Esse arts + opinions

Katie Lyle & Ella Dawn McGeough, Terms of Endearment, Support Gallery, London

Kim Neudorf

Number 105, Spring 2022

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/98802ac

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Les éditions Esse

ISSN

0831-859X (print)
1929-3577 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Neudorf, K. (2022). Review of [Katie Lyle & Ella Dawn McGeough, Terms of Endearment, Support Gallery, London]. *Esse arts + opinions*, (105), 102–103.

Katie Lyle & Ella Dawn McGeough
Terms of Endearment

In *Terms of Endearment* at Support Gallery in London, Ontario, curator Lillian O'Brien Davis's third collaboration with artists Katie Lyle and Ella Dawn McGeough, artworks respond to how *touch* and its material and phenomenological effects might be recognized and embodied through gestures of interference, imprint, and re-inscription. These gestures consider O'Brien Davis's framework of *touch* as an event of displacement within the body, the self, and the artwork. She frames this conception in part within Anne Carson's intratextual exploration of *decreation*, a writerly method of recounting heightened states of spiritual, emotional, and physical self-undoing in which internal and external forces transform and decentre an autonomous sense of self.

At the entrance to the main gallery space, McGeough's large sheet of copper encased in wood reveals marks and rings left by the shapes and weight of various objects and bodies. I was told by a gallery attendant that any visible ripples, sags, and bowed edges aren't meant to be there, nor is the debris that has naturally fallen from the ceiling; I'm meant to look for a more determined residue, or the results of touch as a more careful accumulation of effects. McGeough's wax-treated cotton and silk pieces, in bright sunset colours clouded with inky stains, are stacked, tied, propped, stuffed in corners, and draped across an ornate railing. A wax object appears as cast impression of both bone and sandbag, its floor placement anchoring an invisible force field, interrupting my viewing of Lyle's work on the wall. In a basement room, rings and crumpled shapes made of wax cotton are piled like socks or old underwear, as if left to congeal after too many laundry cycles. A doorknob is a makeshift drying rack.

In Lyle's paintings and drawings we often find outlines of animals, silhouettes of bodies, or the graphic marks of a face. These decisions appear swift and studied, as if Lyle is practising a signature and finding accidental creatures hidden within; the creatures appear, but the legibility of the signature is never truly effaced. Collage-like strings of words might describe the work's figural attitudes: ballerina leg-fingers, bubbles, astonished-clown-horses, battling dancers against exposed-brick walls. The paintings' supports and surface materials often appear pulled taut, as if literally and figuratively stretched too thin. Lyle's surface treatments are the result of obscuring and re-inscription, which enables a space for potential, or a search for the unexpected, that emerges from the process itself. In a large painting propped against the wall of the basement room, layered canvas, paint, pencil crayon, pastel, and sponge are visible, encased in plexiglass—a pseudo-medical cross-section. Here, figurative imagery is short-circuited by material sediment, literally revealing the painting's bodily insides. A fluorescent tube glows from the opposite wall through McGeough's rosy rectangle of cotton, its glow cutting through the wax like an eye.

Fingermarks in blue chalk have been left on doors, walls, and a chest of drawers, which faces the entrance like a lectern. The marks are of various heights, suggesting a body or bodies finding positions of support. The unknown sources of these marks pull me back to O'Brien Davis's invocation of touch via Carson's decreation as displacement of bodily self-autonomy. In a collection of texts related to each collaboration with Lyle and McGeough, she refers to a simultaneity of presence not only in desire for touch, but in memory of it; desiring and remembering are never singular but are multiple events through recurrence, each with an ability to affect and create effects. This conception of multiplicity is made visible by fingermarks left by the artists, gestured toward by McGeough's imprints on copper and in wax, and revealed by the visible history of materials in Lyle's plexiglass piece, all of which signal bodily presence within a simultaneity of traces.

Katie Lyle & Ella Dawn McGeough
Terms of Endearment, installation views, 2021.
Photos : Ruth Skinner

In the **printed version** of this text, the name of the curator, Lillian O'Brien Davis, was misspelled. The name appearing in this document gives the correct one.

Relating decreation to the phenomenon of eclipses, Carson quotes Virginia Woolf describing never-before-seen colours or a *wrongness* of colour. This might be linked to how Lyle and McGeough consistently use or interfere with colour to the effect of desiring a similar kind of *wrongness* or occlusion, an aesthetic that led me to a question mirrored by Carson: How can decisions of interference and editing—of colour and material through a singular artist's voice—be read as gestures of the multiplicity, self-undoing, and decentring of decreation? Carson admits that to attempt to visualize this decentring necessitates a re-centring of self; to decreate is not to obliterate the self but to start from the point of self, from the moment of its eclipse (as in the illusion of planets touching). Apart from the artists' separate, self-determined projects, decreation's undoing of the singular voice is most palpable when their works start to encroach upon each others' spatial orbits. But to what effect? I'm curious about the process of undoing through this proximity; who or what is undoing whom? Although these are plausible, if abstract, ways to think through how Lyle and McGeough have explored touch as displacement, the resulting installation and related texts don't allow easy access to how this specifically occurred for the artists.

In a curatorial text, O'Brien Davis reflects upon how she and the artists learned to work within the changeable, often unknown limitations between and across collaborations, and that at multiple points they have been at a loss as to how to measure success or failure. Although this creates space for indeterminacy and doubt, which complicates readings of a unified voice or predetermined project, the results of these conditions could have been made more available in the exhibition itself. That being said, O'Brien Davis's curatorial framing through touch in relation to decreation is most perceptible when read through temporal cycles of transformation and multiplicity, visible as bodily traces and gestured toward through the artists' material interference, accumulative re-inscription of visual information, and brief glimpses into the emergent processes of painting.

Kim Neudorf

Support Gallery, London
November 27, 2021—December 24, 2021