

ARTFORUM

Josephine Pryde

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Building off last year's body of photographs that depicted three young women posed in totemic attitudes of motherhood, Josephine Pryde turns her lens to images of infancy in her latest exhibition (and first in Los Angeles), "*La Vie d'artiste*" (Life of the Artist). Fourteen large photographs from this year capture often awkward and close-up views of a towheaded toddler adrift in a studio setup. All but one are in color and titled *Adoption*, thereby casting the otherwise nonnarrative scenario as a kind of parodic audition for the role of child to an unseen mother or, perhaps, a reverse adoption conducted by the unwitting child in search of a suitable parent.

Given the frequently sentimental and cloying associations of child portraiture, the unflattering character of these shots is something of a relief, but that alone isn't much to be thankful for. Rather, we can be exuberantly thankful for the resonance of the show's title, taken from French songwriter Leo Ferré's achingly sad yet rousing poem "*La Vie d'artiste*," which Pryde performed with piano accompaniment on the exhibition's opening night. It is a devastating, Leonard Cohen-esque ode to loss and disillusionment, culminating with a conflicted affirmation of artistic will and perseverance: "I'll go on with my artist's life."

Pryde's very need to voice such a declaration implies a serious consideration of its opposite, a deep questioning of purpose and practice. Paired with the photographs, Ferré's confessional song (transcribed on cards at the gallery) transforms Pryde's potentially conservative series of images into a poignant, quasi-allegorical gesture that suggests aspects of subjecthood, linking reproduction and artistic practice: the artist as whining infant, the artist as absent mother. Pryde somehow demystifies the romance of "the artist's life" while invoking its chilling poetry.