

Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era - Review by Dany Louise

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Summer of Love provokes instant delight, a rare aesthetic high that continues to bubble as you tour this beautifully conceived and seductive exhibition. From the warm embrace of its freshly painted orange and pink walls to the playfulness, exuberance and variety of the art, this show pushes all the right-on buttons. It's a testament to 1967 and a document of a complex period when 'turn on, tune in, drop out' was a political mantra for young adults.

The twin themes of sixties idealism are explored – a reaching for spiritual enlightenment through folklore and eastern mysticism, and a celebration of technology that to many heralded a brave new future. So Klarwein's painting "A Grain of Sand" strives for cosmic profundity, while the floating amorphous forms of the many mesmerising experimental films anticipate the rave culture of the ecstasy generation by twenty years.

Vitality and streams of day-glo colour reveal the influence of LSD and marijuana – an engine that drove psychedelic work - and this relationship is made explicit in Fahlstrom's piece "Esso-LSD". To look at this and the photograph "Pot is Fun" is to realise how times have changed.

It is impossible to escape a nostalgic reception to this show, so documented and appropriated is the psychedelic iconography. The optimism and innocence apparent in all these works is staggering to our contemporary cynical eyes, uplifting yet bittersweet. It's a reminder of what we've lost and is never coming back. Janis Joplin's hand painted Porsche signals the excess that eventually killed her, and it is possible to read Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored Room Love Forever" in the context of the 1987 Children's Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

In the substantial catalogue, Tate Liverpool Director Christoph Grunenberg argues convincingly that the psychedelic phenomena, brief as it was, impacted beyond its weight in the related fields of film, fashion, design and music. However it has since been marginalized as "anti-academic" in subsequent accepted versions of art history: "tainted by its incestuous relationship with popular culture". *Summer of Love* is a determined effort to re-evaluate this work, and deserves to succeed. The psychedelic influence has underpinned so much of western visual culture over the last 35 years that we've forgotten to notice it. Actually, the strength of its legacy has been repeatedly proven - visiting this show is a welcome reminder.