

Flanking the entrance to *Botox Thoughts* are *Columns I, Chums and Columns II, My Ancestors, The View from Harvey Nicks, Edinburgh* (2019). These are the only framed works on display and act as a folly to the supposed marketisation of art and the artist, illustrating and dispensing with the idea before it has a chance to embed.

Beyond the threshold, Katie Orton's solo exhibition presents a selection of large scale 'colouring-ins' on paper alongside a series of objects fashioned from domestic items.<sup>1</sup> As with the guesswork involved in scrutinising the faces of middle-aged women for signs of Botox, these large-scale 'colouring-ins' begin from the premise that they are something simple, unpainted, naturally inexpressive or gesturally blank. If the surface of the human face can no longer be 'read' for signs or signifiers of time, so too, the colourings-in engage in the pretence that they are not-paintings, that they are without expression or 'the artist's hand'. Visually confronting in placement, positioning, scale and style, they echo the vernacular of protest banners, friezes, advertising billboards, as well as the ubiquitous screens that overlap every aspect of our lives.

Careering behind these technicoloured 'screens' are *Gross Domestic Products*, where housekeeping in both senses of the word - the cleaning and the budgetary - is evoked. Works such as *Essentially More Worth It Than You* (2025) and *Deep Pan Tilted Arc* (2025) flip the narratives of the marketing world that processes us according to its heightened drive to galvanise mimetic desire and rivalry to financially and psychologically buy into its products.

Merging colourful abstraction and autobiographical details (parenting, gender) with concepts of mimetic desires (branding, advertising, 'influencing') these works dismantle and rebuild worlds to speculate on resistance to the marketing and monetising of desire, and the use of narratives to elicit and foster unthinking complicity in our own repressed representations.

## Brain Freeze

*Botox Thoughts'* Disneyfied signifiers recall the suspended corporeal and emotional existence of *Sleeping Beauty*, the perma-winter induced by Snow Queen Elsa in *Frozen*, as well as bringing to mind the popular myth of Walt Disney's cryogenically frozen head.

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, Kim & Kontturi, Katve-Kaisa (2019). *Feminist Colour-IN: An Aesthetic Activism of Connection and Collectivity*. Available at: <https://www.maifeminism.com/feminist-colour-in-an-aesthetic-activism-of-connection-and-collectivity/>

Botox, its toxins directed against expression, similarly ‘freezes’ gesture and inflection. The lure is attractive, the clinician’s syringe a contemporary manifestation of *Snow White*’s poisoned apple. Orton’s work extends this line of thought to suggest that perhaps it is our minds which are, or should be, induced into a mental block to freeze our thoughts and prevent them reaching the face. In this sense the works confront the cognitive dissonance that exists between the concept of mimetic desires, that supposes all of our desires are a mere imitation of another’s desire, and a need for or belief in self-determination and agency.

What is at stake here is the expression of our ‘true’ desires through works which explore the possibilities of the anti-mimetic by engorging the microscopic to speculate beyond our ephemeral and manufactured desires. Works, such as *Big Beard* (2018) and *Big Touch* (2018) exist as disproportionate abstractions of the original, showing how a macro perspective produces an oversimplification that unsettles our recognition yet still provides a tranquil familiarity. This is an acknowledgment that although distinction, time and experience may be smoothed out it is through this sacrifice there is seemingly a security to found in sameness.

These colouring-ins are not what they appear to be. The black lines are created only after the colouring-in has been produced to bring together fractured and inflated images. Some of the works are actual mimetic versions of others in the show, boldly outlining the differentiating lines that double as fracture lines in our shared consciousness, or what Freud termed, the “narcissism of small differences”. Works such as *Underage Nose Job* (2019) define an imagined world, free from the cognitive constraints that rely on suppressing cognitive dissonance.

On closer inspection, peering up and into the works, Orton’s seemingly innocuous ‘colouring-ins’ reveal themselves as abstracted, inflated paintings whose source is a children’s bed quilt cover depicting the fairytale<sup>2</sup> *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

While Walt Disney presided over the production and proliferation of patriarchal norms Orton’s works, including *HODS (Heads of Departments)*, 2020) and *The Wedding/ Plant Based Problems* (2024), act as ‘magic mirrors’, subverting rather than reflecting and reinforcing gendered structures of power and oppression. Showcased here is an unmasking of mimetic desires.

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<sup>2</sup> Fairytales date back at least to 9<sup>th</sup> century China with a version of *Cinderella*, through to the 17<sup>th</sup> century French conteuses, the subsequent translation of these oral stories into the literary works, to the founding of the Walt Disney animation studio in 1923.

*Cinderella Spongeboobs* (2019) parodies those who seek to capitalise on imitations of desire and who contribute to social manipulation and disempowerment, offering a mirror world to mimetic contagion, one where our desires are freely chosen expressions of our selfhoods. By paralysing and analysing the imitative exchanges that late capitalism relies upon, Orton's constructions project a state of suspended (e)motion, flipping our 'real' world where masking behaviours have led to faces which *can* no longer belie our inner worlds. The artist neuromances<sup>3</sup> late capitalism by speculating into being a world where the master animator's tools are used to deaminate his house.<sup>4</sup>

By abstracting narratives and overlaying them onto existing stories, either through creative 'product placement' in *Gross Domestic Products*, or by mapping the autobiographical onto designs from stories that have their own cultural designs, as in *Mother and Sons* (2022), we are offered an entry point towards an alternative way of being, thinking and existing in a world whose accelerated pace makes intentional pause for thought almost impossible. This can be attributed to late capitalism's heightened drive to galvanise mimetic desire and rivalry; an acceleration of what René Girard refers to as a "crisis of sameness". Taking ready-made myths, *Snow White*, white columns, and the white cube Orton's work demonstrates the possibilities for stories that sustain us rather than maintain the status -quo.

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<sup>3</sup> Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. (1984)

<sup>4</sup>Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1978)