



The sprawling self-portraits of Shadi Al-Atallah convey the cathartic potential of an abundance of feeling

Shadi Al-Atallah is a figurative mixed-media artist currently studying painting at the RCA. Their work gives shape to the realities of queer lived experience, particularly the intersection between queerness, mental health and racial identity.

Earlier this year, Al-Atallah was contacted by Kanye West's creative team and asked to paint the Kardashians for his single, "XTCY". The cover art featured Kim and her family assembled in the booth of a club, leering at the viewer. Aside from this unprompted solicitation from the American music industry, Al-Atallah has been working on a new collection of work, now on show at Cob Gallery.

Al-Atallah paints on canvas using a blend of ink, acrylic and pastels. The canvases are unstretched and pinned to the walls, gesturing towards the possibility that these works are purposefully unfinished. The rough presentation complements the theme of unresolved identity that emerges throughout the series. Al-Atallah evokes the fluidity of identification; the images perpetuate a feeling of flux, heightened by the movement created by the bold, sweeping lines that travel across the canvases. Lacking any sense of closure or certainty, the series is a repudiation of discrete, mutually exclusive categories.

Al-Atallah's self-portraits are situated within familiar spaces. The series is permeated with illustrations that make references to the quotidian – plug sockets, pizza slices and pot plants occupy the background of the frames. However, the artist's representation of the body exceeds the limitations of these domestic environments. Body parts sprawl and coalesce within each frame; some limbs are diminished whilst others are engorged, obscuring our ability to read the body. Swollen breasts dislodged from the figure's chest transform into erect, penetrative organs; fingers and toes become similarly inflated and extend to impossible proportions. These self-portraits do

not assimilate with conventions of the human form, rather limbs emerge from unexpected crevices, twisting uncomfortably in fits of agonising sadness, pleasure or frustration. The figures convulse with an emotion that is conveyed tangibly via their warped postures and enhanced by Al-Atallah's capacity to capture a range of facial expressions.

The works on show are part of a wider series titled "Catharsis." A plethora of affect unfolds within each self-portrait, offering reflections on the experience of feeling a set of emotions that erupt, compound and reverberate beyond our control.

Text by Brodie Crellin

Images courtesy [Cob Gallery](#)