What Lies Beneath: Amie Dickie, Dawn Mellor and Goth Pop Art

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When contemporary artists employ appropriation of mass-market iconography as a flexible critical strategy for achieving conceptual goals a difficult element to evaluate is the sincerity and authenticity of the artist's appreciation of his or her subject matter. Celebrity source material, from which many emerging and established artists create uncomplicated homages as fans of pop-culture, provides an especially rich genre in which to address this issue. Here, interest in pop-culture material is presented not in overtly adoring artwork but through what I term "Goth Pop," an unusual aesthetic that initially appears to undermine the artist's admiring relationship to his or her source material. I consider this style to be "Goth Pop" because of its morbid, grotesque, sinister and violent appearance which mirrors the artist's true feelings for its pop-culture subjects. To engage the complexity of this creative impetus, this study will discusses work by two young, established artists combining Pop art concerns and a Goth aesthetic as an expression of an intimate dynamic between artist and subject.

I examine the work of Amie Dicke and Dawn Mellor because of intriguing contrasts within their relationships to Goth Pop's public and private meanings. Dicke and Mellor are openly and sincerely fans of their subject matter and also fans of the historical and contemporary material from which Goth Pop originates. Melllor has a profound emotional and intellectual investment in her source material but she is primarily involved in work that renders private demons public, just as horror films reinterpret personal trauma or fears as larger external threats. In contrast, Dicke's work is immensely private. Secrets and erotic mysteries imbued with sinister or morbid undertones are central motifs in the Gothic tradition and the updated Goth genre. Dicke's work exemplifies these themes as surfaces are stripped away to reveal underlying concerns and an almost obsessive focus on the contrasts between superficial polish and a rough, intimate under-layer informs her work.

Today's artists working with a Gothic lexicon are different from artists who created similarly themed work in the 1990s. Douglas Gordon, Mike Kelley, Rachel Whiteread, Damien Hirst, Cathy de Monchaux, Gregory Crewdson, and Jake and Dinos Chapman, all internationally prominent in the '90s, worked within a Gothic idiom by producing morbid, macabre imagery intended to evoke the feelings of fright associated with horror media and the Gothic tradition. Yet, as Catherine Spooner notes, "[they] are not concerned with spiritual transcendence and historical nostalgia [of the traditional Gothic], but with the themes of haunting and imprisonment found in the Gothic novel."(1) Instead of sourcing the subculture, they primarily employed traditional Gothic imagery and themes for symbolic, personal or political purposes. In contrast, the most striking movement within the current Gothic genre consists of artists directly referencing horror films, from esoteric camp to commercially successful movies. Artists specifically referencing horror tropes form a distinctive contemporary sub-genre of Gothic art.

Dicke's art represents the impact of the vampire horror genre in the '90s. While Vampire films and motifs have re-emerged with a vengeance in current pop culture, the symbolic significance of the genre is not the same as it was during the '80 and '90s, when AIDS awareness and media coverage was at its most prominent; an era of when Dicke and artists of her generation formed their sexual consciousness. In Dicke's cut-paper collages, which consist of photographs torn from current fashion magazines or peeled from bus-stops, the Dutch artist takes contemporary fashion imagery and alters it to reveal the spectres of grunge behind the polish and decay beneath the glamour.

Dicke began a series consisting of customised pages from high-fashion magazines and poster-sized ads that she sliced with X-Acto knives more than a decade ago. In these works, she whittles flat images of sunny or sultry sex kittens into phantoms of sexual iconography, evoking the photographer Corinne Day's scrappy sullen girls whose beauty seemed weathered by heroin, rough nights, and desperate sex.(2) Dicke's collages are pure fantasy, but they resurrect the spirit of "dirty realism" – a prevailing genre of fashion photography from the '90s, where beauty and decay/sex and death were joined together. Dicke cuts into the images, removing the models' flesh and individual facial features. Leaving their hands, hair, feet and coy pouting upper lips untouched, she carves the models' limbs, clothes and famous faces into sinewy designs, cuts out their eyes and renders the remainder of their sleek bodies into long slick strings of magazine paper - a beautifully Gothic design of slender glossy paper strips.

