

EXHIBITION TEXT BY LILY BUNNEY

I use TikTok differently from other social media. With something like Instagram, I message people a lot. I follow people I know. I use it in a professional capacity. I like to see my TikTok account as anonymous; it's an isolated pocket of content away from my life, where I don't create anything; I just consume.

I saw a tiktok defending a midwest emo song I'd never heard of. The defence was 'You love when men angst about things, let a woman be a bit angsty', which is a defence I can get behind. The song included this lyric; 'your favourite celebrity's car has broken down, they're stranded and they've gotta crash at your house'.

When I was in my second year at university, I wanted to make a piece of art about a youtube video called 'Trapped in an Island with Josh Hutcherson'. I never got into fanfiction when I was a teenager, which is a shame. But being a fan in that capacity was never in my nature. To give a brief summary of the video (in case you don't want to watch it) – the Youtuber analyses a classic bit of fanfiction about a girl who gets trapped inside an island with Josh Hutcherson of 'Hunger Games'. There's a complicated trope in fanfiction, a 'Mary Sue', a self-insert character who is meant to represent the author. And in this fanfic, the self-insert is originally dating Josh after they were stranded together in (it was inside) an island (she ran away from home and fell off a boat, she wanted to be an actor but her parents don't understand, they want her to be a doctor, Josh understands), until towards the end of the fic, the author seems to become jealous of her own self-insert. The author writes herself directly into the novel, and steals Josh away from the self-insert character she had created. I found the whole thing quite enthralling as a narrative device and maybe as a visual –someone killing off their character (metaphorically) to fully enter the fictional space. So they can kiss a fictional version of a 'real' celebrity.

We love to discuss celebrity culture, but honestly I'm much more interested in the part where you (or I) exist in these relationships.

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I use Instagram stories as a way to try and get people's attention. I like that trend of people sharing stupid things they've posted online to try and get their online crushes to reply. I find it tricky to articulate the difference between this type of attention and the attention I might get from my friends in real life. I can text or call a friend if I'm feeling lonely or misunderstood, but there is a difference in feeling between the attention I get from friends in this way, and the attention I can get online from people who don't know me. I think the latter desire to be seen is less material.

I have a note on my phone called Structures for gossip. Structures for gossip means (to me) things which can bring about a somewhat vulnerable conversation. The weather is not a structure of gossip because it doesn't encourage interpersonal reflection. The list so far is: Astrology, therapy, celebrity.

I first 'read' Jennette McCurdy's book on TikTok, in this popular split screen format where the top screen is a static image of the book cover, and the bottom screen a video of someone playing Subway Surfers, cutting up expired makeup, or something similar, with a clip of Jennette narrating her audiobook as audio. There was one person whose whole account was just these videos, and you could 'read' most of the book this way. Her memoir, 'I'm Glad My Mom Died', blurb reads; 'The book is about her career as a child actress and her difficult relationship with her abusive mother who died in 2013'. It's an exploration of personal trauma. And it's very surreal to hear someone openly talk about personal trauma in a video edit which includes Subway Surfer, where the next video might be a TikTok live of someone trying to sell me crystals.

The work that seeded these shows, 'Jennette McCurdy', started as an incidental collage. I was on Instagram and I saw a photo of Jennette positioned on the 'for you' page on Instagram, with a reel of a cat below her, so it looked like the cat was her legs. I screenshot it because I thought it was funny, and because I'd been spending all this time watching split screen trauma videos with a similar layout on TikTok. It captured an interest in what it means to tell these stories to people and what it means to have them disseminated online. The consumption of trauma, I guess.

It got crystalised when I started reading other celebrity memoirs, especially 'Down the Drain' by Julia Fox. All my friends also read it and we discussed it together, and used it as a bit of a guide. Well, we were guided specifically by the way Julia discusses these objectively scary or traumatic experiences with so little shame. Definitely within me and my group of friends there is a lurking stickiness of guilt and shame, a need to obscure parts of ourselves to hide something we see as guilty or shameful. That was the gossip that 'Down the Drain' facilitated.

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How do we fit ourselves into our own narratives when so many other narratives crowd our own? Clarice Lispector's 'The Besieged City' is a story about a girl growing up during a period of mass industrialisation in the city she lives in. There is a scene in the book where Lucrecia lies in bed and thinks about the wild horses which live behind her house, and she imagines running through the streets with those wild horses. Later in the novel, everyone has cars and she wonders where the wild horses have all gone. I think Lispector believes that true subjectivity, being able to really sit in your own life's narrative, comes from complete objective-hood. Like, being an actual object. I think that Lispector wishes she could be a brain and heart inside a porcelain ceramic, feeling everything, looking at everything, without having to worry about what other people feel or see.

When I was writing this, I was with a friend, and we were talking about loneliness. Sometimes it feels like there are two poles; being very localised and held by a community, and travelling around a lot, being 'free'. The upside of being entrenched in a community is you feel held and seen, and the downside is sometimes you feel trapped in your own life. Travelling around often, being free, has the upside of, well, feeling free, but the downside of being lonely in a very deep way. There is probably a middle ground, but I am more towards the 'held by a community' axis point, and so was my friend. She said, 'If I'm by myself, I'm often documenting myself on instagram'. I think I do the same. Almost all of the smaller works in this show feel like that –

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fantasising about wild horses

GUTS GALLERY

photos I've taken on my phone of experiences I'm having, to be shared with others so that I can be fully witnessed even when I'm alone. With the exception of the gem drawing, which is a sinewing thread to the first part of the show; a photograph of me drawing on a friend's back.

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It's fun to reflect on what it means to inhabit a plane of reality on which you are seen in the same way as your idols are seen, where you are able to position yourself next to anyone. 'Trapped in an Island with Josh Hutcherson' sees the author kill off (well, romantically) her own self-insert so she can directly enter the narrative. That midwest emo song uses second person: 'YOUR favourite celebrity', it's this wish fulfilment where it's less about the celebrity and more about your own personal fantasy, your own location in a story. Painting celebrities becomes an invitation for them to enter your life. Perhaps Julia Fox will see this painting I did of her and she will like it. Perhaps Josh will read his fanfiction. Perhaps your favourite celebrity's car WILL break down. Then we will be seen by someone who is always being seen by us.

FANTASISING ABOUT WILD HORSES

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15 Nov - 14 Dec

miłość gallery

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Wed-Sat 11-6

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