

SAFE THE BEST FOR LAST
Olivia Steele at Circle Culture Gallery



For the many voices who said Olivia Steele's exhibition "Save the Best for Last" at CircleCulture Gallery is extremely commercial, too commercial even, you are right. But, that doesn't make it bad. For those who cringed at her invocation of the Auschwitz gates, replacing "Arbeit" so they read "Wahrheit Macht Frei"—yes, very, very thin ice. But, that too is not a damnable offence—at least not artistically. In both cases, Steele plays the role of the provocateur, toeing lines that at the very least wake the viewer out of a complacency of looking. With Berlin often bogged down in overly wrought, and often bogus, conceptual gestures, the simplicity of Steele's juxtapositions is refreshing. *I can see clearly now*, 2012, places the titled phrase in blue neon atop an image of an atomic bomb reminiscent of a decal from a '60s boy's lunchbox. Whether taken as a nod to macho Americana—blow 'em away to see to the next frontier—or more introspectively self-destructive, the work speaks in an accessible, simplistic vocabulary.

I dream of you in colors that don't exist, a more simplistic work of blue and white neon attached directly to the wall, similarly shines in ambiguity and irony. Colours being the only word in white, it speaks threefold: the superlative: teenage girl, head over heels, my dreams I can't even describe; the cheeky: I don't dream of you at all; or the ironic: white not being a color, this statement means nothing, so despite my seemingly enthusiastic ovations, I just dream.

That is not to say that there is not more behind the works' semiotic flips. One could read them as linguistic and cultural deconstructions. But, such an intellectualisation belies what makes them worth talking about. They're cool, and they invite you to look rather than think—an exercise of which the scene could use a great deal more.