

Hannah Black: Aeter @ Luft*****

Eschewing the traditional press release, Hannah Black's Aeter is accompanied by six short citations referring to slavery, cannibalism and psychoanalytic countertransference; their link to the work is not immediately discernible. In the centre of the gallery's ground floor, a pair of clay sculptures, Clay Aeter 1 and Clay Aeter 2 (all works 2018), resemble termite mounds in a process of disassembly. Each is sitting on a plinth. Over the course of the exhibition a gallery worker scrapes handfuls of clay from one to the other, until the first is bare save for its polystyrene support. Then the process begins again in reverse. Intimately entangled – like lovers, or analyst and analysand – each sculpture is always either cannibalising or in the process of being cannibalised. To think one independent of the other does not make sense. Suspended in front of the shuttered gallery windows are three white plastic masks (Shame Mask 1, 2 and 3). Vaguely redolent of tribal artefacts, lengths of jewellery chase through their surfaces like talismans. It is difficult to work out these masks' function: whether they are made to celebrate and disarm individual shame; or, rather less comfortingly, as a means of excising it, or passing it on elsewhere. Referring to a passage from the Book of Genesis used historically as slavery's justification, Curse of Ham 1 is a rectangular, human-height, white advertising banner. Hugging the wall, it has two eyeholes cut into its surface, making it resemble both a perfunctory ghost and a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Looking through the holes, suggestive of a two-pronged *Étant donnés*, we see a piece of paper tacked lightly to the wall behind: a film still showing the naked figure of the actor Michael Fassbinder in Steve McQueen's 2011 feature, *Shame*. Consuming as we look, shame here is the at-times nauseating self-awareness of the gaze. In the projected videoworks Aeter [Sam] and Aeter [Jack], two interviewees recount separate kinds of cannibalism: bone transplant and compulsive nail biting, respectively. Alongside these, three further videoworks, Hey 1, 2 and 3, play out on stocky monitors sitting on the gallery floor. Peering down to look at them, we wait for something to happen. From these flat squares of red, lines of halting text stumble out, like awkward or conciliatory text messages: 'Hey. Baby. It's Just. Hey...' Received on its own as an SMS, the word 'Hey' can strike fear. It threatens something more serious or intimate: a breakup, a confession or even a request for help. There is an anthropophagic charge in this waiting: pushed into anxious intimacy, we feel ourselves slowly siphoned away too. The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott claimed that, in order to treat a psychotic patient, the analyst needs to create the conditions for them to grow up. For the analyst, this infantilisation can breed hate, and, as a result of that hate, shame. Given Black's status as a woman of colour in an overwhelmingly white artworld, this idea is

productive; even more so as an artist known to vocalise the failings of that same world, prompting it towards a kind of adulthood. *The Situation* (2017–18), an orderly pile of ash placed atop a small pile of carpet, refuses the terms of this exchange. Sharing its name with a book made from (already partially redacted) conversations with Black's peers, and shown as part of her 2017 solo show *Some Context* at the Chisenhale Gallery, London, in which viewers were invited to shred the volume, this new work seems to say, and without shame: whatever the book said is no longer being communicated – at all.

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