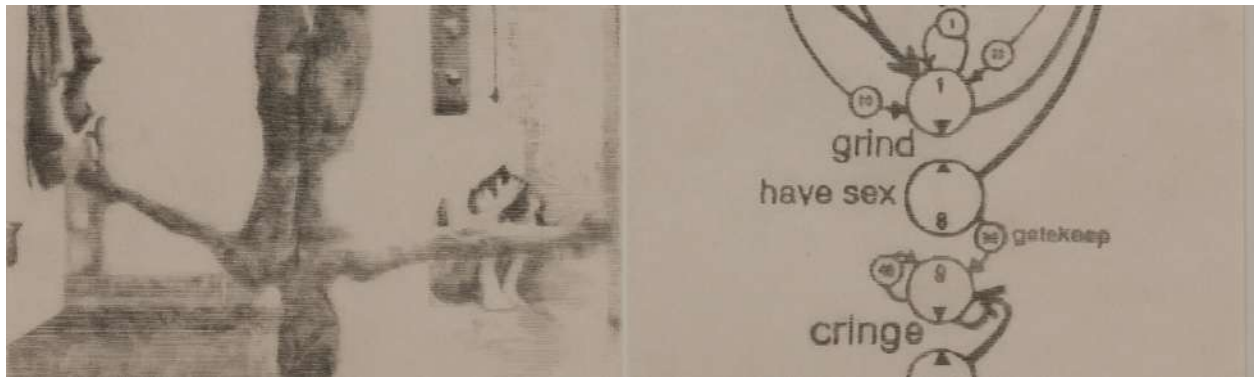


FRIEZE

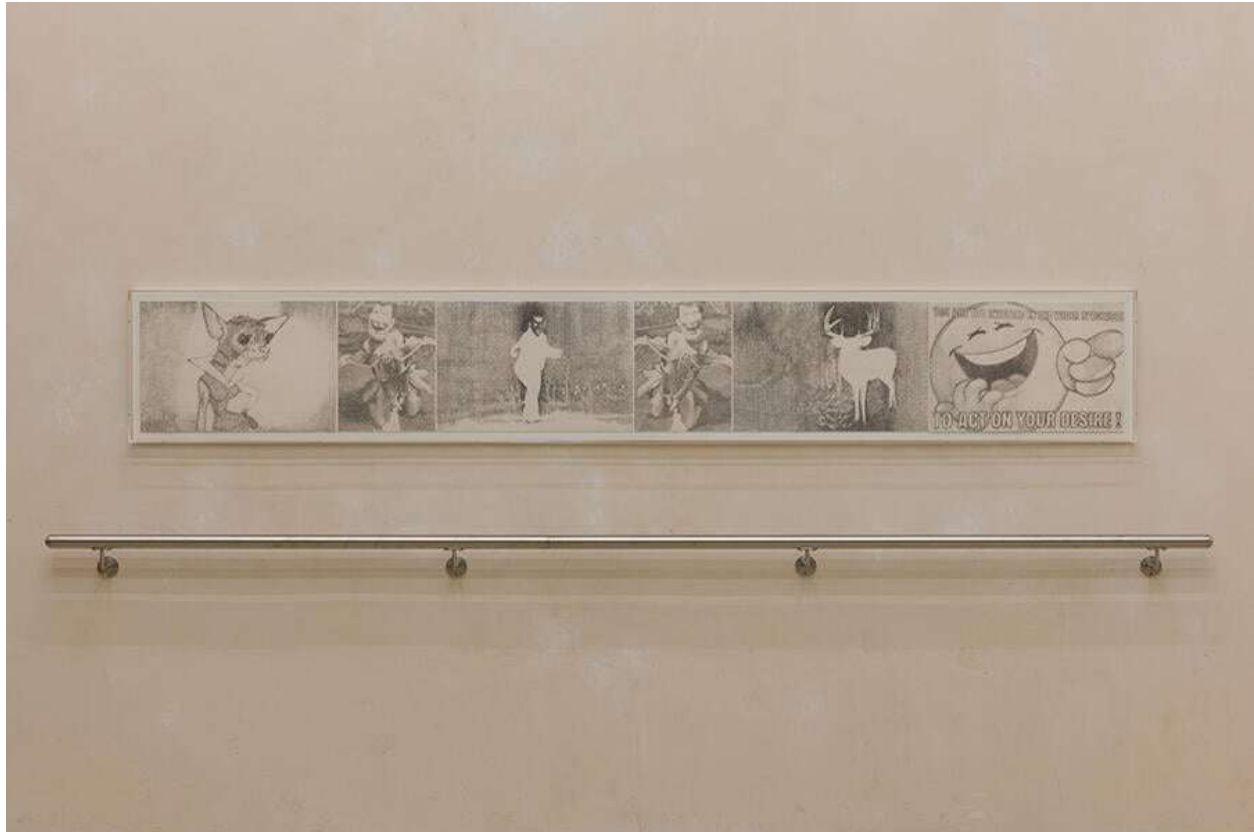
The Meme Art of Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby

