

The Manicured Wild

20 Jul – 26 Aug 2017 at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London,
United Kingdom

10 AUGUST 2017



The Manicured Wild, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde

A giant eye, staring out at you, layers of frames, fingers clawing out of a young boy's portrait. They are presented to us in overlapping image panes, a kaleidoscopic vision of deconstructed portraits. Elsewhere, pictures are embedded in foamy concrete, blocks of grey stone standing on spindly legs like totems. A boulder endlessly pushed up and down a

quiet street, a Sisyphean feat of rebellion against the man-made constraints forever taking over nature. It is precisely here, at the junction where man and nature collide, that the works of artists Jonny Briggs and Evy Jokhova meet. The *Manicured Wild* (20 July – 26 August 2017) at Kristin Hjellegjerde, brings together the place where both disparate artistic practices meet, as each investigates the relationship between the manmade and the natural, old and new, and our desire to control the world around us, whether through landscaping and architectural interventions, or constructed realities, where truth and fiction merge.

The works of Jonny Briggs often touch upon around the blurred boundary between the body and the landscape, a strange in-between state where bodies merge with their surroundings. “The gaps in history shout louder than the facts,” he explains. “I notice how we may project into these gaps our own fears or desires, generating stories that evolve into folklore, blurring the boundary between what is real, and what is fantasy.” This estuary of the natural and artificial is explored through the body of work he presents in *The Manicured Wild*. Briggs probes our need to create artificial versions of nature – as seen in wallpaper, greengrocer grass and laminates, or as smelt in air fresheners, perfumes and candles. For him, it is this phenomenon of nature, controlled, that enthralts him.

As such, his photographic works appear as if they have been digitally manipulated as montages of different visual realities, yet closer inspection reveals them to be more real than one at first assumes. *The Hanged Man*, for example, presents us with a kneeling figure, yet that is only part of the sum of the many parts he is composed of. His eye, like an Illuminati symbol, dominates the foreground, his body grey against the vibrant green of an unruly woodland. It seems like a clever trick of

Photoshop, yet the more one looks, the harder it is to discern what is photographic montage and what may actually be real. “I seek to create uncrackable puzzles, in terms of how missing parts in the photographs relate to the objects they are presented with,” he explains. “The object can’t complete the photograph; the photograph can’t complete the object.” As such, he works with the fragmented body; in particular those parts which relate to senses (eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hands), symbolic of the ways in which we recreate nature to our own tastes – artificial sights, sounds and flavours.

Meanwhile, Evy Jokhova’s practice is research-driven by investigations into relationships between things, the creation of social systems, and how social behaviour can be altered through architectural construction. Exploring social narratives and remembered ‘truths’, she questions her own subjective role in and relationship to society, history, landscape, architecture and public ‘signifiers’ such as monuments. “We often render most things to become representations of our ideals, and not what they actually are,” she says. As such, she is interested in humankind’s relationship with history, anthropology and architecture, and how they metamorphose into myth over time, adapted as we tailor them to our contemporary needs. “Materiality is important to me in relation to culture, nature and artifice,” she explains. “I look at how and why we maintain an attachment to particular materials and architectural features and why we are constantly seeking new ways to synthesize and mimic old ideals.”

Series such as *Templates* (comprising painted linoleum-flooring panels, polystyrene, foam and print), explore these notions of materiality, representation, visual appropriation and mimicry (in this case, of stone), and how they are re-appropriated into contemporary Western culture.

Totems/Cairns, similarly, probes the cultural significance of stone and the relationship between social relics, sacred objects, and assemblages for pilgrimage – and how found and crafted objects are positioned as artefacts. The Manicured Wild will also involve a performance element, as Jokhova creates a giant rock sculpture, Sisypha. Strapped to a plywood board, it will be wheeled once a day up and down the gallery's High Street, a metaphor for the human migration, for the struggle over land, finding one's place, and how place can migrate within collective memory. The work also touches on the current plight of artists who are pushed out of cities due to gentrification and rise of property prices. "Referring to all types of migration, economic, political, geographic, historical, Sisypha is simultaneously 'home' and 'no place' being carted around," says Jokhova. The Sisyphean feat of endless movement extends to the ceaseless tasks of gallerists who take on these artists and their baggage, taking it to and from art fairs, temporary commissions, sculpture parks and so on. Encapsulating history in stone, the work references the eponymous Greek tale, and the human plight of endlessly working to conquer nature (both human and environmental) and our constant striving to perfect ourselves – that endless, hopeless task of seeking to manicure the wild.

