



Jonathan Horowitz: Pre-Fall '17 review

Written by Eddy Frankel | Monday 11 March 2019



Copyright the artist, courtesy Sadie Coles

Jonathan Horowitz will mess you up. By the time you walk out of the American artist's show at Sadie Coles, you won't be able to distinguish between Trump, Gucci, Coca Cola and the metoo movement, because Horowitz sees all of it as an exercise in branding, the weaponisation of symbols.

His four-screen video says it best. One screen shows Trump confidante/immortal gargoyle Kellyanne Conway looking like a grade-A plonker on Inauguration Day in a ludicrous Gucci coat. Another shows the all-white-models Gucci runway show where the coat debuted. So far, so clear: you get it – Gucci is deep in the pocket of alt-white new America, yadda, yadda, yadda. Hell, it's even got a shop in Trump Tower, right?

But the other two screens complicate matters. One shows young black people dancing to Northern Soul in a Gucci ad, another shows clips from Beyoncé and Jay Z's 'Apushit' video, with the duo performing in front of the priceless masterpieces of the Louvre, draped head to toe in luxury clothes and jewellery.

So many complicated things are happening at once. Luxury clothing is used by the alt right and by prominent black celebrities to symbolise the same things from different angles, while the brands themselves are in turn using and manipulating those groups of people to grow their visibility. The people want signifiers of success, and the brands want money. They want right-wing money, they want identity politics money, it doesn't matter to them.

It's a ceaseless cycle of appropriation and reappropriation, of celebrities and brands as interchangeable subjects that weaponise symbols: and we, the consumer, are the target.

To ram it home, along the wall next to the video piece hangs a giant yellow raised-fist emoji, followed by its skin tone variations, the universal symbol of armchair social media resistance. It's picking your identity according to brand guidelines.

The final work converts the huge gallery space into a velvet-lined cinema, with the names of Harvey Weinstein's 87 accusers scrolling past in credits as if they've just starred in the film of the year, not exposed a horrifying abuse of power.

Throughout this genuinely excellent exhibition, Horowitz picks at the scabs of our consumerist society. In the process, he exposes a wound that's festering with brands, movements and celebrities, and writhing with hypocrisy.