I interpret Dicke's art as summoning up central aspects of Georges Bataille's writing and applying them to the threat and danger of AIDS. However, despite the ghost of AIDS trauma hovering throughout her art, Dicke was driven to her subjects through loneliness, not fear of intimacy's ramifications. Dicke first responded to fashion's lure as a young girl in Rotterdam when she transformed her bedroom into a glossy cocoon with collaged pages cut from fashion magazines covering the walls and door. After that early connection with fashion, her admiration blossomed into a creative maturity in 2001, during six month period that she spent in New York City on a starters' grant from the Dutch government, a year after completing her degree in Fine Art from the Willem de Kooning Academy of Fine Arts in Rotterdam.

Unlike other artists producing contemporary Gothic work, Dicke's art does not explicitly reference particular horror films. However, it expresses a haunting sense of the "uncanny" and her early collages embodied the complex and culturally relevant allure of the vampire genre, one of the aesthetic and conceptually driving subgenres of the Gothic tradition.(3) Although they appeared to be born of violence, the careful and skilfully produced interventions into fashion's imagery were driven by Dicke's sincere love for fashion. By dissecting away fashion's fluff, fabric and fantasy, Dicke reveals an underlying morbidity, distilling the signifiers of vampirism during the era of heightened mass-cultural Western awareness of AIDS into a series of seductive paper cut-outs.
Visually, Dicke's cut-paper creations have the dazzling, sensual decorative appeal of Gustave Klimt paintings and the dark, stark, angry bite of Egon Schiele watercolours. In writing about Schiele, art historian Patrick Werkner defines his work as a "death wish united with the cult of eroticism."(4) In today's culture, the cult of eroticism is largely interwoven with the industry of fashion and the images that it produces for mass-delectation, which Dicke renders as overtly morbid. For example, in Dicke's 2004 version of the *Dance Macabre*, a girl envelops herself in a multi-coloured coat; her red hair and her hand are the only parts of her face, body or garment that have not been cut into a flame-like pattern. Dicke often interlaces text with images: ad copy will remain visible or rock lyrics like "I can't control the urge" will be scrawled across models' bodies. By cutting into the space where they are posed, Dicke allows something within the girls to seep out and infect their surroundings.

Although her work initially appeared to be critical of fashion imagery and the fashion industry, my further conversations with Dicke revealed that her art is not, as many critics have argued, a feminist denunciation of Western beauty standards. Instead, her work is an existential exploration of the self that is more at odds with the ethos and application of fashion than a fundamental rejection of the fashion and beauty industries.

A feminist interpretation is often ascribed to Dicke's work because of its keen attention to the models' bodies which ties her art into both a horror tradition and fashion imagery. As Jersley observes, "The Splatter movie is the horror subgenre in which you actually watch the body being torn apart and the blood

flowing. It incessantly talks about disintegration and decay. The body is suffering, not the soul, the body is the visual center of horror, not evil incarnate. The monster is the monstrous body not the monstrous character."(5) Dicke's work transforms female flesh into abstract forms; Helmut Hartwig argues that the body in splatter films is defined by metamorphosis, as it changes from a contained form into a mess of fluids, organs and "uncoordinated and undifferentiated" mass.(6) Victims in these films travel through the narrative until they emerge as mere bodies, "amorphous masses of biological matter" instead of individuals, just as Dicke's models are stripped of their identities and become mere form.(7) Notwithstanding the substantial and well-argued literature characterising slasher films as a sublimation of misogynist urges, the body in splatter films is horrific because it is rendered devoid of signification, gender, desire, and sexuality.

The girls in Dicke's art are counter-points to this use of bodies in horror-cinema. Most models today are very young; they are demographically younger now than in fashion's recent history. Although young models are encouraged to project sexuality, their own sense of their sexual identity is often still unformed; like Clover's Final Girl, they are not in full possession of their sexual power although they professionally evoke sexuality. This dynamic informs the experience of viewing fashion images for dedicated fans of fashion such as Dicke.

