

MOCA London

Museum of Contemporary Art
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Paul Abbott & Alex Roberts
What Hat am I Wearing Today?
3 – 23 September 2017
Private View 3 September 2 - 4pm
Thursdays – Saturdays 2 - 6pm
Or by appointment

What Hat am I Wearing Today?

You've got multiple projects on the go; jobs with varying requirements; three or four different bosses and a series of journeys planned from A to B to C (and back again of course). Yesterday you tried to calm your busy mind, snatching five minutes to scribble another to-do list, replete with aspirations, commitments, needs. Perhaps you'd have been better off writing figure it all out in big black letters because, hey, all these different parts of your self, your work, your life... In the end it's just one person.

Or is it? These days many of us aren't quite so sure – stretching ourselves to the limits of our abilities (temporal and geographical, physical and emotional), hoping to live our dreams and make ends meet. Freelancers who refute the 9-5 lifestyle, in particular, must wear many proverbial hats just to survive. But where does that leave identity? Where do we find stability in a life that's lived in transit? And – perhaps most crucially - how do we make art, distil moments, fragments, snapshots, when we are always on the move?

In the new duo-exhibition at MOCA (London), *What Hat Am I Wearing Today*, artists Paul Abbott and Alex Roberts explore exactly these types of questions. "I'm interested in the everyday masks we all wear - our different guises - looking at what comes out of the chaos of our lives," says Abbott, who juggles his artwork with teaching English to a broad demographic.

Roberts, whose work takes her regularly between London and Berlin, agrees that meaning can arise out of a frantic, nomadic life: "It's in the flick of a moment, usually when I'm on the move that I find something that catches my attention. Someone turns and gives me an arresting look and suddenly I'm pausing, reflective. But how do I capture it? How to reproduce that look, that moment, that pause, that snippet of conversation, without overworking it in the painting? I want to keep things fresh. To keep asking questions about what is or isn't really there."

It's exactly this commitment to freshness that makes *What Hat Am I Wearing* a non-judgemental and playful inquiry, born out of the artists' own experiences of juggling remunerative work along with the more ephemeral *Business Of Being An Artist*. Out of the disorder comes something poignant, suggests these works. And out of speed, a moment's pause – hurrying from one appointment to another – it is still possible to catch inspiration in the unlikeliest of places (but only if you're looking, only if you see).

Yet if finding inspiration on-the-go is a solution to that timeless Creative Dilemma (ie. Never having enough time to make because of the need to earn some cash) neither Roberts or Abbott seems to admit it. Instead both artists are more committed to the process of distillation than explanation; in bringing life into art and thus bringing their art to life.

There's also a beautiful synergy in the installation of these works on the one hand and their content on the other, thanks largely to the artists' combined interest in the space between each piece and how it / they 'hold' the viewer. Given Roberts' and Abbott's tendencies towards different forms (Abbott mostly uses video whereas Roberts prefers to paint) it makes sense that they should collaborate on a project that asks questions of boundaries between connection and difference, movement and stillness. In this way this exhibition brings to life that transitory space that it explores.

Lucy Fry is a freelance author, journalist and copywriter.
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