

**Thomas
Dozol**

Thomas Dozol: *Côtes d'Azurs*
French Riviera, London
16 November – 16 December

The little shopfront gallery looked even more diminutive than usual with its windows blacked out, the flickering blue neon sign 'French Riviera 1988' a primer for the seedy fluorescent light glowing inside, infinitely far away from St Tropez. Thomas Dozol's *Côtes d'Azurs* accesses the silent encoding of high-street sex shops – full of accessories, 'literature' and DVDs – designed to distract you from your desire for the real thing. As is the case with most galleries too, once you've crossed the threshold from the street, the space is more welcoming than imagined. Here, the encounter proves less like a sex shop than a photographic darkroom. Enlarged prints hang on each section of the gallery walls, the UV 'black' light picking out the shapes of xeroxed bodies set off against fluorescent serigraphs. The closer you look, the more indigo-blue the white sections become, and the luminous yellow appears to glow iridescent green, a phenomenon that surprises visually for otherwise tired eyes grown accustomed to the ubiquitous backlit brightness of computer screens.

The press release quotes an SMS from Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland, a hint at Dozol's star-studded personal life as the unshrinking boyfriend of musician Michael Stipe. The writer wonders existentially: 'The other thing about 2012 is that people are more connected than they've ever been before – except they've been tricked into thinking they're isolated. How did that happen?' Dozol's exhibition is located in the overlap between our online and offline lives, and asks if anyone's ever getting the real thing.

Enjoying the way in which the exhibition seems to span the virtual space of Coupland's SMS introduction and the liminal space of the gallery illuminated in the shadowy UV light, I searched for the show online and discovered that the misspelling, or neologism *Côtes d'Azurs*, with the extra *s*'s, bypasses links to the actual French Riviera, connecting searches directly to this Bethnal Green gallery's website. These loopholes in perception read like fictive clues in a detective story, making the visit all the more memorable.

The work itself gives less away: the photographed figures stand stiffly and stare vacantly, collapse their heads in their hands or lean languidly against the colourful outlines. Recalling the similarly skinny, disaffected figures from Ryan McGinley's *Moonmilk* (2008–9) series of photographs set in dramatically lit underground caves, or Marc Camille Chaimowicz's alluring 'Four Quartet' collages of young fashion models making eyes behind layers of flowers (2010–12), Dozol's images are consciously lacking soul. Dozol has spoken about how, as so much of our daily lives is played out virtually, 'our bodies are these objects left behind'. The question of whether or not this process of disembodiment is so new and different from Marshall McLuhan's warnings from 50 years ago (about the numbing, trancelike effects of TV) feels overlooked, or perhaps repeated with such a strong emphasis placed on the sensation of the analogue. But at the same time, his thoughtful installation, with so many twists on the secondary, social experience of visiting a gallery, and the physical perception of viewing the work, animates the gaze, coaxed out from behind the screens we use to frame our lives.

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Thomas Dozol
***Côtes d'Azurs*, 2012 (installer
view). Courtesy the artist and
French Riviera, London**

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