

ARTWORKS LONDON

Stefanie Heinze: Genuflect Softly #1



Stefanie Heinze, *Genuflect Softly #1*, solo exhibition, installation view, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2017). Courtesy Pippy Houldsworth Gallery. Copyright the artist.

Stefanie Heinze's exhibition – *Genuflect Softly #1* – at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is her first UK solo show. As the title might allude, the body of work is a witty consideration of painting through the lens of pseudo-religious iconography.

Before entering the space, one is required to don disposable overshoes. The gallery floor has been covered in a soft white plastic carpet, taped neatly to the walls with quintessential striped black and yellow warning tape. This humorous and slightly nonsensical viewing experience marries perfectly with Heinze's desire to amalgamate high and low culture. There is something quasi-ecclesiastical too about the physical experience of putting on the overshoes – perhaps this is the spectator's own *genuflect* moment. Not bending one knee in a traditional sign of worship, but rather wobbling/balancing against the wall, cocking one leg to the side to reach your foot. The sense of clumsiness involved in wearing and walking around in the shoes is heightened by the implicit 'sincerity' of the Mayfair gallery space.

This is predominantly a painting show, with the inclusion of three drawings neatly pinned to the wall. The drawings (black ink on small haphazardly cut pieces of white paper) depict odd corporeal forms with fleshy trunks or nodules, with large ear-like shapes, or multiple legs akimbo. Heinze's method of working is usually to start with drawings of this ilk, the forms of which are then blown up and translated into large-scale paintings.

Self-described as 'a process of locating and discovering', this method allows the artist to trace the progression of shape, form and movement. This 'discovery' process doesn't seem to abate once the painting has begun. By looking at the sides of the canvases, for example, one can ascertain how many times the painting has changed colour. Mistakes or changes are re-interpreted, swallowed up by the new forms. Colour and line are consistently in dialogue, jostling, resisting, or complimenting each other.



Stefanie Heinze, *Re:blistered Feet*, 2017, oil on canvas, 85 x 80 cm, 33.5 x 31.5 in.
Private Collection. Courtesy the artist and Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London.

There is an enigmatic, graphic quality to Heinze's work. Inspired by the perpetual mutability of cartoon characters, able to effortlessly morph from one guise to another, her imagery consistently converges and teeters at the point of collapse. Heinze approaches the medium full throttle, using a glutinous mix of oil and acrylic paint, and applying it in heavy and generous swathes. The largest painting, *Untitled (Drooling Eyes)*, 2016-17, oozes gratuitously over four canvases. Interested in subverting signifiers of gendered or social relations, Heinze's bodies-cum-objects read as a series of rebellious codes and metaphors. Christian imagery – sandal-clad feet, walking on water, pedestals, flesh and bone – reappears in various tangled and abstracted guises. Figures are submerged by the environment or perhaps the environment is being slowly swallowed by the figure. This is part of the joy of Heinze's work; it defies logic, gravity and reason.

Throughout her wider practice, Heinze has infused a range of visual inspirations, from religion, to pop culture and cartoons, with a considered and scholarly interest in psychoanalysis and queer theory. In Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed refers to the term 'queer' as a way to disturb the order of things, through non-linear, experimental and oblique spatial orientations. Similarly, Heinze embraces difference and variability. Ambiguity is anarchy.

By Philomena Epps