

## IMMORTAL BELOVED by Elisabeth Kley

Lost performances by the melancholy British cult band Joy Division hover over "if we were immortal," the haunting sixth exhibition at Team by Slater Bradley, a specialist in false reincarnation and uncanny coincidence. The band's lead singer Ian Curtis, who committed suicide in 1980 at the age of 23, has long been a prime inspiration for Bradley's constant themes of youth, death and incipient abandonment, themes that he has also addressed via aspiring actresses, Star Wars devotees, children's church choirs, butterfly catchers, astronauts and Michael Jackson (among others).

The front gallery contains a row of nine 12-inch square paintings of images appropriated (and sometimes refashioned) from the covers and sleeves of live and rare studio Joy Division bootlegs. Ephemeral albums of music recorded and distributed on the sly, these mummified pop culture artifacts are hotly traded objects of desire. Bradley emphasizes their precious rarity by resurrecting their iconic cover images on gold and palladium grounds, sending the viewer to otherworldly spaces where fakery meets heartfelt devotion.

On the opposite wall is *Carpe Diem* (2009), a large photograph of the actor Benjamin Brock (sometimes known as "the Doppelgänger"), who impersonated Ian Curtis in Bradley's 2002 fictional pirate Joy Division video, *Factory Archives*. Playing a wiggled flaneur modeled on James Dean and Holden Caulfield (more members of this floating troupe of ill-fated young men) he pensively poses on New York's Fifth Avenue for a more recent Bradley film, *Boulevard of broken dreams* (2009).

In *Ladies and gentlemen we are floating in space 06* (2009), another photo on the right, a beautiful nude woman stands in front of a window speckled with bits of gold leaf, as though cut off from the outside by an icon's remains. The adjacent grisaille painting (again on gold leaf), of a tiny black disembodied hand slipping through a doorway, was taken from the sleeve of *Unknown Pleasures*, Joy Division's first official LP. Bradley theorizes that Peter Saville (who designed the covers for most of Joy Division's albums) appropriated *Enchanted Hand*, an original photo by Ralph Gibson, after seeing it in an advertisement for a 1978 Museum of Modern Art exhibition curated by John Szarkowski.

This typical Bradley progression thus links Brock, the all-purpose floating cipher (who has also appeared as Michael Jackson and Kurt Cobain), to momentary female beauty, and then culminates in a second-generation appropriation that retains its emotional punch despite its decreased authenticity. Conjuring up spiritualist notions of ghosts that enter and leave our world through surfaces of multiple reflection, Bradley has renamed his version of Gibson's image *Mirrors and Windows* (2009), after Szarkowski's show.

The back gallery contains *Aquaseafoamshame* (2009), a four-channel video mounted close to the floor, as if attempting to recreate the seaside indoors. Metaphors for the materialized ineffable, seemingly solidified fragments of foam skitter across Ocean Beach, San Francisco, where Bradley also shot a 2000 series of color photographs of a decomposing California gray whale. On one of the video's channels, a longhaired child in a white parka and boots runs and jumps over the streaming white pellets, while the other three channels feature studies of moving water from different angles and under different lights, from sunset to dusk.

The tide, a timeworn symbol of both eternity and constant change, is thus contrasted with quickly passing youth, while references to death and loss are found within the video's medium. Shot with Super 8 Kodachrome film stock, which was discontinued by Kodak in 2005, the footage is redolent of early color movies. Lush and soon-unavailable hues gleam seductively, but the installation's unusual placement prevents viewers from immersing themselves in the ocean's majesty.

Finally, a handmade black overcoat (designed by Bradley and Haans Nicholas Mott) sometimes rests on the front gallery floor, like a burial garment without a corpse. The word HATE is written in white on the back, a duplication of the painting on a jacket Curtis often wore in Manchester, to silently communicate the dark passion only let loose when he sang, seized and danced.

During the exhibition, Bradley is staging surreptitious performances (also titled *HATE*) featuring Brock wearing the garment. On the day before Thanksgiving, for example, Brock was photographed from the back as he faced a relaxed police battalion guarding the preparation of balloons on Central Park West. Bearing an incendiary message that only the viewer can see, he's a solitary vulnerable figure confronting the forces of the law. When the coat is dropped off in a different corner of the gallery after such adventures, it becomes just one more contrivance left behind on a vulnerable young hero's gloomy journey of interchangeable identity. Prices range from from \$8,000 for the 12 x 12 in. paintings to \$30,000 for the video installation (edition of three) and \$35,000 each for two 96 x 72 in. paintings.

Slater Bradley, "if we were immortal," Nov. 12-Dec. 19, 2009, at Team Gallery, 83 Grand Street, New York, N.Y. 10013

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