

frieze

Donna Huddleston

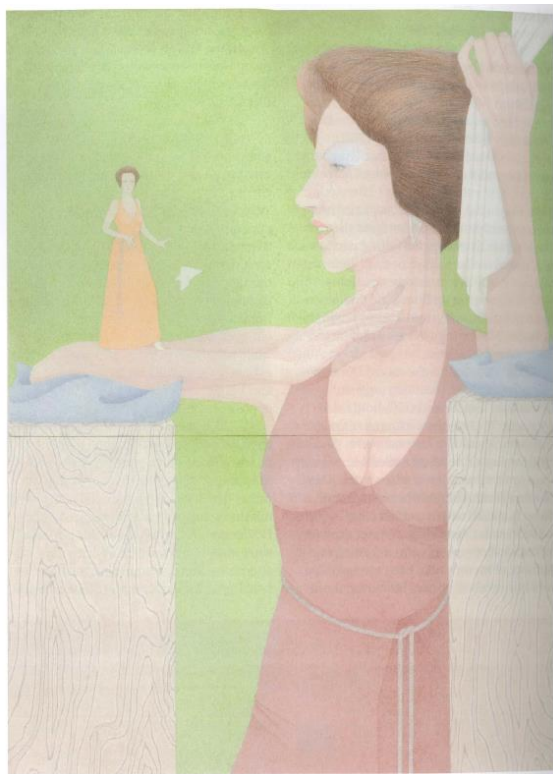
Simon Lee, London, UK

Stepping into 'In Person' – Donna Huddleston's inaugural solo show at Simon Lee, London – is like entering a miniature amphitheatre starring alien divas and Vivienne Westwood-styled punkettes. Often emerging from rainbow spears of Caran d'Ache pencil, the Irish-Australian artist's works pervert reality with performance. Yet, where earlier drawings – such as *The Warriors* (2015) – depicted Earth girls in fairy-tale sportswear, here her work has respawned to resemble a screenplay on Venus.

Personal Development (2021), for instance, comprises layered compositions. A character poses in front of dirty Venetian blinds. With her light-green skin and darker green lips, she looks like a leaf. Below her, a pink flower opens. The piece resembles a Jim Nutt drawing after immaculate plastic surgery.

Huddleston is a philosopher of film. Her attention to doubling – through character, piano-key motifs and split composition – recalls Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Despair* (1978). Based on the novel by Vladimir Nabokov, Fassbinder reimagines the protagonist – Hermann Hermann – as Eurotrash amid silent rain. Hermann's infinite reflection torments him: he sees his double everywhere. In their compact mirrors, Huddleston's characters also reflect Fassbinder's doomed actors. For example, *The Stand In* (2021) pictures a star in blue eyeshadow with ultrathin, sword-like eyebrows. Her hair is wig-textured: equal parts *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972) and a kitten. While some first-person shows may float into solipsism, Huddleston never breaks her glamorous character.

Silverpoints coil into a Hollywood *Shady Lady* (2021). She wears a white blouse with the texture of a bubble. Ivy twists around her. Huddleston's formal sparseness involves her screenplay phenomenology. For instance, *Time Passed* (2022) resembles the setting and tone of Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1975). With the vacant stare of Akerman's compressed title character, a figure rests on a bed and holds a cigarette burning white. Akerman's film is a planet where a spoon can feel like Patrick Bateman's chainsaw in *American Psycho* (2000) – which is to say that, despite materializing from wisps of pencil 'smoke', Huddleston's characters are opaque and resilient.



studded in weird, light-green and gold stars. Spindly blue veins poke from her raised arm. She could be an unusually hieratic extra in the television show *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) or the anime-eyed Mia Farrow in Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Meanwhile, *Capricorn One* (2021) contains a yellow figure with an ash-blond ponytail. She has a bright cupid's bow and silvery eyeballs like water in nebulae.

Akerman famously told a reporter in 1982: 'The more particular I am, the more I address the general.' 'In Person' emanates a related sensibility. Huddleston spins her own memories (and face) into something totally extra-terrestrial, while raising

wider questions: how do artists approach self-performance in the age of social media, when apps such as TikTok and Instagram appear to be Narcissus's plasma lake? How do artists express – not moralize – their inner depth while taming the fat, relentless ego? Isn't vanity the enemy of good art?

— Gabriella Pounds

Opposite page
Donna Huddleston,
The Stand In, 2021,
Caran d'Ache on
paper, 72 × 100 cm



Above
Donna Huddleston,
Shady Lady, 2021, pencil
on paper, 57 × 72 cm

Above right
Donna Huddleston,
Eclipse, 2021, Caran d'Ache
on paper, 47 × 67 cm

Right
Donna Huddleston,
Brighter, 2021, Caran d'Ache
on paper, 72 × 138 cm

