

TimeOut

Kiss My Genders review



Gender identity has only recently become a hot topic in mainstream society. I know, it's hard to imagine what the tabloids wrote about before they could announce that gender-neutral toilets would be the downfall of humanity.

But in art, the fluidity of gender has been a subject for centuries. From Jusepe de Ribera to Claude Cahun, art has almost always been a fertile place for radical gender thinking, and this show traces the last 50 years of it, featuring a wide array of non-binary artists.

It's an exhibition filled with photography. There's Lyle Ashton Harris dressed as Billie Holiday, Peter Hujar's

candid, deeply moving images of New York drag performers, the powerful, alien goddess-like imagery of Juliana Huxtable. The camera is used in some of these works in its traditional role as a documenter – of unseen communities, of oppressed individuals – but it's also used, more importantly, as a tool of transformation. In the hands of someone like Juliana Huxtable or planningtorock, the camera is a means of representing their true selves, or of creating a world shaped in their own image. The camera is a weapon against intolerance. The only problem is that once you get to the second room, the images are presented so boringly that you lose interest, and maybe even realise that photography is the least interesting thing here.

Much better is the video installation of drag artist Victoria Sin performing Cantonese songs projected on shimmering white sheets, or Hunter Reynolds's spinning 'Memorial Dress' emblazoned with the names of countless Aids victims.

Upstairs is where it really gets good. There's Kent Monkman's enormous supernatural spirit paintings, Flo Brooks's fantastic canvases that use cleaning products and changing rooms as metaphors for how society views gender, and Jes Fan's gloopy, bodily glass sculptures inspired by the scientific production of testosterone and oestrogen.

This massive exhibition of art that takes a radical look at gender moves us ever closer to being able to delete the word 'radical'. 'Kiss My Genders' pushes society towards accepting a more fluid approach to gender identity: it demystifies it and normalises it. If art can help knock bigotry down a few pegs, it's doing something right.

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