

## ***I'm all dressed up and ready to fall in love...*<sup>1</sup>**

**Philomena Epps**

'Working within the medium of painting, performance, and sculpture, Susie Green's practice is focused on the body as a site of tactility, vulnerability, and sensuality. In the artist's own words, her creations are 'often a meandering, poetic and rhythmic exploration of form and subject, delicately balanced between suggestive and explicit content'.<sup>2</sup> Her multifarious output questions notions of desire, intimacy, and transgression, suggesting an empathetic line of enquiry into the ways in which we might adorn both ourselves or our environments, as a means of escapism, a way to provide security and belonging, or to encourage joy and pleasure.

Simultaneously impermanent and decadent, Green's installations revel in excess, evoking a theatrical set or the warmth of an intimate party. The intention is to create an atmosphere that is all-encompassing. There is something romantic and sincere about her emphatically handmade works. The accumulation of delicately painted layers and high saturation materials, and the development of an elaborate mise-en-scène within the exhibition space. The atmosphere is heightened, and a sentiment of spiritual connection seeps into the ether. Like decorating rooms, much of her oeuvre is similarly occupied with decorating the body, and clothing as a mode of individual and physical embellishment. There is a strong engagement with the relationship between fabric and form, with works particularly alluding to garments designed for sexual interactions. 'I am interested in imagined spaces that might allow for fantasy,' she has said, 'creating scenarios for characters to play within (through sex, dancing, clothes, conversation, connection)'.

Green has recently embarked on a series of large painted paper figures, akin to the construction of cut-out articulated puppets. Made in jewel-like colours, these characters will debut at FRAC. Working on her studio floor, her artistic process is improvisational and physically embodied, as she applies high flow acrylic paint onto layers of tissue paper. As the watery pigment dries—often left to develop quietly overnight—the crisp white sheets become slowly transformed, their surfaces textured and covered in intricate synapses. Green has recently become interested in the Vagus Nerve, associating it with the way she engages with line and form. A key component of the human parasympathetic nervous system, it is known colloquially as 'the wandering nerve'. It oversees an array of functions, from heart rate to digestion, even one's general mood. Similarly, Green is intrigued by the connections between the body and the mind, from gut instinct, panic, arousal, and excitement: the intensity and inexplicability of existence.

She refers to these new, puppet characters as 'floating figures of love' and 'defiant decorated bodies'. They are 'weightless, free, unbounded'. They exist in a space of contrasts, able to be both diaphanous and fragile, strong and agile. The edges of the paper puppets are formed, cut, scalloped.

---

<sup>1</sup> Divine as Babs Johnson in *Pink Flamingos*, dir. John Waters, 1972

<sup>2</sup> All of the following quotations from Green are drawn from her conversations with the author, July 2020

While this signature frilly motif might be indicative of decoration, perhaps suggestive of gathered finishes on clothing, they also signify something more internal and guttural, akin to intestinal drawings or an umbilical cord. A face might transform into a row of hearts, while body parts are fragmented, laced together, and tied up with bows. Occasionally, the ambivalent fluidity of her figures contrast with the other shapes that their form evokes. The softness of a body, as tender and malleable flesh, is pitted against the potential hardness of objects. The limbs of the yellow puppet are suggestive of a dangling knife, while the red character is reminiscent of a figurehead on the prow of a sailing ship.

The floating figures are isolated and disconnected from one another, their bodies drifting in a state of searching, waiting for their desires to be met. However, in Green's paintings, representations of partnership and union begin to emerge. Despite their formal simplicity, the language of her painted line is animated with a deep somatic presence. She offers an honest and direct way to think about sex and relationships, holding space to represent how entangled our internal and external worlds are. Working with acrylic and watercolour, the colours are bold, and the composition is loose. The leaking and seeping washes of paint suggest intangible feelings and the fuzzy matrix of recalling unreliable or emotionally charged memories. There is also an overt eroticism and playful sensuality to the work, with muddled organic and sexual forms. A lack of gravity and a sense of giddiness underscores their illogical construction.

These paintings extend ideas initially posited by Green in a series of small watercolour paintings made in 2017. Last year, FRAC acquired five of these for their collection. The paintings function like short stories or confessional vignettes. They describe moments of intimacy and encounter, either sustained or fleeting, from online communication to face-to-face companionship. Green starts with words, often mined from notes in her sketchbook. These are written in pencil and arranged on the paper intuitively. From this, a quick painting process follows. Using the words as anchors, she shapes her imagery around them. The shapes are semi-figurative, vague, reduced to subtle symbolism. In *Falling out of us* and *Your hair, the sky*, pink and green folds and curly blue springs all fit together like a puzzle, or an orbit of interlocking shapes. With *The cut out ass fitted fine*, a pair of ass-less tights are the compelling central object, a way of framing, elevating, and accentuating the bottom, particularly due to the contrast between the opaque fabric and bare skin. *The space inside your mouth is entirely yours, except when it is mine* was inspired by an exploratory BDSM relationship, and again the body as an abstract image is brought to bear. Encased in synthetic or glossy materials, Green responds to the fetishistic nature of latex, and the ball gag as form and object, filling up the recess of the mouth. Although deliberately anonymous, the colours in the painting are inspired by the colour scheme in the home where those intimate situations took place. Certain colours become engrained within recollections, acting as clues. In *Watching, pissing, arousing for both*, however, Green selects the colour grey. In relation to the heat of the title, the hue is neutral, cool, open.

Three videos made with her 'longstanding artist playmates' Simon Bayliss, Kim Coleman, and Rory Pilgrim, reflect her interest in kinship and solidarity. In *Coming to Power* (2020), made with Bayliss, Green appears in the guise of a bouncing cartoon strawberry. She regularly collaborates with Bayliss

under the moniker *Splash Addict*, their synth-orientated music inspired by shared filthy sensibilities and a love of dance music. Green's long-standing expanded pop collaboration with Pilgrim is represented by their duet cover of Tami T's 'I Never Loved This Hard This Fast Before': a seductive track that blurs and redefines the lines of gender identity. Finally, *If They Be Two* (2018), co-authored with Coleman, the two artists reflect on their bodies, their encounters with and without lovers, and their relationship as friends.

For her presentation at FRAC, Green has also created a new version of *Slow Burn* (2017), a polychromatic painted rope work, that will function as a divider in the space. Simultaneously a sculpture, drawing, and expanded painting, it has the potential to move through the room like a continuous circuit, gathering across the floor, even travelling up the walls and ceiling. It can be gathered together or spread out, constantly reimagining, editing, and extending space in relation to the body. Arranged like a vascular system, akin to a coiled tendril of hair, or a knotted necklace chain at the nape of the neck, it loops and recurs, like a snake swallowing its own tail. The rope is certain and uncertain, interrupted yet whole, suggestive of a smouldering fuse. It also looks like an abstract score, a reference to corporeal rhythm, undulating slowly like an irregular breath or a heartbeat. Like much of Green's practice, it is a form of fantasy architecture, celebrating the connection between ornamentation, pleasure, and the body'.

- Philomena Epps, 2020