

MINNA GILLIGAN — ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN
SEE FOREVER
Exhibition Dates: 6 November–19 December 2015

Gertrude Contemporary
Emerging Writers Program
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In most readings of Minna Gilligan's work, commentators—like Joe Scott and Christina Apostolidis—have suggested that Gilligan's hyper-saturated colour palette, her use of 1960s and 1970s photographic imagery, and her references to teenage day-dreaming all represent a form of nostalgic sentiment for the unmet potential of an earlier era.¹ This reading positions Gilligan's process of intuited, diverse mark-making and raw collage as a way for the artist to turn her back on the present moment, to instead gesture towards this earlier era through the act of making art. It is more revealing, however, to focus on the interaction between the various compositional elements of her paintings and the contemporary cultural and online spaces within which they circulate. Indeed, Gilligan's paintings can be seen to very clearly engage with and comment on branding and dressing as forms of social codification within a nexus of online, public and gallery-based forums, and should be interpreted as at least partially reflective of the artist's experience of having an extensive online following through her participation in online zines such as *Rookie*, or the all-female artist collective The Ardorous.



This catalogue has been produced as part of the Gertrude Contemporary Emerging Writers Program. The Emerging Writers Program pairs four young writers with an experienced mentor each, culminating in the production of a catalogue essay for Gertrude Contemporary's Studio 12 exhibition program and another exhibition review or essay to be published in a local art magazine.

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Image Captions:

Minna Gilligan
On a clear day you can see forever, 2015
installation view, Studio 12 Project Space
Gertrude Contemporary
Photo credit: Christo Crocker

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Whilst Gilligan's practice in the past has appeared to inhabit the aesthetics of the 1960s and 1970s, there is a shift in this latest body of work, titled *On a clear day you can see forever*, as the images employed are less temporally specific. Photographs from Bulgari catalogues, cherry emojis, miniature paintings within the paintings, butterflies, and grounds made from tie-dyed cloverleaf upholstery litter and underlay the tempered expressionism of her paintings; all are images and materials associated with branding, adorning and dressing. In paintings like *In my head I paint a picture* and *Seeing's Believing*, both 2015, collaged images appear like screen-shots on the canvas surfaces, extracted and pasted, diverging from narrative, behaving as signifiers that point toward fashion cycles, the commercial artworld, and the work that goes into having a serious online presence.

Amidst the scattered and bursting marks of *Seeing's Believing*, one's eye settles on a Bulgari image of topiary extracted from a catalogue accompanying the Sydney art fair, Spring 1883. The painting, a backdrop for this image of luxury, becomes its equivalent—a marker of the commercial,

high-end fashion interests that invest in the branding potential of contemporary art's exclusivity and economy. The Bulgari advert gestures towards a placeless, ideal site: an attenuated garden of tapered, tasteful shrubbery—the kind you might find at French chateaus or in aristocratic garden-scapes. This sense of a generalised 'place' is also evoked by Gilligan's use of upholstery and fabric. In *Then again no* and *Seeing's Believing*, Gilligan refers to rooms, furniture and curtains through the cloverleaf upholstery that one could imagine was extracted from a homely shack or boho-chic apartment. Furthermore, Gilligan constructs this homely 'place' by dressing the stark Studio 12 gallery with large fabric works *I made it through the wilderness* and *If you really wanna be free*, which drape like curtains, intimately immersing the viewer in Gilligan's world.

These 'places' permeating the lustrous paintings in both Gilligan's Studio 12 and the annual Gertrude Studios exhibitions differ from the temporal markers of 1960s and '70s fashion and flower-power motifs that were present in earlier exhibitions, such as *Feel flows* (Daine Singer,

2013). Yet these paintings continue to enact a deferral to an 'elsewhere'—an unattainable place that remains out of reach, except in the meanderings of the artist's painterly forays. This pursuit of an elsewhere through Gilligan's painting practice is inextricably linked to the enactment of her online avatar, as Gilligan makes work for the Internet based magazine *Rookie* and posts images of her paintings and collages amidst recent fashion purchases and autobiographical details on her blog. This body of work considers the online, highly visual forums (like Instagram or Tumblr) that the paintings circulate within. Miniature paintings within the paintings create scale shifts that act like one web browser sitting atop another, mimicking the viewing conditions of Gilligan's website in which the artist's name, 'Minna Gilligan' (spelt out in rainbow-coloured typography), sits atop a backdrop of the vivid brushstrokes that are synonymous with Gilligan's painterly style.² The cherry emojis awkwardly painted atop all of the paintings in the exhibition talk to what Gilligan defines as methods of online branding, as the emoji behaves like a bumper sticker—tacked onto the end of

a status update or email marking one's identity and attitude through online vernacular.³ Gilligan has appropriated the cherry emoji as a stylistic motif that reflexively performs this branding, albeit incongruously and therefore humorously within the paintings.

Gilligan's paintings travel widely through online forums, but now also depict aspects of these methods of digital dispersion within their very frames. This is especially evident upon looking at Gilligan's images of enlarged and cropped brushstrokes printed on polyester (*I made it through the wilderness* and *Familiar now strange*) which seem as though they could extend forever if only they had not been cut and pasted into the here and now. The pursuit of these paintings is an unreal place where a screen-grab or a single image is plucked from a melange of images—cut, pasted and re-contextualised. That the images in this body of work have been dictated by the online, commercial art and design forums that these paintings frequently circulate within, marks a recognition of the reception and reading of this work in both online and gallery contexts. Both these con-

texts frequently demand a positioning of oneself as an image or brand that is legible amidst the seemingly inexhaustible plurality of experiences, images and communities that are available online. That Gilligan has created this legible image with such vibrancy is testament to her knowledge of how the processes of dressing, styling and decorating a space can produce an elsewhere, drawing us (and her) into closer proximity to that which seems out of reach.

1. See for instance: Christina Apostolidis, 'Long Time No See,' *Daine Singer*, <http://www.dainesinger.com/long-time-no-see>, 2014, accessed November 4, 2015; and Joe Scott, 'Lack, Longing, Desire,' 2014, J.W.T.S., <http://j-wt-s.tumblr.com/post/98990589086/lack-longing-desire-minna-gilligans-long-time>, accessed November 5, 2015.
2. See *Minna Gilligan*, <http://www.minnagilligan.com/>, accessed November 4, 2015.
3. Minna Gilligan, conversation with the author, September 21, 2015.