

Max Wigram Gallery, London
26 June – 31 July

By Martin Coomer

The peregrinations of a vain young man. Beautiful and angry, he strides Manhattan, frowning at his reflection in the window of Cartier, looking aghast at a limo, sliding down the handrail outside St John the Divine. The references are filmic, musical and literary. With his collar up, pulling a cigarette packet from his coat pocket, he's James Dean. Walking in his black boots along the cracks in New York's pavements, he's a young Bob Dylan. In Central Park, where he finds a lumberjack hat, he could be that most iconic of misunderstood adolescents, Holden Caulfield. The sense of shifting personae is accentuated by the fact that Bradley's protagonist in the film *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* (all works 2009) is, once again, Benjamin Brock, an actor used by the artist because of their physical resemblance. Here we hear the angsty Everyman recite snippets from *Novel with Cocaine*, M. Ageyev's 1934 book about hedonism degenerating into oblivion in revolutionary Russia.

What we're seeing is, in effect, a walking, talking Elizabeth Peyton painting. Like Peyton, Bradley seems to be on an endless search for handsome disquiet, serving up an array of fast-fading blooms for us to flit amongst. Both artists' subjects are venerated and yet are somehow trivialised by their evident self-regard, made preposterous by their replaceability. To be truly moved by Bradley's film you'd probably have to be of an age where watching Brit teen drama *Skins* (2007-) takes precedence over sitting through videos in West End galleries, or think that the title of the piece has less to do with Sunset Strip's long history of injustice than with the epic profundities of Green Day. Which it does, in part. As much as he steers towards the authentic, Bradley leaves in his wake a malodorous trail of cultural impurity to wade through.

The work ebbs and flows between youth and maturity, dream and reality, East and West Coast. A native San Franciscan living in New York, Bradley straddles the divide, asking us in the four-screen film *aquaseafoamshame* to return to a deadstock, Kodachrome dreamworld: a child plays on San Francisco's Ocean Beach, but a sense of innocence is shattered by a mysterious spume that floats in on the tide. Surrounding the figures, mostly female nudes, in his large, adulterated photographs are sheets of palladium leaf that, rather than fixing the subjects as icons, tend to splinter into visual static. There could be a sense of magic about this – everything dissolving into its constituent parts – but Bradley's subjects are clearly neither stardust nor golden, and if *aquaseafoamshame* is anything to go by, there's no garden to get ourselves back to. What a crummy place and what phoney, Holden Caulfield might say, unaware that the disappointments of youth are as nothing when compared to those of a fast-approaching middle age. Slater Bradley, by contrast, is thirty-four, and getting better and better.