



## WITH

Rokey Gallery London August 29 to October 3

WITH (withyou.co.uk)  
DYINGFORIT™  
2008

The art world – once a sanctuary for those too lazy to get up in the morning – is increasingly replicating the 24/7 ethos of profit-chasing commerce. It is this dehumanising professionalisation that WITH's first solo exhibition in London satirises. WITH poses as a web-based service, withyou.co.uk, which invites you to delegate laborious aspects of your life to its agents to live out on your behalf. A wall text at the entrance explains that Rokey's directors, Beth and Ed Greenacre, have commissioned some personalised 'Life Enhancement Solutions' from WITH. What can they have been too busy to do for themselves?

An email pinned to the wall reveals that Beth has opted for the KNOWTHING solution, for which an agent will do nothing on her behalf for the duration of the exhibition – the ultimate fantasy for the stressed-out gallerist. Every hour, on the hour, the email instructs, Beth must print and display an emailed photograph of her doppelgänger performing her task. In today's bureaucratic work culture, even doing nothing requires paperwork. In their role as a surrogate, agents must keep their own identity anonymous; accordingly, this one's face is described as camouflaged in Chroma Key Green, used by the media industry to signal new features to be superimposed in postproduction. In reality, the printed-out portraits show a girl smeared in an unflattering shade of green greasepaint, variously looking bored, pensive and sleepy – just like the woman on the reception desk, who turns out to be Beth. Or is it her agent? As with all therapies that require a certain leap of faith, it's best not to ask too many questions.

On the wall opposite, we read that Ed Greenacre has, more vainly, chosen HOMESPACE, for which an agent will exercise on your behalf. Ed's client statement is polite but to the point: 'General toning, fast results please'. As with all its products, WITH is zealous about providing evidence of its agents' activities, and exercise DVDs – featuring footage of all the rowing and shadow-boxing – duly line the shelves, while supposedly sweat-stained T-shirts hang on a coat-rack that looks more primary school than luxury gym. A monitor plays footage of a man exercising vigorously, his face a disturbing rash of blemishes that

turn out to be motion capture dots, another special effect linked with postproduction. Gallerists used to nurture their beer bellies at private drinking clubs; now they have personal trainers to watch their waistlines for them.

The rest of the gallery is taken up with case studies and archival material from WITH's extensive range of products, including GAP (FEAR), for which an agent will travel the world on your behalf. It is not difficult to see the appeal, given that gap years or 'sabbaticals' are now expanding into the kidult market. Even artists, who used to make do with colonising a nearby seaside resort for the summer months, are now considered provincial unless they regularly visit the world's biennials and art fairs. At Rokey, antique wooden slide boxes, embossed with the company's silver logo and labelled alphabetically according to destination, pay suitably luxurious if retro testament to a worldwide tour. However, it seems that this WITH agent has indulged in a spot of extra-curricular time travel: the dates neatly recorded on the slides range from the 50s to the 80s.

Despite its cryptic statements and Scientology-style self-mythologisation, it is obvious by now that WITH is not a real organisation. In fact, the names of its supposed directors – the artists Alasdair Hopwood and Sean Parfitt – are teasingly lightly crossed out in a framed letter from Granada about their reality TV show 'Re-design Your Life'. Nonetheless, WITH's ideas are only too plausible in a world of quick-fix solutions and gadgets, whether women's magazines promising '10 Steps To A Younger You', a Wii console offering a cathartic game of virtual street fighting, or Nicole Kidman advertising a pocket brain-game. WITH's TRAUMAFORMER solution, designed to 'imagineer' a more traumatic past for those bored by their lifelong good fortune and happiness, is a perverted, satirical reversal of the pressures to conform to some idealised notion of self, not only physically but also psychologically, and of the ready availability of consumer products and TV shows to correct any perceived flaws.

After years of operating as a largely underground artists' project, WITH's first commercial outing is surprisingly successful, particularly in its gratuitous exploitation of the current trend for passing off documentation as saleable artworks, such as its logo-embossed memory sticks in absurdly oversized archive boxes. WITH is also taking the opportunity to sell its solutions to real paying clients – art collectors who need more than art to fill the gaps in their lives. In our current economic climate, I predict MIRACLEMAKER will be the bestseller. ■

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