ALMINE RECH

Brian Calvin
End of Messages

Oct 24, 2015 — Jan 17, 2016 | Mu.ZEE, Ostend, Belgium

At a moment when social-media fatigue may be finally tempering the ebullient narcissism of practically a decade of "status updates," Brian Calvin's new works crystallize the inevitable malaise of an acutely self-aware population. His clever and luminous paintings—rendered in the Day-Glo colours of overexposed photographs—depict hyperexposed pretty young things casually mugging for an unseen observer, their faces flattened (visually and figuratively) with the stylized ennui of Modigliani's oblong portraits. In some works, he zeroes in even further: the same pair of sensually parted glossed lips reappear. Brain Calvin often tightens the frame to reveal gap teeth and a dormant tongue.

Emotionally distant and elusively cool, Calvin's characters convey the banality of selfie culture, and, like selfies, they evade any narrative arc. Brian Calvin, a California-raised artist, is occasionally compared to David Hockney, whose colours and subject matter equally evoke the ominously easy life of a sun-bleached suburbia, and to the New Yorker Alex Katz, whose graphic, flat compositions are visual siblings of Calvin's, but whose paintings tend to suggest backstories and aftermath.

Calvin takes a more existential approach to portraiture, treating the human face or body as a self-contained landscape, and in these new pictures he has both tightened and expanded his focus. Where his earlier works tend to portray the awkwardness of casual interactions between people, these breviloquent scenes close in on an epidemic of self-awareness: The objective filter of a close-up may magnify the physical, but it also protectively hides the soul.

(Taken from the text by Anne Prentnieks, Artforum, September 2014)

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