

CHEIM & READ

ne Parker riddles with a
The Invitation (1997). This
 te projected film loop
 icles Parker lying in bed
 ing straight up into the cam-
 er gaze, though direct, is an
 own quantity. Rolling over,
 rther denies engagement,
 ng a prescribed invitation to
 nd participate in a film fan-
 t love. A chandelier, shot
 below (and thus implied as
 ject of Parker's vision) cuts
 ie loop of looking and de-
 dding a cold formal element
 bedroom cameo. In Isaac
 's *The Attendant* (1997), two
 v photographic prints are
 osed horizontally, purport-
 rrorring each other's con-
 The top image shows a
 man bound to the floor,
 a hazy figure cracks a whip.
 background hangs a
 ux of muscle men cartoons.
 verted print below is of a
 man grinning in the same
 io. Caught in a moment, the
 ing lash is an extension of
 endant's silhouette. In per-
 stasis, the images are bound
 medium, yet the prints'
 e suggests transference of
 aptured dynamics of power
 :sire from a time-based
 m.
 : in Julien's piece, sex creeps
 ne of two Jordan Baseman
 in the show. *Muscle* (1997)
 rmine cast of a tongue
 ' pointing out of the white
 / wall. Provoking a sensation
 / physical delights, the
 e and its associated wicked-
 lmost sends up the show's
 represent Love without
 ically referring to sex. The
 g poignancy of love is inti-
 by Simon Foster-Ogg's
 ic piece, *Love Song* (1997).
 rocal relationship is entered
 cross the gallery threshold.
 mins installed in the door
 s warble a response to your
 ice, their pitch oscillating as
 nt parts of the metal jambs
 ched. But of course, once
 ive passed on, their fickle
 lays for another.

Izi Glover

Chantal Joffe and Dawn Mellor

Victoria Miro Gallery,
London

Conspicuously curated, this show
 naughtily matchmade the butch
 and femme painting styles of Mel-
 lor and Joffe respectively. Large
 numbers of very small paintings
 by each artist were shown in the
 same space, but were separated by
 being arranged in orderly grids.
 Mellor's paintings are butch both
 in subject and technique: rigidly
 but effectively painted in a stiff,
 dryly opaque, gruntingly baritone
 style, they resemble stolid Latin
 American souvenir painting and
 are almost unrelievedly symmetri-
 cal. Joffe's paintings are lightly
 spontaneous and compositionally
 asymmetrical. Fluidly moist, they
 have a delicate quicksilver move-
 ment, like windswept chiffon to
 Mellor's heavy leather. Mellor's
 works can be seen in relation to,
 but go beyond, a gay art tradition,
 which in her case – because of her
 enthusiastic depictions of female
 torture and cuntal depravity –
 could be called vindaloo dyke.
 Joffe's works are blatantly hetero-
 sexual in their orientation towards
 the family. She is effortlessly flu-

ent in her descriptions of human
 emotions through manipulated
 external appearances.

Seeking to exert a psychologi-
 cal leverage on the viewer, Mellor
 subjects iconic Hollywood females
 – including Marilyn Monroe, Liza
 Minelli, Bette Davis, Diana Dors
 and Shirley Temple – to sexually
 cruel, but unresisted, physical
 tortures. Other aberrances include
 raw cannibalism and sado-
 masochistic auto-eroticism, dis-
 ease and physical deformity, as
 well as lesbian, perhaps incestual,
 paedophilia. These deeply inti-
 mate tortures and sufferances,
 ambiguously inflicted, are in
 ironic contrast to the fixed public
 smiles of the characters in receipt
 of them.

Fetishised hair is a dominant
 theme in the works, and is used as
 a restraint on the characters, ei-
 ther literally or figuratively. When
 not obstructing the eyes as colos-
 sal fringes, it spends a lot of time
 as very long pigtailed disappearing
 into hollow eye sockets, thence
 through bodies, and finally
 emerging out of deep, kippered
 vaginas – as in *Swollen Joan* (1997).
 Mellor disallows vision to her
 characters: eyes – the windows of
 the soul and all that – are denied
 to our gaze. Almost without ex-
 ception, her personas are de-

souled by being blinded by their
 own dumb hair-dos.

In all this, as intended by the
 artist, there is a potentially disre-
 spectful confusion. Heavy, weirdo
 collisions, disloyal collusions and
 anxious transpositions and appro-
 priations occur between gay and
 straight male, feminist and cul-
 tural orthodoxies (heavy duty
 Freudian theory stuff), media and
 fantasy fetichisms, and above all,
 deep sexual pathologies such as
 coprophilia. Although vulnerable
 to the over-seasoning and over-
 sugaring inherent in camp, a
 problem in gay art, Mellor is suc-
 cessfully disquietening and un-
 life-affirming in her take on the
 gender that gave us Rosemary
 West and Myra Hindley.

Joffe's works occupy the
 ground somewhere between the
 instantaneousness of photogra-
 phy and the intensification and
 emphatic distortions of caricature.
 The origin of her subjects is am-
 biguous: at times they seem deeply
 personal, as if from a family photo
 album, and at others as if they
 stem from clothes catalogues or
 advertisements. Her subjects are
 principally female – males are
 usually only present to copulate
 with them, which they do in mutu-
 ally ludicrous, domestic scale
 pornography, such as *Couple 039*



(all works 1997).

Many of the paintings are of children, who squint, peer, pose and pout at – or resent – the viewer, indicating a suspicious, nervousness toward the camera. Overall, the effect is like finding a stranger's wallet or purse, containing personal photographs. This is simultaneously voyeuristically fascinating yet anonymously remote. Even more so when further photos are found, some of which are extremely rude, and which raise an interesting ethical problem in returning them to their owner.

Joffe's observations are compassionately ludicrous; she shows the inherent gormlessness to which we are all susceptible, no matter how cool, and which reveals our greater humanity. Her females, in their nighties, pyjamas, bathing costumes, naughty underwear and best dresses imply greater stories beyond their poses – a more identifiably authentic biography – than is first apparent to us from the subject's intended presentation of self. Although there is occasionally a sinister presence in her works, Joffe usually hints at stories of a greater happiness, momentarily eclipsed by the demands of the camera, or observer. This is a neat, generous reversal of the trick usually played on us, where unhappier stories lurk in the background.

Joffe's depictions of humans are joyously, pleurably insane, as humans can be if approached from the right angle. She has defeated the prejudice against being seen to enjoy the skillful handling of paint by cultivating an apparently flippant style. Similarly, her observations are successfully non-judgmental, again through a superficial frivolity. This extends to her charming pornographies, which can here be seen as just another set of domestic documentaries – the innocence of children, the innocence of porn stars – like having our photos taken while fucking, by mum, for the family album.

Neal Brown