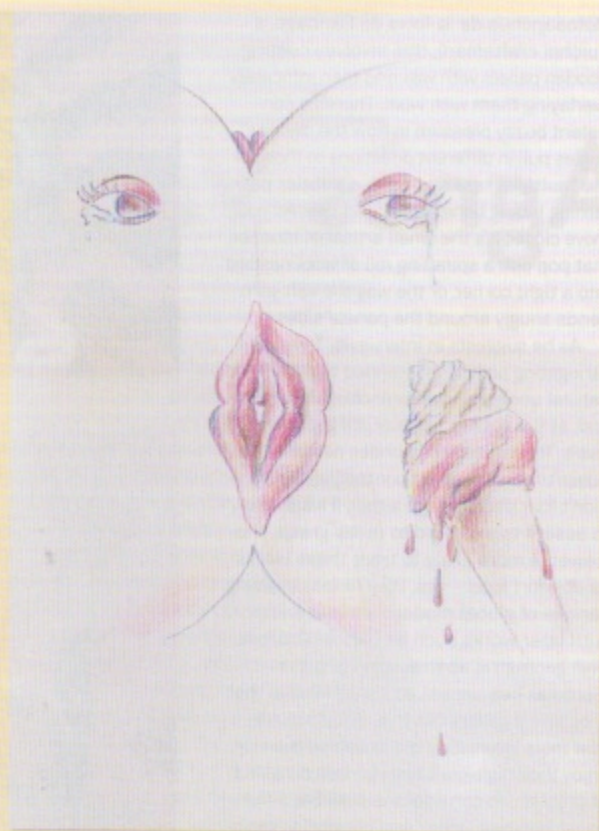


backgrounds reminiscent of flat computer screens. Many depict the simple, almost archetypal, forms that might appear in a Google image search for 'orange', 'sun', 'earth' etc. His aesthetic calls to mind Photoshop actions: draw around one form to cut it out and overlay it on another, copy and paste, enlarge the size. The program's sidebar of tools is recalled more explicitly in the right-hand purple and grey strip of *Baby Grand Barrier* (2015). As Thornton indicates, however physical the action of painting remains, it cannot escape the virtual realm and its influence on visual culture.

Two distinctive works were comprised of found slatted-wooden panels. One is striped with yellow and red, the other a rich green plane studded with masonry screws: Robert Rauschenberg's 'combines' meet Jasper Johns's 'flags'. *Drag Sass Cross* (2015) presents a similarly idiosyncratic case: green polyester play mats take the place of canvas, lending the paint a rubbery texture. Thornton follows in the footsteps of these 20th-century American titans, who used popular iconography to symbolize the blurry intermingling of art and life. Thornton's conflation of the two draws, instead, on the mediation of the computer screen – each of us, after all, enacts a form of collage on a daily basis, layering windows, tabs and images on our computer desktops. His titles, often reminiscent of quick-fire quips posted on social-media sites, seem to corroborate this background narrative.

Aerial views appear in works such as *Name Your Yellow Lab Cabbie (I Didn't See But OD)* (2015) or the colloquially titled *Snipers Vacay Too* (2014) – a topography of sea and shoreline. In the former, a palette of shimmering golds and ochres suggests plots of land. I was reminded of the recent bird's-eye images of the destruction of the ancient city of Palmyra in the Syrian desert: bare rectangles of dusty land, no monuments in sight. The smoke-chugging, colossal tank-like form in *You Say Militia, I say Melissa, Or Something, Mostly About Striping* (2015) is surrounded by a strange melange of galloping equestrian-statue horses, conjuring a feeling of warfare from a Command & Conquer-type videogame. At first, Thornton's canvases seem not to take themselves too seriously but, further considered, they reproduce the mood of our time, in which war, fantasy and pop culture all combine – often on the same newsfeed, one window visible beneath the other.

