

Keith Boadwee & Erica Eyres

Secret Signals

21 January - 06 March 2022

OTP Copenhagen is proud to present *Secret Signals*: a two-person exhibition by Keith Boadwee (b. 1961, Meridian, MS; USA) and Erica Eyres (b. 1980, Winnipeg; Canada). Both artists share a background in photo or video-based performance but have in recent years transferred their interest in body politics towards the development of studio-based painting practices. Exploring ideas of gaze and desire, surface and psychological interiority, and humour and sexual taboo, as they relate to contemporary painting, this exhibition marks the first time that Keith Boadwee and Erica Eyres have shown together.

Ask yourself: 'what is my biggest secret?' Perhaps it involves something you did in the past, a thought or feeling that you've been having for some time, or the discovery of information that you were never meant to know. In any case, secrecy refers to *those private things* which (for the most part) you keep to yourself. Keith Boadwee and Erica Eyres share a broad interest in the sort of subjects that societies deem secretive and the different ways that we might be able to imagine and depict private spaces, nude bodies and personal acts of contemplation.

Keith Boadwee first rose to prominence in the late 80s and early 90s with a series of wilfully transgressive artworks that included large-scale abstract enema paintings and iconoclastic self-portraits that both adopted and ridiculed imagery from Western art history. Around the year 2000, a friend gifted Boadwee a book on the Dogme 95 cinema movement; inspired by the hard formal limitations that these Danish filmmakers imposed on themselves, he began re-working his practice in order to focus on a "basic language" of art-making.

Today this basic language consists of a set of signature motifs which Boadwee returns to again and again. Common figures include: yearning androgynous frogs, desirous upper-class poodles and the naked and unruly figure of the artist in their studio. Boadwee reworks these figures using different palettes and compositions, constantly exploring opportunities for formal and expressive variation through compulsive repetition. In a work like *White On White Poodle* (2021) the effect is that Boadwee's style feels immediate and accessible in its cartoon-like aesthetic. At the same time there is a constant suggestion of ambiguity in the way that he seems to present these figures as emotional vessels, inviting us to project our own subjectivity into their vacant eyes.

Similarly interested to explore ideas of unexpected ambiguity, particularly as they relate to popular media, most of Erica Eyres's paintings take their source material from vintage pornographic magazines. Here we find images where lone amateurs pose in a way that feels slightly off. "I suppose these photos were mostly taken by men, for men" says Eyres "but I identify with them in a strange way, almost like I am trying to inhabit them". Caught somewhere between impromptu fun and static self-consciousness, the women in Eyres' paintings all maintain eye contact with the viewer and complicate any easy idea of eroticised passivity through the slow, deliberate and expressive manner in which they are rendered.

Often removing contextual details and changing faces, clothes and backdrops during the painting process, Eyres depicts realistic figures that are divorced from the "real" people that are their reference points. Instead the artist presents us with scenes that feel non-specific as much as they do sexually explicit. A sense of precious intimacy is fostered in works like *Chris* (2021) by the artist's choice to work in miniature format; the small size of this work encourages closeness but also evokes a tradition of cherishing physical photographs that feels old-fashioned. It is also the fetishised content of these images that "dates" them as being from another time. In the process of highlighting certain features and scenarios, Eyres emphasises how pornography shapes desire, how specific sexual cultures predominate before expiring, and the incoherency of the idea that any sex behaviour is standard.

Painting can be an act of exposing oneself and the vulnerability that comes with such exposure differs from person to person. Keith Boadwee and Erica Eyres take different approaches to exploring those behaviours that humans often keep to themselves, but share an interest in the ways that pleasure, vulnerability, secrecy and desire so often facilitate one another and overlap.