Although she disagrees about restricting her work to a purely feminist critique, Dicke is open to differing interpretations of the work, which she asserts is created without pre-conceived concepts. In 2008, she told me:

"My art has violent aspects. But that violence is infused with concentration. Curiosity, combined with frustration, is the starting point where my work begins. Sometimes the combination creates the exact type of energy that I need to do something 'stupid.' And an impulsive, direct, uncontrolled action, like that, can be seen as violent. 'Stupidity' can inspire discovery. And ironically, it can produce a beautiful feeling. It makes me think of a quote by Georges Bataille: 'Truth only has one face, that of a violent contradiction.'"(8)

This sensibility connects Dicke's work to AIDS iconography. Bataille also approvingly quotes Sade's assertion that, "There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image,"(9) and Dicke does this brilliantly. Seen today, Dicke's Gucci succubusses are a reminder that sexuality is still not, and never has been, safe. AIDS shaped young peoples' emotional landscape by bringing scepticism and mistrust to the forefront of every relationship, by forcing partners to disclose their sexual histories under mutual threat of death. If they were cautious, this dialogue promoted intimacy because they were obliged to share facts about themselves, but the consequences of lying and being lied to could be deadly.

This sensibility is hauntingly expressed in her 2007 sculpture "Dissolving floors of memory." This work consists of an opulently decorated, but discarded and dishevelled, chair, a pair of battered luxury shoes and sugar. The sugar is gathered on the floor besides the chair in powder and solid cubes. Dicke assembled the piles of sugar when wearing the shoes and grating the sugar with a knife between her spread legs. "Dissolving floors of memory," conveys a clear sense of loss and pleasure's bitter aftermath. The shoes and chair were evidently once desirable and lavish but their current condition is ravished and worn. The sugar that Dicke shaved between her spread legs is another sign of depleted delight and need. The effect is a haunting testament to craving, memory and empty, unfulfilled longing. The sculpture's melancholia is a universal rumination on faded glory and romantic loss. But it can potentially be interpreted as a rumination other addictive and destructive white powders. In the specific context of AIDS symbolism, the sugar can function as a reference to drug-fuelled recklessness, the carelessness of wild

parties or the danger of infested needles, and the erotic significance of Dicke's heels hinting at a specifically sexualized form of decay.

This upsetting sense of absence is also demonstrated by Dicke's see-through sex kittens, whose apparent transparency is sinister instead of comforting – an illustration of the sexual risk/reward profile of living in the era of AIDS. Yet, her images are also articulate renderings of Bataille's theories, which can be applied to the iconography of AIDS as a virus spread through pleasure and behaviour associated with desperation or hedonism such as casual sex or heroin use. A cautionary precept of Bataille's 1962 study, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, is that "eroticism is assenting to life up to the point of death … In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation. The whole business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still."(10)

Frustration, rage and a drive toward suicide are evident in one of Dicke's most noted images of glamorous sexuality. *Gisele Wants Out* (2003) is simply a gossamer-thin web of the contours around Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bundchen's famously voluptuous body as she writhes against the constraints of her background. Similar impulses surface in *Show Ass Jess* through the thin outline of Calvin Klein model Jessica Miller jutting out her hip as she pulls at cords of paper connecting her to sliced-up surroundings. The seemingly contradictory sentiments engendered by these manifestations of misery are captured by Bataille's observation:

"We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is … this nostalgia is responsible for … eroticism in man."(11)

Dicke undercuts eroticism's anonymity by including the name of the subject in the title of a piece or in text taken from the original image. One such piece is *oooh Kate* (2003), a brightly coloured, slick headshot portrait of the supermodel Kate Moss. In *oooh Kate*, Dicke retains the elements that signify Moss's transformation from unscrubbed gritty beauty to polished chic, such as her shiny mahogany hair and the outline of the brocade high-collared jacket that Moss modeled, but cuts away Moss's face to bring the image back to her dark roots. Similarly, in *Heidi II* (2003) Dicke manipulates a swimsuit shot of the German model Heidi Klum crouched on her palms. Klum's symmetrical features, warm expression and muscular body radiate healthy domesticity and rational intelligence, and even with her face reduced to lines of glossy paper, lips and hollow eyes, she still expresses a hint of residual sweetness. This relic of the model's personality warns that an infection like AIDS is invisible and even a familiar sexual partner may be a deadly threat; an appropriately haunting cautionary image.

