

# Sadie Coles

HQ

JONATHAN HOROWITZ ELIZABETH PEYTON

*Secret Life*

Sadie Coles HQ is delighted to present *Secret Life*, an exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz and Elizabeth Peyton. Integrating their distinct practices, the two artists explore plants and their relationship with human psychology. The exhibition draws its title from Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird's *The Secret Life of Plants* (1973), a treatise on plants which bridges science, philosophy and folklore, as well as *My Secret Life* (c. 1888), an anonymous diary charting a Victorian man's sexual exploits. It is simultaneously inspired by the life and work of Sigmund Freud.

These divergent sources mirror the exhibition's examination of plants as both physical organisms and as multilayered metaphors. *Secret Life* readdresses the notion of plants and flowers as motifs of love and death, fecundity and fragility. At the same time, each artist considers houseplants (and by extension domestic spaces) as emblems of interiority – of private introspection and imagination – poised at the threshold between, in Freud's words, "the world of our sensations and the world outside".

In a series of paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures and photographs, Horowitz and Peyton invoke a long tradition of floral symbolism, from the works of Henri Fantin-Latour to Charles Demuth, or Georgia O'Keefe to Robert Mapplethorpe. The artists range in their subject matter between houseplants – domesticated yet alive – and the cut flower, excised and transiently beautiful. Underscoring the exhibition's collaborative impulse, Peyton's works incorporate images of a plant salvaged by Horowitz from household rubbish. Her works also include a sequence of portraits of the young Freud, at odds with the majority of popular images showing him as an old man. Freud famously, if perhaps disingenuously, remarked that "flowers are restful to look at. They have neither emotions nor conflicts". Peyton evinces the delicate beauty of flowers while at the same time alluding to the way in which they inevitably become repositories of human emotion, and form the stage scenery of human dramas.

Horowitz has produced a series of paintings of silhouetted house plants executed in different shades of grey and using household wall paint. The works' grisaille schemes look back to the coolly understated cinematography of Gordon Willis in Woody Allen's film *Interiors* (1978). Aptly reflecting that film's title with its allusion both to domestic spaces and psychological and emotional states, the paintings dwell on the relationship between houseplants and their human contexts. On a physical level, these elements are implicit in the household paint and the linen supports which derive from plants (Horowitz describes them as "denatured with multiple coats of gesso, and then renatured with the plant imagery"). At the same time, the muted and contemplative tones – which resemble blanched photographic negatives – betoken shifting moods or the erasures of memory. The paintings moreover test the boundary between schematic and naturalistic depictions of plants: Horowitz deliberately eschews their ordinarily verdant colour and hovers between the abstract and the representational.

Elsewhere, Horowitz has created enormous planters for bonsai trees (classic examples of nature being pruned and tailored by art), liberating the trees from their stunted state. One tree has been transplanted into an antique bathtub, evoking both the Victorian context of *My Secret Life* and its hippie era reincarnation. Another tree has been transplanted into a cylindrical vessel, which in contrast to its modern form is patched together from reclaimed lumber.

Horowitz and Peyton have also collaborated on a series of monotypes which develop upon the concepts of plants as metaphors for psychological hinterlands. A collaborative artists book published by Morel Books is forthcoming.

Jonathan Horowitz (b. New York, 1966) studied philosophy at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. Major solo exhibitions include *minimalist works from the holocaust museum*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland (2010-11); *Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or*, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2009); *Apocalypso Now*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, (2009); *Jonathan Horowitz/Silent Movie/MATRIX 151*, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut (2003); and *Time, Life, People: Jonathan Horowitz* at Kunsthalle St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland (2001). Horowitz lives and works in New York.

Elizabeth Peyton (b. Danbury, Connecticut, 1965) studied at The School of Visual Arts, New York. Major solo exhibitions include *Ghost*, a retrospective of the artist's prints at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis, USA, and Opelvillen, Rüsselsheim, Germany (both 2011), and the major retrospective *Live Forever* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA, touring to the New Museum, New York, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, and Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (2009-10). *Reading and Writing* at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, in 2009, brought together many literary-infused works. Catalogues accompanied these exhibitions, and a monograph was published by Rizzoli International Publications in 2005. Peyton lives and works in New York.

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