

FILLING THE CRACKS  
JULIE COCKBURN  
WITH CEILING WAX



29 April – 29 May 2010  
Private View Saturday 8 May 2 – 4pm

## FLOWERS

82 Kingsland Road  
London E2 8DP

*Incognito* 2009, plastic game parts, found photograph, 25.3cm x 20.3cm

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

Entering the world of Julie Cockburn's images – a labyrinthine space crosshatched by 'the archived corridors' of the artist's imagination – we are met by a coterie of misfits: cut-outs, collages and aggregate creatures, they are the cast in a vignette where visual seduction is saturated by a sense of the familiar made strange. Cockburn's characters are engendered from of a heady concoction of appropriation, artistry and artifice. Central to their creation is the cache of found images – neglected photographs co-opted from car boots, studio shots of 1950s movie stars, pages torn from American high school year books – that become playthings for the artist to 'embellish, manipulate, torture and caress'. The portraits that Cockburn selects for her maverick mark-making are united in their status as images once dazzling but now defunct. She explains the allure of these outcasts and faded icons as their potential for redemption through a re-possession and re-visioning: 'I feel I have a right to them, that they are mine for the taking, or rescuing even'.

Cockburn's mode of attack is defacement, a strategy driven by the dual compulsion to both blemish (destroy or diminish the perfection of) and embellish (beautify by, or as if by ornamentation). Violence done unto the page manifests in splicing, smothering and stitching, in the bleeding of one surface into another, in quixotic patterns that migrate from fabric to flesh. Such is the case in **Tattoo Face**, where the high-necked blouse of a sanguine starlet gives way to a tightly-wrought bloom of embroidery that assails her face, an impeccably groomed arched brown, kohl-lined eyes and the glossy stain of lips her only surviving features.

**Belle** also bears the mark of the artist's needle; her convoluted scars, etched in cotton, are offset by ink smudges, seemingly the flighty imprints of childish fingertips or traces of the *danse macabre* of a wounded winged creature. In the **Moodswing** series, hand some portraits of 1950s movie stars are abstracted into anonymity through the application of vinyl ellipses that act as veils to obscure the women's faces. Cockburn encourages these laminated discs to peel into 3-dimensions, a buckling of the pristine surface that alludes to the psychic disturbance of feminine hysteria. This reading is progressed by the study *Tupperware Bowl*, which objectifies the 50s ideal of an attractive, hermetically sealed, wipe-clean form of femininity. Whilst Cockburn's presentation of this domestic vessel appears straightforward, its unconventional finish - a dense slick of yacht varnish - betrays the artist's sensitivity to the slipperiness of superficial facades and the veneer of kept up appearances.

**Shellshocked** presents another image of the disintegration of the self; the face of its subject, ascribed an alien, geometric anatomy, is fractured into indistinction. The title is telling, conjuring an inherently fragile, feminine structure and presenting it in its pathological form. A kaleidoscopic derangement transforms **Crystal** from a smiling schoolgirl into a chaotic mass of splintered features: hair, teeth and eyes alchemised into crystalline form. Cockburn's geometrical fragmentation gives way to a fleshier, palpably textured form of defacement in **Just Like Your Father**, where the head of the subject appears as an impasto intrusion on a found photographic print, its bulbous proportions and incongruous countenance causing it to appear as a kind of painterly tumour.

The artist's propensity for breaking up, analysing and re-assembling in abstracted form is suggestive of cubist sensibilities, but where cubism is concerned with permeating the picture plane with every viewpoint and angle in its arsenal, Cockburn's skewed imagery operates, ultimately, on a temporal rather than spatial register. Her subversions, incisions, stitchings and unpickings are a form of visual storytelling based in questioning notions of origin and originality. She challenges fixed ideas of authorship by incessantly reframing events and inspiring images to destabilise the authority of the frame. Nowhere is this more patent than in the **Provenance** series, where she imposes images of her own making into scenes captured by the camera in a bygone era, thus interweaving the threads of two unrelated narratives - his-story and her own - with audacious disregard for the axioms of linearity and chronology. Cockburn is characteristically self-effacing in accounting for this subversion, insisting on the insurgency inherent in the image: 'There is something that happens beyond my control with a successful work; it is greater than the sum of its simple parts, becoming a new image with a new history to unfurl'.

Julie Cockburn lives and works in London. She studied at Chelsea College of Art and Central St Martins College of Art and Design. She has exhibited extensively in the UK, Europe and the United States. Her work is included in the collections of Yale Center for British Art, The Wellcome Collection, British Land and Goss-Michael Foundation.

For more information contact Ellie Harrison-Read on +44 (0)20 7920 7777 or email [ellie@flowersgalleries.com](mailto:ellie@flowersgalleries.com)

[www.flowersgalleries.com](http://www.flowersgalleries.com)