

BOLEE GALLERY

Semper Dolens

Written by Hannah Lees

Semper Dolens is a Latin term, 'always grieving' or 'always sad'. I thought it sounded like a man's name, a sort of everyman or no-man. It brought to mind 'John Doe' a placeholder name for the unidentifiable or 'Dear John' a term for a letter that ends a relationship. I thought of the many portraits in Boo Saville's exhibition, all these Semper Dolen's like some surreal selection of Dorian Grays. The novel by Oscar Wilde was a cautionary tale about hedonism, vanity and the consequences of separating beauty from morality. But the portraits in the exhibition depict male figures, some part of the 'manosphere', a term for a virtual world promoting masculinity. Dorian's painted portrait aged while his real face maintained a youthful appearance. The users and contributors in the manosphere find community and solidarity online which they cannot find in the real world.

Looking at the painterly treatment of the paintings, I found myself attempting to get to the truth through the fog. The non-hierarchical glitchy treatment of each painting from the use of imagery mined from the internet holds the politics of AI and the truth in an image. There is a search for the reveal of what is hidden: Arnie's blurry chin and obscured Adam's apple, the back of the footballer's head. Testosterone levels in men can fluctuate wildly throughout a day, falling at disappointment or stress and rising when being around other men. The tenderness seen in the tear in the boy's eye being comforted by his father at the loss in a football game, can also be seen in the other paintings as care-giving now, being depicted in men. The kindness shown in the male couple, the pieta depicting a woman giving care that is still needed to a vulnerable man. The writer James Baldwin was an exponent of expressing more love and care to those that expressed hatred rather than fighting hatred with more hatred. Hateful people needed to be gently shown another way through compassion because they were scared of what they couldn't imagine.

When I saw the portrait of Andrew Tate as a baby I was reminded of something my mother-in-law had said to me in regard to a man in my town who had fallen through the cracks of society, "He was someone's baby". I knew what she meant, that there had been innocence, that they weren't born that way and that someone may have truly loved them. In a recent Guardian interview, Louis Theroux when speaking about his current documentary 'Louis Theroux: Inside the Manosphere' talks about the trauma Andrew Tate and his brother had experienced, domestic abuse that they felt had emboldened them. As Theroux suggests, they were born of a broken place.

I thought of bell hooks book 'The Will to Change'. I had thought of 'Lost Boys: A Personal Journey Through the Manosphere' by James Bloodworth, I knew it would make for depressing reading and I wanted to have bell hooks to hand. Less as a solution to the problem of the manosphere but more to show that there were people, women, aware of what was needed, we all need love. I hope that men will want to read bell hooks, to claim what is already available to them but I also acknowledge that those indoctrinated will not listen to a woman telling them they can find love and acceptance in the community of women, by being more like a woman. A recent global survey showed that Gen-Z men were twice as likely as male boomers to believe wives should obey their husbands. This is probably not a massive surprise but the finding that shocked me the most was a massive 30% of Gen-Z males believed men should not say "I love you" to their friends.