

Interview with Kate Hawkins

Charley Vines
July 2013

CHARLEY VINES *I wanted to start by talking about your current practice and its roots in your earlier performance-based work.*

KATE HAWKINS When I got to the Slade I was in Bruce McLean's painting department, but I didn't do any painting - I did performance all the way through. It was only when I left that I started to quietly do 'proper' painting, whatever that is. Anyway, the reason I started painting was because many of the ideas I was interested in were concerned with surface and I couldn't properly work through them using performance. My paintings are not so much a record of a performance - something you might say of Jackson Pollock - but there is a relationship to performance in the display and reception of the works.

CV *So when you were doing the performance work did that arrive from having 'painterly' interests?*

KH I think I've always been slightly obsessed with Jackson Pollock and all the abstract expressionists. I can't work out whether it's because they represent a certain machismo, or whether it's about the element of performance involved in the production of their work. Another thing was the environment at the Slade. Bruce really encouraged this idea of expanded painting. I think I probably took that a little too literally to the point where I didn't do any painting at all.

CV *For your PhD you're exploring painting as performance, spectatorship, and ideas of front and back stage. Do you think front and back stage are defined as terms, or not?*

KH I think they're not at all defined at the moment. With so much social media, you're always performing; you're always on show. I guess that's why I'm interested in performance; it relates so clearly to what is going on socially.

CV *Is it right that for this show you have worked from street-style blogging images?*

KH It started off like that, but then it got a bit weirder. But I hope that the whole set-up of the space and the over-riding feel that you get as a spectator at least touches on that. I started thinking about those street style blogs because of the close relationship between style, performance and performing your identity. So I made quite a few of the pieces in the show using street-style imagery as source material. I was thinking a lot about 'being seen' from both the perspective of the paintings and spectator.

CV *I also wondered about your painting process - whether there is an outcome in mind and how source material is used?*

KH I usually work from print-outs taken from Google or the blog images or whatever. But when I paint I try to look at them briefly and then I turn them away or close the laptop. It's more about the process [than the outcome], and it's when you surprise yourself that things become more interesting I think.

CV *Let's talk about the use of motifs in your work, such as the moustaches or sunglasses.*

KH I find it much easier to work within a loose structure, so I impose these 'forms' upon myself, which actually allows me to be more playful. Sunglasses, moustaches, everybody understands them. And they describe identity. I like the work to be accessible on even the most basic of levels and if there's something in a painting that can do that, then boom.

CV *So we should talk about the show. It plays with that spectator/spectacle dichotomy, and maybe attempts to erase that boundary which exists between performer and viewer. Are these things that you initially felt would be explored in this show?*

KH It's a response to the space. Although my research was going in that direction, the space, which is long and thin, reminded me of a street.

CV *The high street seems to be a popular topic at the moment. Perhaps it's a place where people can exist on common terms?*

KH Well it's got to be about community hasn't it? Because everything is online I guess it provides an alternative to the digital. And it's about people. It's a kind of meeting place. I suppose I'm more interested in what the high street means socially rather than politically.

CV *Throughout the show, there are suggestions of posture and personality. There's the group of paintings that are something like a group of girls, one with 'her' leg bent and Mary, on the tripod. We spoke earlier about how the work may not make sense for you until it is installed. How do you feel about the pieces operating as individuals?*

KH I hope they operate as individual pieces but I think they probably work best in an exhibition format like this. It's really nice seeing 'Eloise', 'Being Seeing' and

'Squiggle' together, because you get something else. They are three individual pieces and I have never hung them together. They're quite funny, they're so wrong together but I like it.

CV *I first came to know your work whilst at University, and mainly on the basis that I was working with grouped paintings. My interest, then and now, is in making an image expand beyond a singular plane. I wondered whether your work is perhaps less to do with making an image expand and more to do with creating a set or a scene.*

KH For me it is probably more about creating a scene or a set. I'm interested in theatre and the theatrical, but I don't want my paintings to become theatrical in an inauthentic sense. I really like borrowing forms from theatre though and like to think of the works as props or players. So it's not so much about expanding a painting. I suppose it's because I have come from a more performance based practice, rather than a painterly one. I don't think of things in 2D or as images but more in relation to the whole environment.

CV: *And is it made with the audience in mind?*

KH: Absolutely, yes. It's all about the audience. Including my subject

Charley Vines is an artist based at Crate, Margate.
www.charleyvines.com