

The Way We Live Now

The George Economou Collection, Athens, Greece

The most striking work on the ground floor of 'The Way We Live Now', a group exhibition at the George Economou Collection in Athens, is something that, ironically, feels a little divorced from the concept of the now. David Hockney's *Sur la Terrasse* (On the Terrace, 1971) depicts a figure – often thought to be the artist's muse and then-partner Peter Schlesinger – standing on a balcony, looking at palm trees and the horizon beyond. Long shadows are illuminated by the blues and pinks that colour so much of the artist's work. Hockney's perspective, peering across a threshold, offers a glimpse into the two men's intimacy, alluding to the shared hotel room just beyond the frame. More than that, however, the painting

captures a moment of pause. Stillness is rare in this exhibition; much of what brings the show to life is the chaos and constant motion of contemporary life. It makes these moments of quiet intimacy feel all the more powerful.

Taking its name from Anthony Trollope's 1875 novel of greed, scandal and industrial capitalism, this exhibition, co-curated by Hilton Als, Ann Philbin and Skarlet Smatana, asks how the exponential development of technology has changed contemporary life. Organized across three themed floors – 'Intimacy', 'Politics' and 'Being' – its most effective moments come when these categories collapse into one another, offering an incisive diagnosis of the present: a time when everything is happening simultaneously and when bodies, technologies and desire exist in a constant state of flux. Installed alongside Hockney is one part

of Ellen Gallagher's suite *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* (2023), a mixed-media painting that deconstructs the pastel tones of *Sur la Terrasse* into an abstract collision of moving shapes. Taken together, these works seem to represent the passage of time within the exhibition: a sense that as the years march on, everything around us happens more rapidly, threatening to become formless.

It might be tempting to read this dissolution as a visual stand-in for the technological development that has come to define our relationship to intimacy: a digital world where relationships risk being flattened down to a flicker on an app, all while the very technology that offers this alleged connection continues to surveil us. And while there are some pieces that could hint at this – such as Katharina Fritsch's sculpture *Two Men* (2023), in which two blue figures stand one behind the other, clutching their phones – those that ask the viewer to search for an image, for something defined to hold on to, are much more effective. Whether in Lorna Simpson's collage *Detroit (Ode to G.)* (2016), where abstract painting overlays archival images of the 1967 Detroit uprising, or Mohammed Sami's *Every Day Is Ashura* (2020), a painting of dark, abstract acrylic lines that linger like shadows or ghosts, 'The Way We Live Now' is able to capture the sense that, in a contemporary moment where everything is available, the search for something that feels real is more important than ever.

It is this impulse, this search for a reprieve from the endless stream of images and ominous surveillance, that imbues Charles Ray's stainless steel *Shoe Tie* (2012) with so much power. A naked male figure, exposed to the world, squats down to tie his non-existent shoes. The sculpture's placement amid works that are overwhelming to behold, is a curatorial flourish that, enhanced by a sly visual pun with Allison Katz's *S.O.S* (2019), an oil painting of a cock positioned beside the nude figure, captures the way we live now more acutely than Fritsch's figures with their digital devices. Ray foregrounds the innate vulnerability of the human form, even when casting it in something as durable as steel. This show understands that the constant projection of images obscures a stillness that is becoming increasingly rare, threatening any search for a sense of peace.

— Sam Moore

