Walking through Greg Parma Smith’s institutional survey at Mamco felt closer to the way one swarms past paintings in the halls of an art school or workspace—densely hung and devoid of a focal point. If wasted space can signal forms of opulence—think of a circular driveway or a golf course—this laissez-faire hanging seemed slightly too crowded to be considered tasteful. Admittedly fore-stalling an opulent attitude in the presentation of the paintings; within the frames, Parma Smith dramatizes a level of extravagence—sublimating an inventory of “decorative” material effects.

The scope of estranged ethos drawn upon (graffiti, orientalism, underground zinz, academic figure painting, tourist painting, indie comics, and song dynasty scrolls to name quite a few), if not quite cut from the same cloth, seem to consistently cultivate in the development of groups—forming something of a collective pastiche. Yet in this grouping something anti-social permeates—as an expression or mediation of solidarity among the group relations and subcultures. By favoring an ideological rhetoric over its narrative, or at the least suggesting that the two are joined at the hip, ideology returns here in a correspondence with taste—as artifact, relic, or style—already liquidated of its ideals, lingering in a decidedly mannered (dis)guise.

Mysteriously protruding from the weave of the canvas, masks recur as a motif evoking creepy and crass caricatures of paintings as quasi-subjects—de-bordering the modernist picture-plane, subjecting their viewing subjects. As wounds or irruptions, these breaches extend another hesitation—between method or
technique and subject matter—lying closer to a form of “corpsing”\(^1\) than to theatricality. A caricature by J.J. Grandville (*Un Autre Monde*, 1844), drawn out in an exemplary illustration, comes to mind as a kindred spirit. It has been suggested that Grandville’s satirical attitude towards nineteenth century bourgeois culture was formed in a time where romantic dispositions to culture took hold of art, providing an alibi for estrangement. For Walter Benjamin, “the disintegration of culture into commodities was the secret theme of Grandville’s art.”\(^2\)

In both Grandville and Parma Smith, taste (or tastelessness) appears as a mask of distinctions—withholding of denoting the social, as in a masquerade or riot.

The paintings grouped under the head *Poseurs* (2011-2013) muster the style of academic figure painting over the groundwork of raised-acrylic reliefs (presumably squeezed directly from the tube), grafting two ways of seeing on

---

1. Corpsing: Theatrical slang
   - 1. Spoil a piece of acting by forgetting one’s lines or laughing uncontrollably.
     “Peter just can’t stop corpsing when he is on stage!”
   - 1.1[with object] Cause (an actor) to forget their lines and start laughing.
     “One singer ad libbed and corpsed his colleagues on stage”

L’éclat d’un Soleil levant a ébloui tous les regards, jusqu’à ceux d’une taupe qui était parvenue à s’introduire dans le salon.

Notre célèbre peintre de nature morte Swidermann n’a exposé cette
top of one another—a painterly body and the painted body. They left me thinking about the construction of the romantic and the exotic—the underlayer and the overlayer—what they might serve to enable and disenable. In the Poseurs “the fantasy of the unknown” has been embedded and converged with “the manufacture of The Other.” Such exoticized mythologies, redistributed in light of a precious political crisis, point to the now-critical moment of generalized constructed hostility.

In much of the exhibited work, the mythographic appears Janus-faced, or as a process of bricolage—in a working-over of confused forces. The multi-evocative trope of Janus is put to work as an unlikely container for flexibly stylized avatars constructed from underground diaristic comics, where inward-looking marketable selves are broadcasted in banal quotidian scenarios. The tendency to mix hermetic iconographies “in bad taste” is part and parcel to l’arma Smith’s project, which seeks to antagonize aesthetic neutrality within protocols of engagement with representation. Positing a critique towards the way in which subcultures are brought into a dominant domain, Parma Smith highlights exploitative taboos long repressed and smoothed over in so-called high-low narratives in advanced art. In the interconnection between the social and the pan-subjective, the Mehrwert of holding oppositions of “good” and “bad” in suspense, speaks to the programmatic shifts of taste as a lubricating agent and potent form of currency in new economics and their reliance on circulating a mishmash of identificatory interests.

Back in the institution, subsumed in a neoclassical aesthetic equivalent, which only vaguely resembles its reified naturalist Sumi-ink genre scene, an albatross is bound or perhaps accessorized within a nimbus of plastic jewels forming a ring around the migrating signifier—those vast sea birds that indolently follow a ship as it glides over the deep, briny sea, like a sticker or decal against the sky. One of its large wings (which also resembles an oar) awkwardly juts out from the near-symmetrical ornamentation of the canvas. Painting is presented as an excorporation, driven onward, not to fill and divert (though that may happen, too), but to probe and mitigate (if only a little) what is presupposed and nevertheless so often latent and hidden.