

JUSTIN EAGLE

Lovely.... Lovely.... Lovely

Text by Paul Bayley
Images by Jonathan Bassett

Justin's Eagle's work is both eloquent and inarticulate, constantly switching between the experiential and the impenetrable. Signs, ciphers and signifiers are both the concern and raw material of his artistic practice. A photograph of the statue of Eros is juxtaposed with a modernist white steel sculpture. The sculpture acts as both barrier and gateway to understanding, a Tom Ford lipstick teeters on its end. A set of monochrome silkscreen prints of lipstick stained, lit cigarettes reproduce themselves across a gallery wall. These are iconic images designed like advertising to stir memory and impulse but also to retain a kind of invisibility. Lipstick allows us to make a face by putting on a mask. Like all the icons of our lived life these signifiers become magnets of meaning.



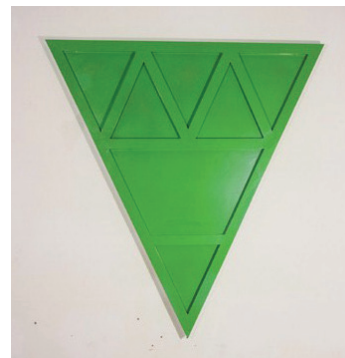
Eagle's photograph of the statue of Eros has all these magnetic qualities. The god of love is a powerful London icon, on the masthead of its evening newspaper, at the heart of Piccadilly Circus and a million tourist snapshots. However, this naked, winged, archer is actually Anteros, a twin and was itself subsequently renamed The Angel of Christian Charity. The statute has been moved several times around the Circus and though incredibly well known most Londoners don't know that it is in fact a fountain. The tourist connotations of innocent romantic meeting place have actually played out for decades to a tawdry backdrop of the gay sex trade and acted as a literal signpost towards seedy Soho. Just as a narrative seems to emerge you realise that this particular Eros has a pastoral backdrop and the photo is of a replica that resides in Sefton Park, Liverpool. It is this switchback of contradictory meanings and ambivalence that gives the image its traction.



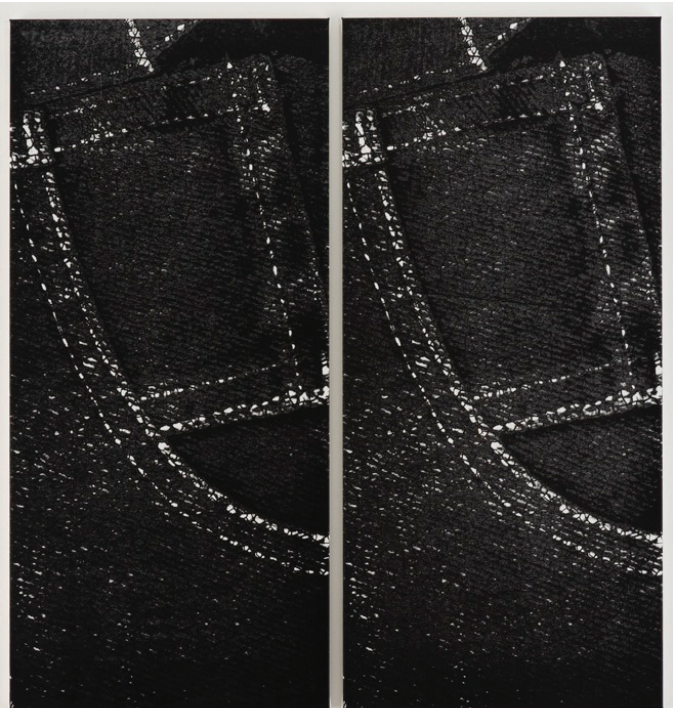


In his earlier work Eagle was drawn to the civic pride of regional England. Its contra flow traffic systems, its public art, its logo's and identities. All of course promising difference, all blandly invisible. Just as architects plan utopias and real people then have to inhabit an often, soul less modernist vision. Graphic designers and the 'creative industries' aim at creating excellence and uniqueness yet often produces a sort of visual white noise that drown out alternatives. Eagle meticulously reproduced these symbols as artworks that are literally dumb: mute monuments to our inability to communicate. Of course in a media saturated world this could be strategy for self-preservation. Instead of speaking clearly the artist seeks to protect his sensibility from straightforward interpretation.

In a series of screen prints of the pocket on a pair of jeans we are again dealing with an iconic item of clothing. An item of clothing that at once reminds you of both labouring and leisure, personal expression and uniformity, freedom and oppressive consumer culture. They also remind us of our bodies, our past, our future, other people, memories and projections. The oppressive nature of the consumer culture is made clearer with a series of works based on images of catalogue Jewellery. The current banking crisis has seen worried investors push the price of gold sky high whilst on estates across so called broken Britain the ostentatious display of jewellery is ubiquitous. These are literally the 'chains that bind'. Eagle understands what life is like in Mayfair and Merseyside and uses his aesthetic to embrace our delusional power to dream but tinges it with the melancholy of reality.



List of images (top to bottom):
Variation and the spice of life for me I vowed. But boy, I never dreamed it could vary so much 2011
The Sluggard (detail) 2011
Private blend I,II,III,IV,V 2011
Triangulation 2006
aioli 2010



Justin Eagle's solo exhibition *is he, isn't she* is at Vitrine Gallery, Saturday 10 September - Saturday 22 October 2011.
www.vitrinegallery.co.uk