



**Window  
Space**

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***Lil Pink Photo Op***

Katie Morton

September 11 – October 30, 2015

**I don't know what would happen if I stop posting art and started posting pictures of my food.**

Katie Morton has recently graduated from OCAD University with a BFA in Painting and Drawing. Inspired by her friends and personal experiences Morton's body of work portrays young women in quirky situations. Her personas are colorful, daring and most importantly, assertive of their own power and presence. Lil Pink, a life-size cardboard teen diva, is part of this lineage of fictional characters. Using the window space, Morton explores the power of the gaze in a society of spectacle. More specifically, it is through an investigation of social media interactions and the notion of self-branding that she unveils new methods of feminine empowerment. For the purpose of the exhibition, the addition of a fictional interview (which is a co-production between Katie and I) with Lil Pink further develops the character as the archetype of the youth obsessed, self-absorbed, cis-gender, and privileged- the true post-feminist popular icon.

The creation of Lil Pink, a spoiled brat who is famous for being famous, is in direct conversation with today's market of desirability. Entertainment hot topics like the Kardashian-Jenner saga are by-products of an economy of visibility that has introduced a new genre of acceptable voyeurism and commodification of the self. Seated on a throne and taking a selfie, surrounded with articles from her new clothing line and her recent endorsement for Coca Cola, Lil Pink actively participates in shaping her image as an appealing and entertaining consumable good. Actually, the selection of the medium could also be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek comment on the disposable and fleeting nature

of reality TV stardom. Extending their social influence from the small screen to the realm of the Web 2.0, young socialites such as Kylie Jenner work every day to perfect their images on Instagram. This popular application has become one of the most effective social media platforms on which self-fashioning has evolved as the proper way for individual emancipation and self-preservation. Academic and author Sarah Banet-Weiser explains in her book *Authentic; the Politic of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* that when we think about the self-as-commodity we have to consider the social relationship within which we position one's self. There is an entertained ideal of the self as one of innovation, production and consumption that stands as a unique 'authentic self'.<sup>1</sup> This shared obsession we have with the performance of the self in our daily interactions underscores a widespread need for recognition that expands beyond our close circles- it is now between the individual and a culture at large. Through self-conscious *mise en scène*, we capture what we believe represents an appealing facet of our 'authentic' self. Thus, via Instagramming our dinners, travels, clothes, readings, home décor, our social gatherings are reduced to backdrops of a relentless self-promotional campaign.

The relationship between Lil Pink and the social implications of self-branding has led me to think about the ways in which this conversation could be linked to the use of social media by emerging artists. My reflections were mainly centered on the non-quantifiable and invisible labour that is at play when orchestrating the self as an "art brand". What does it take to be a desirable "brand" when promoting one's practice online? What are the advantages that spaces like Instagram offer to young artists? I had the pleasure of discussing with Katie the aforementioned topics; here are some of her thoughts<sup>2</sup>:

### **On Instagram as a Tool for Networking and Exposure for Young Artists**

KM: I love Instagram as a tool especially because I am an artist and I like to share images. It's instant, fast paced and the quickest way possible to get my imagery out to

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah, Banet-Weiser. "Branding the Postfeminist Self" in *Authentic; the Politic of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, (London and New York: New York University Press, 2012), 73

<sup>2</sup> Katie Morton (artist) in discussion with the author, August 6th, 2015. All citations were taken from recorded sessions with the artist during the Xspace residency at Artscape on Gibraltar's Point. These excerpts have been revised and approved by the artist.

people. Now it has a much larger audience than something like Facebook. It's the quickest way to connect with an audience. That's important to me, because I am making lots of stuff and I don't intend to hide it. I want to share it with the world, also as a means of marketing myself, as something that can be attainable. I want people to be able to approach me and you know, purchase my work or work with me if there are other artists who would like to do that. (...) I don't know what I would do without it coming out of school. I might have felt a bit more lost cause I would be looking for other ways to put forth my work. I know that from [Instagram], I received most of my leads. I feel like a lot of people are not really good at one-on-one social networking, knowing the right people and having those connections. So people really feel trapped (...) but I mean, it can also be hard to curate yourself on social media.

GW: I was reading an article about the nature of the invisible labour in the commercialization of the self online. How do you feel about that? Do you feel like it is also part of your job when you are managing your Instagram account?

KM: Yeah, it definitely is. And sometimes it can feel shallow or silly when you're spending so much time figuring out the best way a tiny square image can be presented. It does take a bit of behind the scenes effort sometimes to get a picture you're happy with sharing. I suppose that is the case with a lot of artistic process but there you have it.

GW: But it takes time and there is no monetary value to it. As an artist you are not paid for that. Internet 'Likes' do not mean that you can pay your rent. There is still a lot of financial scarcity, even though you are visible.

KM: That's the tricky bit I'm trying to figure out. As an artist, how can I use these tools of visibility to assist in financial stability? Just because people "Like" your artwork does not mean they are willing to purchase it or go beyond the convenience of social media interaction.

GW: So do you think that your Instagram account is tied to your survival?

