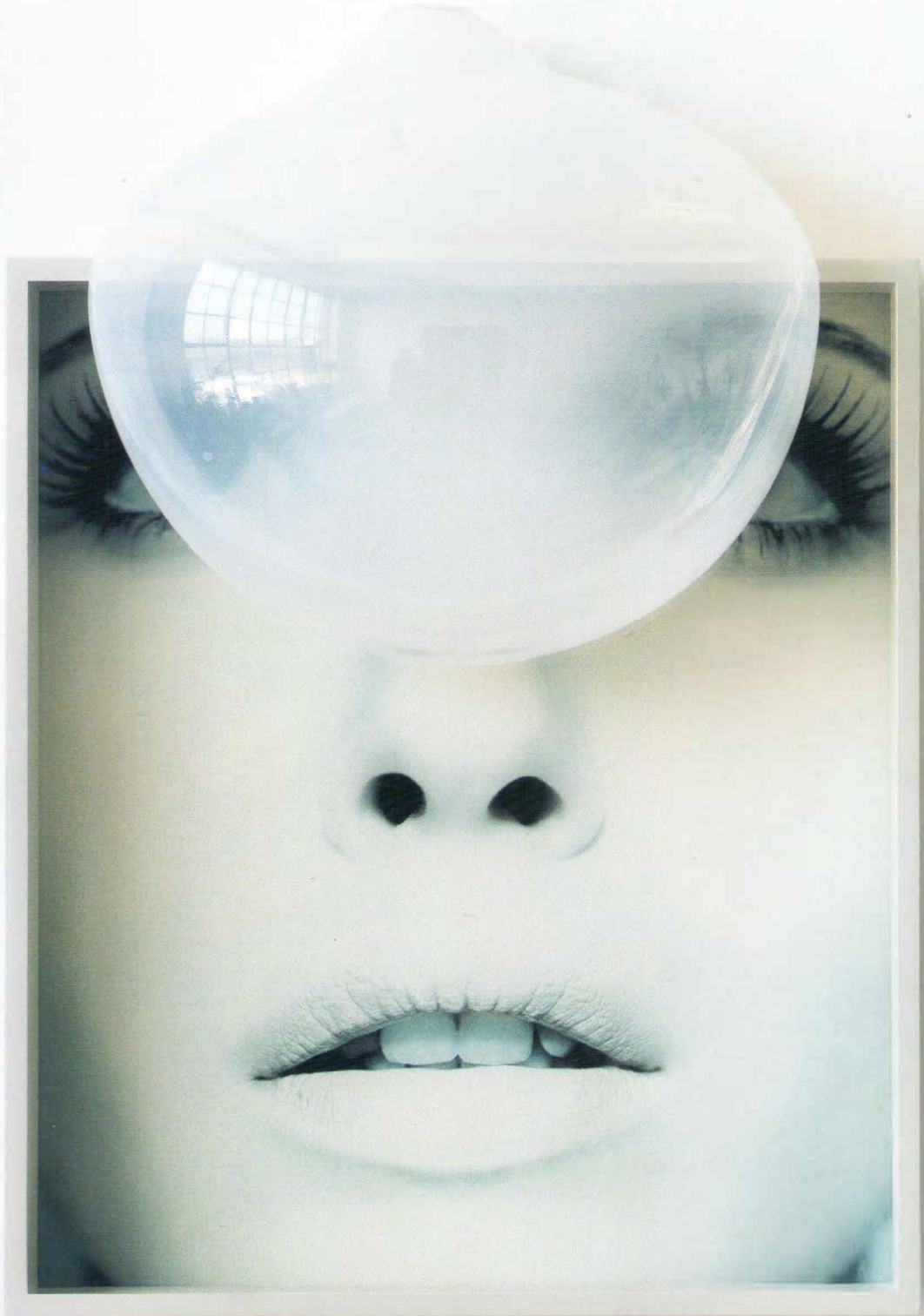


OPENINGS

GABRIELE BEVERIDGE

KATE SUTTON

Gabriele Beveridge, *Untitled*, 2016,
found poster, handblown glass,
artist's frame, 24¾ x 16 x 7⅞".





Left: Gabriele Beveridge, *Practical Exercises (II)*, 2015, sunfaded poster, artist's frames, shop fitting, fake bamboo, agate slice, iridescent glass, 55½ x 24 x 3½".

Right: Gabriele Beveridge, *Grace & Mercy*, 2016, found posters, feathers, handblown glass, pearlescent glass, chrome shop fitting, artist's frames, chains. Installation view, Chewday's, London.

GABRIELE BEVERIDGE'S works dip into the dream life of consumer culture to deliver a contemporary *vanitas* attuned to the temporality of modern commodities, on-demand objects whose promises of “forever” are only as good as the next upgrade. Rather than present a critique of commodity goods by way of simulation, Beveridge takes the cosmetic mechanisms that prop up consumer desire and carries them to their logical extreme. Her assemblages put display on display, spotlighting the modular shelves that populate the innards of high-street shops: steel pegboard panels, “slatwall” panels, chrome fittings—humble contraptions streamlined for flexibility and lightning-speed turnover. Unlike Haim Steinbach, who has used similar shelving systems specifically for their functional value, Beveridge approaches retail architecture as raw material, a ready-made paean to the transience of retail trends and the inevitable obsolescence of merchandise.

