



GLADSTONE GALLERY

Eddy Frankel, "Ed Atkins: Olde Food Review," *Time Out*, May, 2018

Time Out

Ed Atkins: Olde Food review

Art  Cabinet Gallery, Vauxhall  Until Saturday June 2 2018



We all like to think we're immune to the manipulation of the internet: that Facebook and Cambridge Analytica's electioneering shenanigans only swung the opinions of poor morons out in the boonies, while we saw through all the BS and voted cleverly and informatively; that targeted advertising has no impact on us and we consume our goods objectively, right? Yeah, probably not, eh lads.

And British artist Ed Atkins's new show is a confusing, overwhelming, dense indictment of our servitude to the internet. He drags you through a muddy bog of food porn, fake tears and medieval costumes and leaves you reeling.

The sound of thunder and rain cracks and dribbles through the gallery, there are moans and screams, sad piano chords echoing around the space. The walls are lined with video screens facing huge clothing rails filled with medieval costumes. One video shows sandwiches being made out of piles of human bodies and slices of human face ham. The rest feature a cast of babies and weeping medieval peasants in the rain. Texts around the gallery explain the link between the artificiality of food photography or CGI and our emotional malleability. The idea is that artificiality only serves to amplify emotions.

Look at it as a big parable: Atkins casts us average humans as serfs in a feudal system controlled by the lords of Facebook and Google. The freedom promised by the early days of the internet has been replaced by a deeply unjust system where some algorithm decides what ads we are most susceptible to and some Oxbridge toff is selling your likes to international dictators. It's gross.

Don't get me wrong, this is difficult, complex technological art with dense language, and there's more than a whiff of small-government libertarian thinking to it, but it's super-rewarding, super-aesthetic and super-immersive. It feels like Atkins is pushing you to think about freedom and manipulation, about how you live your life online and how complicit you are in the things around you. If that feels too big and too awkward, that's probably because it's worth saying. It's not easy art, but it is very good art.

Either that or I've got it all wrong and it's just about weird lunches and LARP-ing. Which is pretty great too.