

STATION

Laith McGregor

Heady

24 May — 14 June 2014

To be 'heady' is seemingly to be ambivalent, because to adopt all of its definitions would surely be a strain on the word; heady due to too much wine, or another form of intoxication: success or exhilaration; to be impressed, or impetuous; to feel destructive, or simply unenthused. If we put away the grammatical suffix and consider the noun 'head', we suddenly have a form to go with the feeling. This form, the head, follows the viewer throughout Laith McGregor's new body of work. *Heady* is an interdisciplinary study in portraiture, it twists and turns through dualities of fiction and non-fiction, icon and iconoclast, past and present, myth and enlightenment. McGregor challenges formal representation, proffering a series of simulacra: with realist drawings of those close to the artist, later graffitied, added to, and subtracted from; anthropomorphic 'blob head' sculptures; and high-definition film documentation.

In this series of works, McGregor seems to double as iconographer and iconoclast. A group of four drawings—originally the work of a Thai street portraitist—display the transformative effect of McGregor's hand, adapting their fundamental truth with a flurry of energy. McGregor sketches, scribbles, erases, writes notes and texts over the existing portraits, harnessing artistic intuition and allowing the audience a glimpse into the inner workings of an active mind. With these artistic annotations McGregor lovingly 'defaces' the originals, an iconoclastic betrayal of their original nature, resulting in images that are somewhat abrupt, comical and often nonsensical.

In McGregor's *SomeMan*—a work entirely of the artist's hand—we see the quintessential example of this disfigurement, or adaptation, at a much larger scale. This edifice of a drawing depicts 'some man' with long hair and a beard, the man we all identify as Jesus. Assembled from typological shapes filled in with graphite pencil marks, *SomeMan* has been stylised and manipulated to resemble his stalagmitical sculptural disciples attentively scattered around the gallery space. These blob head sculptures are the Pagan contrast, evoking tales of fiction and non-fiction; ruins of the past recovered in the present, appearing as forgotten totems of a lost civilisation of uncannily make-believe. They resemble amorphous forms that have taken on their own shape after years of erosion, brought out in nostalgia and infused with a semblance of something recognisably contemporary: wooden bowls, drums and smoking pipes.

McGregor's exhibition encompasses a sense of multiplexity, as exemplified in the dual reality of his drawings; initiated by the practiced hand of a street vendor, later transformed with the whimsical fantasy of an artist's impulse. On the one hand is the past in which they were first drawn, on the other is the present in which they are manipulated, just as McGregor's totemic blob head sculptures appear ancient but contain contemporary features. These works offer notions of enlightenment: in realist portraits and video documentation that are rational and clear, juxtaposed by emblems of myth: with vampire fangs, Pinocchio noses, silver objects with smoking pipes, and surreal forgotten artefacts that correspond to images of magic, make-believe, spirits and Gods.

In *Heady*, McGregor provides the viewer with the framework through which to view art: drawing on the form, the 'head', to illicit a multitude of sensations, the 'heady'. For there is only one form when looking at the totality of a single work, but the opportunity for many feelings towards it, as subjectivity would have it. In Laith McGregor's *Heady*, you may feel excited or exhilaration, be impressed, or impetuous; see elements of a ruin or of contemporaneity; forms that are factual or fanciful; known and proven or of belief and the spirit; true representations or distortions of the divine.

— Jack Willet