

LORD OF THE FUCKING WASTELAND

Eliza Douglas' cropped paintings of graphic tees dissolve whatever boundary between product and personhood still remains in our post-authenticity culture.

Every morning, billions of people get up and get dressed, often in a barely conscious blur. The net-result of this constant and chaotic process is something like fashion, the best metaphor we have, as [Emily Segal has remarked](#), for “knowing the now”. The paintings in Eliza Douglas' *Lord of the Fucking Wasteland*, currently on show at [Air de Paris](#), seem to channel this constant production, circulation and commodification of meaning. They resemble sterile, vacuum packed versions of the graphic tees they depict. Anime hero Sailor Moon's face is squished into a contorted *ahogao* pose. Metal band logos are folded into fractal abstractions. The surface of the paintings is less like worn-in fabric than the smooth, generic sheen of luxurious packaging. Cropped to an iPhone's portrait mode dimensions, they seem to depict the point at which a material object dissolves into a loose, general impression (what we sometimes call a brand), the sum of whatever associations the object already holds for the viewer.

But they aren't just screenshots of macro-level pop culture: the T-shirts are all from Douglas' own collection, referenced last year in a sculpture titled *Pile* (2019) on the occasion of Douglas' partner and frequent collaborator Anne Imhof's Tate Modern performance *Sex*. Here and elsewhere in her work, Douglas plays with ideas of authorship. She has previously recreated the work of other artists, outsourced production of her paintings to Dafen village in Shenzhen, China (a hub for lobby-room art once responsible for 60% of the world's paintings) and spoken candidly about her reliance on assistants given her own lack of technical ability. In this series though, Douglas does not just appropriate the ideas or efforts of others, but her own possessions, made to feel as impersonal and accidental as the stock images she has previously used as source material.

In *The System of Objects*, the philosopher Jean Baudrillard writes of how collectors are driven by a desire to externalise their own narcissism. “What you really collect,” he decrees, “is yourself.” Viewed in these disparaging terms, Douglas' work might be dismissed as an extended exercise in self-curation, a repetition rather than a rewiring of the protocols of advertising and brand strategy. But what's compelling about her images is how they corrupt any easy distinction between product and personhood. What unites the mass-produced T-shirts and other outsourced objects that make up Douglas' paintings is that they are presented under her own name but paradoxically never quite hers. Douglas does not assume a self which preexists the material objects through which it is elaborated and discovered. The thrill of her T-shirt paintings is that they are seemingly caught in the process of transforming into something else, packaged up to be reimagined elsewhere.

By leaning into the paradoxes of mass authenticity, Douglas challenges the convenient fantasy of autonomy, of being able to maintain a safe distance from the cultural codes we inhabit. In their vertiginous too-closeness, the paintings in *Lord of the Fucking Wasteland* make palpable the intoxicating scale and speed of the distributed systems of sentiment and narrative which increasingly form the back-end of our own identities. **Guy**

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