

HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

From Porn to Pizza, Some Postinternet Art Is Deeper Than It Looks

by **Gretta Louw** on October 15, 2015

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Emilie Gervais, "Pizza Sexual" (2015), digital collages, installation (all images courtesy of Gretta Louw)

BERLIN — *Porn to Pizza*, the latest exhibition at Berlin's DAM Gallery, which opened in early September, has done well in the press. This is not surprising, given its assortment of hot-right-now international artists, many managing to ride the dual waves of "postinternet" hype and critical acclaim / street cred in the insular, although geographically diverse, digital and web 2.0 art community. The press images of the exhibition are, like much of the work, pristine, glossy, visually engaging — attractive in all senses of the word. There is a sense of the familiar, a relevance (to our lives but also to something that feels bigger and vaguely, non-specifically important), and that ostensible "high art" / white cube quality that so-called postinternet art — regardless of the label you choose to give it — has in spades, and which sets it apart from the majority of preceding digital and net art practices. Much has been made of the banality of the apparent thematic interests in the show: porn, pets, plants, and pizza. Indeed, this is emphasized in the inherently self-deprecating addendum to the show's title: *Domestic Clichés*. What seems to have been overlooked in much of the coverage of the exhibition, however, is that this ironic superficiality is just a veneer.



Installation view

Curator Tina Sauerländer, through her curatorial project *peer to space*, has staged numerous projects relating to digital and media practices in recent years, including *Money Works Part 2* (Haus am Lützowplatz, Berlin, 2014) and *Non-Stop Infinity* (Future Gallery, Berlin, 2011). Her curatorial practice is expansive, scholarly, and cohesive; the exhibitions draw parallels not only between the individual works in the space but also between historical movements and contemporary trends, and they are often complementary, successively expanding and deepening a conceptual interest. I asked Sauerländer, for example, about how postinternet art arguably reduces the political / anticapitalist undercurrents of digital and net art (which has traditionally been uncommercial and largely ignored by the art establishment and market), and she replied decisively that she covered notions of the market, value (or lack thereof), and art's uncomfortable but inextricable link to finance in the exhibitions *Money Works* and *Money Works Part 2* and therefore did not want to cover the same ground in *Porn to Pizza*. This sharply defined focus is palpable in her current exhibition.



Curator Tina Sauerländer with digital prints "Towards a New Shiny Internet Domesticity" 2-3 by Eva Papamargariti

Porn to Pizza is an exhibition that builds bridges. Sauerländer connects contemporary digital art with Pop art through the focus on the everyday of the online and the glossy, neatly packaged, perfected exteriors projected by many of the works. The exhibition also feels like an invitation, as though a drawbridge was being lowered between elitist, white-cube, highbrow Art with a capital A and the common, universal experience of a millennial everyman. It invites a broad audience to reflect upon its own relationship to the internet. The cute cats, bright colors, and exposed flesh draw us in, and the works are heavily laced with a reflexive irony that forbids us to take it all too seriously. But this is, in many instances, just a pretext to explore the deeper societal, political, and psychological factors associated with digitalization and the networking of the world.

The four *Selfie Drawings* from Carla Gannis's ongoing series feel like a masterfully rendered psychoanalytical free-association on the fragmentation of self that occurs, almost by definition, as we mediate ourselves to the world through our devices, slicing up and dividing the pieces neatly between social media platforms devised exactly for that purpose. Kate Durbin's social-media-friendly performance "Hello Selfie!" is presented in high-production-value video documentation, highlighting the self-exploitation of the personal-branding generation, while also acknowledging that social media can be, perhaps paradoxically, empowering for those who are marginalized in mainstream, patriarchal society.



Lindsay Lawson, "Benro" (2015), diverse items and pigment in plaster and resin (click to enlarge)

The concept of the surface as a construct that can protect, obscure, or even sell what is hidden beneath is evident in a number of the works, perhaps first and foremost Lindsay Lawson's sculptures "Wrangler" and "Benro," in which the artist uses pigment, plaster, and resin to "bury" various objects from her life (jeans, a tripod) in a sort of reverse archeological process, camouflaging these discarded remnants as elegant, vase-like sculptural objects. Emilie Gervais's installation "Pizza Sexual" literally allows materiality to ooze into the digital: The artist embeds a smartphone screen showing stills of real porn actresses that have been digitally sanitized to CGI perfection and then smothered in digital pizza within an actual, physical pizza. On

opening night the oil greased visitors' fingers, clothes, and the screen of the phone as people swiped between the digital images on display.



Claudia Hart, *The Real and The Fake*, multimedia installation, 2015

This juxtaposition between the physical and the virtual recurs throughout the exhibition. Sauerländer cleverly creates a dialogue between numerous works to critique the outdated notion of "real" and "unreal" in favor of a new realism. That which we see or experience is real. The internet is material. There is no virtual reality, only, as Manuel De Landa proposes, real virtuality. Eva Papamargariti's prints, *Towards a Shiny New Internet Domesticity*, create perfectly rendered interiors that blend reality and surreality, digitally designing objects that would be either impossible or prohibitively expensive to produce IRL. Claudia Hart addresses the issue more bluntly in the multimedia sculpture (digital images on digital photo frames installed on a custom shelf) "The Real and the Fake," in which photographs of "real" food are imperceptibly blended with noticeably "fake," digitally rendered apples. "You asking me about my drinking but not about my thirst" is a polyurethane sculpture or reproduction of a bowl of soup by Hayley Aviva Silverman; the 3-D work functions like an image on a webpage — indeed it could be a 3-D print of such (it is not) — and one questions in what way this inedible reproduction of an edible thing is in any way more "real" than a digital image.



Installation view

The subject matter of the exhibition is not the casually observed pets, porn, and pizza, but rather the existential, philosophical questions about life in a reality that blends the digital with the more conventionally experiential. Like the internet itself, the skein of darker, deeper, more troubling concepts addressed in the exhibition are packaged within a slickly branded, often amusing, and readily accessible layer of mass appeal and good design. Those who choose to stay on the surface — of the internet, or of the works in this exhibition — are willingly buckling on their own blinders, refusing to acknowledge the reality (a term that has nothing to do with materiality) of the age we live in, distracted by *kawaii* and endlessly entertaining YouTube videos.

[Porn to Pizza](#) continues at DAM Gallery (Neue Jakobstraße 6, 10179 Berlin, Germany) until October 24.

DAM Gallery

postinternet art

Tina Sauerländer
