

Mieke Marple: Live Laugh Lube

I don't even want to but I do. I check it again, tapping the icon. After setting my alarm for the next day and turning on do-not-disturb for the night, I might as well take one last look, I'm already there. Even though I don't want to. There's that schizophrenic split. I'm in bed and it's late and I know all about those studies showing how it fucks up sleep and brain function, and fucked up sleep translates into all sorts of other health issues. Still, my stupid finger taps the stupid icon because it's so easy to do. Stupid lizard brain. Court cases and a bevy of articles have laid out how social media is, for all intents and purposes, operating like big tobacco and big pharma, exploiting neurological mechanisms to maximize their product's addictiveness. We can no longer claim ignorance about how much these devices and platforms we hold in our hands are radicalizing, isolating, alienating, and dividing millions of us, hundreds of millions of people with detriment effects on a broad societal level as well as local familial level. Save the children! But also the grandparent boomers who seem to get sucked in as deep as anyone.

While checking the gram or even just browsing the internet, I see myself from someone else's (my family's) perspective and feel terribly guilty, trying to hide it. If someone walks in and catches me, I close it up fast and make like I wasn't scrolling. I know better, and still. I'm starting to actually hate it because the algorithm sucks ass now and is getting worse, this last update has really ruined it for me. It's mostly just slop now being spoon-fed to me and the feed isn't even people I follow anymore; I don't know who or what all these accounts are that I have to wade through to see the ones I actually recognize. It's barely worth it for the few relevant tidbits, usually some announcement of a local community event or targeted news (friends' opening, a morning standup show, a concert, war updates) I glean from the muck. We each have our reasons for staying in the swamp; it's difficult to opt out and miss whatever goes on in there. But it has, undeniably, lost its shine at this late-feeling date. I've set app time limits for myself. I'm increasingly over it. Something is sunseting, even as some menacing new thing dawns. Enough already.

And yet, communication between real people in the real world matters, perhaps more than ever, and tech still can facilitate that. Amidst all the numbing brain rot, tech's initial promise of bringing people together in new ways does persist. Wanting to turn some of the problems and anxiety around social media into an excuse to form relationships and work with people IRL, Mieke's paintings and videos are the evidence of collaborations she has sought out with comedians and clowns. Art is an excuse to juice real human interactions with people who know how to laugh and make others laugh. Art is the best excuse to hang with people full of life-affirming energy. Together through levity, they attempt to respond to or at least acknowledge the dark absurdities of our moment and the obvious foolishness everyone is participating in.

These small dark lightboxes, which are in fact paintings, flashing shit in acrid, glowing hues, draw us like moths to their flame. One can't help looking into black mirrors. That bold, all caps, sans serif meme font, rendered fluorescent, is not typically the graphic sign of nuance but it is the vernacular of internet humor, snark, and sarcasm (i.e., some kind of critique). In Mieke's paintings, the airbrushed text softens and shifts beyond its edges—both in sharp jolts like a glitch with pixel grids misaligned and, more ubiquitously, as a fuzzed blur that gives the impression of speed, movement, drunk vision, and the bleary-eyed optical fatigue of looking too

long at screens or staying up too late at night when lights halo in the dark. DUMP, ENJOY, YEET DATA, SUPPRESS SOFTLY, FOLLOW, PLAY, USE FACE, LUBERATION, POST & GHOST, FACE IT: bite-size language poses as joke, command, flirtation, and warning at the same time.

The clowns and comedians she collaborates with supply Mieke with a word or phrase responding to the phenomenon of social media which she then pairs with an image of her choosing and turns into a small painting of text and image that she then ultimately gifts back to the collaborating comedian. Collaborators then recommend two other comedians for her to work with. She's collaborated with about a dozen comedians so far and the project is ongoing, open-ended.

While they are the things that take material and visual form that can be shared, the paintings and videos shown here are not, in fact, the ultimate, most essential product of these collaborations for Mieke. Rather, the people she meets and the mutual support structures she builds through their exchange are the main thing for her. Because time, not money, is the most valuable resource. Time and people. And gifting, in the face of market vicissitudes and precarity, proves to be a daring act that demonstrates just how much one person values another.

- Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer