remained continuously open, without closing, for the past 30 years. Incidentally, '*Bild*' means 'image' in German, which only adds to the self-enclosed and tautological gestures that hold this exhibition together.

Through the combination of the motor that keeps on running and the never-ending arrivals and departures of people, images and fragments of information, *Machine 2* suggests an underlying mistrust of both speed and brevity as the inevitable symptoms of our age. Just as transition and flux do not necessarily equate with an emptying out of meaning, in the bar that never closes there will always be moments of continuity and repetition, and images that gradually come round once again. ■

**Calla Henkel &
Max Pitegoff**
Machine 2 2017

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Kate Davis: Nudes Never Wear Glasses

Stills Edinburgh 28 July to 8 October

At the beginning of Kate Davis's solo show at Stills there is an immediate disruption akin to an ending: a brick wall. Discounting the enclosing, permanent gallery walls, Davis has constructed three, purpose-built walls to house her selected works. Utilising the dualism of internal structures, the exhibition manifests as a series of installations, presenting partnerships and fractures between Davis's photographs, films and drawings which at once face or mirror each other and are separated by industrial brick. 'Nudes Never Wear Glasses' features a new series of photographic works which were developed and printed at Stills, and Davis's Margaret Tait Award film *Charity* from 2017, shown in a gallery context for the first time.

Encountering Davis's initial intervention into the space also introduces, and immediately defies, the exhibition title, which is taken from a passing remark by artist Jo Spence. Hung on the first brick wall is a silver gelatin print of a classical nude female sculpture onto which Davis has stuck crude, cartoon-like glasses. Scratched into a found negative, the spectacles are oval-shaped and clumsy. Davis uses this act of removal to produce the positivity of unbroken line – the intensity of which dominates the blurred edges of the historical, sculptural form. Her simple act construes a quiet challenge against archetypal, characterless 'celebrations' of femininity because the inclusion of glasses issues the female an immediate release from her idealisation. On the wall's reverse is a photograph of a male monument – a soldier, whose gun has been removed and replaced with a breast-feeding infant. The two prints and their adjoining structure accumulate a new, if overly simplistic, symbolism: the male soldier celebrated as life-giver and nurturer rather than life-taker, the nude female celebrated for her intellect or the flaw of poor eyesight, and the wall as the concretion of histories shaped within ideological, domestic and institutional boundaries.

While Davis's erection of additional, exposed walls is a forceful navigation for encountering the work, her gentle iconoclasm is propositional rather than dogmatic. In her constant revisiting, reclaiming and re-presenting, she contests the notion of a 'hard history'. *Charity* continues the theme of breastfeeding, here reframing it as a potential act of economic and social value. Over the course of 16 minutes, Davis slowly streams numerous representations of feeding mothers, including ancient and anonymous sculptures, photographs and paintings by (mostly male) artists, such as Caravaggio, Henry Moore, Peter Paul Rubens, Honoré Daumier, Lucas Cranach the Elder and Mary Cassatt. The still images are intercut with fragments of Davis's hands as she undertakes daily household tasks of laundry, sweeping, feeding her son and washing up. These excerpts are aggressive in their intimacy: the camera rattling inside the washing machine, seemingly swept up alongside dust, inside the sink as it fills with water and soap.

The visuals are accompanied by a monologue read by Scottish actress Gerda Stevenson, who featured in Margaret Tait's 1992 film *Blue Black Permanent*. The monologue weaves together extracts from Tait's film alongside adaptations from publications by DW Winnicott, Susan Griffin, Adrienne Rich

and Mary Chamberlain & Justin Partyka on the subject of motherhood. Using this source material, Davis's collective narrative details breastfeeding as a form of employment – in which mothers are issued contracts, paid and praised for their work. As Rubens's *Roman Charity* of 1612 appears on screen, showing the female Pero as she secretly breastfeeds her father to save him from starvation, the disembodied voice details the internal, administrative affairs of working as a breastfeeding mother: the strange lack of unionisation, the acceptance of irregular break times and unregistered overtime.

Despite the fundamental continuity in subject, Davis's selected imagery spans at least 550 BC to the late 20th century. Women feed babies, elderly men, mothers-in-law and animals; one engraving envisions the earth as a circular, breastfeeding woman. This collection of archaic and modern imagery enforces the persistent presentation of the feeding mother as the archetype of sustenance, generosity, sacrifice and universal love. In reframing this domestic act as paid work, Davis parallels the writings of feminist economist Marilyn Waring, who challenged notions of what constitutes work and value: 'value is a sense, a feeling – not a tangible measure.' *Charity* repositions an action which is often invisible and unpaid yet celebrated as a universal, cultural symbol – often by men. In her meticulous reappropriation of archival documents and footage, Davis examines how procedures we employ and endure to care for others could be reimagined and revalued. She chooses to do so in an environment with freshly built walls which show no signs of coming down. ■

KATHRYN LLOYD is an artist and writer based in London.

