



Ethan Kristy *Man Cunt* at Cage me a Peacock Gallery, August 2017 **By Charlotte St Clair Wilson, Director, Cage me a Peacock**

Cage me a Peacock is delighted to present *Man Cunt*, Ethan Kristy's first solo show. Ethan's work is confronting, profane and peppered with dark humour. It deliberately challenges the viewer and forces a broad conversation about gender and sexuality. Yet it is also a deeply personal account, Ethan uses their own body and their own transition journey as the focal point for this discussion.

The transition narrative challenges conventional views of gender and sexuality by positing these notions in the transitional and liminal - in Ethan's work, this is the "man cunt". Poverty, violence, discrimination and mental health issues still disproportionately affect the trans community. The trans body therefore sits as a site of violence. In the "Inkblots" series, Ethan abstracts the body/genitals, stripping out its image through a process of casting, printing and digitising. The result is a reclaimed artefact of the man cunt, an image that can be commodified and duplicated. In calling the series "Inkblots" Ethan presents the viewer with a Rorschach test - what is it that we see in the cast of genitals? Has the body been stripped of its meaning and become merely Warholian pop repetition, or is it still the highly contested site, albeit placed out of context? In asking these questions of the viewer, Ethan confronts the notion of identity through gender, or identity in the corporeal. He is representing a central idea in Queer Theory which says there is no fundamental "self", gender is not an essentialist concept. Rather, it is a contestable space.

Ethan's "Trans Lego" series asks a similar question of pop culture. It rebrands the trans body into the recognisable Lego form. If the genital-less Lego bodies are given genitals does this change their gender? Why does the gender of Lego matter if you can swap their hair and they look the same? Why do these toys need to ascribe to a gender norm at all? By evoking childhood toys, Ethan invites us to consider the difficulty of gender non-conformity in a society that forces us into binary genders from the moment our birth certificates are issued. In the Lego-face series ("Transgender" Word of the Year) Ethan also pokes fun at the sexualisation of the trans-community. The bodies are rendered silly and unimportant by the vacantly smiling Lego head. But beneath this humour remains the dark reality of the experience of the trans community - everything is not awesome.

Ethan's photographic works ("Governance") depict the heads of gender and sexually diverse people in various forms of imprisonment - from a cage to a gas mask. It is as if they are trapped inside the depictions of their bodies, their identities constricted and obscured. They are voiceless, faceless and nameless. Thus Ethan exposes the sexualised narrative of transgenderism, gender and sexual diversity through cis eyes - a narrative that traps people in a depiction of themselves purely through their genitalia. The person is treated like a spectacle - a side show - rather than a person. These works depict the body as a highly politicised site, a body that is the subject of surveillance and policing by others.

Thus Ethan's show presents the viewer with a series of unanswered questions about gender and sexuality. They are at once confronting and beguiling. Ethan presents the issues facing trans and gender diverse people without sermonising. The beauty and humour of the work juxtaposes with the darker exploration of marginalisation and fetishisation. It is the start of a long and important conversation...

Ethan Kristy is a visual artist from Melbourne, Australia. Ethan works in mixed media with a primary focus on themes of sexuality, gender and (dis)ability. Ethan advocates for queer, transgender and (dis)ability rights and is currently completing a BA of Fine Arts at RMIT University.