

## LADIES, BEAUTIFUL LADIES

The two-part exhibition project *Ladies, Beautiful Ladies* by the Icelandic artist Birgir Birgisson follows up on the latest developments of his ongoing project focusing on the question of politics of representation, addressed through the visual negotiations of blondes in our cultural environments.

In *Ladies, Beautiful Ladies* Birgisson presents a variety of works that reach from painting on canvas via installation in the site to works on paper. What connects all the different media is the issue of how identities are made and shaped, distributed and retold – rooted and rebounded.

The exhibition brings about the more formal studies of how beauty and beautifulness is presented and promoted through the years, ranging from current affairs to historical phenomena. These are the series called *French Blondes*, contemporary reflection of beauty with the most minimal painterly means of color, and the series called *52 days with Pretty women of Paris* that revisits sites presented and promoted in an old guide book from the 1880's, mainly serving the British male tourists visiting Paris there and then.

Simultaneously, the exhibition underlines the actively politicized versions of what is beautiful and how that is used and abused – from any sides of the equitation, wishes, wants and fears. These are then works of art, for example, that deal with the heavily loaded image and social imagination glued to the ex-prime minister of Ukraine, now jailed in Kiev, Yulia Tymoshenko, a series of large scale works of paintings, and as another case, a single work, oil on canvas, that with painstakingly detail paints the letter of a certain historical figure called Brigitte Bardot; a letter in which she openly supports the racist and nationalist policies of Marine Le Pen and her xenophobic party.

These are works that confront the theme of what is believed and seen as beautiful but the point being is that it does so with a means of a distortion and the amazing grace of artistic detail. The works of Birgisson are not illustration, they are not explanation of a phenomena or a clarification of an effect. Neither are they celebration or glorifications of the inherent quirkiness of our relationship towards beauty and blondes.

Instead, these works are elegantly and carefully conducted and executed expressions that bring together constantly emerging version of a painting and works on paper that are obviously very aware of its plural pasts while at the same time in great need to articulate a current version of it. These are works that express the necessary interplay between an artistic means and the connections it has and generates with the social and political sites and situations.

As artistic expressions, these works do achieve what any work of a cultural product tries to achieve. They connect the dots between what was before, what goes around us right now and how that is then expressed into a new body of work. They are expressions that link the exhibition series to the source from which the title of the project is with dedication borrowed. We attach ourselves openly and playfully to a song by Lee Fields and his band called the Expressions. It is a contemporary act of soul music that by itself more powerfully connects the dots between past, present and the future.

These are emotions in motion that shine in and through the words of the sweet and tender refrain of the song called *Ladies, Beautiful Ladies*, taken from the album *My World*, 2009.

*“Let me hear you say ladies. Beautiful ladies. Lovely ladies. You're so fine, so fine. Come summertime. When I saw you walkin by. Girl you blew my mind. The way you look and smile at me, girl I saw a sign. And when you pass me by, you're like candy to my eyes. Ladies, beautiful ladies ...”*

Mika Hannula