

# MAXIMA SMITH CROCODILE TEARS

20 APR 2024 — 28 APR 2024

*Crocodile Tears* brings together a body of work created during the artist's time at the Dutch Art Institute. The works, spanning video, photography and sculpture, continues Smith's exploration of the boundaries between 'performance' and 'authenticity'. Central to the exhibition is the tear, a symbol of emotion and often considered as a marker of 'realness'. However the tears that flow here are shed from dry eyes, are a reflex to onions, are digitally rendered, or made from glass. *Crocodile Tears* invites us to instead consider the performativity of emotion.

As with much of Smith's work the relationship between the subject, the camera, and the audience is central. She continues to draw on her research tracing the camera's search for authenticity, and specifically what Laura Grinstaff termed *The Money Shot*: 'the moment when tears well up in a woman's eyes and her voice catches in sadness and pain'. Every subject in the exhibition is crying, while we watch on. Continuing her fascination with the socially expected roles we play in everyday life, Smith draws on familial relationships, lending the work an intimacy which is complicated by the presence of the camera.

At the heart of the exhibition lies *Copypcat (Ann Buchanan)*, one of two works from Smith's ongoing series *Copypcat*, in which an image of a female subject is projected on top of the artist's grey skin, enacting a form of *moi-peau*; a double sided hide shared between Smith and her chosen muse. The eyes and the mouth become abject portals to the fleshy body beneath the digitised surface. In this Ann Buchanan edition, Smith is working with a film from Andy Warhol's infamous series *Screen Tests*; a seminal body of work which highlights the potential violence of image capture. Ann Buchanan faithfully executes Warhol's instructions to look at the camera without blinking, and consequently her eyes begin to tear up. Smith mimics this act, leading to an uncanny image where her tears trace the tracks of *Buchanans*'. In *Copypcat (Kim Kardashian)* Smith shadows Kardashian's emotional gestures. The repetition emphasises the performativity of the moment, and through mimicry she begins to undo her muse's subjecthood, reinforcing the drama of femininity that is at play.

ASYLUM STUDIOS GALLERY

## PLAN OF WORKS

In the back left hand corner of the room *Crying with my Family* is projected directly onto the wall, acting as a vibrant moving mural. In this performance to camera Smith is joined round the table with her family as they cut onions and cry together. Although the audience knows these tears are not 'real', this ritual still oscillates between an absurd gesture, and an intimate moment of vulnerability. A 35mm still from the other iteration of this work, *Crying with Friends*, is projected into another corner. The Da Vinci-esk set up, performed at their graduation from the Dutch Art Institute, acted as an non-verbal way for the graduating year to say goodbye to each other.

Near the centre of the room, spotlight on a stage, stands a rendition of the artist as a puppet. Whilst this work has been shown numerous times since 2016, the puppets' face now has the addition of glass tears, referencing Man Ray's photograph of the same name – a work described as either 'ridiculing female crocodile tears, or pouring scorn on the men who are taken in by such sentimentalism'. *Crocodile Tears* rejects this contempt for either the teary subject or the onlooker. It instead asks us to think about tears beyond being 'real' or 'fake'; as an abject fluid which breaches the boundary of the skin, allowing us to process somatically.

Maxima Smith (b. 1992, UK) is an artist, researcher and activist who lives and works in London. Smith's work, primarily based in moving image, examines the mediation of the camera, somatic processing, and is influenced by the slippage between sincerity and absurdity. She questions feminine archetypes and roles, critiquing gendered acts such as mimicry to reinforce the performativity of gender. Smith situates much of her work in the blurred boundary between 'on' and 'off-stage', where questions arise of how we act and perform ourselves. Her films are often shown on loop, and in installation, in order to emphasise the rhythmic and ritualistic qualities which reappear throughout her work.

In parallel, Smith holds a position on the board of executives of Artists' Union England, and works with a large number of (grassroots) initiatives and organisations to publicly make the case for cultural democracy and increased funding, as well as interrogating and working towards changing the poor working conditions in the (art) world.