In contrast to the slick glossy surfaces of Dicke's collages, dense, heavy clotted oil paint characterizes Mellor's paintings. These surfaces suit her personal pantheon of broadly famous pop-culture faces from fashion, film, art and politics, and more esoteric icons of intellectual culture. In contrast to the media's assertion that celebrities are a "combination of the spectacular and the everyday,"(12) Mellor's morbid surrealist paintings present celebrities as ghouls in comical and telling scenarios whose scrappy, witty and brutal surrealist portraits are like a voodoo retelling of mass media cultural mythology.

Represented by the influential TEAM gallery in New York and formerly with London's prestigious Victoria Miro gallery, Mellor has shown at Tate Liverpool, New York's PS.1, and the Prague Biennial. For her, celebrity has always been a central theme. Her subjects range from French feminist Helene Cixous and French post-structurist Gilles Deleuze to French-o-phobe Condoleezza Rice. She has painted Christina Aguilera in the pose of Saint Sebastian, Audrey Hepburn as a zombie with her lips chewed off,

yet still elegantly attired, and Linda Blair from *The Exorcist* wearing an "I Love NY" T-shirt. For the lead image to *The Flesh and the Fury*, her 2003 debut exhibition at TEAM, Mellor presented a chorus-line of fifteen nearly identical images of Madonna in her iconic Jean-Paul Gaultier cone-bra, whose last figure holds her leg high and emits a stream of urine. Another 2003 painting shows a young Elizabeth Taylor, standing against a bright sky-blue background with a swarm of butterflies surrounding her head and her mouth open in a cry of terror.

In service of these themes, Mellor uses a strong palette of rich colours and thickly applied paint. Her palette has become increasingly muddy, even murky, and the density of the brushwork has intensified, giving her canvases the look of dusty oil paintings unearthed in an attic. This appearance of premature aging confers an optimistic illusion of longevity on her contemporary celebrity subjects, while the portraits of older, more culturally established icons seem to be undiscovered evidence, offering new insight into their character.

Much of the impact that Mellor's work evokes comes from the atmosphere of the supernatural that frames her practice. Positing that Mellor is inspired by political feminist motives to satirise her subjects, Grady T. Turner described her debut show as "an exhibition of surrealist art lampoon[ing] media fascination with celebrity."(13)

Time and again, Mellor isolates her subjects' most telling aspects and renders them radioactive, creating mutant versions of public figures that critic David Cohen terms "anti-portraits."(14) Through sci-fi metaphors, these depictions of celebrity illustrate Sean Redmond's argument that "*fame culture* offers 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' people the chance of a heightened level of intimacy that potentially, perhaps inevitably, destabilises the borders and boundaries of identity, and which energises or electrifies one's experience if the world."(15)

Viewers of Mellor's images will often find it difficult to discern affection for her subjects in them. But after closely examining her work and conducting a series of interviews with her, I have concluded that empathy instead of iconoclasm is her fundamental motivation.

In a 2007 interview for Saatchi Online, Mellor told me:
I think my motives for conscious misrepresentation are a response to what I perceive to be the impossibility of conclusive representation, at least if it is aimed at directly. Maybe I can discover something by accident through misrepresentation, something about my own desires, dreams and fears. I wanted to take responsibility and discover my moral position. On the one hand there is a sense of empathy for the 'victims,' the celebrities I portray, that could appear to suggest moral commentary and on the other I am the one who is in possession of the tools of violence and destruction. I have painted and imagined them this way. I wanted to see the extent to which my desire may be imitative of the culture I was consuming and if a possible spontaneous and subjective desire existed at all.(16)

Mellor's desire to "take responsibility" is a repudiation of the notion, articulated by Matt Hills, that "the media world is effectively divided into two groups: those who are visible in the media, and so possess high status, and those who are invisible – the far lower-status audience of fan-consumers."(17) The empathy that Mellor's paintings are intended to provoke is an inversion of the manufactured empathy produced by the media, which crafts an image of celebrities as accessible and relatable figures. The differences between American and British celebrity culture, and the complex inter-relationship between gender, class and pop-culture within the British art establishment, have been the topic of our interviews.

