

I DON'T WANT TO KNOW

In 1977 the artificial heart, the personal stereo and the neutron bomb were invented, and Fleetwood Mac released *Rumours*. Recorded in a hedonistic flurry of cocaine, imploding relationships and unscheduled hospital visits against the decaying epoch of hippie culture, the album was an unqualified success borne from a hot mess. Titled in recognition of the uneasy comradeship of the band members, and in the context of intrusive media speculation about the future of Fleetwood Mac, *Rumours* reified the importance of myth, mystery and pantomime to the craft of the artist.

Rightly or wrongly, 'great' art has long been romanticised as the hand-in-glove product of great suffering. After all, art is frequently challenging, powerful, and inscrutable, and so it stands to reason that the process of making must, in reflection, also be challenging, powerful and inscrutable. This form of myth-making is about being taken seriously, always at the risk of being taken too seriously. It's also about putting on a show - quite literally, in this case. In a collection of brooding photographs and brutally frank sculptural objects, Ayres has assembled a collection of powerful and cryptic signifiers of his own carefully cultivated mythology.

Decade in a Wet Mess is a satirical conjuring act of smoke and mirrors, a portrait of the viewer (or the artist) obscured by a cloud of artificial smoke spewing from a hidden party fogger. These grave, profound, familiar symbols of the *memento mori* and *vanitas* artistic traditions are illuminated from below by a strip of mass-produced LEDs intended for installation in a bathroom vanity unit. Ayres' reference to a 'wet mess' - a worksite dining hall which allows the consumption of alcohol - playfully references both the hard and manual labour of making art, and alludes to a personal history of soggy hedonism.

A framed and busted-up plywood panel, *Dreams (confined to quarters for the duration of the rum)* is the abortive product of a drunken afternoon of idle destruction. Originally intended to be a support for a new painting, the work was interrupted by the arrival of mates bearing a case of coconuts and bottles of rum, who repurposed the panel as a target for throwing knives and tomahawks. The resultant 'painting' is then exhibited anyway, as artwork and as evidence, a mocking affirmation of the beauty and creativity found in destruction.

Straddling these two works are a series of Untitled photo portraits of three 'cunts', taken in tiny urban apartments and historic colonial bungalows. Printed in a domestic scale and mounted in IKEA frames, these offer intimate and cryptic vignettes into a reputed life of late nights, rollies and hangovers.

An elephant in the room which is difficult to address, *Only Love Can Break Your Heart* is an absurd erection dedicated to [REDACTED].¹ The artist's hands [REDACTED] in an arcane and vaguely obscene gesture, [REDACTED]. This is in reference to an act of [REDACTED] he recently experienced, [REDACTED].

As much as they are explorations and expressions of a personal mythology, the works in *Rumours* are also commentaries on popular social constructions of masculinity. And just as Ayres introduces humour and doubt into the mythology surrounding art-making, new concepts are inserted into existing narratives of maleness. Presented with a tongue-in-cheek hostility, these works suggest violence, depression, self-loathing and insecurity are tacit and powerful markers of male identity. Although difficult to separate from the stories of glitz and coke, even Fleetwood Mac's own *Rumours* are possessed of an achingly sincere core of truth.

Ayres makes works which are a rare combination of black humour, raw autobiography and subtle menace. Like all *Rumours*, his work demands that you take its mythologising seriously - but perhaps not too seriously.

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