Born in Hong Kong, Beveridge received an MA in 2010 from the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where she is currently based. While she originally trained in photography, her interest in the medium has

never been tied to the technical aspects of production, and Beveridge works almost exclusively with found images. A key early material for her was the mass-produced glamour shots blanketing the walls and windows of cheap beauty parlors and nail salons, posters peddled to retailers eager to add that hint of innocuous sophistication to any storefront, anywhere. For her assemblages, Beveridge uses only the original posters (never scans or photographs) in whatever condition she may find them—sun-damaged, ripped, stained. The artist does not subject these images to any further manipulation, though she may crop or spray-paint out any text that might link a picture to a specific brand or situation.

The models in these images radiate a dual sheen of exclusivity and availability. These are not the kind of models whose names you know, but the kind who *look* like women you know. They are women steeped in the cool contentment of their own liminality and the anonymity it affords. Confined to their gradated voids, they wear expressions of near-uniform indifference, their complexions airbrushed to plastic perfection, their eyes often either coyly downcast or gazing off just



outside the frame. These “depersonalized faces,” as the artist calls them, are offered up to potential customers as masks, skins to slip into, if you’d just come sit in the chair. Time does not exist in these images, or rather, it exists only inasmuch as it informs the subject’s styling, insinuating itself into the shading of the eyelid or the strappy sandals corraling pertly pedicured toes.

Within Beveridge’s assemblages, these “depersonalized faces” operate like skulls in a *vanitas*, reminding the viewer that, for all the promises of eternal youth and beauty one finds in consumer culture, the life cycle of a person—like that of a fad, a hairstyle, or a fresh coat of nail polish—is inherently fleeting. The artist embellishes the found posters with memento mori, mostly in the form of references to the natural world: fake plants, feathers, and precious stones, whose inclusion effectively collapses the enormity of the geological time implicated in calcification and crystallization and repackages it into the temporality of the commercial photograph. Produced for her 2015 exhibition “Mainland” at Brussels’s MOT International, *Practical Exercises (II)*, 2015, features two simple white rectangular frames, one above the other, like a



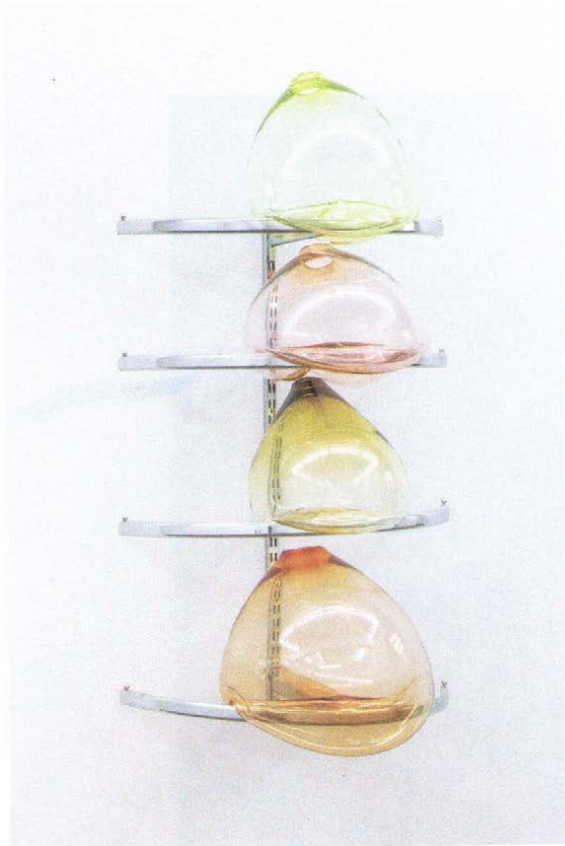
Beveridge’s work collapses the enormity of geological time and repackages it into the temporality of the commercial photograph.

steamrolled punctuation mark. The smaller, lower frame is empty, save for a faint spectrum cast by the iridescent glass pane. The top frame contains a washed-out poster of a brunette, her pouty lips propped up against the knuckle of a hooked index finger. An oblong slice of coffee-colored agate substitutes for her right eye, its interior ovular rings suggesting an over-size iris while also rhyming with the stains on the poster. A sprig of ersatz bamboo leaves sprouts from the bottom-left corner of the image, while crowning the frame on the top right is a chrome garment rail. The gentle curve of the metal fitting extends the contour of the model’s cropped forehead, sailing upward into space like a feather in an unseen cap.

