

Lavrador, Judicael

“Des stars jetées en peinture/ Stars Dispensed with in Paint”  
(translated from French)

Liberation

June 10, 2016

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# Des stars jetées en peinture

By [Judicaël Lavrador](#)— June 10, 2016 at 6:31 p.m.

**Several decades after Warhol serigraphed the superficiality of celebrities, artists like Johannes Kahrs or Tursic & Mille, currently exhibited in Paris, capture the tarnished aura of celebrities.**

Wide eyes, raised eyebrows, pale and pimply, Justin Bieber looks groggy or even dumbfounded, like a small animal caught in the headlights of a car. But he is also caught in a painting by Johannes Kahrs. The star's stupor, the viewer of the German's paintings exhibited at Le Plateau in Paris, the sharing: seeing Bieber in paint is not to recognize him at all. The artist's virtuosity is not in question. Certainly, he is a master of his brush and Bieber is brought forth. Next come Michael Jackson and Amy Winehouse. Then, in the Almine Rech Gallery, it's Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love, tanned and smiling with arms full of flowers, represented by Ida Tursic & Wilfried Mille along with other celebrities, past and present: artists (Jeff Koons), writers (Michel Houellebecq), musicians (Iggy Pop, having a drink with the idol of French letters) and it girls (Lindsay Lohan, all proud, in her kitchen, presenting a dish she is taking out of the oven). But there is a shadow over all these images. It comes from the fact that the painting both brings out the bright aura of the stars while veiling it somehow, as if it is somewhat doubtful about its subject and model.

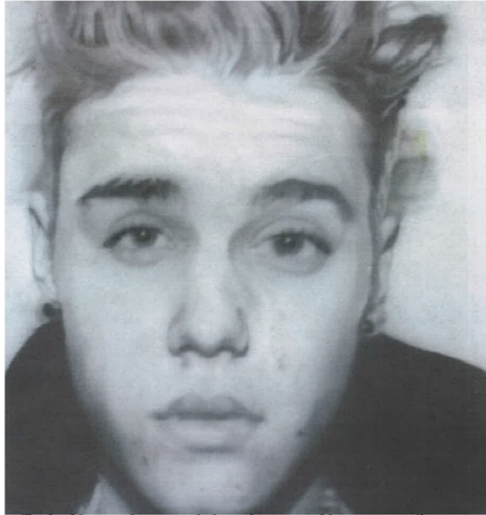
There's plenty of material. But what's the point of delivering a pictorial representation of these famous pop culture figures, already over-

photographed and over-videotaped, filling up all the networks and screens, big or small, as long as they're digital?

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It's a matter of demonstrating the superficiality alongside the radiance of society's stars of the spectacle, it's already been done: Warhol's anything goes and on command portrayal of "le Grand Monde", after the title of the exhibition that the Grand Palais dedicated to him in 2011, has killed the genre in some ways. In which photography took a hand. The stars that pose for Annie Leibovitz or Juergen Teller, Terry Richardson or Gregory Crewdson, are surprised by paparazzi, but have, after Warhol, disappeared from the picture rails. Painting would thus have remained aloof, bringing about the end of pop art and refusing to participate any more, even ambiguously, in the "*society of the spectacle*", folding back into its own history and drawing a security cordon from the world, grand or otherwise.

Gotha pop

Elizabeth Peyton, American gotha pop portraitist, from Eminem to Julian Casablancas, from Jay-Z to Justin Bieber (again), explained why in the magazine *Parkett* in 2008: "*What I love about Warhol is the fact that he was not in the art world so much as the tout court world. I think that's what's missing in the art world around me. It's so confined. 15-year old kids looking for hope draw from music since it is more suited to them, the media, magazines and all that. I think that art could provide all that, but it is so hard for people to get the hang of it, to get into it. It's too obscure, it's filled with things that have nothing to do with the human experience.*" From portraits of stars, she asks a question of the viewer that they recognize and identify intimately. Up-to-the-minute, with a lively and naive brush, not very precise, but shimmering, with a versatile application of color, Elizabeth Peyton certainly paints portraits of teen idols, but renders them with the intimacy and positioning of "normal" people. Discrete portraits in some way. Hence their very small format (30 x

24 cm, hardly larger than a sheet of letter paper) which has become one of the artist's trademarks. Crowds are prohibited: each painting is an acoustic concert, not High Mass at Stade de France stadium.

It is in that style of familiarity that Ida Tursic and Wilfried Mille have also adopted a miniature format, using wood as a surface. *"By painting them, you have the impression of touching them"*, they rejoice. The paintings are hung in clumps, as teenagers do with their posters or as images displayed in digital cloud fashion. In fact, the duo paints their heroes according to images found on the Internet. This is characteristic of painted portraits today, for stars and others. The gap between the painter and their model widens. The intimacy, or even a façade thereof, that could be established between the two when they were face to face is no longer appropriate.

#### Disheveled hair

It is this loss that becomes partly the subject of portraits by Johannes Kahrs. His take favors the stars at the trough of the wave, in those moments when their public image has suffered from their excesses and wrongdoings, and when they are gazing into the void. Amy Winehouse thus appears, on a black background which blends with her disheveled hair, mottled skin, open mouth and haggard gaze. Next, a silhouette of a man with a blurry outline, as if wrapped in a coat too big for him. The title alone permits identifying him: it is Bill Cosby, whose legal and media problems merit this subdued representation.

But artists are not so judgmental. If Kahrs' paintings say anything about his subjects, it's that painting has not given up its rivalry with photography. It takes the lead, with this blurring in Kahrs' work. In fact, close up, you only see a cloud, a slurry of pigments, as if they formed an emulsion. In Tursic & Mille, the star, their image, are treated with more ostentation:

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thick rough patches come gaily to ravage each portrait, some even being painted on a previously burnt surface, others wrestling with a neon palette. Why stars though? It's almost a pedagogical choice, designating the paint and its texture (thick or evanescent, pasty or foamy) as the only star to admire, and the work as the only properly dazzling performance.

