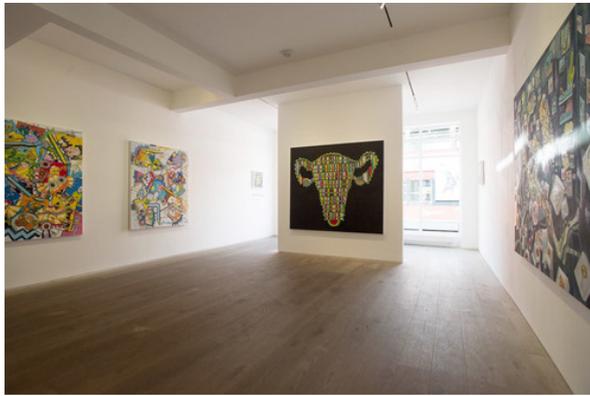


COGITO ERGO SUM (CELINA
TEAGUE)

Earlier this month, [Celine Teague](#) presented her latest exhibition 'I Think Therefore I #' in the southwest London gallery, [Kristin Hjellegjerde](#). The title of the piece played on the famed phrase coined by French philosopher René Descartes' - "I think therefore I am". In essence, the act of thinking proves we exist. In adding the hash tag and removing the 'am', Teague explored in her work the trivialities of a digital world in which our polished, filtered and hash-tagged digital concoctions precede us. After touring the exhibition, Teague and I sit down to chat at Putney-based café *Brew*, and discuss her work, the power of social media and the 'armchair activist'.



I Think Therefore I #, 2015 exhibition view at Kristin Hjellegjerde

Jamal George-Sharpe How would you describe your aesthetic?

Celine Teague: Deceptively fun because the content underneath it all is quite dark and there's a lot of thought processes that go on behind my work. Sometimes it takes me personally into a dark place. The colours often mask the contents.



The Last Sharpenings 1, 150cm x 120cm, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

“Social media, the relevance of the hashtag and the power it has over us, are subjects that I think we should talk about more.”

JG-S: What about the subjects that your pieces explore, such as the rise of social media?

CT: Social media, the relevance of the hashtag and the power it has over us, are subjects that I think we should talk about more. Social media, and the way we use it, is such a new language at the moment. We are all exploring it. We don't know where it's taking us. We don't know what it is turning us into. It reveals a slightly warped side of us in some ways - very vain but there is a compassionate side too. People are being motivated to change. There's a lot of armchair activism, which is potentially lazy but also a great force for good. I'm kind of torn between where I stand personally on it. The initial idea of social media and the Internet was to bring the world together. At the moment, I think it does exacerbate our differences often. Yet there is a great potential for the Internet to be a great

unifying force.



I think Therefore I #, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

**“We are going from
one extreme to the
next. I use the analogy
of the Daily Mail
because it has these
two columns that are
side-by-side - the
horrific news
alongside the showbiz.
We dip in and out.”**

**JG-S: Your work, and the duality of the
‘fun’ exterior and the deeper darker
message beneath, mimics how we now have
our digital self and our physical self. They**

often don't mirror each other - one is more perfected and filtered and hash tagged and the other is just reality. I found that interesting whilst I was looking at your work. What would you say about this?

CT: Yes, that's true - and we have not really explored the space in between. We are going from one extreme to the next. I use the analogy of the *Daily Mail* because it has these two columns that are side-by-side - the horrific news alongside the showbiz. We dip in and out. This kind of pictorial overload we're receiving on a daily basis means we're not going into depth with these stories. We're just seeing one image there and another there and nothing in between. I'm not surprised that we want to just indulge in the frivolity of filters and all these things because there's so much dark news.



I Am No One, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

**“These are big events -
people's lives. I think**

**we forget that very
easily.”**

JG-S: Could it be a form of escapism?

