

# ***In My Nightmare The Title Was Cuteness***

Curated by Valeria Brücker and Marlene Kurz

Gaia Del Santo, Viola Morini & Giacomo Giannantonio, UMORISMO MISTERIOSO  
(Ștefan Tănase & Marina Luz Ferla)

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

The exhibition 'In My Nightmare The Title Was Cuteness' brings together three positions that critically explore the potential of cuteness and cute aesthetics while dealing with its ambiguity. Associated as something innocent, small, pink, big eyed, soft, cuddly – this exhibition stresses the inherent complex power and violence structures of cuteness as well as its subversive and empowering aspects. What cuteness cannot do, is remain neutral. One could almost say it is a statement, an attitude, originally related to gender, ethnicity or class, but is now in the midst of redefining its possibilities and limits.

Manipulation through cuteness, especially in consumer culture, has an ominous connotation, as indicated in UMORISMO MISTERIOSO's work 'Advertisement (Gauloises 1978-2023)' (2023) which is an inquiry into how cuteness shapes ideals, morals, and values. While browsing magazines from the 70s and the 80s, the artist duo discovered grotesque and out of time fallen cigarette commercials. One advertisement for Gauloises cigarettes from 1978 specially captivated them since it promoted tobacco consumption through a wedding photography of a young, cute, freshly married couple. 'Advertisement (Gauloises 1978-2023)' is a reenactment of this advertisement. «It was quite revealing to us to see how the paradigm of cuteness shifted. While in the late 20th century, with the boom of economic growth, cute images were used to promote the sale of cigarettes. Today, these same images are used to discourage smoking with expressions such as 'Smoke can harm the health of your kids, your friends and family.'» (UMORISMO MISTERIOSO, 2023)

Gaia Del Santo's drawings 'The Ordinary' and 'Pygmalion' (2022) consist of image and text fragments that the artist collected from various social media accounts. The drawings are inspired by face filters and different types of masks, referencing for example Patrick Bateman's beauty routine in the horror movie *American Psycho* (2000). The drawings also address recent micro-trends such as 'Blokette' – a fashion style combining hyper-feminine connotated pieces such as ribbons with typically masculine-read items.

The three collages 'angel complex', 'machine girl', and 'bffs' (2022) by Gaia Del Santo reference Tumblr blog entries combining screenshots with diaristic poems and calligraphic writing. They're framed with rhinestones and pink ribbon stickers, exploring pop-cultural notions of girlhood and femininity as spectacle. Drawing on net cultural trends and methods of online self-representation, she tackles the connections to the attention economy and consumerism of the TikTok era.

In the exhibition, on the one hand, cultural understandings of cuteness are critically questioned, and on the other hand the dark, alien side of cuteness is illuminated as its own, relevant aesthetic category and almost forced upon the visitor as for example in the walk-in textile installation 'No child left behind' (2021) by the artist duo Giacomo Giannantonio and Viola Morini. For their first exhibition abroad, Giannantonio and Morini present a site-specific version of the installation, which for the first time contains two lamps to immerse visitors in a dystopian atmosphere as they enter the newly created 'room'. By incorporating bioplastics and Kitsch materials in their lamps, the duo engages with the optimistic genre of solar punk, a futuristic vision that incorporates science, subcultures, and activism.

On the outside of the installation, Giannantonio and Morini bring memes and random internet images back to the haptic by printing them on various textile materials and incorporating them into a patchwork of soft, delicate-looking fabrics floating in the space. While hearts, fur frames, and the colourful patches evoke a cute, homely aesthetic, the included, often politically loaded memes oscillate between sugarcoating pressing topics and a humorous survival strategy, addressing subjects such as capitalism, climate change and war. In this group exhibition, cuteness becomes an unrealisable utopia that achieves exactly the opposite through its compulsive urge to «sweeten life»: cuteness becomes a nightmare.

– Valeria Brücker and Marlene Kurz