



# BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

RYAN MCNAMARA *Gently Used*  
*No Entrance, No Exit*

by Kara L. Rooney

Much has been said of late about the status of so-called “post-Internet” art. Detractors, like Art in America’s Brian Droitcour, see the movement as “the art of a cargo cult, made in awe at the way brands thrive in networks.” He contends that when exhibited in the gallery setting, the work either falls flat as estimable objets d’art, or worse still, reinforces institutional power by emphasizing the value of the white cube as a showroom for mass produced consumerism. Glossy, slick, and historically narrow in content—either brandishing the veneer of ’90s-era relational aesthetics or buffeted by the art world’s fanatical debate surrounding issues of presentation—post-Internet art, for Droitcour, often boils down not to questions about art, but rather about the market. Those in favor flip the aforementioned argument on its head, praising p.I.A.’s penchant for neo-capitalist subversion (use the system to critique the system, often via the platform of branding), its predisposition for social interfacing, and its emphasis on the debunking of old-fashioned power structures: replace the art world’s mystical aura with the mass appeal of mainstream entertainment. Two exhibitions, currently on view, speak to the complicated nature of post-Internet art: Ryan McNamara’s *Gently Used* at Mary Boone’s uptown location and *No entrance, no exit* at The Kitchen. Both utilize recognizable p.I.A. motifs—the deconstruction of the body, fluorescently hued palettes, advertising speak, technology, and sleek stationary objects—while drawing heavily upon the medium of performance. This human element, or at the very least its inference, is where these artists separate themselves from the rest of the post-Internet pack, though not without faults of their own.

Curated by Piper Marshall, McNamara’s *Gently Used* features assembled objects, paintings, and sculptural reliefs based upon his recent forays into performance art, most notably “MEEM: A Story Ballet About the Internet” (2013), “MEEM 4 Miami” (2014), and “Misty Malarky Ying Yang” (2014), respectively commissioned by Performa, Art Basel Miami, and High Line Art. Signifying each are the performers’ “gently used” but pristinely exhibited leotards and silkscreened clothing, which either take the shape of flat, two-dimensional collage materials or parade as ghostly hollowed-out shells.

In “Misty Malarky Ying Yang” (2014), McNamara’s prior performance by the same name constitutes the conceptual backbone of the work. The original piece featured a troupe of dancers in unitards silkscreened with images of former President Jimmy Carter’s daughter, Amy Carter, as a pre-adolescent girl with her childhood cat, Misty Malarky Ying Yang, and dated ’70s-era eyeglasses. (Ms. Carter would later become known for her political activism, echoing, in some respects, the work of her father who in 1979 took on the controversial subject of American energy consumption in his now infamous “Malaise” speech.) The High Line piece sought to elicit Ms. Carter’s same spirit of communal activism, incorporating park visitors into various aspects of the performance through movement, spoken word, and staged public interactions. Within Mary Boone’s 5th Avenue space, however, this message is unfortunately lost. Here, the same leotards are lifelessly sandwiched between a windmill formation of eight panes of tinted plexiglass and iron frames. While the freestanding structure attempts to recreate the essence of movement—the costumes’ limbs bent and folded at right angles—the deflated bodies only reiterate a sense of performative absence, the leftovers of a potentially radical moment.

Professional stage lights set against the gallery's central support pillar cast a theatrical glow onto otherwise static works like "Untitled" (2014), a 72-by-48-inch painting rendered in monochromatic lavender. The austere executed ground acts as a sterile backdrop for another high-keyed unitard, stretched diagonally across the surface of the canvas. At the work's bottom right edge, a cast plaster hand extends from the two-dimensional "screen" holding a fuchsia-cased iPhone. Brand loyalty or connective offering, it's anyone's guess which of the two McNamara aims to proselytize.

This interplay between sculptural object and lack of bodily form comprises one of the show's more compelling statements, for it's here that McNamara stakes his claim for the post-Internet condition as well as transcends typical p.I.A. pastiche. In the shadow of the "MEEM" and High Line performances (or rather because of them), absence—as opposed to themes of technology, art, or branding—emerges as the real subject of the work. Gently Used reminds us, with dystopic playfulness, that we've officially devolved into our own avatars. The problem is that what's left in that wake is a brightly colored, energetic endgame, but at the expense of anything tangible.



No Entrance, No Exit, Installation view. Courtesy of The Kitchen, photography by Jason Mandella.

This same type of post-Internet caginess is woven throughout No entrance, no exit, the aptly titled three-woman show curated by Lumi Tan at The Kitchen. As in Gently Used, the works here refuse to take any sort of committed stance, aiming instead to expose the detached ambivalence of the contemporary moment through the relationship between performance and object. Twenty-eight-year-old Anna K.E. is the most well known of the group, and indeed, her works prevail as some of the more persuasive examples of post-Internet art's critical potential. In "Multiple Keyholes" (2014), shot against the large industrial windows of her New York studio, Anna, classically trained as a ballerina, twists and bends her silhouetted body into abstract shapes that echo, in turns, the lithe calligraphic forms of 19th-century manuscripts and Modernism's formal tenets. Undeniably poetic, the absurdity of K.E.'s performance is only fully revealed in the context of her other works: a slick, 3D rendered video projection of a swimming pool ("Unfinished Smile" (2014)) and that same object, constructed in the space as a real but waterless tiled vessel.

Alina Tenser and Viola Yeşiltaç also contribute to this dialogue of the transitional with multi-media installation, sound works, and photography, all of which reference the import of previous actions. Yeşiltaç's idiosyncratic assemblages draw upon the complex boundary lines between personal and private as in "The Lift Operator III," (2015) in which the artist compares her chosen profession to the cloistered world of an elevator lift operator

striving to make contact. Tenser's video works, on the other hand, concern themselves more with the performative potentiality of sculptural objects within gaming and logic systems, erasing the body through invisibly edited gestures in which the objects appear to move of their own accord.

In the end, each of these exhibitions suffers and succeeds in equal measure. The doubled sense of separation, enacted first between object and viewer, and again between viewer and past performance, fails to resolve the movement's contentious state, not due to any lack of intellectual effort but as a direct result of corporeal distance. The exclusion of the body, rather than bridge the gap between communicative expression and post-Internet art's base standard of consumerist "cool," merely acts to reinforce the dialectical debates that have haunted post-Internet art from the beginning. Surprisingly, this is both the works' strong suit and their shortcoming. At the same time that these artists deny us much in the way of aesthetic engagement, the implication of sentient interaction holds more radical potential for challenging the status quo—one that might actually be realized if we could see ourselves in the face of post-Internet's mirrored surfaces. For now, we may be left with neither entrance nor exit to the question at hand but we are least that much closer to something. What that something is, however, remains to be seen.

Source: <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2015/02/artseen/ryan-mcnamara-gently-used-no-entrance-no-exit>