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## INTERVIEW WITH CATHY LOMAX

Earlier this week I had the pleasure of sitting down and talking with Cathy Lomax in her studio in East London. Her paintings, where seductive imagery of film, fame and fashion are contrasted with personal narratives and the mundane, can currently be seen at Century Club in the exhibition 'Classical Corrosive'. We talked about her fascination with women in Hollywood's Golden Age films, the female gaze and our mutual interest in Voyeurism.

**Your work concerns how we consume information and misinformation – often originating in the romance of popular culture and interwoven with personal identity and experiences. Firstly, what lead you into art? Would you like to tell me a bit more about how your paintings came to be?**

I was working as a makeup artist and became quite disillusioned with the fashion business. I did a part-time Fine Art BA and MA whilst still working.

My starting point is images that I am drawn to – I have to have some kind of personal connection with them. I collect these images and file them – when I am ready to start on a painting I will look through my stored images to find something that conveys what I am thinking about. I have for a while been very immersed in film. So many of my paintings are derived from stills from films.

**A few years ago you did an exhibition for Dolph called American Tan. Could you please tell me a little about that body of work and also of what importance the origin of culture has in your work?**

I was thinking about the dominance of American culture and how its zenith seems to have been in the 1950s – an era that I particularly find very seductive. This made me think of the now pretty much obsolete hosiery shade American Tan, popular in the 1970s. What tended to be a rather nasty shade of orange was marketed as a colour that we should aspire to – America was where films were made, the land of plenty. So by pulling on a pair of tights we could all have an American tan. The work I made for the show was looking at how we are reflected in this American glow. I installed a wall of etched mirrors, which featured American stars and products and showed a series of classic American films.

**What is your current body of work taking its inspiration from?**

I am currently making work for a solo show at the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery in September, which is called The Blind Spot. I am thinking about how women are encouraged to look a certain way (by fashion magazines, films etc.), which is at odds with the reality of how it is possible to look. This idealized look is exemplified by perfected images of women in art. The Venus de Milo etc. – women turned to stone. The Blind Spot refers to the idea of looking at your reflection in the mirror – and how this flattened, reversed image is not the same as the way you are actually seen. I was also thinking of the image of the back of the head which you hardly ever see and takes you by surprise when you do glimpse it at the hairdressers and so on.

**Please tell me about your exhibition at the Century Club and collaborating with Leo for this show.**

The works at the Century Club are from a series called Belladonna, which I made while on the Abbey Painting Fellowship at the British School in Rome. They are all images of women I encountered whilst in Rome – some are real women, some are sculptures, some are from films. Belladonna is on the surface the Italian term for a beautiful woman. It is, however, also another name for the poisonous plant deadly nightshade. The name was acquired because in Italy the juice was used to dilate the pupils of the eyes to make them appear more seductive. It is also used in herbal and homeopathic medicines and can be used as a sedative because it blocks the function of the nervous system.

**What other exhibitions and projects do you currently have going on?**

Aside from The Blind Spot I currently have a work in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.

**Since 2002, you have also run a gallery called Transition Gallery. Would you like to tell me a little about the program and what lead you to start it and how it has developed over the 15 years that it has been open?**

I started Transition after finishing my MA at Central Saint Martins. My idea was that I wanted a space to show my work alongside some of my friends. This soon developed, as the space became better known. I have never had a long-term plan for the gallery; it has more or less grown organically. We like to show a mixture of artists – recent graduates and well established – and allow them a space to show new work and try out new ideas.

**What do you enjoy the most about running a gallery program?**

It allows me to stay connected with other artists. Working in ones own studio can be quite isolating. I also enjoy curating shows – putting artists together that may not have previously known each other.

**What is the next show at Transition Gallery?**

We are currently in the process of moving. Our last project was Speedway (info here). We hope to be opening in October in a new venue in Hackney – maybe with a more defined objective. We will also be showing at Sluice Art Fair in September.

*Maria Stenfors has more than 20 years of experience from the art world. She worked at several galleries in Stockholm and London, as well as an independent art advisor, prior to running her own eponymous contemporary art gallery in King's Cross between 2010 and 2016. Passionate about 'space and material' she is an independent consultant alongside working in a gallery.*

Cathy Lomax was part of the exhibition 'Classical Corrosive' that ran in Century from April 22nd - 22nd July. Cathy's work is also part of Century's permanent art collection and can be seen installed in various locations throughout the club.

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