In one of these discussions, Mellor summed up her observations with the statement:
There is of course a relationship between class and the consumption of popular culture, which informs both within U.K. and U.S. When I've shown work in Belgium or Italy people discuss the violent perversity and desire more. I guess the American art I've seen about celebrity still exposes some differences from British art. It's less explicitly seedy even when it's dark or melancholic, in the same way perhaps that American Pop Art and European Pop Art are similarly divided. American artists really know how to celebrate something beautiful or sexy in some aspect of their art. In the U.K., we pride ourselves on irony, perversity and failure.(18)

Mellor underscores the cultural dynamics that oppose ordinariness to specialness by painting an array of cultural icons as complete freaks. Tabloids undermine the mythic status of celebrities with close-ups of cellulite and exposés of their every bad day while at the same time feeding upon their accessible ordinariness.(19) Mellor's art goes further and deeper by mocking the desire to make super-human stars out of the people we elect to govern, teach or entertain us. In works such as Mellor's Sapphic satire of Hilary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, there is never any question of whether celebrities are 'normal.' Many of her subjects appear barely or not even human. In some images, Mellor places celebrity stars in graphically sexual situations, such as in *The Supremes and Four White Cunts*, where three members of the iconic girl group are depicted as holding decapitated blond heads and one of the singers exposes herself to show that she has a white woman's vagina.

However, many of the renditions of celebrities in Mellor's images are not inconsistent with their personae, and it is possible to divide their subjects into those who would be pleased by their attribution and those who would be baffled or offended. Thus, Grace Jones, who is shown pushing smoke out of her nostrils like a bull about to charge, looks as erotically overwhelming as always. Karl Lagerfeld might be amused by Mellor's depiction of himself looking dignified and svelte, with a massive silvery cockroach on his shoulder and another dangling over his forehead, its legs brushing his sunglass lens like a hat's veil. In contrast, Mellor's comparatively straight-forward portrait of Anna Wintour would probably not meet with her approval. In Mellor's subtly disquieting image, Wintour is seen with her arms tightly pressed to her chest and an expression of stiff disdain on her pinched face, while a few faint streaks of blood on her arm reveal the pent-up mania and fury emanating from one of fashion culture's most feared and admired forces.

It is difficult to imagine that Tony Blair would be pleased to be presented as a blessed-out raver with a Barney doll dangling off his nose-ring. As Phil Ginsberg describes this work, "Tony Blair turns his head and stares out at us, his trademark grin on his face. This time, it seems a little more manic than usual. A metal key-ring brutally pierces the cartilage between his nostrils. Dangling from it, just below his mouth, is a cute children's toy: Barney, the purple dinosaur and superstar of American children's television."(20)

Not all of Mellor's images are intended to tease out a subject's particular quality or to reference an episode in a celebrity's life. She also arranges disparate celebrity combinations to portray interconnectedness of fame among the upper-echelons of stardom's incestuous social community. As Ginsberg observes, "The[se] drawings tend to bring the women together in perverse collusion. Jennifer Aniston is caught paying loving homage to J-Lo's famed posterior; Penelope Cruz smilingly offers her severed breasts to a vision of [Nicole] Kidman; and Anna Nicole Smith binds Courtney Love in forced admiration of Mariah Carey."

For a striking group of subjects, Mellor goes beyond a single representative image to show them in a multiplicity of guises. In 2008, Mellor presented "A Curse on Your Walls", a themed exhibition with

TEAM gallery that focused on her most extensive single-subject series. The show combined 71 portraits from Mellor's *Vile Affections* with a separate series of larger-than-life paintings inspired by Judy Garland and *The Wizard of Oz*.