KM: I don't think my survival is tied to Instagram, but I think the potential for wider reach is certainly helpful. It's basically a virtual gallery with a set amount of guaranteed viewers to attend the "show".

### **On the difficulties of curating one's self on social media and Our Dependence on the "Like" Factor**

KM: It is so funny how the "Like" has turned in to a quasi currency which gets divvied out and measured by the creator as the images worth. On the one hand it's great to share the love and be able to quickly and easily voice your opinion but on the other hand we can get caught up in the politics of how those numbers look. For example, maybe one day you post a silly photo you could care less about and it receives a large amount of likes and then the next day you share a photo of a work of art you worked hard at and it receives far less acclaim. You know the whole matter is trivial but part of you is probably thinking 'what the gosh darn hecky'.

GW: Yeah, it's weird because some of my flower pictures get thirty Likes but then when I post art, the response is lower, and I am like why?! It's Art!

KM: Yeah, it's weird and annoying, it's hard to tell. I don't know what would happen if I stopped posting art and started posting pictures of my food. I guess people would be mad?

KM: It definitely makes you think about what your audience would like best but then, I don't care if a picture gets way less Likes. I decided that if I like something, I'm going to leave it up. I used to delete things if they didn't reach a certain point. It still has to be mine. I still want to remain myself and not get all weird about it.

GW: Yeah, I mean if you don't have any Likes on a picture, you don't feel good. It is stupid but it is how it works, and you know it's ridiculous and rationally you don't want to give into that. At the end of the day, it still takes so much space. So how do you think this interaction influences the value of your work?

KM: It's frustrating. Especially, like you don't want to show too much for free. You are just getting to a point where, is this enough for people to want to go beyond just seeing your Instagram and purchase something or see this work in real life? (...) Even if you do have a good following, it is hard to know the formula. It's like whatever hits, hits.

Based on the discussions I have had with Katie, I realized that nowadays the commercialization of one's artistic practice is closely linked with the ability one has to market his/her/their self/selves as a subject worthy of the public eye. Although, if we look back at previous generations of artists, one can argue that it always has been the case; however, there is something different happening on social media. Perhaps it is this new positionality generated by the accessibility to someone's daily life- the performative aspect of the artist- as a mythical character is not just a rumor- it becomes something you can actually observe on a regular basis. Consequently, one has to capitalize on the capacity to sustain their followers' interests in order to sell their art. Through platforms like Instagram, what we are now consuming is no longer art for what it represents as an object, and idea, but an access to the maker's 'authentic self'. Under this angle, Morton's satire transcends recent shifts in art's marketability.

**- Geneviève Wallen**

## Exclusive Interview with Lil Pink

Most of us have followed, or at least heard about, the White family drama through their reality TV show *Red White and Juice*. The daughter of Rose and Redmond White, Lil Pink did not want to only be known as “the daughter of...” and sought to become her own brand at a young age. The eighteen-year-old socialite is already at the head of an empire consisting of a clothing line named *Lil* and a forthcoming makeup collection. Nominated as the most influential teen of 2015, she is one of the voices of her generation. Today, I had the privilege to meet and conduct a short interview with this inspiring young woman, as she is in the city for a short trip.

GW: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet me today. It is so great to finally be able to chat with you a little. Wow, what a year it has been for you, eh?

LL: Oh, thanks for inviting me. I am very happy to be here. Toronto is such a fun city! And the fans and all! Yeah... super busy year but like really exciting you, know?

GW: Let's dive in shall we? So, who are your role models?

LL: I would have to say my Mom, Rose. She has like literally always been there for me and has been a great example of how hard work really pays off.

GW: Do you define yourself as a Feminist?

LL: Um, Like I think so. I think that maybe people think that being a feminist means hating men and stuff, but like after hearing Beyoncé's new album, I think I understood the definition a little better. Plus Beyoncé is so beautiful so ya.

GW: Haha yeah, Beyoncé is amazing! Can't wait to see what she will produce next! Ok, let's talk about your relationship with Kylie Jenner. She stated in a recent interview for Teen Vogue that if it wasn't for the success of her family's show, *Keeping Up With The*

*Kardashians*, you wouldn't enjoy the social status that you have today. What are your thoughts on this comment?

LL: First of all, I love and like totally respect Kylie and her family. However, I don't think the success of myself or my family is a result of being featured on *KUWTKJ*. I have worked so hard to build my clothing line and give my fans something they can enjoy and be proud of and I think that has little to do with them and everything to do with my own motivation.

GW: How do you feel about your nomination for the most influential teen of 2015?

LL: Honestly, I like literally feel so blessed to have such amazing fans and such support from everyone. I am excited to be announcing my new makeup line this fall, so I hope I can repay everyone with something new and exciting.

GW: Where do you see yourself in five years?

LL: Well, if my math is correct I will finally be able to sing that Taylor Swift song about being 22. Haha um... but for reals though, life is a journey and I hope by then I will be living in my new dream home and bringing it with my *Lil* clothing line. Just gotta believe it to achieve it, I always say.