

# curated by

---

4.9. – 2.10.  
2021      Wien  
                 Vienna

Galerie Kandlhofer  
*Phoebe Cripps*

Artist: Rachel Maclean

*i'm 2 happy!*

*Look sweetheart. None of this is real. It's just a game that the grown-ups are playing. All you gotta do is play along. OK?*

The game is late-stage capitalism, and its appetite is insatiable. Consume or be consumed. Feed yourself, and your dreams. Achieve true happiness by sustained success. Rate yourself, and survey everything you purchase and consume, so we can continue improving and innovating. If there was a symbol for this era, it might be the smiley face. In Rachel Maclean's work, wide-eyed, rosy-cheeked smiley faces unnerve in how saccharinely they radiate the cyclical violence of consumerism.

Part of that violence lies in how companies infantilise us to manipulate our decisions. In *Feed Me* (2015), one of Maclean's longest and most ambitious films to date, society's simultaneous infantilisation and sexualisation of women is portrayed through the classic fairytale story between beast and young girl. In what could be a reworking of the seven deadly sins – pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth – Maclean constructs an entire world encrusted with prosthetics and crystallised by hairspray, at once slick, shiny, cute, and dirty, seedy, dripping with disgust. In its artifice, theatricality, playful irony and exaggeration, the work oozes camp, and yet at the same time its dark humour criticises the very thing it mines.

Maclean conceives, designs and acts all of the characters herself, using actors for the voices, which she then lip-syncs. Part-musical, part-fable, *Feed Me* features a cast of humans and beasts often in interchangeable roles – demonstrating the hypocrisy of a society that is quick to demonise men accused of paedophilia as monsters, but continues to sexualise young girls. Doomed to fail, traps are set for young women who must simultaneously prove both their innocence and their allure. In *Feed Me*, Maclean's characters speak in hyperbolic language reminiscent of overachievement

# curated by

---

4.9. – 2.10.  
2021      Wien  
                 Vienna

and marketing platitudes: they proclaim that they're too happy, and are constantly striving for 110%. Festooned with curtains, glittery carpet, and a series of new digital prints, the gallery is similarly too much, a hyper-sensation of both cuteness and absurdity.

Installed near the entrance, Maclean's 2013 film *Germs* takes on a new layer of meaning in our post-pandemic world. Her army of invasive, giggling bacteria seem adorably harmless at first, yet quickly our self-protection becomes commodified, killing not just the germs but also ourselves. Our self-imaging – through the internet, through advertising – has siphoned off to the economy every part of our bodies, and, in Maclean's parallel universe, even our souls. There are times in her films when you see the edge of her costumes: the seam of the prosthetics, the wig cap, the layers of makeup embedded in fake wrinkles. Her characters are all the more grotesque in their unravelling – no longer just monstrous versions of ourselves, but also melting and breaking before our eyes.

*But why do we keep making new products? Why do we keep innovating? I'll tell you why. Because we realise that success is just temporary. You get hungry, but you've just eaten. Right?*