At Goldsmiths CCA, London, the artists repurpose images from digital sources to create works which evoke the experience of being ‘extremely online’

BY [MATTHEW MCLEAN](#) IN [EXHIBITION REVIEWS](#) | 17 DEC 24



Exclusively drawn from digital sources, the works in the debut institutional exhibition by London-based duo Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby feel like screenshots: pictures posted, forwarded, reframed. Running found images through digital thermal-transfer printing software – which renders data and noise into a surface residue of long lines, like woodgrain – the artists then meticulously copy these warped images by hand. The resulting pencil drawings, as in *Contact (Forum)* (all works 2024), have the silvery feel of an industrial antique, like metal printing plates, somehow both hard and soft, impersonal and warm.



Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby, 'Inner Heat', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artists and Goldsmiths CCA; photograph: Rob Harris

The selected images themselves meanwhile belong to a register that's equal parts crass and creepy: a chihuahua's head emerging from a cheesy sci-fi gown; a deer in the woods; the face of a strangely human furry costume. Adjoined in diptychs and one six-panel piece, like reassembled fragments of a broken frieze, they invite but don't entertain thematic interpretation. Is this a story about animality and chimeras? About masks? Or what Charlie Fox calls, in an accompanying text, 'the sexiness of nature'?

Looking for a unifying meaning here feels like missing the point – or the joke. In *Contact (Graph of Desire)*, the barely intelligible diagram of the subtitle, proposed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in 1960, has morphed into something like the Kabbalistic tree of life, its nodes relabelled with inane trending terms from online babble, like 'rent-free', 'girlboss' and 'gatekeep'. The work neatly evokes the kind of knowledge gained from being 'extremely online', every image or utterance seemingly linking to another in an intricate and directionless web of references. Indeed, reading the words 'charge phone'

and 'twerk' in this work, I can hear them being spoken by US politician Bernie Sanders in a mutation of a meme about the skills of 'Any female born after 1993'. Only connect!



Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby, 'Inner Heat', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artists and Goldsmiths CCA; photograph: Rob Harris

Yet, as for a suspect at the end of a whodunnit, this joining of the dots can be anxiety-inducing, too. In *Contact (Bucks)*, two hunks embrace waist-high in thick mud, which, like the digital realm, is sticky, boundless and seems to get everywhere. It takes a minute, but I recognize the image as the work of 'Muddy Buck', a niche internet pornographer. So, the work summons an uncomfortable confession, for to interpret *Contact (Bucks)* – to 'own it' – I have to out myself as a certain type of person: one who spends enough time on the internet to know that mud porn is a thing.

This knowing quality – the way the works tease out both identification and shame, the tension of the almost-spoken – is also how I make sense of the two steel rails which the artists have placed in the centre of the gallery for visitors to lean against. Like anti-homeless hostile architecture, the rails do not provide rest, only respite: a chance to be alongside another person, but only

for a stolen moment. This exhibition isn't about consummation, but about what it means to be on the cusp of it: all edging, no climax.



Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby, 'Inner Heat', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artists and Goldsmiths CCA; photograph: Rob Harris

Things almost come to a head in *Inner Heat*, the show's titular video work, which depicts a viral clip of a powerline catching against a tree in falling snow, erupting in violent flashes of blue, crimson and yellow. The artists have reshot this clip on a DV camera and looped it – a kind of homage, I suppose, but one which signals only further distance from the original wonder. 'YOU ARE TOO INVESTED IN THE WIDER SPECTACLE / TO ACT ON YOUR DESIRE!' reads the text in one panel of *Contact (Forum)*. This show stirred many things in me: not least a desire to go outside and, as they say online, 'touch grass'.

*Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby's '**Inner Heat**' is on view at Goldsmiths CCA, London, until 12 January 2025*

Main image: Laila Majid and Louis Blue Newby, 'Inner Heat', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artists and Goldsmiths CCA; photograph: Rob Harris