

Bucknell, Alice, 'Review: Signe Pierce: Faux Realities', this is tomorrow, (June, 2017)

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Signe Pierce: Faux Realities
Annka Kultys Gallery
8 June - 1 July 2017
Review by Alice Bucknell



“This is where it all started,” Signe Pierce points toward a lone print of a silhouetted palm tree that has somehow managed to wrangle free from the infinite scroll of neon-soaked imagery expanding across the walls of Annka Kultys Gallery in East London for her ‘Faux Realities’ exhibition. Compared to the buzzing psychedelia of the other 30-some hyper-real stills, the shadowy flora – cast against a pink-blue gradient, its largest frond illuminated from underneath by a rainbow spectrum – feels pared back, almost minimalistic.

Pierce goes on to reveal that every photograph included within the show – the artist’s first in the UK – unfurled after her fateful encounter with this tropical tree upon first arriving in Los Angeles in late 2014. A Brooklyn dispatch raised in the arid desert stretch of the Southwestern United States, Pierce’s nomadic practice is tied to competing narratives of overstimulation and alienation, hedonism and loneliness.

From empty fluorescent Chinatown restaurants and the snow-caked trashcans of Brooklyn circa early 2016's mega-blizzard, to the accidental tropical conservatories of Californian fast food mecca In-n-Out's drive-thru landscaping, Pierce's homage to New York's gritty angst and her lust affair with LA's technicolor hedonism bleed together to offer a deeply personal documentation of this transamerican story as eerie as it is seductive.

'Faux Realities' is a touchstone for this series of simulacra: it is the first time that Pierce's photographs have been exhibited off the screen, and to a scale larger than a desktop monitor (or more commonly, one's iPhone: a nice synchrony with their mode of capture). Blown up to size A0 prints and edited accordingly, the photographs appear like a HDR vision cloaked in low-res fuzzy ambience. The illusion splays itself out on the surface but doesn't lose any impact in keeping things skin deep: underneath the gallery's fluorescent lights that are specially encased in holographic perspex, the photographs occupy an uncanny space between digital and print aesthetics.

"Pixelism is the new pointillism," Pierce likens the Hollywood-grade SFX treatment that goes into the final form of each image to a post-digital form of painting. "Each of these pictures started from a batch of three or five-hundred," she says nonchalantly. "I then import them into Photoshop and begin messing around with texture, hue, saturation ... Sometimes even from my iPhone."

The neon glow soaks up all colours of the spectrum, but there is a noticeably strong lobby for pink and purple compositions. "Women are socialised to love these colours since birth but there's not a lot of hyper-feminine colour in the streets," she notes. But Pierce's colour therapy is not without its political missive. Tapping into the cult following her work has amassed on Tumblr and Instagram as well as its subversive political potential, 'Faux Realities' tackles questions of gender and identity, activating real and digital communities with feminist agency: "[Social media] influence has become camouflage for activism" she says.

Indeed, the feedback loop of the work – flowing from real-world encounter, to hallucinogenic hyper-real imagery distributed across the Internet, to IRL gallery space, and then back again to social media shares – becomes a type of infinite scroll where post-internet aesthetics wires up its enraptured audience. This is something that Pierce describes as "entry-level activism" and it is slipped into a glitter pill of sensory seduction.