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PELOTON



**WILL FERRELL**

Julie Fragar interviewed by Wes Hill, August 2007.

Julie Fragar's work is firmly based on the ground. She isn't a fantasist; she deals with the immediate world around her yet with enough objectivity from her subjects to avoid both pathos and alienation. There are many qualities in Fragar's practice that I like. I like her seductive application of paint. I like her use of black as a colour. I like the fact that some of the photographic imagery seems arbitrary - as if in copying a random image she might find something that she didn't know about herself or the people that surround her or both. I like how she isn't weighed down by art theory or history yet paints with such intelligence. I like that her work doesn't seem like art but like a conversation. I like all of these things about her practice yet I wondered where it all came from. To find this out I conducted the following interview with her in August 2007 to coincide with her exhibition 'Man'.

Wes: Julie, your practice seems to be more gestural than didactic. I can see this conceptually in your solo exhibitions as well as in isolated works- through your particular style of paint application and the emphasis you place on interpreting photographic sources rather than literalizing them.

Julie: When I started using photographs, I liked the slavishness of copying, the redundancy of the act, probably the virtuosity of it too. I was quite hung up on those American West Coast photorealists like Richard Estes and Robert Bechtle. But when I saw these paintings in the flesh I figured out that these 'Photorealist' painters weren't all the same breed, the good ones, like Bechtle and Estes, really dealt with the paint. You wouldn't think it from reproduction but Estes' works are quite painterly, the colour is pure and the brush is still very evident. From this point I changed focus, from as you say, literalizing the photographs, to playing with the contradictions and crossovers between the paint and the photograph.

W: Your work seems to avoid the rhetoric surrounding the death and renewal of painting perhaps because of the sheer sincerity of your approach which you couple with only the slightest amount of skepticism about the image.

J: You are right about the sincerity. I have an affection for the subjects. I am sincere about painting too, I still believe in painting- because it is defeated over and over and carries on regardless. I am not sure what exactly you mean by skepticism about the image, but perhaps you mean a disconnection from the subject- I don't hang on to the human subjects like a mother. If I paint a picture from a photograph of my daughter, I don't see it as a sort of family portrait; I'm not making a painted autobiography, at least not in the traditional sense. I take more distance from the subject than that- and yes, using the photographic representation of the subject and reinventing the image as painting is one way that this occurs. There is a more general conceptual distance as well in that I see in the work - and the whole practice actually - as a curiosity, the idea that a female artist decides that she would make paintings of these diaristic images for years and years.

W: The diaristic aspect of your practice does provide a rare intimacy between yourself and the viewer. Can you tell me then how this exhibition fits with that idea?

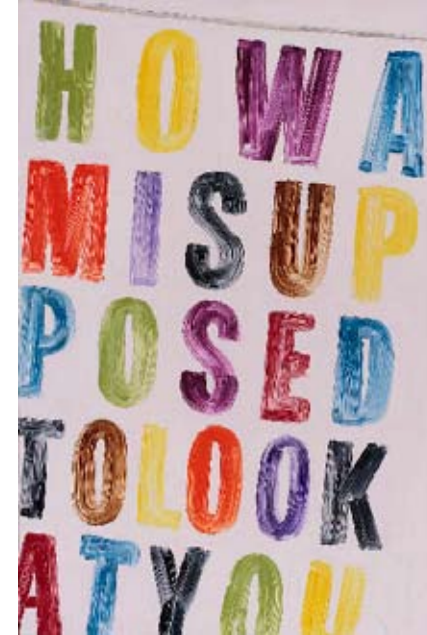
J: Every heterosexual woman when she is thirty starts thinking about men. I have been thinking a lot about what a man should be like. I married someone quite different from my father, who is something of the old school man; decisive, authoritative, and a bit arrogant. So you think in some deep sense that this is what a man should be, but women of our generation can never be married to men like that. Sometimes I think we are in a bit of a predicament ... So of course, this stuff is of personal interest to me and so there is some sense of a proposed intimacy between myself and the viewer. But this really is a false intimacy; there is too much between the artist as a person and the viewer's perception. I am interested though, in what it is to present the 'personal' in painting, and about the relationship that is imagined between this authorial subject and the viewer. Someone like Marlene Dumas is very good at playing with this.

W: Your relatively open-ended approach to art-making means that this exhibition might be read as a homage to men, a satirical take on feminism, a sincere feminist statement or simply a thematic device to generate an exhibition of paintings. Practically speaking then, what were you most concerned with when formulating this show?

J: I wanted to create a sense of an individual thinking critically about how they relate to the men that they know, and that this thinking was done at the same time as thinking about the problems of painting. I wondered if it was possible to make a painting show about men by a woman that was neither political or a homage, but the objectification of an artist's present concerns- both psychological and formal. I was interested in the point at which form or an idea of the process, would start to challenge the loadedness of the content. To do this, I thought the painting had to remain visible, it had to fluctuate across the series, reinstating itself by way of contrast, at different points the painting would dominate and then recede. If there was an overriding concern in making 'Man', it was perhaps to explore the oppositional values inherent in paintings of men made by a woman; the work is quite consciously aporetic.

W: The American artist John Currin said that "The subject of a painting is always the author, the artist. You can only make an illusion that it's about something other than that. I think that's what the function of representation is: to give a painting the illusion of a subject". Whether you agree or disagree with that statement, I'm interested in how you feel the interview process contributes to the perception of your work, which is in some way the perception of yourself as a person. Are you wary about what sort of perception your responses will generate and how it will affect the work?

J: Its funny you mention that Currin comment, today I just finished a Courbet painting- my painting of the artist at the centre. So yes, I do agree with what Currin says, in reality my work is no more personal than anyone else's; I'm just playing into the idea it. As for the interview process, the work is already out there, and the artist at some point has a responsibility to say something about it.



HOWA MISUPPOSED TO LOOK AT YOU, oil on board, 60 x 40 cm, 2007.



David Thomas and Gustave Courbet, oil on board, 60 x 40 cm, 2007.



David Thomas and Nicholas Chambers, oil on board, 60 x 40 cm, 2007.



Our Deer Hunter (Jason), oil on board, 60 x 40 cm, 2007.



Gustave Courbet, oil on board, 60 x 40 cm, 2007.

MAN  
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