

"I Think Therefore I #"
WITH

CELINA TEAGUE

PRIVATE VIEW 5rd of August 2015
6:30 – 10:00PM

6th of August – 5th of September 2015

Our lives now take two forms: one in the physical world and one online. We are virtually connected to our next-door neighbours and entwined with the lives of strangers halfway across the world, just as they are with ours. We feel the pull of each video that goes viral, the utter shock and morbid curiosity at stories that change our perceptions of the world, the polarizing effect that these images, strewn across social media, have on us. Do we dare to react, inserting our authentic opinions into the carefully curated Internet identities we have constructed? Or, with its congregations of tweeters and swarms of image-posters, has social media suppressed our appetite for contemplation and overwhelmed us into complacency? In *I Think Therefore I #* (6th of August – 5th of September 2015), British artist Celina Teague transforms the gallery, surrounding us with shards of social media, ciphers of our online interactions, fragmented and suspended in the air like the shimmering relics of the present in an anti-gravity chamber – yellow smiley faces, glittering duck lips, and then a cactus, a giraffe, a pair of legs on the beach, a tropical holiday – floating, detached, shorn of context, into a liminal space where we are confronted and challenged by the display of our own consciousness. She invites us to take a closer look at our role as meticulous architects and unabashed voyeurs of the cult of social media.

Teague's inspiration for *I Think Therefore I #* began with the sudden, violent spate of news stories that carried 2015 into existence: the massacre of twelve people in the offices of Parisian satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and the immolation of Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh by Isis militants, along with the now "standard" daily news events of bombs lobbed across fences, cities razed, civilians, journalists and children slaughtered like sacrificial lambs. Teague's work is the product of the realisation that each of these horrific, appalling episodes are exactly that: someone's reality detached and rearranged, slickly packaged into digestible bytes for our consumption, masquerading as unassuming tweets or posts on social media sites, critical political events hidden among the multitudes of selfies, belfies, and dronies. These stories

aren't new; rather, the ways that they are disseminated, circulated, and accessed at unprecedented levels are. "They feel different", Teague says, "because they are literally coming into bed with us at night and they wake us up in the morning... we are allowed to indulge 24/7 in this tortuous voyeurism."

And we all indulge in it. We exploit social media to our advantage, whatever the objective may be. Says Teague, "Everyone wants to tell a story – you me, journalists, Isis – we all want to upload our story to an instant audience." We're not content with being part of a collective narrative – we want to stand out, to be seen as relevant within the sheer volume of winking emojis and breezy beach holidays, protest marches and Je Suis Charlie signs, so we filter and hashtag, curate our lives and Instagram feeds, present the best and most radical versions of ourselves and our stories. We construct a binary, oscillating between two extremes: scenes of graphic, horrific violence and the trivialities and banalities of our daily lives, each disappearing with a click of a button or flick of a finger.

It is not these extremes, however, that Teague is interested in exploring with these paintings; rather, it is the "in-between" space that she endeavours to reveal, the gap that opens up when images are confronted intentionally and thoughtfully. She seeks that space which is "more contemplative, one where we are more conscious about the information we share and bring into our lives... one that allows us to properly digest the information before us" – and painting, for Teague, is the perfect medium, a slow, gradual process that allows her to locate it. In *The Last Sharpenings I and II*, the artist analyses the images that initiated the Charlie Hebdo massacre and ensuing worldwide protests against the cartoons, polarizing friends, cultures, and nations, "destabilizing the world in a way the graphic photos we see don't." She depicts the cartoons as drawings on pencil shavings, foregrounded alongside bent pencils and scrubbed rubbers, squeezed-out tubes of paint and coffee rings on blank lined paper; these are the objects of an artist, the cartoons very clearly figments of an imagination. Teague began to personalize the images: "The more I painted the more I began to imagine the lives of the people who made them. I looked for clues as to who these men were – the glasses they wore, what they might have eaten, and whether they smoked." Released from the unyielding grip of the media, unfurling in this in-between space, images are distilled, stripped of their power to incite violence, exposed – and this happens every time we take a step back to unpack what we see. As she explains, "We think we see everything – but we are fed information and we should pay attention to who is feeding us."

In each of her vibrant, expressive paintings, Teague explores this in-between space with us, subverting, recontextualizing, and repossessing the power of social media. These paintings, as she explains, are meant to be "the starting point for discussion. We are all story tellers and the one thing we do have is the ability to choose the stories we tell and how we tell them." As French philosopher René Descartes proposed, "I think therefore I am"; the act of thinking proves that we exist. With these paintings, Teague posits an equally pertinent, and perhaps more urgent, statement: "I think, therefore I #". Our online presence precedes us – unless, as Teague proposes, we explore that in-between space of awareness. If we think consciously, we will hashtag consciously – and in that space, we can then "debate and discuss and, maybe, come together." After all, as Teague explains, "we are all storytellers."

***I Think Therefore I #* runs from 6th of August – 5th of September 2015
at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London**

Information for journalists:

Celina Teague

Born in London, Celina Teague received her MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins College in 2007. Prior to this, she studied Fine Arts at the Universidad de Bellas Artes in Oaxaca, Mexico. Recent solo shows include *In Search of Lost Space* at Kristin Hjellegjerde and *Brave New World Hits a Glitch* at Rook and Raven Gallery, both in 2013. Teague has taken part in numerous group shows in London, Los Angeles, Berlin, Spain and Vienna, mostly recently in *Investida* at Sput&Nik Gallery, Porto (2015) and the *Oceana Junior Ocean Council Launch*, Phillips Auction House, London in 2014. Her work has been shown at various art fairs, and awards and residencies include a 2012 Takt Artist Residency in Berlin and inclusion on the shortlist for the 2013 Beers.Lambert *Contemporary Visions IV*.

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

Kristin Hjellegjerde opened her gallery in south west London in June 2012 following her move from New York. The gallery showcases cutting-edge contemporary art from emerging and established international artists, with the central concern being to create an intimate space in which artists can present a coherent body of work within a focused environment. Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to discover and develop new talents by creating a platform through which they can be introduced to local and international audiences and by allowing for artistic exchange. Kristin Hjellegjerde also acts as an art advisor for both emerging private and corporate collectors. For more information, visit www.kristinhjellegjerde.com.

For further information and high-resolution images, please contact Kristin Hjellegjerde on khjellegjerde@mac.com.