

Herbert De Colle
one above and one below

[Men] are takers. They will take every single thing from you, and they will drain you. They will never give to you, ever, because it's not about you, it's always about them. And they will leave you broken, in a heap, on the floor.

Candice Carty-Williams, *Queenie*

Herbert De Colle's series of paper pulp sculptures, *Emotion*, is what happens when a man is done with you. A series of thin, pigmented discs composed of pressed paper pulp, with two holes and a slit achieving the effect of a face, these emotions are different enough to be distinguishable from one another; not in a way you would call unique, but rather, identifiable. The variations (in wave, wobble, texture, expression, delicately bile-tinged color) achieve the effect of a personality, if not a person. They feel purpose-built to make you love them despite yourself, like brachycephalic dogs, or mammalian babies. And the recognition that these flattened skins are almost an Other, places you in a nearly ethical relation to them: face to face, you are drawn into an obligation of care. Explaining them to a friend, I noted I feel affectionate towards them, almost protective, like they are deflated himbos.

Even though there is no *Emotion* in this show, I still think we can walk around the room and, piece by piece, ask: what happened to you?

If my relationship to *Emotion* is one of being ghosted by an arousing object, there is a delicate edging at play in the fringed text works *Peace*, *Love*, and *Forever*. It's difficult not to feel like we are being teased: on the one hand, there is the anarchic satisfaction of the mess that would result if De Colle would just get on with it, just go a little bit further with the knife. It would only be a matter of a few centimeters, and then the shimmering mirage of these words, already nearly invisible from how much they have been worn down with overuse, would collapse into a pile of toxically bright kindling. Then they could be useful: we could warm ourselves in front of them, cook something, maybe, have a party, move towards other bodies, hide away from others with them in the uneven flicker of their burning. These shreds would light up beautifully.

But here they are, instead, wispily clinging to each other, strand by strand, flat weft extensions for a giant, their legibility vulnerable to the slightest breeze. I wonder, at the vernissage, will the air move enough to make them tremble? Will it be enough that you can imagine them out on exterior walls, plywood barriers, doorways, just the narrowest strip of their upper edge held down with oozing wheat paste, the rest of them frantically tickling the wind?

Why is he doing it?

--LOVE

What are you after?

--PEACE

How long will it take?

--FOREVER

I can't look at *Peace* and not think of gay marriage: the path of an ideal that ossifies into a symbol, a zeitgeist that precipitates into a bauble, a surge toward emancipation that drips down into two signatures on a contract. Obviously, the form is deeply heterosexual: a pair, inextricably wrapped up in each other (here literally cast together, eternally). But also quite literally *homo*, the same. They are like a pair of promise rings, promising the

exact opposite of what they have become. Chained together, they're not going anywhere. But however they got here, they didn't arrive unscathed. They don't appear as anything other than a symbol, but that symbol is carried on a substrate that is scorched, chipped, gouged away, a material that is marked with the violences its eponym enacts on others. Maybe this is the sacrifice any symbolic burden demands from the flesh that bears it.

Kurt Cobain/Courtney Love and *Courtney Love/Kurt Cobain* are full of words, and no one understands them. We have an idea of the characters (Hole, Nirvana, Kurt, Courtney, Billy), but everyone here is only visible through the prism of a very specific cage (a band, a shotgun, a gender, a drug, a name, a body, a fandom). Two parties, each saying the same thing over and over again, each only appearing to the other as a specifically shaped absence. Even though the language of each song is subjected to the same treatment, filtered through the same abstract machine, it's impossible not to feel how fundamentally incongruous they are: one expansive, endless, dense, pungent, even, in its masochistic evacuation; the other opaque, evasive, vowels stretched beyond comprehension, consonants hollowed out and whistling, always wanting more even if that more is an end. Each operating according to predetermined logics, following the only narrative they can find, their sole protest a hole inscribed in the other.

Kurt & Courtney are trapped in a structure of meaning and love that will never serve either of them, but to which there is no imaginable outside. They are so close, but they can't help but miss each other, over and over, until at last one of them goes missing. All they can do is disinvest from this structure entirely, occupy their roles but refuse to believe in them, cut themselves into each other, hoping that eventually, the registration will go off, that their gap will make the other stutter, that somehow the friction of their husks rubbing against each other will ignite, burn up, leave a residue for someone else to make a new mark with.

Carrick Bell