

## LISA BRICE

### French Riviera, London

The proverb 'cut your coat according to your cloth' is a reminder of the need for humility – to make what you can with the means at hand. It seems apt that the saying was partially appropriated as the title of South African artist Lisa Brice's solo show at French Riviera, her first in the UK, though her work has been exhibited widely across Europe and South Africa for a number of years. The installation was simply threaded together, modest in its materials and the domestic focus of the works, which were hung, draped and pinned to the walls and window of the pocket-sized shop floor that houses the artist-run space.

'Cut Your Coat' comprises eight works on paper that take as their preface the space's former identity as a poodle grooming parlour in the 1970s. On the threshold of the gallery, hovering in its window, the inky outlines of four women (all works *Untitled*, 2014) as primly coiffed as their poodles, are positioned as bystanders to microcosms of drama unfolding within the paintings inside. Brice's protagonists are all women – with the exception of the poodles, the star of which is surely a majestic snow-white specimen, poised regally mid-groom in the show's most prominent work. Variants of the same scene, each work opens a portal to the female universe of familiar objects and everyday rituals, steeped in the quiet hush of shared intimacy. Cobalt blue inks trace the forms of a mother kneeling with baby; black Toulouse-Lautrec-like silhouettes of legs slipped into hosiery; a snipped curl of poodle coat.

In spite of the assured draughtsmanship that underpins Brice's oeuvre, the artist repeatedly returns to familiar motifs and poses. Take, for example, a pair of ink-on-paper drawings tacked alongside one another to the right of the space, forming a kind of before and after. The before: a drawing, light in touch, that sketches the rough details of a room in which a girl stands before a mirror. The after: another female figure, who seems to float in space, glimpsing her solitude in a mirror, which is all that remains to suggest the domestic interior. In their style and illustrative quality, the drawings have the almost cinematic air of the storyboard. However, there are other influences at play. The flash of a torso in a mirror, a passageway of light that tilts our imagination to the outer reaches of the scene and a dog that has sneaked under a table recall the late paintings of Pierre Bonnard, which were almost exclusively devoted to the interiors of his home – domestic reveries, which resonate in the painterly conversations that Brice imagines in response to the former shop space.

It would be fair to say that Brice's approach to painting since her early days in South Africa (she has now settled in London after a brief interlude in Trinidad) has been restless; tossing and turning between the figurative and abstract, or otherwise segueing between the two. A case in hand is the artist's 2013 monochromatic paintings in which a single motif of a lone figure draped across a bed is repeated, becoming increasingly

shrouded in a reverie of masking brushstrokes, as Brice gradually relinquishes the sturdier marks of inks, oils and acrylics to the pallid wash of *Reclining Figure (White and Pink)*, in which the person's outline is replaced by a cloud of pale colour, hanging isolated in a sky of thin light.

In his text accompanying exhibition, writer Sean O'Toole draws on Nikolai Gogol's 1842 short story *The Overcoat*, about a reclusive St Petersburg copy clerk who scrimps and saves to own a new coat. The reference gets to the heart of Brice's show: the antiquated nature of its title; the bygone days of dressmaking; a domesticity void of laptops, TVs or iPhones. Lingering at French Riviera was the subdued resonance of past tenants, made tangible by the artist's indelible lines and fleetingly caught silhouettes.

JOSEPHINE NEW



1

1  
Lisa Brice  
'Cut Your Coat', 2014,  
installation view

2  
Michele Abeles  
Watches #85, 2014, archival pigment  
print, 110 × 74 cm

3  
Ed Fornieles  
'Modern Family', 2014,  
installation view