A similar solitary fitting appeared in *Grace & Mercy*, 2016, an assemblage created for “Eternity Anyways,” a 2016 solo show at Chewday’s, the now-defunct London gallery fronted by curator Tobias Czudej. Beveridge took a cue from the space’s past life as a clothing boutique, rigging an ensemble of hanging frames within the window to approximate a store-

front display. Named after the erstwhile business, *Grace & Mercy* features a pair of found salon posters with identical images of a woman’s profile clipped at the cheekbone, her lips pressed in a serene smile. Cut to the same height, the two posters show the same model in the same pose, but with a perceptible difference in tone (one is bluer, the other more sepia) and scale (one is slightly larger, with the neck and shoulder digitally accentuated) that speaks to the images’ individual lives as printed objects. As in *Practical Exercises (II)*, Beveridge obscures the model’s eyes, though this time with long white visor-like feathers. The posters sink into rectangular artist’s frames, rigged with hooks to one of three other boxes. Two of these remain empty, backdrops for the play of light filtering through their iridescent glass panes, while the third repeats the powder-blue backdrop of the larger poster. An off-kilter L shape, it contains a single chrome garment rail, pointing up like Brancusi’s *Bird in Space*, so that its stark silhouette recalls the curve of a spine or the neck of a mandolin.





IN 2014, the artist started experimenting with glass, finding it shared a certain frailty with photography. The following year, handblown glass bubbles began to punctuate the artist's oeuvre, neatly complementing her drift toward the more cosmetic aspects of consumer culture while evoking the *homo bulla* motif of the *vanitas*. In *Practical Exercises (II)*, one such glass bulb—a thing whose surface is its only substance—slumps like a giant teardrop over the top edge of the larger poster frame. In “Eternity Anyway,” three such baubles perched along the parallel spines of *Dead Skin Living*, 2016, a chrome rack of reconfigured shop fittings, ending in a talon-like row of garment railings. To affix the bulbs to their metal supports, Beveridge presses the glass onto the chrome fitting while it is still hot, then anneals it in a kiln to preserve the new shape. The result may appear accidental—like globs of hair gel dripping from the salon counter or silicone implants escaping the operating tray—but it actually follows the same modular logic as the rest of the structure.

Glass bubbles also settle on works from Beveridge's “Clouds,” 2016–, a series of wall-spanning assemblages of perforated-steel pegboards and shop-shelving panels mounted through interlocking struts into tidy columns. For these works, Beveridge joins unprimed new panels purchased directly from suppliers to older ones whose previous use has left them mottled and spotted. The artist limits her interventions, adding only some



powder coating and occasionally spraying surfaces in what she jokingly refers to as her “H&M palette”—a collection of tasteful nudes and blushing pastels better suited to nail-polish colors. If her salon-poster works simultaneously enshrine and negate the idea of portraiture, “Clouds” takes on the landscape genre, offering variegated expanses of connected panels. In their immersive scale, these works approximate Color Field painting and Minimalism, featuring subtle patterns and tonal shifts within the panels that invite comparisons to Agnes Martin in particular. But lest these objects be read as two-dimensional images, Beveridge pierces each of the “Clouds” with a pair of railings upon which rests to a single glass bulb, like a soap bubble caught on the shower drain.

One of Beveridge's recent exhibitions, “Live Dead World” at London's Seventeen Gallery, centered on a freestanding “Clouds”-like construction, *Vanillic Acid Dampening*, 2018. The work comprises five vertical columns of shop panels of varying finishes, attached through the same system of steel struts. Here Beveridge has introduced a tint to the glass bubbles: The bulbs bloom in vibrant hues of red, orange, green, and blue. If the crystal-clear glass objects of the “Clouds” series have a hygienic feel—recalling the figure only so much as they recall the cosmetic maintenance of the body's surface—the colored ones in this work sooner suggest a dialogue with Eva Hesse,



sleeping through the orderly rows of racks like beautiful tumors blossoming along metal ribs. As with the salon posters, their presence distorts the modular logic of the other materials, or rather, redirects it.

While many of Beveridge's earlier exhibition titles can be traced to beauty-commercial slogans or product descriptions ("Lock In the Colour You Love"; "Perfect Lasting"), the title of the London show remains ambiguous, with no indication of whether the *Live* should be read as an adjective (evoking a kind of "Live nude girls!" carnival barking) or imperative ("Long live the Queen!"). In either case, it warns us that what we are looking at is already dead. The object's hallowed status as an artwork cannot spare it from its inevitable disappearance. The artist previously hinted at art's evanescence in "Newly Laundered Smile," her 2012 exhibition at London's Rod Barton gallery, where an audio text quoted the opening lines of Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1818 poem "Ozymandias," the classic cautionary tale about the dangers of worldly grandeur. Beveridge's works reveal a similar awareness of their temporal predicament. Beauty is, after all, only skin-deep. Just as the consumer object is pinned to novelty, the sublime is in the surface, inherently fleeting and yet, for this instance and this instance alone, fixed: eternal, but only for a day. □

KATE SUTTON IS A WRITER BASED IN ZAGREB, CROATIA, AND COEDITOR OF INTERNATIONAL REVIEWS FOR ARTFORUM.