

I want to go to a show, and I want it to leave a taste in my mouth. A sense that something is happening here; a new flavour, one that leaves me ecstatic. This itch of mine, for the most part, remains unscratched, until now. Ch'lita Collins and Josephine Pryde at Mercy Pictures is an event and a possibility that represents something more for art in New Zealand, there's a different kind of life here, an impulse, one missing from the lifeless galleries.

It feels as though *waiting*, and the same old comfortable critical discourses are what underscores New Zealand's art scene. A criticality that is produced within art's specialist systems, which means that its made possible by the maintenance of such systems... What's the risk? What's new? Who's listening? Existing within this bubble, or more accurately, this vacuum leaves one feeling like little is ever at stake. There's work waiting to be seen and there's an archive waiting to accumulate, all that's missing is a conduit.

This context is what makes the gesture of this show as a whole so compelling, New Zealand for the first time is able to see Josephine Pryde and Ch'lita Collins's photographs exhibited, the table has been set. Pryde's works are from her series "Cubicles", made for the first issue of *Hard Mag* in 2005. They hang upon the walls of the gallery unframed, an aesthetic consideration that emphasises the question: what necessitates the possibility of access? Despite New Zealand's isolation and the lack of resources at Mercy Pictures' disposal they were able to be sent all the way here in this format to be seen. In their unframed status, the coherence between the artwork and treatment make an aesthetic whole.

These photographs by Pryde and her reconfiguration of photographic aesthetics such as fashion photography, are interesting to view alongside Ch'lita's photographs, in her use of the language of fashion photography to document her life.

There's something quite wonderful about seeing the visual anthology of Ch'lita Collins, a girl not yet 20, who took photos as a reflex to memorialise the world around her. Emotionally charged, constantly changing and reckless; the looming threat of *these days* soon ending meant that an impulse and instinct was necessary in order to capture a world that felt like it should last forever. The result is an amalgamation of feelings, relationships and influences which weren't entirely conscious. Ch'lita's experience as a model scouted at age fourteen had an immeasurable impact on her mode of capturing other subjects, how does one go about composing a photograph once put through the wringer of e-commerce? The subject matter fluctuates from a flash of pale buttocks peeking out from under a purple velvet dress on the dance floor, to a soft intimate shot of high school sweethearts Maddy and Jake caught in the afternoon light riding home on a scooter. The influence from the likes of Terry Richardson, Nan Goldin and Robert Mapplethorpe, coupled with fashion photography such as the Prada AW97 campaign shot by Glenn Luchford come together with the emotional sensitivity and personal investment Ch'lita wields behind the camera, creating an inimitable visual world.

Pryde's "Cubicles" for Hard Mag in 2005, seen here in their initial magazine format, display a squid and multiple octopi in different changing rooms alongside hanging clothes such as shirts, jackets and jeans. Coming from a different background to Ch'lita, Pryde doubles down on the codes of fashion photography to stress the nature of image making for display. The changing room anxiety, the hanging clothes, colours, fabrics and the gloop of tentacled sea-creature place the viewer within the paranoia and disposability of the shopping experience. The reason this association is so effective, is because Pryde doesn't reject recognisable codes of photography, rather, she assumes and disrupts them. The squid, alive and wet, cropped among the lifeless hanging fabrics and labels conjure uncanny associations, until ultimately, we are reminded of the unequal market relations that brought each object to this claustrophobic cubicle. The titles of Pryde's works too, immediately recall us back to the exact scene of the crime: the name of the brand with which these scenes are implicated. Titling the pictures "Topshop" and "Gap" remind us of where we are situated exactly in this consumer maze, making these photographs simultaneously stable and disorienting. In a 2004 interview with art historian Sabeth Buchmann, Pryde observes of her process that "all this fantastic image stuff and style and the consumer world can leave me very confused and over-excited, and making my own photographs is quite a good way for me to try to stay calm." I like this, it's that same photographic impulse omnipresent in the photographs from Ch'lita, and here, in this show, happening now.

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I remember a warm summer day when Ch'lita and I were hanging out in her bedroom, probably hungover from drinking an entire bottle of Scrumpy each and trying to impress skaters at some awful party in Te Aro. She was sixteen, and I was seventeen. The day prior she'd done a photoshoot where she was the model, some kind of test shoot for a photographer who just wanted to flex her editorial muscle. I'd stayed in her room all day, sifting through her books and skincare products, trying on her clothes and then taking them off. When she got home, she had a wad of the rejected polaroids and gave me one because she didn't want it. "I look like a heroin addict" I remember her saying. It's interesting to me, that even within a context in which she was not the image-maker, she continued to crop and distribute the world in any way she could.