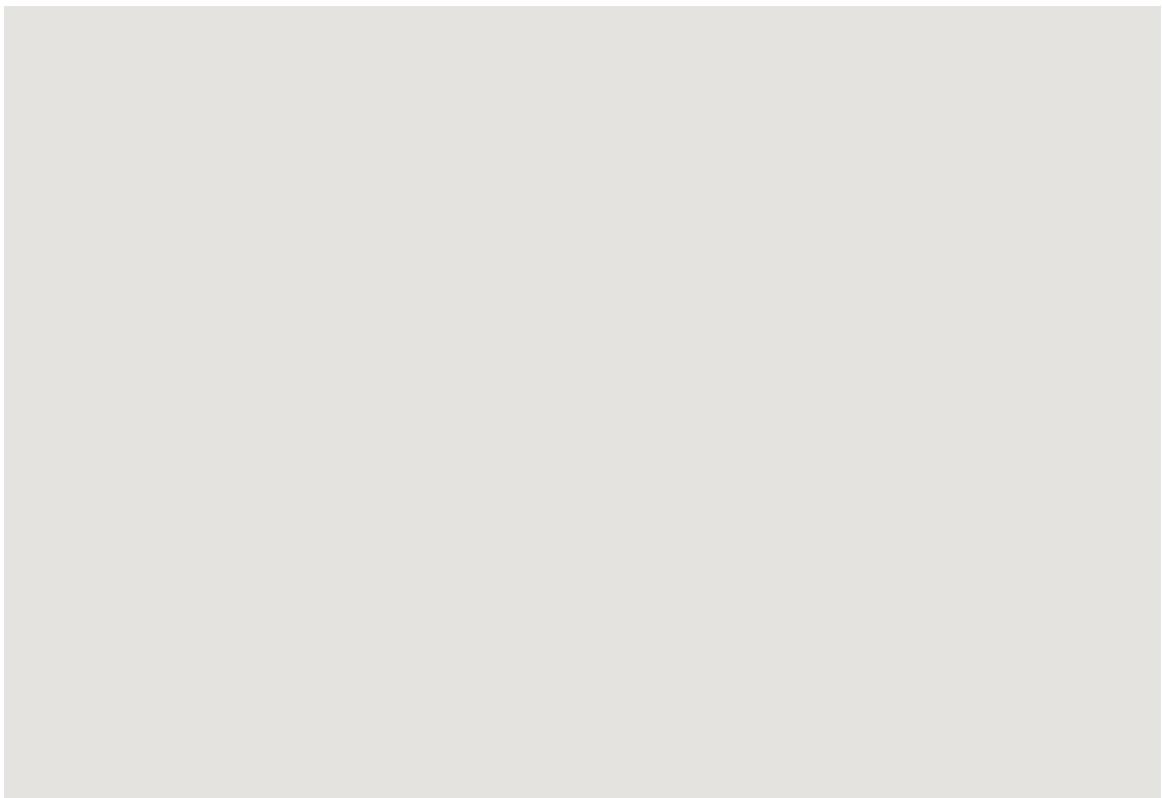
In search of lost parts of his childhood, Jonny Briggs explores a reality outside what he was socialised into by creating new ones using himself and his parents as the main subject. Through these he uses photography to explore his relationship with deception, the constructed reality of the family, and question the boundaries between child/adult, self/other, nature/culture, real/fake in attempt to revive the unconditioned self, beyond the family bubble. Although easily assumed to be photoshopped or faked, upon closer inspection the images are often realised to be more real than first expected. Involving staged installations, the cartoonesque and

the performative, Briggs looks back to his younger self and attempt to re-capture childhood nature through assuming adult eyes. Recent exhibitions include From Selfie to Self Expression, The Saatchi Gallery, London (2017), Photoforum PasquArt Photo Museum, Switzerland (2017), Unseen Art Fair, Amsterdam, MC2, The Netherlands (2017), When something bad happens more than once, it starts to feel normal, N Contemporary, Turin, Italy (2016), Centre Photographique, Rouen, Normandy, France, Curated by Raphaëlle Stopin (2016), Soil Culture: Young Shoots, The Eden Project, Cornwall, UK (2016).

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

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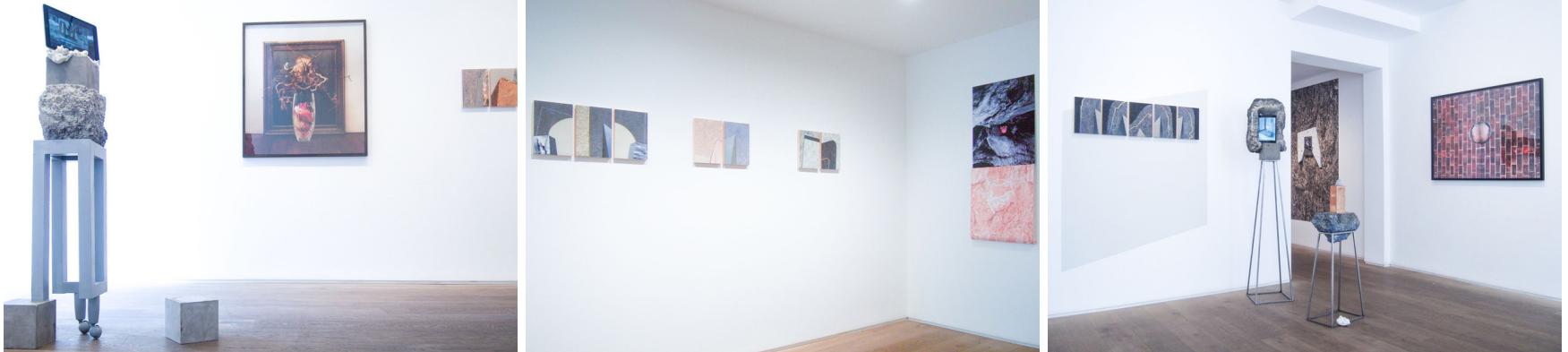
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Opening hours

Tuesday to Saturday
From 11am to 6pm



Captions

1. The Manicured Wild, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde
2. The Manicured Wild, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde
3. The Manicured Wild, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde

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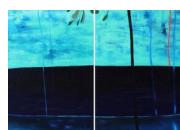
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