Mellor's relationship to the star and her character summoned up a complex range of associations and extrapolations. Garland and her character, Dorothy Gale, both were young women with such unwavering senses of self that setbacks, wondrous distractions, horrifying diversions and even a field full of poppies could not push them off course. For this reason, the character of Dorothy has come to mean a great deal to many very different people. Dorothy's protean ability to be adopted by divergent admirers while remaining a quintessential American icon was a key reason why Mellor chose her as an inspiration.

In six mammoth paintings, some of which measure 12'x10', Mellor explored Salman Rushdie's notion in his essay, "The Wizard of Oz", that Dorothy may exemplify Americana through her yearning to return to small-town Kansas, but she is also the ultimate "symbolic refugee" who struggles through the Diaspora, desperate to find her way home.(21)

In his review of the TEAM show for the *New York Times*, Ken Johnson described the paintings as "rousing ambitious" with "incendiary impact."(22) Beyond question, they were unconventional in handling their iconic subject. According to Mellor's own exegesis, Dorothy is "a nasty piece of work" and the paintings reflected that persona. For example, *Yellow Bricks Dorothy* presents three monster versions of Dorothy pushing wheelbarrows filled with gold bricks in a row though an interior whose stained-glass window suggests a church. The final Dorothy is rendered as if she were a portion of the stained glass, although her placement in space is some distance away from where the window reaches the floor. The Dorothy before her has a half-skull and half-beast head, and the one leading the line is missing flesh on part of her face. Mellor asserts that the multiple Dorothys are positioned like British women moving bricks in a vintage World War II photograph that she copied. There, Dorothy's bricks are made of gold and the skin on her face is melting, a composition that Mellor intended to convey the impression that Dorothy was a Jewish girl slaving in a work camp during WWII.

Of another Dorothy painting, critic David Cohen writes,

"Ms. Mellor's handling of paint is often at its most subtle and tender when her politicising is at its most blatant and brutal. *Giant Dorothy* (2007-08) has Dorothy kneeling before a soap-bubble globe containing her longed-for Kansas homestead floating above a blasted heath. But in a gesture that cripples the innocence of the image, she has sprouted an erect penis (depicted in the same blue gingham of her dress) that penetrates the bubble. Her face duplicates as it turns its gaze from the house to the ground; a beautifully handled passage. Around her head is a halo of burning white slogans of militant, anti-religious, anarchic character, burning bright against the dark, ominous sky, that read, "Destroy the Abrahamic Moralist Trilogy of Terror. We will establish a new state. Kill Breeders, Steal Babies."

The Dorothy image that most tellingly expressed the Pop Goth aesthetic is *Dead Dorothy*. Here, Dorothy lies naked and mutilated in a smoking foxhole. A cluster of disco balls gathers near her disembowelled corpse and thick streams of blue and white stripes form sharp shapes, like the markings on a graph. Stuck into her bloody body are signs reading, "There is no place like home," "Suicide is painless it brings on many changes," and "A Star is Born." The most explicit image in the series, it engages with Garland's own personal trauma, her career and her status as a gay icon, to which the disco balls allude.

Within a shifting context of ambiguous origin and social placement, Mellor offers a range of alternative and often oppositional identities for Dorothy. “She looks American from the gingham dress she is wearing,” Mellor has said. “But it is unclear whether she has adopted that outfit in order to assimilate, or whether it is reflective of her identity.” In some paintings Dorothy seems to be wandering through a war-ravished stretch of Iraq. In one, she lies stiff in a bombed-out building whose appearance is copied from a newspaper report about the destruction of an Iraqi home. Yet, current polemical questions coexist with historical and political references such as the invocation of the Holocaust in *Yellow Bricks*, while other images offer the possibility, through news reportage they appropriate, that Dorothy might instead be Palestinian.

