

The beautiful soothing wasteland of 21st century desire.

An Essay exploring the artworks of Evan Tyler. Written by David Jager.

Evan Tyler is sincere. Evan Tyler is so sincere, even his irony is sincere.

The result is a body of work that surveys a dysphoria that is as fuzzy as it is incisive. We follows his meanderings into the contemporary landscape half chuckling and half cringing, shaking our heads in disbelief as we nonetheless sharply recognize everything he presents us with.

Tyler's terrain is that of our current obsession with self-governances: the thousands of micro-disciplines we subject ourselves daily while simultaneously sorting out and cataloguing our every more detailed and metastasizing desires. The result is a study in proliferating contradictions. We want to be more simple and authentic and we want to be more networked and productive. We want to be more compassionate and we want to be more self-directed. We want to have the luxury to plumb the depths of our personal confusion while forging ourselves into ruthless engines of networking and self-promotion. We want six pack abs but we don't want to body shame. We want ever more elaborate Starbuck's orders, ever more elaborate gender spectrums and ever more refined and inclusive forms of intimacy. We want freedoms that have yet to be invented. We want.

In an earlier video work, we meet Tyler's persona of Kimberly. She's Tyler dressed as a yogini in a brunette wig going through her asanas in a perfectly bland condominium gym. While attempting a warrior stance on her yoga mat, we hear Kimberly's voice chanting a mantra of continuous desire. Not a desire for things, but for *practices*: "I want a yoga practice, I want a novel writing practice, I want a contemporary art practice, I want a studio painting practice". And on and on. Her litany echoes our own endless desire for the production of self: for the self as carefully honed and presentational object, for the self as the ultimate resource of desire and usefulness, for the self as a productive nexus. Kimberly continues her asanas as the soothing smooth jazz soundtrack slides off pitch and she appears to be on the verge of blacking out from too many pills.

Other videos show us the business casual, breezily charismatic life coach Ev-dog, an amalgam of every late night infomercial salesman and motivational speaker of the last forty years. The camera follows him around as he delivers a positive and affirmative stream of loopy consciousness that intertwines his promises of personal productivity and fulfillment with nakedly confessional and jarring revelations about his personal life. Yet the presentational tone does not waver, nor does the endless light optimism, buoyed as it always is by smooth jazz and pop. Yet we can never escape the sense of something profoundly disjointed. What we have are the broad outlines of a presentational aesthetic running automatically on its own hyper capitalist engine, the window dressing from our culture of desire, where the true object of desire is the self.

After the late seventies wave of bitter irony- biting expressed in the nihilist aesthetic of Punk Rock- followed by twee irony- perhaps best expressed in the lovingly sheltered imaginariums of Wes Anderson- we come to Tyler's post irony. Which is to say there is no implied separation between Tyler and the culture of self-improvement and self-indulgence he explores. With a guileless sincerity that would make an older cool kid cringe, Evan succeeds in performing what amounts to a topography of our current cultural terrain. He is not asking us to identify or deidentify with anything he takes us through, or implying that we need to strike up a particular position for or against the self-obsessed, desire infused, smooth jazz world he takes us through. He's just showing us where we live.

Tyler takes us beyond these surface divisions and shows us that- for or against- we are all deeply implicated in this ever proliferating world of personal desire: of the desire for the ever improving and productive self, for ever larger and expanding menus of personal challenge and pleasure. We are all lured by the siren song of motivational speakers, Instagram accounts, personal trainers, productivity and image consultants, lifestyle and wellness coaches. Whatever our forms of internal and external protest, we continue to frequent food franchises and shopping malls and spas and gyms. If we're honest, we have to admit it's hard to put our phones down for longer than ten minutes. This is the world we are swimming in.

In his current video, shot in collaboration with Ira Lee, Tyler returns to these themes and obsessions, nested in a series of vignettes. It starts with the opening shot of a forlorn and broken umbrella being run over on the freeway. It then moves on to the voice over dialogue of two housecats, two immaculately cared for and content creatures lounging on the absolute safety of a couch.

"I ate a bird today" says one cat. "Well at least you're still sober" remarks the other cat. This confession of momentary relapse- addiction is one of the many continuing themes in Tyler's work- sets the stage for a cat dialogue about the many detailed problems of contemporary young existence.

This comical staging situates us uncomfortably between the eminently memeable cuteness of two furry creatures and the anxious litany of self-obsession they spout in voice-over. In little fragments of dialogue they worry about self-care, work life balance, perceptions of the now, the hierarchy of coolness, mental health, ADHD, the pros and cons of medication, the interior landscape of subjectivity.

Underneath all of it, the recurring image of Keanu Reeves surfaces and resurfaces with ominous synth tones, a potentiating force of unconscious desire narrated by a voice which only speaks through a vocoder, like a kidnapper demanding ransom. The distorted voice explains to Keanu what an example and life line he has been, and expresses the hope that he might, as an avatar of success and fulfillment, be able to impart some life wisdom. In a typical Tyler subversion, the ominous demanding voice of the action movie villain has now been co-opted to make a strikingly personal plea for guidance.

The video proceeds this way in aleatoric fashion, little scattered moments of boredom, reflection, introspection, celebrity worship. The figure of Ev Dog appears in the form of a sculpture: a perfect cube covered in blue and white bathroom tile that he claims represents the 'Internal landscape of his subjectivity'. This perfectly bland abstraction appears on the couch between the two cats, not affecting the tenor or tone of the conversation that much.

Only in one earlier shot do we get an image of potential freedom, a hummingbird beating aimlessly against the inside of a window screen, a visual reference to the bird eaten by the cat in the videos opening.

Once again, Tyler doesn't deliver a sermon so much as provide a topography, a survey of the terrain of uneasiness and self-soothing jargon we use to keep ourselves occupied in this most strange era of the self as project and product. He seems to be suggesting that we are cats, sitting contentedly on the comfort of our couches, obsessively going through our litany of real and imagined symptoms.