

MODERN PAINTERS

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of eighteenth-century erotica (but more chocolate box than hamburger wrapper). Yet these objects (which also include ornate furniture similar to that depicted in Boucher's paintings) manage to make the world of overblown decadence and excessive luxury he depicts seem somewhat less fantastic and a little more real. They draw us into a world of conspicuous consumption and excessive luxury that, since the French Revolution, has seemed somewhat over-effeminate, very otherworldly and generally a little weird.

After all, the two centrepieces of the show – *The Setting and The Rising of the Sun* (1752 and 1753 respectively) – are appropriations of Louis XIV's heroic Sun God iconography applied to the subject of getting in and out of bed. Along with the numerous images of women at their toilette, and shepherds and shepherdesses lounging around in the fields, Boucher seems to be presenting a world in which his fat-bottomed women are fat-bottomed because they spend all day sitting on their bottoms and waiting for their men. Those men are turgid and muscular because they are in constant motion, either having implied adventures (nearly always outside the picture frame) or pleasuring their fat-bottomed women. In short, Boucher gives the world a system and an order, and everyone's having a jolly good time. And given the fact that the king, Louis XV, was busy manufacturing an identity as 'Le Bien Aimé' (to set himself off against Louis XIV's more belligerent 'Le Grand'), it's easy to see how appropriate Boucher's works, and any seductive qualities they may have, were to this goal. Indeed, in his brilliant 1759 portrait of Madame de Pompadour he exploits his talents as the world's politest pornographer to produce a political statement that advertises the chastity and availability of Louis XV's mistress (faithful to the king, but available to those who need political favours) at one and the same time. But that painting, along with the entire theme of Boucher as a producer of sophisticated political brands, is tucked into the corner of this exhibition. If you really want to know what Boucher was all about you'll have to buy the excellent exhibition catalogue instead. MR



New York

Amie Dicke: New Season, New Girls, New Looks

D'Amelio Terras

7 SEPTEMBER – 2 OCTOBER

A cautionary precept of Georges Bataille's 1962 study, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, is that 'eroticism is assenting to life up to the point of death'. In these 19 cut-paper pieces, Amie Dicke illuminates Bataille's insight. Even without their skin, her girls beacon.

Dissecting fashion's fluff, fabric and fantasy, Dicke reveals its underlying morbidity. With an X-acto knife as her scalpel, she slices off the flesh and features of slinky models from bus-stop posters and fashion spreads. Leaving their hands, hair, feet and coyly pouting upper lips untouched, she carves the models' limbs, clothes and famous faces into sinewy designs, cuts out their eyes and renders the remainder of their sleek bodies as long, slick strings of magazine paper. Cutting into the space where they are posed, she depicts the models' toxic, erotic essence seeping out like perfume and infecting their surroundings.

In *Sleeping Beauty* (2004), Dicke's adaptation of the 'Princess and the Pea' fairytale, she cuts gashes into a pile of mattresses on which a ghoulish girl languishes. Unlike the original story, in Dicke's version a minute irritant does not disturb a hypersensitive girl's sleep and thereby prove that she is pure and deserves to be pampered; instead, it is the girl's ectoplasm that taints the bed. In *I Suck My Tongue in Remembrance of You* (2004), Dicke cuts open a Yves Saint Laurent advert featuring the parchment-pale, red-haired British beauty Karen Elson holding a phone close to her open lips. With her heavy eyelids nearly shut and her tongue wandering towards the mouth on the other end of the receiver, Elson's expression emanates ecstasy. After Dicke cuts away her distinctive, already otherworldly visage, what remains of Elson is the outline of a sinister siren. Despite what the person hearing her voice may imagine, she is revealed to be deadly. Like those phone-sex ads during the height of AIDS awareness which advertised anonymous dirty talk as quintessentially safe sex, the image of the phone connecting Elson to her lover is transmuted into a dystopic reality wherein the phone distances, and thereby protects, Elson's lover from her.



François Boucher
Madame de Pompadour,
1759, oil on canvas,
61 x 68 cm

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OF THE WALLACE COLLECTION, LONDON

Amie Dicke: *I Suck my
Tongue in Remembrance
of You*, 2004,
cutout, ink on poster
paper, 175 x 119 cm
COURTESY THE ARTIST; D'AMELIO TERRAS
GALLERY, NEW YORK; PERES PROJECTS,
LOS ANGELES

The Rotterdam-based artist whit-tles today's flat images of sunny or sultry sex-kittens into spectres of sexual iconography, reminiscent of the 1990s when fashion pages were populated by sad, scrappy, skinny girls whose beauty seemed prematurely weathered by heroin, rough nights and desperate sex. While fashion photography in that era was articulating (and some say romanticising) death as the omnipresent element in all erotic imagery, it was also representing a culture shaped by AIDS. Seen today, Dicke's Gucci succubi remind us that sex is still not, and never has been, safe. AFH