London Round-up

Lisson Gallery • Chisenhale Gallery • Barbican

A painter friend with whom I visited the Lisson gallery to see **A still life by Chardin** was not impressed. His complaint was that the pieces in this exhibition of a dozen conceptual artists seemed more a joke, parody or pastiche of the form than anything else. And indeed this might easily be one's first impression, for a battered cardboard box containing sundry metal pipes (latterly revealed to be material illegally ripped out from abandoned buildings and bought from a salvage yard in New York) or works made from the rearranged components of a simple shelf – metal brackets, screws, wire and wood – could well exemplify a comedic reference to 'modern art' of the sort seen in films such as *The Rebel*, 1961, starring Tony Hancock as a naive but hypersensitive artist. The cited works are, respectively, by Cameron Rowland and B Wurtz, while the show also includes pieces by Michael Asher, Audrey Barker, Hanne Darboven, Trisha Donnelly, Jef Geys, Dan Graham and Pati Hill. The confusing press release – with the show's opening times incorrectly rendered, as I discovered during an attempted second visit – consists of disconnected passages of text, making it hard to decipher exactly what the exhibition purports to be; at a guess it is a modern take on the category of the still life, in which Jean-Simeon Chardin, 1699-1779, was exemplary. Marcel Proust is quoted, from his 1895 essay on the painter, which states that Chardin gives to the most humble of objects 'the essence of life'. Possibly, then, the visitor to 'A still life by Chardin' might read the works on show as contemporary approximations of Chardin's painterly observations.

An oddly isolated sentence tells us that in 1973 'there was



another exhibition at Lisson Gallery ... which took place in the basement'. The significance of this unintentionally amusing statement is difficult to discern. One might hazard that it refers to Asher's presentation that year of a seemingly empty room save for a one-and-a-half-inch-deep hand-cut groove into the bottom of the gallery walls where they met the floor (a device which was utilised for very different reasons by galleries to enable the walls to be painted without having to mask the floor). The piece is represented here with a series of production shots casually placed in the gallery's entrance opposite the reception desk.

Notwithstanding all the confusion, the show rewards careful attention. Barker's *A Box for Nicholas Roberts*, 1967, is composed of coloured circles which allude to a paint or make-up box, while Hill's ghostly photocopies from the late 1970s are among the exhibition's most engaging pieces. Hill casually gathered numerous household odds and ends, storing them in a laundry hamper, eventually deciding to photocopy (in black and white) the objects she liked before putting the accumulated items back into circulation – *Untitled (paper bag printed with fruit image)*, c1977-79, foregrounds a typical Chardin detail. Hill's procedure is a good example of what Susan Sontag called an 'ecology' of images, raising thoughts about originals and copies, aura, archiving and the random fetishising of what Charles Baudelaire neatly termed 'the transient, the fleeting, and the contingent'.

At Chisenhale in east London the large dark gallery space is given over to a single work by **Luke Willis Thompson**, *autobiography*, made during the artist's residency at the gallery earlier this year. The piece is a large-scale single-screen silent portrait of Diamond Reynolds, a black woman who, in 2016, broadcast through Facebook Live the moments immediately following the fatal shooting, by a Minnesota police officer, of her partner Philando Castile while he was reaching for his wallet after police had stopped the couple's car. The video, in which Reynolds is seen and heard calmly giving evidence of the shooting, was viewed by millions of people during the following days and is in effect an official piece of police evidence. We are not shown this recording but only a loop of two short images, consciously reminiscent of Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*, 1964-66, with each portion ending after 4 minutes and 30 seconds, the standard duration of a roll of 35mm film. There is an uncanny resonance here with John Cage's notoriously 'silent' *4'33"*, 1952, the work also recalling Thomas Pynchon's fascinatingly critical account of racist police killings as described in his 1966 article 'A Journey Into The Mind of Watts'. One shot is of Reynolds's head entirely filling the screen as she slowly utters words we do not hear, the second view is a head-and-shoulders image of Reynolds staring downwards. In both cases she looks as if she is about to

Kate Davis

Charity 2017 video