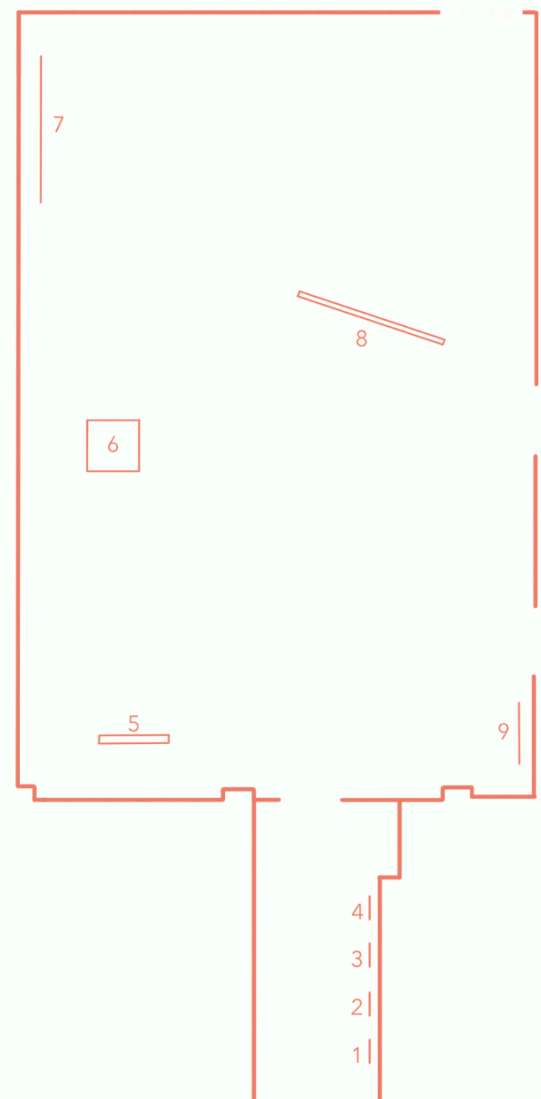
She holds a BA from the Slade School of Fine Art in London (2016) and an MA in Art Praxis from the Dutch Art Institute (2023). Selected exhibitions include: *Lada Screens*, LADA, London (2024); *Invisible Goddess*, La Magazzino, Venice (2023); *Visions in the Nunnery*, The Nunnery Gallery, London, (2022, 2020, 2018); *Ode to a Window Cleaner*, The Clarence, London, (2021) (solo); *Re-enchanted Matter*, APT Gallery, London (2020); *To all our absent dialogues* Pixelache2019 Oranssi, Helsinki, (2019); *Puppet Portraits*, The French House, London (2019) (solo); *Ode to a Window Cleaner*, The People's Palace, London (2019) (solo).

### Corridor:

1. *Stage Door (The Savoy Theatre)*, Digital Print from 35mm Ektachrome Slide, 17x12cm, 2022
2. *Stage Door (St. Martin's Theatre)*, Digital Print from 35mm Ektachrome Slide, 17x12cm, 2022
3. *Stage Door (Theatre Royal Drury Lane)*, Digital Print from 35mm Ektachrome Slide, 17x12cm 2022
4. *Stage Door (The Savoy Theatre)*, Digital Print from 35mm Ektachrome Slide, 17x12cm, 2022

### Gallery:

5. *Copykat (Kim Kardashian)*, HD video, 23:24 loop, 2022
6. *Portrait as a Puppet (Crying Edition)*, wood, resin, cloth, oil paint, plinth, 50x12x10cm (puppet size), 2016-2024
7. *Crying with my Family*, 4k Video, 09:52, 2022
8. *Copycat (Ann Buchanan)*, HD Video, 04:18 loop, 2023
9. *Crying with Friends*, 35mm slide, still from live performance, Centrales Fies, Italy, 2023



## WORK CREDITS

### *Crying with Friends, Live Performance, Centrales Fies, Italy, 2023*

Performed on 23rd July 2023 as part of 'Where the Moon is Up' at Centrale Fies, Italy.

With thanks to my friends/performers (from left to right):

Maxine Vajt, Pelumi Adejumo, David Přílučík, Ros del Olmo, Ronja Sommer, Adriana A. Leanza, Lucas Lugarinho Braga, Ioli Kavakou, Maxima Smith, Gleb Maiboroda, Mara Ittel, Nagham Abu Assaf, Iarlaith Ní Fheorais, Iliada Charalampous, Orestis Giannoulis, Theresa Zwerschke, Zuzana-Markéta Macková, Cornelia Isaksson and Till Langschied

Photograph courtesy of Norma Cicala, edited by Maxima Smith

### *Crying with my Family, 2022, 4k Video, 09:52*

With thanks to my family/performers:

Lynn Murphy, Nye Smith & Dillwyn Smith

Chosen for Lada Screens 2024



Live Art  
Development  
Agency

### *Portrait as a Puppet (Crying Edition), Wood, resin, cloth, oil paint, plinth, 50x12x10cm (puppet size), 2016-2024*

Painted by Alexander Guy

With thanks to the whole team at Asylum for their hospitality and support

And eternal thanks to Sam Risley