



# Michael Pybus: Soft Play

Art, Contemporary art Lungley Gallery, Trafalgar Square

Friday December 14 2018 - Sunday January 13 2019

FREE



courtesy of the artist and LUNGLEY Gallery

**TIME OUT SAYS**

Michael Pybus has had enough of the internet. The liking, the fav-ing, the selfies, the retweets, the anger, the call-outs and the witch-hunts. He's sick of it.

This show is a reaction to all of that, and it's a sucker punch. He lures you in with an actual ball-pit, leaving you to waddle about in your very own adult soft play area and snap all the selfies your retinas can handle. Then he surrounds you with cutesy drawings and paintings. OMG there's Pikachu, cute! LOL, there's Mario and Yoshi! But there's a thorn to this adorkable rose. Pikachu is scrolling through his phone, bored and despondent; Mario is lecturing about failed modes of cultural production; a tortured Yoshi is lamenting the death of 'hi-res thought'. Pybus has tricked you, dragged you into a safe space of ball-pits, cartoon characters and selfies just so he can mock your very desire to do those things. Bang, sucker punch.

But it gets complicated. There's a lot of 4chan-inspired imagery here that people are going to take issue with. The liberal-baiting NPC meme crops up in one painting (grey, anonymous

figures), and Pikachu is mashed up with alt-right emblem Pepe the Frog in another. Combine that with taking a look at Pybus's Instagram and you'll start to build an image of a man so frustrated by online call-out culture, by the idea that offence can stifle free thought, that he's started drifting towards shit like Breitbart and ultra-fuckwit Paul Joseph Watson.

That will make a lot of people kick back immediately. I should be one of those people. Last time I wrote about Pepe the Frog I received a stream of death threats and was told to go back to Israel by Holocaust-denying Twitter eggs. But while the moronic wake-up-sheepie bullshit of NPC memes and everything that Pepe represents is idiotic, you have to ask yourself if you can hack art that doesn't fit with your worldview. Because it's the rejection inherent in contemporary social media posturing that has edged a working class artist like Pybus towards finding new ways of dealing with politics, especially in an environment as outwardly liberal as the art world. To reject this show is to validate the very politics in it that you disagree with.

The fear of getting called out even extends to this review, despite the fact that nothing in this show is racist, or even especially problematic. But it's that fear that makes this feel like a vaguely important thing to do, it's that fear that seems like part of the problem. If nothing else, this is a show that will make you think really, really hard.

And in the end, what this feels like is a guy who has been burned by life online and has been pushed so far into his head by it that he's started reacting. This show is a rant, a paranoid freakout, a raging scream against likes and favs, against a world obsessed with selfies and surface. Though some of the drawings leave a bit to be desired, this is art as an expression of frustration, anger and desperation, and that's a hell of a lot more interesting than yet another exhibition of abstract tapestries in a faceless Mayfair gallery.

**BY: EDDY FRANKEL**  
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## DETAILS

**Venue name:**

[Lungley Gallery](#)

**Address:**

The Haggerston  
438 Kingsland Road  
London  
E8 4AA

**Opening hours:**

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