AUTUMNAL

#3 Soft Sell

03/11/26-05/11/26

Artist: Kaitlin O'Connor

RL: Where did you make the works in the show?

KOC: I crammed three separate projects into one show, ‘Neon Bodega Cats’, ‘Perpetual Kittenhood’ and ‘Nobody’s Dead Yet’.

KOC: ‘Neon Bodega Cats’ I started developing when I worked as an illustrator for a clothing company. It was a really fun job, I was paid to finger paint. The designers would go to Tokyo or Paris, and they’d come back with an image, and they’d say they’d want it for a t shirt. I thought: How can we do something else? I ended up designing a whole line of ‘cat’ t-shirts for them.

KOC: When I moved to New York I met up with someone who does these bodega cats services. She has a mobile clinic, and we started doing bodega cat portraits. A lot of the time they don’t get the vetenary treatment they need, so my friend has this mobile vet clinic.

MM: What’s a bodega cat?

KOC: Here, it’d be like an off licence, in New York they’re called bodegas. Every shop has one or two cats and everybody in the community knows the cats. It’s a real cornerstone for where you live in Brooklyn. Everyone has their bodega cat. In the show, I had 3 A1 portraits of cats on wooden panels.

RL: Do you work from photographs or sit with the cats!

KOC: When I worked at a cat café in New York, I actually tried to organize a cat life drawing night for some of the NYU students, and as you can imagine, it didn’t work.

KOC: ‘Nobody’s dead yet’ started when I got into branding, products and identity. I was really into watching the show Succession, and I made this world of characters, with a fake multi-conglomerate company. In the project, there’s a casting for a show called ‘Lust Canal with Pedro Pascal’ (Paul Mescal). The characters in the casting are doing interviews for a tv show set within a company, with zoom calls in between them etc. The centre piece for that was a corkboard of research and information of all the characters, which was on the wall of the gallery as you go in.

KOC: There was also a short film projected in the back room that I made as part of ‘Nobody’s Dead Yet’.

RL: Do you star in the film?

KOC: Yes, with lots of wigs. I’m an actor as well, so I have the self-tape set up.



Assorted products: Nobody's Dead Yet (2024),
Various materials, Kaitlin O'Connor

RL: How important are props in your work?
MM: Do you improvise?

KOC: I try to write things out, a lot of times I'll do something and realise I need something for that. I take apart boxes and remake them: boxes of medication, juice boxes - a Campari juice box. I make props as I go.

KOC: I was lucky enough to find a gold tacky chalice. In love is blind, they’re always drinking out of metallic glasses, so we can’t see how much they’re drinking. I realised I had to use it for a love is blind character. She has her own backstory as a child pageant. She also needs a sash.

KOC: My other project, called ‘Perpetual Kittenhood’, that’s kind of like my millennial board game. I had one thing on the wall, and a demonstration of it, so people could see the cards, dollar bills, box and moving parts. Some day the board game will be playable. I made all the currency for the game not corresponding to the game itself, but I think the fact that It’s not playable might work in its benefit.



Installation details of Soft Sell at hARTslane Gallery (2026), Kaitlin O’Connor

KOC : I was born in 83’. It used to be illegal to advertise towards kids, but after I was born that stopped completely. I grew up watching Transformers or Ninja Turtles or Barbie. Entertainment that I watched was also selling me lunchboxes and toys and ‘everything I needed’. So many of my memories are based in ’get it while you can’. The board game in itself, is personal in the way that there’s certain things that I don’t understand from history. The board game is a combination of the advertising that was on growing up, and the events that happened in history.

RL: How did you find bringing your work into hARTslane, a space that is anti-consumerist by nature?

KOC: Yes, but its right next to Sainsburys, and right next to Goldsmiths. It’s really interesting. The whole Sainsbury’s area feels like a truck stop.

KOC: What I really liked was that there were ‘regulars’ who came by. People who came every week to the different shows. I was talking to someone who came in here the other day, I told them what I really enjoy is that I used to teach oil painting and watercolour, sometimes you have to do something you don’t want to do!

KOC: I studied illustration, and I don’t know what that is anymore, they just use AI. Nothings being printed anymore. Even so, a spot in the New Yorker is like 200 bucks, all the professors I had from Illustration came from the heyday in the 80s or 90s where you could do a cover for time magazine and live off of that. It’s not been like that for 25 years. I think we have to learn how to edit videos and make things.

MM: Are there any specific artworks or artists that have inspired the work in the show?

KOC: I really like Adam Curtis' work, Happiness Machines, that really drove two of my projects. He talks about Bernays, who was the nephew of Freud, and godfather of marketing in the US. He came up with 'you're not buying a product, you're buying an identity', that's the starting point for my 'Nobody's Dead Yet' project.

KOC: His big thing was in the 1920s. A tobacco association was trying to make smoking cool. During the suffragette march, he got all the 'it' girls to smoke at the same time, and they rebranded cigarettes as torches of freedom. It became synonymous with feminism - if you want to be progressive, you gotta smoke. In some of the products I made, like 'Black Lives Matter Merlot', I co-opt the protest.

KOC: I also am really inspired by Nathan Fielder. He's one of those artists that I guess is a comedian. He had a show called Nathan For You, where he would help small businesses in the most absurd ways possible. Like, a rebate system for a gas station, but in the fine print you have to walk up a mountain, and in the end nobody gets the rebate but they're all friends. He kind of explores personal things through these elaborate stunts.



Identipro (2024), Cardboard product mockup,
Kaitlin O'Connor

RL: Your poster for Soft Sell uses a very specific windows xp blue aesthetic. This blue colour palette, even this blue colour translates as being from a certain era. You wouldn't steal a car 2000s.

KOC: I think tumblr era internet was cool. You were kind of putting your vibes up on the internet, not necessarily to get seen or sponsored. Now everything we do on the internet has to be for a purpose.

KOC: Instagram was also cool, taking pictures of our coffee and that stuff. Nobody posts anymore, we’re so scared of cringe and anything permanent. If I post something I think its good enough to stay there. If I post on a story, who cares, it’s kind of a way of not being tied to anything.

RL: How do you archive your work?

KOC: I was at the V&A store house thing, it’s interesting to see what people think is worth to keep. If so many things are not tangible, how do we preserve things. We don’t own anything we pay for, with subscriptions, etc. How do we preserve?

KOC: I’ve always wanted to keep scrap books of things. Even when I was really young, if I had a birthday card and a concert ticket and a label from a wine bottle, even if it’s just the shapes and colours, I feel like you can always get ideas from something like that. I always like having physical things.

MM: Where can we follow your work?

KOC: I’m talking with Koppel studios about doing another show in January or Febuary. What I’d like to do is start to incorporate a YouTube channel from one of the characters I’ve made, and if I could do it in a way that it’s not completely obvious that it’s satirical, and maybe it can grow more satirical as time goes on. My dream is to be able to continue expanding on it physically but then also use some other mediums for ways of people to see it, whether it’s a podcast or something. I’d like to grow it that way.

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