

I'm sorry I can't go any faster
Michael Lee & Zak Penney
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The Physics Room

I'm sorry I can't go any faster either **Ronnie Coco-Muse**

Often, it's attention to detail that counts. It was the way she picked the stickers out from underneath her thumbnails as we talked, as I shambolically but seemingly unceremoniously left. She was peeling his name from the wall, and with a kind of irritated tastelessness that would flick around her quicks, removing the little black flecks of his moniker. This wasn't the last time I had left. Nor the first. But it was the last time I left the show, and the show had begun to leave too. There were remnants for sure—a giant 'M' lying face-down on the floor; a bag stuffed with overalls burying a cheap paint brush, some masonry bits and miscellaneous stationery; the leftovers of *truth's weapon*; and that, now strangely familiar, portrait. I dawdled—the detail drew me—and I was late for my next appointment. Less stairs would have helped—in my world *where the laws of the living prevail*, one has to move slowly on the inky blackness of a newly washed smooth and shiny surface.

And I'd learnt my lesson earlier, on the occasion of my first visit. That time not of leaving but of arriving—no less shambolically and unstyled—amid atrial fibrillation and flutter, I was still in pain when she met me at the door. I (had) rested on the deeper of the two window sills while alighting, after a momentary forgetfulness of my key mantra—*I'm too old to be anything but slow and patient*—had left me with ankle twist, elbow smash, ego bruise and torn trousers. Not a good look. She greeted me mint julep at the ready. I had to wait until later to not get the orange. It was given to someone else—left as a remnant; a duck-rabbit, non-Bambury white motif in motion, for the next finder of foundlings.

On that first occasion we wandered—well, she wandered, I lope-limped around the room and made seemingly sensible noises. I asked her things, not because I necessarily wanted answers, but because I wanted her to hear my questions. After a while I said, “It looks like what I did when I once left a flat. I left the flat.” I kinda regretted it later. All that stuff, all those memories. *Big hunk of carrot cake. Blueberry milkshake.* Shit I’d found. Shit I’d stolen. Shit I’d made. Portraits I’d carried for longer than forever, and hung in every room I’d ever lived in, just because I wasn’t quite as dispossessed of my attachments as the world was dispossessed in general. All manner of things cast off in their own elaborate self-seen positioning of materiality. I used to leave an awful lot of useful rubbish bins around too. Dumpstering my own *month-old samosa* and a *fistful of Coldrex* out of one of them being a highlight of that particular patch of my low-lit, low life.

“Are they going to make it?”—always nice to get the easy questions out of the way early on in the intervention. I had an idea my job was to write a review, but they’re always really interventions aren’t they? Come to think of it, it wasn’t meant to be a review at all—I was, on that first occasion, simply going to have a look and do the polite thing and decline in person. “Mr. Coco-Muse (for the uninitiated) doesn’t do reviews,” he reveals. Whatever it was I was being asked to do, I forgot to decline the invitation to write. A mild concussion may have occurred on my unfortunate alighting—I, like most embodied mortals, think with my elbows. Or I may have taken leave for some other reason. Anyway, I never did find out what my friend thought about the likelihood of these fellas hitting the hysteria curve and going stellar on it—she did answer, but I was concentrating on the, now dwindling, pain and wondering if I should swap to Brandy Alexanders—the juleps were hip, but I was tiring of the Bourbon a tad.



Michael Lee and Zak Penney, *An older adult with a particular belligerent attitude*, 2015 (deinstallation view). Image courtesy of the author.

On another, pain-free, middling occasion, I had Ry with me. Not because I'd wanted his imaging skills but just because, recently, I've come to travel with a photographer (and he's my photographer of choice at the moment). I travel with Ry simply because it's always good to have *an older adult with a particular belligerent attitude* around. Own recognisance is not something I'm fit for as yet, and he has become such a *faithful engineer*. Anyway, he took some snaps—as that's what he does. He thought he might get an exhibition out of it. I explained that I thought it both unlikely and unfair. Photos of someone else's stolen paintings of stuff that someone else had borrowed off someone who had found it while avoiding dog poo? Well ... Still, I let him take some snaps. Which was good, because it helped my memory and there was a lot to remember. Too much for two men, methinks.



Michael Lee and Zak Penney, *The weapon of truth*, 2015. Image courtesy of the author.

Later, one night, Ry's photos became a focal point over dinner. In research mode—pretending to review, talking about the show, softly enough to be annoying, but loudly enough to be overheard, I had a chat with a man about it. He said he was an artist and I had no reason not to believe him. He said he was surprised the dog poo wasn't in plastic bags and he remembered some stuff about what it is to be an artwork and how it is that one should, as an artwork, perform one's duty. Then he left the restaurant without paying. I started remembering some stuff about being a patron in a gallery—a rational agent with disposable *thumbs* and a responsibility to do more than simply shrug one's *shoulders* when reading the gallery's contents. "It's up to me to make this happen," I thought. Although, to be honest, I'm not sure that I thought about what it was, that it was, that I was supposed to make happen. Before his dining dash, this artist chap had muttered something about the references to Ronnie van Hout which I couldn't quite understand. From memory (and Ry's snaps), the only trace I could find of my namesake was that the artist with his finger pointing at the sky appeared to be metaphorically standing on the suitcase that is the gallery (it's the only way to make it close). Why do people have so much baggage? *I'm sorry, why can't they pack any lesser?* I had a feeling that the practitioners who had put this particular show together may have deliberately decided to insert every concept (via its representation, of course) into the space that was The Physics Room.



Michael Lee & Zak Penney, *St Germain's Tourist*, 2015. Image courtesy of the author.

It wasn't until I was back in the open desolation of the outside air of the innovation precinct (where the galleries duly and most aptly are) that I deluded myself that there was some significance in the initially referenced, noticed detail. Guess I could have stolen the portrait of the three girls—could hang it next to one of the prettier of Ry's snaps. Or I could have claimed a flag, or two, or, taken the brick I was in fact offered. When I move slowly—whether by accident, design or desire, I have a chance to read the details between the details. And as I said at the outset, that's what counts—the attention I mean. Remembering one's own observed reactions; the flat, the leaving, the regretting. All that found, stolen stuff and memory. Because when the suitcase is full and it's time to flee, or you leave the show and hit the street, you can't take everything with you. But you can, at least, choose what to take. And you can of course, move slowly.

References.

Hidden or semi-visible appropriation as a tactic of mine isn't terribly noteworthy anymore and I got myself in trouble once with some officious *Little Man* when I failed to admit the authenticity of my anxious plagiarism, so I need to nod a nod toward Elizabeth Alexander, Thomas Dolby, Giles L'ego, Ry Porter, and Blaise and Antoinette. Gratitude to Gaff as well. Much of the generative impulse for this piece came from that movie about W.V.O Quine called 48 Hours.