“Is she a terrorist?” Mellor asks rhetorically about the implications of her images. “Is she a victim of war? A Fascist? Is she American? Is she just an American working-class girl with an extreme view? Because she is a child, you want to see her as a hero and you want to empathise with her. But who is she and does she deserve our sympathy? It is important to have ambiguity; I had massive empathy and then I tried to imagine the rage I would feel if I were a Palestinian child or a child from the Holocaust. I portray her in many of the paintings as an extremist, and I want there to be the question of whether she is a child who was so oppressed that she developed extreme views as a result of her oppression.”

Implicit in Mellor’s speculative interpretations of her own work is an overarching desire to show that Dorothy can be every displaced person confronting the dark side of their own vision and quest for freedom.

In one of the most compellingly conflicted storylines that Mellor establishes, the character of Dorothy becomes the narrative of a “gay fundamentalist, ‘kill breeders’ extremist ...reinvented as a gay terrorist.” Mellor says that she was not aware of *The Wizard of Oz*’s gay cult status when she began obsessively painting images of Judy Garland during her MA studies at the Royal Academy.(27) “I knew I was gay then,” she recounts. “But my whole relationship with the gay scene was through techno and clubbing. I saw Judy Garland at Carnegie Hall during her last summer performing, and I just became obsessed with her, without realising what she signified within gay culture. But I became fascinated with her and just kept painting her over and over.”
From this desire to represent her personal relationship to a star in whom she has invested private meaning, Mellor created gripping portraits of a culture’s dysfunctional relation to celebrity.

Conclusion
Dicke’s and Mellor’s Their Pop Goth aesthetic enables them to explore their subject-matter and express their convictions because of the style’s innate passion and explosive imagery. Their style superficially appears critical or aggressive towards their subject mater, yet actually articulates their emotionally invested attachment to the richness, complexity and wider relevance of their pop-culture interests. A Gothic visual vocabulary enables Mellor and Dicke to delve into the contradictory allure of specific public figures, and celebrity overall, without relying on simple binary assessments of a star’s likability. Instead of expressing a basic approval or criticism, Pop Goth allows both artists to grabble with the desire, fantasy and one-sided emotional investment that fans feel for the stars they adore.

1. Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion, 2006), p. 8.
2. See: Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).
3. Jersley, Anne, "The horror film, the body and the youth audience" in *Producing cultures - The construction of forms and contents of contemporary youth cultures*, February 1, 1999, p 1
4. Helmut Hartwig, *Die Grausamkeit der Bilder: Horror und Faszination in alten und neuen Medien* (Berlin: Quadriga, 1986). P.211
5. Jerslev 19.
6. Dicke in interview with the author, 8 December 2008.
7. Georges Bataille, Eroticism: Death and Sensuality (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986). p. 5
8. Bataille. P. 8
9. Bataille. P.8
10. Sayre Shay, King, Cynthia, "Star studded Society: Role Models" in *Entertainment and society: influences, impacts, and innovations* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p.307
11. Grady Turner, "Dawn Mellor at Team – New York … an exhibition of surrealist art lampoons media fascination with celebrity," *Art in America,* October 2003.
12. David Cohen, "Dawn Mellor: A Curse on your Walls," The New York Sun 8 August 2008.
13. Sean Redmond, "Intimate fame is everywhere," Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture, ed. Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (London: Routledge, 2006): 46.
14. Mellor in interview with the author, 8 November 2007.
15. Matt Hills, "Not just another powerless elite?: When media fans become subculture celebrities," *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*: 101.
16. Dawn Mellor in interview with the author, 10 November 2008.
17. For a history of the U.K. heat magazine as a representative tabloid, see: Rebecca Feasey, "Get a Famous Body: Star styles and celebrity gossip in heat magazine," *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*: 177-193.
18. Ginsberg, Phil, „Dawn Mellor: Vile Afflictions," artcornwall.org 8 March 2009
19. Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (BFI Film Classics), ed. Melvyn Bragg and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 2008).
20. Kenneth Johnson, "Dawn Mellor: A Curse on Your Walls," *New York Times*, 4 July 2008.
21. Cohen.
22. William Leap, *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 98.

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