

CRISTIN TIERNEY

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CLAUDIA BITRAN AND FALLEN: THE MORBID DEBAUCHERY

As if they were synonyms, youth seems to be directly associated with confusion and shame. Chilean/American visual artist, Claudia Bitrán, presents her latest painting and animation work called Fallen, in which she explores adolescence, ecstasy, vulnerability and exposure.

Claudia Bitrán (1986) is a multidisciplinary artist who works mainly with paintings and video. Born in Boston, she lived much of her life in Santiago and currently resides in Brooklyn. Her varied work, in which she assumes various roles as a painter, director, producer, editor and actress, aims to recreate, emulate and rewrite the world of mass industry production, and thereby question the power of the different forms that it takes the culture of entertainment and the subjects that inhabit it.

Fallen, his latest work, falls within this search. Fallen is a series of video-animations made with between 30 and 70 paintings on canvas, based on viral videos of drunk teenage girls. Some of them are collapsing, others vomiting, and many are scantily clad. With Fallen, Bitrán immerses himself in the empty spaces of new technologies. If control has always been something difficult to have as a young person, the viralization of moments as intimate as a drunkenness can mean, perhaps for a lifetime, the complete absence of power.



How was the inspiration for *Fallen born*?

I'm attracted to these videos because they're super popular, they have very basic humor and they're also violent. I love that mixture of humor plus violence, because they are common ingredients of mass entertainment, so the exercise of approaching them creatively without falling into obvious criticism is challenging and entertaining. They are viral to the point of being empty and devoid of human connection with the teenage girls who starred in them. Spending time painting each of the frames in the videos made me have a very intimate connection with the adolescents and made me re-imagine their individualities through the mediation of painting. The plasticity of the awkward and languid bodies of these young women made me think about the history of female representation, and that is something that kept me very motivated during production.

Do you feel identified with the girls? What do they mean to you?

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If much. I chose them because I think we can all identify with that drunken state they're in. Somehow, I think we all carry a drunken teenager inside. I do not mean a literal identification, but a mental state of doom, debauchery, disorientation, ecstasy, vulnerability, euphoria and escape. I chose these teenagers as a metaphor to represent how I feel and see where we are as a society. Also, having been a teenage woman, I know what kinds of pressures, anxieties, and vulnerabilities are in these bodies. I remember a couple of times when I could have died from disconnection from my own consciousness. It haunts me that death is so latent in these videos. With this work I sought to stretch that intense micro-second of euphoria and danger.

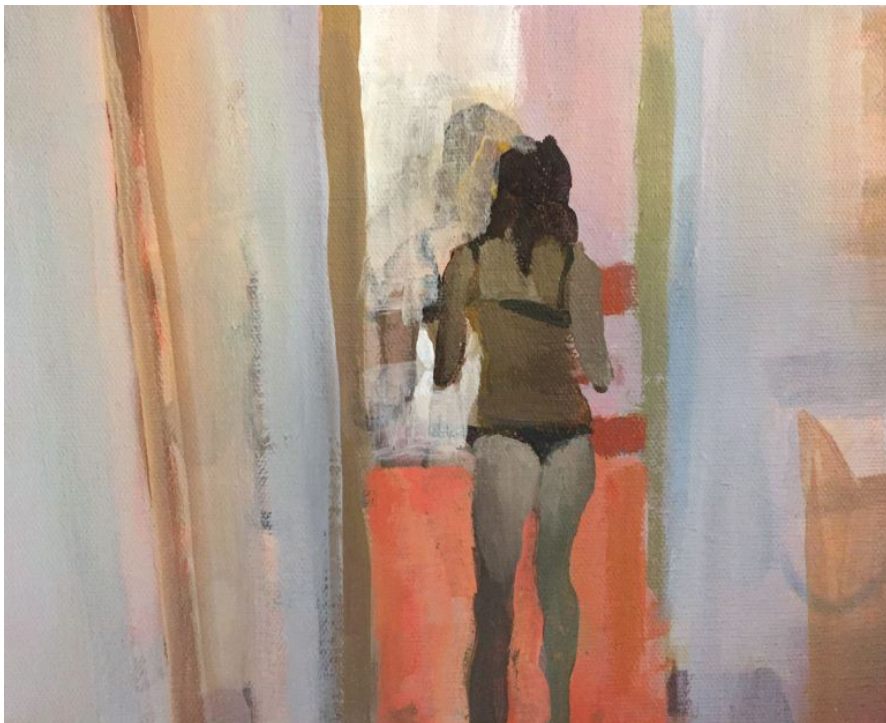
What do you think of this overexposure and with it, of the loss of intimacy in today's culture?

All the young women I photographed were exposed to the masses and were the targets of cyber-bullying. This phenomenon amazes me because it is too complex and cruel; it ruins lives, causes depression, isolation and suicide. In fact, cyber-bullying more than doubles the risk of self-harm and suicide among adolescents. The motor of this work was the tension that exists between the popular fun that these videos produce and their real violence. I've collected viral videos of drunk teenagers popping beers over their heads, jumping off rooftops onto tables, throwing up in various places, falling down multiple times, hurting themselves. I made a file with a selection of 50 videos, and I realized that most of them featured women. Obviously this is no coincidence, and I found it very interesting to work with that statistic.

How was the creation process?

It was a lonely, tedious and super creative job. For each of the 8 animations I did about 50 paintings, that is 400 paintings in a month. I sat in the same position for many hours, so to compensate I went jogging a lot. Although each painting appears for 1/4 of a second, each of the 400 paintings was done with a lot of intention. I wanted to use a wide variety of painterly gestures in each animation. My goal was that the gestures of each frame, when played one after the other within the same animation, would add psychological subtleties to the videos that I used as a model. Some of the paintings are very realistic and detailed, others super fast sketch-like, in others I introduced caricatures, in others I used abstraction to be very formal. The opposition of all these ways of representing is how I try to fill the anonymous teenage drunks with a more complex and moving personal narrative. It is always stimulating to have a date to finish a work, in this case it was the invitation to do this work for a collective exhibition at Cindy Rucker Gallery, curated by Paula Solimano and Cindy Rucker in New York.

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Your work has a lot to do with digital overexposure and connection. What is your vision of today's hyper-connected society? In what ways do you think it affects artistic creation or creative processes?

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Today one can have very intimate, deep and even physical relationships through a screen, and that is incredible and super positive. There are connections, interactions, and projects that would not be possible without social platforms. I am stimulated by the infinite field of people that one can look at and meet and that inspires me. On the negative side, I am terrified of how our personal information is being indiscriminately disseminated, which is why I try to keep accounts private. In addition, although the democratization of information is necessary, it has double-edged tentacles that often mislead the user, with the aim of collecting private information to sell products and manipulate policies. My work in general is about mass culture: I wonder why we consume the shows that we consume, how what moves us is changing, and what kind of passions, perversions, beauties and dangers exist behind what we consume. For my work, it is always important to question everything that exists, to challenge opinions and fashions that seem correct or attractive, to always try to bring to the fore what one's own fantasy dictates. Skepticism is a defense and creative tool for artists in this noisy virtual society.

