



The Unbearable Lightness of Beauty

The Apartment, London

16 July — 31 August

'The Unbearable Lightness of Beauty' curated by Vassilios Doupas is the inaugural show of The Apartment, which as its name suggests has most recently been converted from a flat into the newest addition to the West End gallery scene. The exhibition, which brings together the work of two young artists, Caroline May and Kasumi Morimura, aims to reflect on the nature and importance of beauty in contemporary art.

From Longinus to Kant, the notion of beauty has always been crucial to the perception of art. But it was not until very recently that contemporary art has turned its eye on beauty again. For most of the twentieth century, the art world has been kept busy with ideas of the avant garde and its aesthetic apparatus. It is only in the late 90s that we observe a radical shift towards intricate decoration and sensual appreciation of the visual. (The current obsession with the LA art scene is a good example of this).

It is in this context that Kasumi Morimura's work should be read. Her series of inkjet prints are sumptuous collages of floral motifs in lilac, violet and light blue tones. They are carefully considered in terms of tonality and composition. It is implicit in the dreamy presentation that Morimura is interested in the inexplicable aura of beauty.



▲ Caroline May, *Winckelmann Upside Down*

And yet, this work is no dumbpop. Morimura's ulterior motive is to reflect on the way images as well as technology work. How much do the images featured every month in lifestyle magazines affect our outlook on abstract values such as beauty? Her text painting (the writing of the word 'rose' straight on the wall) depends on its cultural context, the outcome is deeply personal: for those who master the language it can only read

'rose', but for those who do not, it is nothing less than the most exotic structure of lines and curves.

Caroline May's investigation of beauty is more formal. Her colour transparencies displayed on light boxes show the image of a half-naked male figure in a park. Her work is born out of the reading of the criticism of Joachim Winckelmann, one of the most fervent supporters of Hellenistic sculptures. It is significant that his writings became the vehicle for Nazi aesthetics. In a post-feminist gesture, May is trying to dissociate herself from this canon of beauty. Her young man has dyed blond hair and slim body and is full of movement. May's irony is explicit through the works' titles. *Winckelmann Upside Down* and *My Torso Belvedere* both call for a personal vision of beauty.

The venue also lends itself to the exhibition theme: Soho, traditionally associated with gay culture in which physical appearance is of prime importance, strangely contributes to the carefully considered curatorial approach.

• Joanna Krysa, art curator and writer currently based in London.