

# LUNGLEY

## Big Fat Narcissist

Ant Hamlyn

*Exhibition text by Hector Campbell*

04/10/19 - 27/10/19

*Private view 30/09, 6-9pm.*

Ant Hamlyn's debut solo exhibition, 'Big Fat Narcissist', continues to investigate and examine his existence as a maker of objects, a purveyor of visual performance, a craftsman of the kinetic, and above all, as an artist. It also raises fresh questions about how those roles operate within our contemporary society, their perceived importance (or lack thereof), and their enduring cultural necessity.



Ant Hamlyn: ME (2019)

The exhibition's titular work embodies Hamlyn's use of tongue-in-cheek, subversive and self-deprecating humour to address prevalent cultural issues. The openly egotistical and aspirational act of having one's name in lights is instantly alluring to viewers, praying on their inherent narcissistic tendencies and implied response, "Me?". However, in reality, the works incessant pleas for consideration are undermined by its own muted and sparse illuminations, attracting the attention of the viewers only to leave them disappointed. Shifting enthusiasms, managing emotions and controlling expectations are therapeutic tools Hamlyn, who grew up during the advent of the internet and came of age surrounded by social media, has had to learn to exercise in and of himself, and tools which he attempts to impart to his viewers. In the contemporary culture of influencers, over-sharing and instant gratification it is all too easy for this works allegorical intention to be overlooked, overshadowed and outshone.

Instant gratification is again addressed within Hamlyn's 'Unplayable Pinball Machines', fabricated from alluring, glossy Corian and furnished with arcade machine buttons and fairground cabochon lights, reminiscent of childhood toys and the artist's own boyhood holidays to the British seaside. However, these miniature facsimiles are in fact completely devoid of functionality. Viewers are enticed with implied interactivity and the promise of participation, only to be denied the gratification they so crave and feel entitled to. Emotions are once again played upon and manipulated, as the vacuum left empty by this lack of indulgence must be filled by anything from anger to embarrassment, indifference to irrelevance, amusement to confusion.

In this exhibition, therefore, we see also Hamlyn take on the guises of the artist as magician, the artist as trickster and the artist as puppet master; steering his audience through the show using a combination of sleight of hand, artifice and emotional leverage. He flatters to deceive, as the audience becomes unwillingly complicit in his duplicity, outmanoeuvred at every turn by Hamlyn's poetic, carefully considered chicanery. Whilst some viewers may leave completely unaware of their performative participation, there will be those for whom the dystopian double-dealing becomes apparent; it is they who find the mirror firmly reflected back upon themselves, left to consider their own susceptibility, and perhaps learn a worthwhile lesson to carry forth into the current age of fake news, click-bait and catfishing.

Finally, then, what of Hamlyn himself? For despite the exhibitions self-deprecating title, whilst considering his role as an artist - and by association the aforementioned magician, trickster and puppet master - he modestly steps back and allows the work to speak for itself. The 'hand of the artist' is often obscured in his work, hidden under layers of sound conceptual ideas, playful poetic wordplay, undeniable technical expertise and a mastery of materials. As the Wizard of Oz cried "Don't look at the man behind the curtain", perhaps too Hamlyn's attempts to guide the audience's gaze are in fact a means of keeping that gaze off of himself. One plays a role and therefore becomes a role, and Hamlyn is adept enough at the role of artist that we could be persuaded to turn a blind eye to his own fallible humanity, finding it instead imbued within his works unpressable buttons, understated illumination and childlike, imitative scrawl of 'Puppet'.

Exhibition text by **Hector Campbell**, Art Historian, Writer & Curator.

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