

SLOPPY



How boys broke the world

Hi everyone, welcome to my show. This exhibition was created on, and this gallery stands on, unceded Larrakia Land. I acknowledge the Traditional Owners past, present and future.

I would like to thank the Fringe Festival for having me. Sam Bowden for her friendship, for inspiring me to continue with this body of work, for just being there, staying close and being true. David Hancock, a wonderful ally, beautiful photographer and friend, for the use of his gallery; Stan, Jessie and Neil from Eprint for the luscious prints and Simone for the hang and Tarzan for the food. Thank you.

So, I was watching *Titan, the Oceangate Submersible Disaster* on Netflix, it's about Stockton Rush the billionaire who imploded himself and 4 others in his submersible, which isn't my point, although imploding billionaires is an amusing concept; the point is, that Rush stated that he wanted to be, 'his words' a 'big swinging dick', like Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos. Well, one swinging dick leads to another, and I started reading about Bezo's, Blue Origin all-female passenger flight.

That took me down the rabbit hole of the online hate for Katy Perry, one of the Blue Origin's passengers. I mean, yeah she is a bit of a privileged tosser, but it struck me just how hyper-normalised; how loud and relentless the online cruelty towards her and other women has become.

And it is not just by the manosphere. If you want to understand the manosphere, think about those boys, aged between 14–18 who raped a 16 year old girl for 6 hours. That's akin to murder. But there is also the womanosphere. Woman, who repackage anti-feminist, gender essentialist right-wing messages in a delicate, thin, fertile skin, all the while stroking their strong, protective men. I think it's boring bollocks but I keep reading about Katy Perry—better the devil you

know—and this one post, which isn't too bad, goes something like: "Wow, Katy Perry went into space, while people can't even afford to buy eggs", this line, flung me face-first into yet another 'big swinging dick', a couple of them actually.

The first one is Adolf Hitler. Adolf Hitler and eggs—in the same sentence—and not as surprising a link as you might think, because when he was elected as Germany's Chancellor, Hitler had tariff's at the top of his agenda, which raised the price of eggs by 600%, making them unaffordable.

Everything is connected by big swinging dicks. The second one is Trump. Now, I am not saying Trump is a mass murderer, mind you, he hasn't finished with us yet, so he might be, but if I were to ask you, who, when legitimately and democratically elected, introduced tariffs to liberate his country from a globalised order and make it great again; or, pardoned and released loyal followers who violently attacked the established government and its citizens; wanted to annex neighbouring countries; or called his political opponents "vermin" and claimed immigrants were "poisoning the blood of his country", or who invaded his own country arresting it's citizens; loved military parades, and had some weird signature hair-thing going on; who would you say I was talking about? Two big swinging dicks.

These are the men of the modern world.

But *Sloppy: how boys broke the world* is not about Hitler or Trump, although Trump is definitely a player because he is a man that our modern society is designed to create; as are Nazi's and fascists. *Sloppy* is about the last twenty years of the Internet. It's about information, but more importantly, what people do with that information, and it's about what people are prepared to believe.

Nothing happens in isolation though. Over the last 20 years, capitalism, as demonstrated by the monopoly of big corporations and the global super elites, JP Morgan, Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple, Facebook, Walmart, Nestle, X, Nvidia, Open AI, Meta. Here in Darwin we have Santos.

These corporate chiefs and our governments are teaming up under the premise that corporations are no longer selfish, that they can help to make the world a better place, strolling hand-in-hand with government and new legislation they brand themselves as the new and improved 'psychopath', blending the need to make money with social responsibility, insinuating themselves deeper and deeper into all aspects of our lives and undermining our ability to have any say over what happens in our lives.

But capitalism has never been committed to people or the planet. Capitalism is an economic system built around individual consumer preferences and the notion that there is anything inherently social about a corporation is preposterous, because there is no such thing as corporate social responsibility. Take the fossil fuel industry for example: fossil fuel companies groom us with delay tactics, asking us to believe that they are the heroes by promising a carbon free model but explaining that in the meantime we may have to keep using their fossil fuels.

The way these elites, and I'm talking about Zuckerberg, Trump, Musk, Altman, Gates, have gained power is by changing the way we think and the Internet has been the most convenient and triumphant mechanism for that manipulation.

People and society have changed too—our once, common moral values have been replaced by abstract, fragile, hyper-individualism, too unsteady to give any real meaning to our lives. Everyone wanting to be right, resulting in polarised, indignant, sometimes murderous, never-ending public arguments.

Our new found obsession for private property, our own status, lifestyle, success, relevance or physical appearance. Narcissism, fanaticism, and authoritarianism is on the rise; the language of self, of I am, I gain, I acquire; people, including children and teenagers use smart-phones like extra limbs, rarely looking up; Donald Trump uses his presidency as if it were a possession, a stage for his wonderfulness.

