



ASSETS

Simone Hine
17 June - 8 July 2023

OUTER
SPACE

"The American philistine prefers his oranges to be painted orange."

—Vladimir Nabokov.¹

"Pink slime is good for you."

—Ariel Pink.²

All the artworks exhibited in Simone Hine's 'Assets' are titled either 'Frozen Assets' or 'Liquid Assets'. There is a clear play between solid and liquid. Ceramic and silicone globs resembling frozen rippled puddles or spilled condiments decorate the ground. Some serve as humble mounting devices for screens. Others obscure them. The screens—display monitors, smart phones and tablets—manifest contemporary ways of seeing and means of cultural consumption. Their placement on the ground connotes the primal lowness of nature, as opposed to the verticality of culture (the high-rise, the wall-mounted canvas, the cinema screen, etc). Rocks and plants are also scattered throughout, completing the perverse, techno-dystopian still life.

Fluid serves several functions in 'Assets'. It operates as an overarching metaphor, a subject, and a methodology. Conventional mediums manifest in works like 'Frozen Assets' (2023), a grid of textured paper lightly stained with different Faber-Castell watercolour pencils, including halo-like cup marks.³ From a distance, the grid resembles jumbled pixels, or a digital colour chart.

Another tricky visual conflation of digital image culture and older representational mediums occurs in 'Liquid Assets' (2023). The video work depicts three scenes: a high-rise building dotted with a sparse crown of window-washers, a swimming pool, and a bridge. These monumental man-made structures evoke a sense of the sublime reminiscent of English landscape painting—a connotation cemented by 'Liquid Assets' presentation in wall-mounted frames and the footage's misleading stillness. A parallel could be drawn with J.M.W. Turner's concessions to the harsh geometry of industrialisation, and the aesthetic and literal pollution of the landscape.

Notably, Hine's exploration of liquid as a metaphor and commodity also recalls the systems-focused art of Hans Haacke, an artist that similarly conflated institutional and bureaucratic operations with atmospheric processes, as demonstrated in works like 'Condensation Cube' (1963-1968). Indeed, 'Assets', with its commerce-inspired fluid/frozen titling convention, highlights the fluidity of meaning and fungibility of definitions. This is a common phenomenon under capitalism where symbolically potent terms are often lifted from nature. The Amazon used to refer to a threatened rainforest, but now it often denotes the online seller. Apple is a fruit, but also a tech company.

Despite the blue sky, the high-rise in 'Liquid Assets' likely produces huge data clouds, while the pool (full of water) and bridge (over water) are shrouded in fog (vapourised liquid). Though it might not be visible, the high-rise footage also features water: the suspended window-washers are using it to clean the building's transparent shell. The scene might allegorise a cultural climate of openness that requires constant maintenance. Under surveillance capitalism, ubiquitous smart devices track users' online activity, location, and biometrics. Corporations operate in open-plan office spaces behind glass curtains. Yet, the glass needs to be scrubbed. It gets dirty.

Pino 0 Cleen brand disinfectant liquid features prominently in 'Frozen Assets / Liquid Assets' (2023), though not for conventional cleaning. A series of short clips conclude with calamitous explosions of the artificially coloured fluid. Some scenes feature balloons bulging with their liquid contents, the synthetic skin threatening to break as it slams against pavement, contorting artfully in slow-motion. Sometimes a hand emerges to pop the fluid-heavy balloon with a pin. Like a slapstick gag or predictable magic trick, it's cliché, but a satisfying gesture nonetheless.

Recalling traditional still lifes, various scenes in 'Frozen Assets / Liquid Assets' include flowers. Several show Babies Breath and Static clasped by a white, feminine hand. The veins of the wrist are made prominent with the strain of a forceful grip—the rigid lines echoing those of the bundled stems. After a brief moment to appreciate the arrangement, the flowers are blasted with liquid (some brightly coloured with Pino 0 Cleen products). In some ways, these clips have a similar function to pornography. There's anticipation and climax, followed by a few

darkly serene moments to appreciate the messy aftermath. This is the ideal formula for our current consumer landscape, delivering instant gratification and high visual affect in an abbreviated format.

Pino 0 Cleen products claim to leave "a lasting, fresh fragrance".⁴ A harsh skin irritant and respiratory toxicant, Benzalkonium chloride is the active ingredient. Along with the arboreal reference in their branding, Pino 0 Cleen boasts a bourgeois scent gallery. Artificially echoing the aromas of nature offered by flower bouquets or fruit platters, available scents include green apple, eucalyptus, grapefruit, and pomegranate blossom. 'Frozen Assets / Liquid Assets' offers a calamity between the ugly, commodified echoes of nature in the Pino 0 Cleen with the curated nature of the bourgeois, artistic still life. It could be read as a witty recuperation (or parody) of the destructive, iconoclastic fervour of the avant-gardes. While the Italian Futurists hated women and nature most fervently, aggression towards beauty and tradition, and an embrace of progress, technology and the everyday—including mass culture—carried throughout the twentieth century.

"Purge the world of bourgeois sickness," wrote George Maciunas in 1963, "PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART, promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes, and professionals".⁵ The scenes in 'Frozen Assets / Liquid Assets' echo the creative models of the post-internet, prosumerist realisation of the Fluxus dream. Indeed, a great cultural levelling has occurred in viral TikTok trends where banality is venerated, and repetition is encouraged. The coherence between maintenance labour and algorithmic thinking in work and play is just one of the confluences Hine illuminates in 'Assets'. Transparency, opaqueness, and the dialectical relationship between nature and culture, and art and life reveal themselves in colourful condensation in the white cube.

— Tara Heffernan, 2023

¹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 309.

² Ariel Pink, "Pink Slime", track 9 on *Mature Themes* (4AD, 2009).

³ These marks recall those found in post-painterly abstraction.

⁴ Pino 0 Cleen: Product Details", Woolworths. Accessed 10 June 2023.

URL: <https://www.woolworths.com.au/shop/productdetails/790917/pine-o-cleen>.

⁵ George Maciunas quoted in Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 220.

Simone Hine is an artist, curator and writer. Her artworks expand across performance, video, installation and sound. Recent works draw connections between the structures of contemporary visual culture and that of historical art practices. Writing and artworks explore the conditions of late-capitalism, with a particular focus on labour as it is redefined in a perpetually in-motion 24/7 society. Widely exhibited, her work has been included in Anne Marsh's recent *Doing Feminism* monograph (2021) amongst other publications. Hine's visual art practice is intertwined with her independent curatorial practice. She is a founding co-director of Kuiper Projects (Brisbane), a contemporary art gallery and project space (2017-present). She was also a founding co-director of Screen Space (Melbourne), a screen-based gallery (2010 - 2016) and Beam Contemporary (Melbourne), a commercial gallery (2010 - 2014). Hine holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne: School of Culture and Communication, in Art History.

Tara Heffernan is a blind art historian who is deeply invested in Australian art criticism and culture. Her academic work focuses on global modernism and the avant-gardes with an interest in their ongoing aesthetic and political relevance to contemporary debate. Her writing regularly appears in Australian and international publications such as 'MeMO Review', 'Eveline Magazine', 'Artlink', and 'Third Text Online'. In 2022, she curated *Laughing in Public: The role of Humour in Navigating Public Life, Politics and Space*, a public program for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. Heffernan is currently completing a PhD on Piero Manzoni at the University of Melbourne.