CT: Yeah, I think we're in a bit of trauma with all of the things we see on the news. We're taking our phones to bed with us every night and waking up to see horrible news stories. It's just not healthy. It's desensitising us. If we continue like this, I'm not sure what it's going to do to us as a society. That's why I find painting such an interesting medium personally. I can just take stop of a news story, such as the 'Bring Back Our Girls' campaign, which was the starting point of one of my paintings. This horrific event was very hash-tagged and promoted all over social media, but it has not been resolved. I saw a BBC documentary about it and the news developments get worse. Some stories affect me so much that I want to take the time to think about, and almost honour, these girls in a way before I move on to another story. These are big events - people's lives. I think we forget that very easily.





I Speak! Emoji, 41cm x 41cm, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

JG-S: Where did you get the idea to document news stories and current affairs?

CT: I've always done this to some extent. I don't intend to paint political works. I paint from this personal standpoint rather than from any attempt to make sweeping generalisations. It's about me coming to terms with some of the things I see around me. In Mexico, I was painting about women's issues because I was living on my own in a town where I was the tallest by at least two heads and very blonde. I definitely stuck out like a sore thumb and got a bit of unwanted attention. I painted about these experiences. I think with the news we get so much different information all the time. It's spun. But at the end of the day, I want to make my own opinions and I want to make them based on as much information as possible.





Come Together Over Me, 80cm x 70cm, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

“I think all discussion should be had in the open and it’s up to the other person to express their opinion however they want in a non-aggressive, non-violent way.”

JG-S: Because your work is so personal, do you fear its response when placed in the public sphere?

CT: Yes I do. I believe passionately in free speech. I think all discussion should be had in the open and it’s up to the other person to express their opinion however they want in a non-aggressive, non-violent way. Free speech has got us to where we are now, not believing that the world is flat.

I got afraid because I was touching on the Charlie Hebdo subject. I was stripping them away almost from their contexts, taking

texts away to just explore the theme that had caused such a big upset. I wanted to look at these cartoons that I knew nothing about. I didn't know who Charlie Hebdo was. Initially with the first two paintings I was taking snippets of these cartoons indiscriminately. By the third one, I realised there were certain cartoons that I didn't want in my paintings. They weren't for my taste. They made me feel uncomfortable. It was an interesting personal experience because your knee-jerk response to something is not really thought-through. It's not considerate or considered. But by the time you really go into the issue and explore it at a personal level, you feel different. You feel more uncomfortable about offence that might have been caused. That's a debate I have with myself and I'm really happy that I had it.



Social Suicide, 150cm x 120cm, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

“I’m not interested in being the provocative artist. I hate that word being associated with my work because that is not what I’m trying to do.”

JG-S: What has been the response to the Hebdo works?

CT: I think initially, when people hear Charlie Hebdo, they think “Oh don’t touch it!”. Then when they realise that I’m not an antagonistic person and it comes from a good place, they understand. I’m not interested in being the provocative artist. I hate that word being associated with my work because that is not what I’m trying to do.

JG-S: Your work, ‘I Think Therefore I #’, in particular, explores the ‘armchair activist’. Would you say that social media has caused people to become more politically inclined and opinionated?

CT: I’m tempted to say more engaged. I think a lot of the advances that are happening are because of social media. People are becoming aware and motivated to sign the petitions. That’s great. I also think it’s important to get outside an embassy and

campaign about your causes too. So I think armchair activism can go beyond. It shouldn't be a fashion. These issues are really serious. You also have to ask why is it that we use social media to be so nasty?



What Your Language Says About You, 170cm x 150cm Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 2015

JG-S: So are these issues that you might incorporate into future works?

CT: New work? I want a holiday. I don't know what my next show is going to be about. If I look at my last shows I've always been interested in similar subjects - what's going on with the environment, the world around me and animals and politics. I always take my cue from what's happening in the world. It could be a personal family experience. I never really know until I feel something very strongly and I'm in the studio painting it.

Find out more about [Celina Teague](#).

Words: Jamal George-Sharpe

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