LOUISA ELDERTON



BASIC INSTINCT Seventeen, London

In her 1986 essay *Eros: The Bittersweet*, the poet Anne Carson remarks, in relation to Ancient Greek lyric poetry, that 'love and hate converge within erotic desire'. In 'Basic Instinct', a group show at London's Seventeen gallery part-inspired by Carson's book, this convergence was made explicit in *Stabbing* (2014) by Reija Meriläinen, a two-channel video work in which serrated knives repeatedly penetrate blocks of transparent jelly: quivering oblongs of vulnerable matter impaled with numbing, pneumatic repetition. Knives are sharp objects that often make for blunt metaphors, but Meriläinen's playful approach elevates her work above the reductive equations its imagery might otherwise imply (dick equals weapon; hetero sex equals murder). By slowing down the footage to a hypnotic crawl and placing a bewildered-looking cat – a pussy – in the midst of the action, Meriläinen twisted an inherently violent image into something that looked almost cute.

Comprising two flat-screen monitors leaning against the wall, *Stabbing* was positioned directly opposite the entrance to the gallery. It set the confrontational tone for a show less concerned with sensuality, or even sexuality, than the idea that threat can be a form of foreplay. Harsh textures and serrated edges were the motifs of the first room. The jagged rim of *Hunk* (2015), a thrusting, phallic sculpture by Gabriel Hartley, recalled the blades used in *Stabbing*, while another work by the artist, *Cob* (2015), dangled from the ceiling on a strip of pink foam carved into fang-like ridges. In two large paintings by Zoe Barcza, *Clyff I* and *Clyff II* (both 2015),

coloured grids were interspersed with patches of raw canvas fringed with ragged scraps of painted fabric resembling torn bed sheets. It wasn't clear how – or if – *Berlin* (2015) by Yves Scherer related to the erotic overtones of the show as a whole, though it shared with many of the works an interest in textural opposition. The ephemeral assemblage of cardboard, splattered paint and red thread is contained in a Perspex box, generating friction between base matter and high-end display.

'Basic Instinct' took its title and central reference point from the eponymous 1992 film: a deliciously preposterous soft-porn noir starring Michael Douglas as a randy detective and Sharon Stone as a murderous man-eater. The film was notorious at the time for its explicit depictions of sex, particularly the interrogation scene in which Stone uncrosses her legs, revealing, for a heartbeat, that she isn't wearing underwear. Beatrice Marchi's colour-pencil drawing *Gelato e Tristezza con Panna* (Ice Cream and Sadness with Cream, 2015) parodied this iconic scene, depicting a cartoonish vagina dentata, complete with pink lipstick and long-lashed, weeping eyes, opening its lips to take a lick of dripping ice cream. As with Meriläinen's *Stabbing*, the kitsch aesthetic produced an image that was, at once, seductive and repulsive, cute and violent. This was true of 'Basic Instinct' as a whole, which, by producing an often-visceral sense of abrasiveness and unease where it might otherwise have indulged in pleasing, supple textures, succeeded in restoring to sex some of the transgressive frisson it has lost in the YouPorn era.

The unsettling mood of the show was enhanced by a series of visual and thematic correspondences. A mural by Megan Rooney dominated the third room, its garrulous, tumbling title corresponding to its visual excess: *Doggy breath, finger deaf, mute, winking. A wink she could only do with the right eye* (2015). With its pink smears, finger-strokes and handprints, the painting recalls (or mocks) the macho spontaneity of abstract expressionism. Replete with isolated lips, ears, haircuts, handprints and a lone torso, it brought to mind the dismembered body parts seen elsewhere in the gallery: the pink ceramic tongue jutting from the wall (*Jala Wahid's Hard Blush*, 2014), for example, or the decapitated ceramic head of *Freak on a Leash* (2015) by Jaakko Pallasvuo. Meanwhile, props used during *TEMRA* and *DAVID in Three Parts* (2015), an absurdist play devised by the collective Oa4s and performed prior to the show's opening, were scattered throughout the gallery: these remnants included discarded peanut shells, a sack of compost, sheets of black card and a half-peeled grapefruit.

This last item was placed on the floor in the far corner of the third and final room in the gallery. Mounted on the wall beside it was Wahid's video *I Am a Charm* (2015), in which two peeled segments of grapefruit are arranged in the shape of pouting lips, on a beach-like bank of sand, as slicks of olive oil ooze and drool beneath bright studio light: accompanied by a Selena Gomez track, the gratuitously indulgent imagery evoked both the sexual act and its stylized representation in advertising and cinema. After a series of variously sharp, rigid and jagged works, *I Am a Charm* felt like a consummation: a final, headlong yielding to sensual pleasure.

PATRICK LANGLEY

