**DON’T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YVES LEATHER TELLS YOU**

Clara Raillard

‘Hi, I’m so late, I showed up at Pipeworks instead’, my friend said as she greeted me in front of The Pipe Factory on Wednesday, at the opening of the exhibition *Don’t Believe Everything Yves Leather Tells You*. The exhibition shows work by artist Yves Leather and photographer Jack Thomson, and is curated by Ciaran MacDomhnaill. My friend’s confusion was in some way orchestrated by the creative trio, whose last exhibition collaboration was sponsored by the gay sauna, Pipeworks—they were hoping something like this would happen. This show, as the text next to the door promises, will centre “on gossip within a queer context”, gossip that more specifically “touches upon subjects of relationship, friendship, sex, sexuality, neurodiversity and the sale of art”.

‘Don’t Believe Everything Yves Leather Tells You’, warns the show’s title and poster. Yves Leather is the artist whose work and, it seems, life, the show revolves around. The name already flips the script of expectations when encountering an artist so devoted to their persona: their given name (as I was told), inherited from Mr. And Mrs. Leather, would make the task of finding a better avatar a difficult feat.

Leather is here showing work of two very distinct factures: on the one hand, gestural paintings of desert landscapes overhung by rocky dick peaks, in frames shaped like flames of a decidedly handmade or ‘crafty’ aesthetic. On the other, ready made objects, mostly of the inflatable variety, inflatable frames around screen prints of scanned inflatable ready-made objects. MacDomhnaill informs us that the desert paintings were made in response to “a recent relationship [of the artist] with an American lover, a relationship that was fragile, easily punctured and is now standing at a point in which it needs to be ‘put to bed’”.

Gossip may very well be a regular attendee of art opening discourse. Here, a deliberate decision is made not to relegate it to the unacknowledged, but to instead integrate it into the main discourse. Reflections on the sincerity of the handmade flame frames, on the tenderness of the giant desert cocks, more than well-endowed but so lonely; and murmurs about whether the American lover is going to show up to the opening, whether they have read the text, and what do they think of it, all arise within the same discussion and have their rightful place. In a milieu in which accusations of frivolity and superficiality are leveled against any interaction with art that strays from the consecrated male, heterosexual, and most of all serious model of critical engagement, reclaiming cattiness is here envisionned as a queer criticality.

On the flipside, Leather appears to be aping celebrity, seemingly expecting audiences to excitedly take private jokes as celebrity gossip. This confusion could be a conscious one, if the desperate plea ‘I am a famous artist .com’ spray-painted on an inflatable mattress is anything to go by. Yves Leather is stuck between a rock and a hard place, between inside jokes, the language of community; or celebrity gossip, that of the art market. Tension is in the air, as there seems to be hesitation concerning which group Leather is more eager to embrace and be embraced by. Coming out of the show, I am left wondering if Yves Leather is a budding famous artist, or the ‘no one important’ who sponsored the show ( “this exhibition is sponsored by no one important”, reads the wall).

The work of photographer Jack Thomson shows Leather posing as an unconvinced artist-superstar, looking straight into the camera with sad frightful eyes. The headshots flashily edited with chroma key composition owe much to pop art, with a visual sensibility fit for the social media age, and the stance of the artist-model is affected with hesitation. A few of the photographs show Yves Leather shirtless in front of a green screen, wearing a green balaclava. One of these shows the artist taking a selfie. With the green still very much present, these images make the statement ‘I want to hide’, without actually using the green screen for its intended camouflaging purposes. Announcing that one is not to be trusted, or that one wishes to hide, is enough of a gesture not to be taken to task. Leather camps coyness, postures naïvety, and performs plausible deniability from the title of their show down to their persona.

If you don’t feel particularly inclined to play along, you may have started asking some obvious questions: is all this gossip really at the crux of the work? Was all of it produced in a love-scorned frenzy (like Leather’s last show *Inner Conflict and Gayness* was supposedly motivated by an obsession with their curator)? Is any of it about any of that? Curator Ciaran MacDomhnaill is a fabulator in his own right, but accusing him to supplant the artist’s intent with an alternate account of events would amount to asking Yves Leather for the truth. As we’ve established, the artist—in this case Yves Leather—hardly constitutes a trustworthy source, or one of authority.

Some, perhaps even Leather themselves, may find the soap-operatic curatorial paratext to be a distraction from the art. But it may also be, in the tradition of smug fourth-wall breaking calls for audience responsibility, a provocation not to take any authoritative statements, from artist or from curator, as an unquestionable truth; and to instead look at the art. To look at the writing, as well. MacDomhnaill’s curatorial text won’t tell you all about Yves, and it is, as much as the artwork, responsible for itself. But, placed in conversation with each other, they offer different places from which we may start to read. Lying is only writing, and it is a craft.