

Mat Collishaw, at Blain Southern: review

Mat Collishaw's second solo show, *THIS IS NOT AN EXIT*, impresses with its mixture of beauty and bite

★★★★★



Sinners by Mat Collishaw Photo: Image Courtesy of the Artist/ BlainSouthern/ Matthew Hollow

By Rupert Hawksley

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If the *Freeze* exhibition in 1988 launched the YBA generation it was not until Charles Saatchi put *Sensation* together in 1997 that they barged, sniffing and sneering, into the public consciousness. “Is it art?” the tabloids screamed and no one quite seemed to know the answer. The likes of Emin and Hirst were not afraid to play the clown for the growing media circus and

were soon propelled by the controversy to superstardom.

It is strange then that Mat Collishaw, whose art was once described as the ‘nastiest’ of the lot, managed to escape the brouhaha, never crossing the threshold from artist to celebrity.

While his outstanding second solo show, *THIS IS NOT AN EXIT*, is unlikely to change that, it does provide a timely reminder of his ability and continued relevance.

It is well known that Collishaw’s work is not straightforward; it is a mistake to take it too literally and true to form these vast, impeccably crafted canvasses hide dark secrets of their own. Rich colours combined with fleeting snatches of beauty or erotica (a high heel, a bunch of roses) entice us to peer ever closer.

Only then do we see the trap and realise our folly, for each canvas is in fact a blown up ‘wrap’ of cocaine constructed from the pages of upmarket glossy magazines. The intricate folds are still visible and any remnants of the drug are dusted carelessly on the surface. What we once saw as beautiful is degraded and sullied by human greed and excessive consumption.

The title of the exhibition is a nod to the novel *American Psycho*, Bret Easton Ellis’s indictment of Wall Street excess in the 1980s. Decades later and faced with a financial crisis of our own, Collishaw shows us the circularity of human greed. So much promised and yet so little delivered.

The same cannot be said of this exhibition.

THIS IS NOT AN EXIT is at Blain Southern until March 30; blainsouthern.com

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