The White House muddies the once sacred waters by posting AI generated images of him as the Pope, a king or Superman. Israel's Prime Minister, Netanyahu slaughter's Palestinians, bombs hospitals, starves people and it's not OK to point out that he's become the barbarian we are all so afraid of?

To keep up, we are encouraged to see ourselves, and all of society, as potential merchandise, rarely thinking about what it really means to economise our own, or the planet's, life-force.

We are living in an era where a protected, privileged few—the 1%, the brologarchs, the elites, the super rich—whatever you want to call them, are surrounded by an impoverished majority. And we see the consequences of that now, with the economic frustrations of that majority turning into a new wave of hate, blame, conspiratorial thinking and a murderous desire to punch down, hurt and destroy.

We live in a turbo-charged self-parodying era of billionaire-tech-men, breeding like Attila the Hun, dancing on stages with chainsaws, while half a dozen of their tech-company-bros control the world, hyper-linking anger to hijack people's attention, stealing the work of the world's creators, attacking and claiming journalists are enemies of the people, undercutting them with Zero Click Searches, buying social media platforms and promoting disinformation and hate, shitting on democracy with fantasies of algorithmic governance and polluting the planet, all the while building bunkers to hide from the masses and the consequences of their lifestyles, and whingeing about 'free speech'.

The word 'free' being the operative here, these men are super-rich and yet, they don't want to pay, or be responsible for anything—Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube and others have open comment sections without any fear of consequence, by not being deemed as publishers they relax in their legal immunity whilst media companies are faced with the impossible task of monitoring comments on all their social media outlets around the clock to avoid defamation. We are circling the drain here, in a newsless world. This is the basis of the modern Internet.

We do not live in a fairytale, equality does not occur naturally. The fact is we need political systems, education, health, transport, a taxation system that targets high income earners and multi-national corporations. It takes commitment.

I ask my self, if people can see that these elite wankers are so totally and unashamedly full of crap, why do we keep letting them get away with it? Let's look, say, at the motivation for Facebook. Zuckerberg couldn't make friends, in particular girlfriends. Him being super-rich and owning most of an island in Hawaii, has not made him any less appealing. YouTube—two boys assessing and grading the fitness of women via still images deciding it would be more fun if the images were live action. Lets be serious why would you endorse this mindless bottom line? If this room constituted the 99% of the world, and I, for instance, was the 1%, for the life of me I cannot work out why you don't tell me to fuck off, or at least deprive me of oxygen.

Finally, there were two separate events that planted the seed for *Sloppy*. One was the Referendum; and the other, my last exhibition *You are here* curated by Joanna Barrkman and held at CDU Art Gallery in 2021.

During the lead up to the Referendum and whilst working for the electoral commission on the day of the Referendum, I bore witness to an unrestrained deluge of conspiratorial stupidity fuelled by a hatred which had me wanting to give up on humanity altogether. I saw racism for what it has always been—a weapon that ignorant people use to leverage themselves upwards and above their peers in the hope that they might appear 'better', or somehow more intelligent. But racism does not make you smarter. I saw that a lot of Australians through their ignorance, really did not have the heart to give their fellow Australians anything, even if it meant very little.

I saw no cohesion that day, just a very weakened, shared common ground or normality. Anxious, fragmented egos, susceptible to made-up machinations. I saw, that we do to other people what we do to ourselves—we deem them memorable or having potential, only if they are useful—and I wondered how the abject poverty and illness of one group of Australians will ever be healed if we continue to lie about, exclude and discriminate against them.

I also saw that things would come full circle and that there are, and will continue to be consequences for everything we've done, continue to do, and neglect to do. Nobody benefits in the long run. Mostly though, I asked myself how do I deal with this much hatred? When did we become so splintered that we lost what it means to be human, lost our capacity to make common moral judgements?

The second event was *You are here*. It charted the fossil fuel extraction in Australia and corresponding massacres of First Nations People. When it finished up, I considered doing a similar time-line tracing the history of misogyny. I spoke with a few potential PHD supervisors and they advised me that it was probably a tad ambitious. I am not sure if they saw the irony of a woman telling another woman that their idea about recording the hatred of women, might be too ambitious, but I did see their point. Basically I would be documenting the history of the world right?

But, a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do, and the trick is to start somewhere. *You are here* and *Sloppy: how boys broke the world* do tabulate chunks of the misogynistic ecosystem encasing us all. *Sloppy* is a small bite, but a significant one, because our future has never been so uncertain.

And, nothing in *Sloppy* has not already happened before, same theme, different stories, different 'swinging dicks'.

To paraphrase Margaret Atwood the author of the dystopian novel, *The Handmaids Tale*, one of the most gruelling portraits of men's hatred for women: "Nothing I have written about has not already been done".

Thank you and I hope you enjoy my show.

Therese Ritchie
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Darwin