

# schmick

# contemporary

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# Oralfixation

# danielMUDIEcunningham

**july 20-aug 5**

Daniel Mudie Cunningham  
*Oral Fixation*  
Pigment prints on metallic gloss paper  
7 parts. 35 x 22.5 each (4)  
25 x 52.5 (3)  
Edition 3 +1 AP  
2023

Daniel Mudie Cunningham  
*Days of the Teeth*  
HD video  
0:30 sec loop  
2018-2019

Daniel Mudie Cunningham  
*10kg Laughs*  
Lolly teeth installation  
10kg  
2023

Oral Fixation is a satellite project for Daniel Mudie Cunningham's survey exhibition *Are You There?* curated by James Gatt at Wollongong Art Gallery, showing until 10 September 2023.

Oral Fixation was made at Waverley Artist Studios, where Daniel is a current artist in residence. Daniel would like to thank James Gatt, Carolyn Mckenzie-Craig, Damian Dillon, and Anthea Duffy.

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Text

Anthea DUFFY

The forced smile is an agonising thing. The splitting stretch of the unwilling mouth, the humourless eyes, the reluctant stance; the smile, however it is given, has become a code of conduct within the realm of civility, where the unsmiling are immediately suspect.

'SAY CHEESE' has long been established as a barking command for constructing the ideal portrait, inciting the knee-jerk reaction of a smile that denies inherent human resistance to self-documentation and examination. With Kodak's popularisation of snapshot photography in the mid-20th century came a simultaneous enabling and enslaving of the public. We were empowered to create as we were empowered to perform, and became advertisers, models, and salespersons in the theatre of image.

Rampant enthusiasm for documenting the everyday formed a perverse need to boast illusions of upper-class leisure, happiness, and staged candour; the camera became a weapon of ownership, determined to convince its owner of a glorified reality. The very language of snapshot photography involves an element of hunting the fleeting and claiming it as a possession. To aim, capture, and shoot is to control; to be photographed is to be owned.

Daniel Mudie Cunningham's *Oral Fixation* detects both vulnerability and perversity within the snapshot. As though glaring from a bus stop advertisement, behind a department store window, or branded on a billboard, glossy orthodontic prints confront the torment of private pain for public pride. Headshots from the artist's teenage years in the early 1990s sear in their discomfort; resemblance to the self-conscious school portrait made tender beside the brutality of surgical photography. A kind of visual onomatopoeia radiates from Cunningham's catapult mouth; stretched and braced, the glisten, slick, and suction of his interior is immediately invasive, tactility exposing the subject and audience alike. With orthodontics gaining rapid advancement and popularity from the 1970s and peaking during the time these photos were taken, the display of a pristine grin has become more ubiquitous and parallels swift developments in snapshot photography that were on the cusp of evolving from analogue to digital technologies.

The smile is a thing of maintenance more than one of pleasure, its unnervingly accepted artifice spotlighted in *Days of the Teeth* (2018–2019). Cunningham's year-long online project serves as a feat of endurance, where the artist posted a different smiling, white celebrity on his Instagram story every day from Tuesday 9 January 2018. Each famous subject had their blinding teeth defaced by white caps lock lettering, spelling out a new day of the week and forming a garish parade of privilege as the finish line for the constructed 'Hollywood Smile', advertised by orthodontists. *Days of the Teeth* winks across the room to *10kg Laughs*, an installation of bulk-purchased lolly teeth crammed into the disused fireplace at Schmick – a joke on how candy can rot your teeth and can ruin a perfect smile.

*Oral Fixation's* tryst between humour and anguish, perfection and defection, surfaces and what lurks inside, lets us know that beneath the snapshot's status-hungry reign, we are smiling victims as much as we are sad ambassadors.

Schmick Contemporary acknowledges the land on which we operate as unceded and we pay our respects to past, present and emerging elders of the Eora Nation.

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