



## ***Dopamine loading...***

By Taylor Hall

Satisfaction is a slippery bar of soap suspended in fumbling hands. Within reach but still foaming and clumsy in anticipation of being grasped. Contemporarily, this dissatisfaction is one product of living in our current technological age; which provides all too much, yet seemingly not enough. Questions of compulsion and addiction now fuel the discontent that seems to inform our engagement with the digital. We embrace our smartphones as if they are crystal balls, seeking, searching, and curious for more — and more, and more. By the same token, all too often does our experience of social media come with a sentiment of careless, casual ignorance to ever hurrying time. Mindless oblivion satiates modernity's empty moments.

Born from this itchy, scratching desire to disengage through our compulsive use of technology is Adrian Charles Smith's latest exhibition *DIS/CONNECTED*. Smith's exophthalmic portraits, with their dramatically diverse height, scale, and applications, shine a spotlight on the human caught in an information age. A world where overstimulation is championed as the cure to the boggling and chafing symptoms of boredom.

Motivated by Gustave Courbet's *The Desperate Man* (1843-1845), Smith follows suit with similar concerns of his own lived experience of a rapidly changing world. Wide-eyed and tugging at his hair *from the roots*, Courbet's portrait reveals the anxiety of a young artist gazing at an uncertain future. Concluding his studies, and at the apex of cynicism with both himself and the world around him, Courbet's portrait shares the intimate angst of accepting uncontrollable failure. Comparably, Smith lives in interesting and uncertain times. Artists are still at the mercy of their circumstance and are currently caught in the net that world disaster and venomous politics has cast. Courbet's fraught realisation of powerlessness in the maddening crowd reemerges through Smith's vision of colour, caricature, and chaos.

Smith's body of work seeks to come to grips with the restless residue of the digital experience. Plagued with an unwavering fixation on the screen at which we too often gaze, each portrait holds us accountable for our undisciplined consumption. The wild eyes of strange caricatures peer into your soul and confront the inner cyber monster that dwells under our bed. A creature with the neurotic inclination to doom scroll eventuating in the frenzied, shallow swipes of a Tinder bender, or repetitive, fruitless checking for phone alerts. Our virtual habits are slowly becoming similar to the jaded opening and re-opening of your fridge, as if food will spontaneously appear to satisfy whatever listless hunger drove you to the door.

With titles such as *When you think turning on night shift on your phone will help you sleep but before you know it, you've scrolled for hours and now you're wide awake* (2021), Smith taps into our laughable ability to arrive full steam at stimulation station. It seems that the pandemic has unearthed

a fear of liminal space and vacant time — time otherwise spent agonizing over the uncontrollable. This has resulted in applications such as Tik Tok and Instagram Reels viciously gaining popularity during isolation, promoting a mind-numbing fixation on rapidly delivered content. In Smith's works, dazzlingly coloured pulsating paint—visibly both slippery and dry—is applied to the canvas in broad, sweeping motions. Each swipe, flick, swirl, and wiggle reminisces on the invisible gesture of interacting with a touchscreen. In close proximity, larger works appear like nuclear topographical landscapes, though with distance, a creature-like human emerges.

Smaller works climb curiously to the top of wooden structures or linger in the nooks and crannies of the space. In between larger, meditative works, the viewer pokes their nose into the wagging world of the absurd. Animated and playful, Smith feverishly paints as if the very act will liberate him from the detested desire he is depicting. Some with motley patterning like fairy-bread, others with colours so vivid they could be the brightly coloured cordials our parents warned would make us hyperactive. Smith creates a sticky, sweet cacophony, full of manic promise.

Though each self-portrait exhibited oozes dread caused by the discombobulating present, *DIS/CONNECTED* may very well be an antidote to this digital affliction. With each lick and spray of paint, Smith indicates the slow, introspective process of an artist willing a painting into existence. Reverting our fixation from screen to face, Smith privileges the spontaneous rather than the systematic body. Each work is utterly uncontrollable, frenzied, energised and alive. Resurfacing the analogue human in a virtual world, *DIS/CONNECTED* is a cocktail of satire and doom, shaken not stirred, and begging to be guzzled.