

Laura Lancaster
Shapeshifter

WORKPLACE LONDON

61 Conduit Street
Mayfair
London, W1S 2GB

Preview:

6pm - 8pm Wednesday 6th April

Exhibition continues:

7th April - 27th May 2016

Thursday - Friday

10am - 5pm (or by appointment)



“Abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it - on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger.”

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, 1980

Workplace London is delighted to announce a solo presentation of Laura Lancaster's new paintings, 'Shapeshifter', that runs concurrently with her exhibition at the New Art Gallery Walsall. Lancaster's dense grayscale paintings take further her ongoing investigation of the uncanny and the abject - both concepts preoccupied with the idea of the boundary and the blurring and destabilisation of the categories it creates - and their relationship to aesthetics.

First explored psychologically by Ernst Jentsch who described it as a product of 'intellectual uncertainty', the concept of uncanny was further developed by Sigmund Freud in his seminal essay *Das Unheimliche* in 1919 in which Freud argues that we experience the uncanny when a certain trigger brings back repressed childhood conflicts and primitive beliefs that suddenly receive renewed affirmation. The objects and individuals that we project our own repressed impulses upon, become a threat causing extreme mental discomfort, unconsciously reminding us of our forbidden, infantile, impulses.

Lancaster's paintings with their distorted mask covered figures and almost mutilated features, precipitate this particular sense of unease by setting up a chain of associations for the experiencing subject. The paint has been scrubbed, smeared, scraped, and painted with fingers, leaving the viewer with the sense that the figure in the painting has emerged from a violent collision between the artist, the paint and the image. The scale of the work refers to Lancaster's own body whilst addressing the viewer's own interpretative body in the process. In *Powers of Horror* Julia Kristeva describes the subjective horror one's body experiences when confronted with one's 'corporeal reality', a breakdown in the distinction between the self and the other. Lancaster's paintings exemplify the abject by challenging the borders of the self as we perceive them and revealing an incompleteness, or lack, in ourselves.

Influenced by the palette and the expressive markings of the paintings by Philip Guston and Albert Oehlen, the black and white paintings further efface the boundaries between the subject and the background as the forms appear to emerge and dissolve simultaneously. This game of presence and absence serves, by nature, to further confuse and attract the viewer by erasing the distinction between the imagined and the real. The layer of paint becomes a mask in itself and as such adds further ambiguity to the work, whilst the subjects in the paintings, being far removed from their original context, seem simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar.

Lancaster explores the way in which the image transforms itself during the painting process whilst embracing the physicality of the painted surface whilst revealing how this process distorts and destabilises the order of the photographic image they result from. The gestural marks themselves become imprints of the performative action as they self-consciously explore of the idea of painterly gesture, its significance and the myriad ways it can be interpreted. As we are confronted by this new information that conflicts with our existing beliefs, ideas, and values, or what Kristeva describes as disturbing 'identity, system, order', Lancaster's work forces us to rethink the ways in which we experience the world and ourselves, whilst questioning painting's capacity to emote or express.

