

GENERAL IMAGES

COEN YOUNG

*“La lumière crue  
Se charge vers moi  
Me laissant vide*

*The Light Pours Out of Me*

From the album *Real Life* by Magazine 1978

All is Vanity

Magazine’s song *The Light Pours Out of Me* pre-dates  
Coen Young.

Much of frontman Howard De Voto’s lyrics had a snarky bitterness to them, a legacy to the ‘bonfire of vanity’ that punk yearned to be. De Voto’s earlier musical life was with the Buzzcocks whose anxieties were somewhat less existential – for them it was fast cars and orgasm addiction, although one of their “hits” seems well suited to the current millennial slackers...”What do I get?”

With Magazine, the *Pb* level of De Voto’s lyrics and music dropped a notch or two, the whole pitch became more layered and sophisticated as the nihilism of punk gave way to a slightly sullen brand of existentialism.

The theatrical negativity of punk was unlikely to have sustained much of Young’s attention. I’m well aware his energy is more Camus than Rotten and yet there is something ‘quietly punk’, if that makes sense, about his significant suite of works, collectively titled *Studies for a Mirror*. It is not simply that these works resist many of the orthodoxies and imagined responsibilities of a painting, rather it’s that they refuse a position and then set about questioning ours. They exist as endlessly mutable veils of refusal – evading form, and abnegating image.

*Studies for a Mirror* 2016  
Private Collection Sydney, Australia

*Studies for a Mirror* 2016  
Private Collection , Guangdong, China

*Studies for a Mirror* 2016  
Private Collection Tokyo

*Studies for a Mirror* 2016  
Private Collection Paris

Installation: Art Basel Hong Kong 2016



This play on our narcissistic urge is at the core of Young's work. He is acutely aware of our desire to find recognition and satisfaction in the embrace that reflection offers. By denying us that pleasure he reminds us of the transience of the image and in the works deeper connection to enshrouding. Like the gauzy imprint on Veronica's veil, we are given nothing but traces, a faltering hologram.

Given that paintings usually set out to either describe or establish form, Young's pursuit of its absence draws connections to the work of German painter Günter Umberg for example. Umberg's paintings radically assert body and material and yet the experience of them is one where absence and presence are in sensitive balance. As different as the materiality of Young's work is from Umberg's, the manner in which they both seem to paint themselves out of the work in an attempt to express existence feels consequential.

In 2009 I suggested that "the existentialism that Umberg refers to in this making is replayed in our viewing with the quiet disorientation and sensory confusion that we experience part of the realignment of knowledge and emotion that paintings arouse in us." This statement could easily be applied to Coen Young's paintings. The disorientation arising, not from the depth and elusiveness of the "still-point" but of the ceaselessness of the turning world.

And as much as Umberg's paintings attune our senses to the banishment of light, to its lowest possible register, Young's shimmering veils make it feel as if the light pours out of him, pooling in front of us, tempting our vanity - but in the end these paintings remind us that it is not us that is beautiful but our uncertainty, our transience.

Günter Umberg *ohne titel*, 2001  
pigment and dammar on wood 60.5 x 53.5 cm  
Private Collection, Sydney, Australia

Coen Young *Studies for a Mirror #3 (january)*, 2016  
enamel, acrylic, marble and silver nitrate on paper 141.5 x 104.5 cm  
Private Collection, Auckland, New Zealand

Installation: *The Authority of Death*, Auckland, NZ, 2016



coen young  
*general images*, 2016  
enamel, acrylic, marble and silver nitrate on paper  
Installation: Coen Young Studio, Sydney, Australia

