

Press Release

Claudio Pestana: Fag Attacks the Country

Espacio Gallery
3 – 8 August 2021

“Like a fairy tale, it all started once upon a time – this time in 2020 with the birth of a new world order of ecological dystopia. The woods were quiet, the cows grazed undisturbed, the genteel went about attending to their lawns and vegetable patches, the crows, always suspicious, scanned the rolling hills, when suddenly an evil foreign non-binary Queen arrived in the scene.”



In ‘Fag Attacks the Country’, Claudio Pestana’s first solo exhibition, we are presented with an imaginary Queer space in the English countryside. In this series of paintings, completed during lockdown, Pestana subverts the tradition of the ‘conversation piece’, the eighteenth-century sub-genre of portraiture, which at the time was profitably mastered by the likes of Gainsborough, Devis, and Zoffany. In ‘Fag Attacks the Country’ Pestana challenges the symbolic capital historically attached to the genre and creates an antithesis to the traditional decorum that was obligatorily depicted in the 18th century and beyond.

“During lockdown, whilst social distancing in the depths of Dorset’s countryside, I started thinking about how, as a non-binary foreign person, I fitted into the landscape of the county with its specific social topography. Surrounded by traditional and conservative cultural markers, I started reflecting on the symbolic power that those around me held.

‘Fag Attacks the Country’ explores the intersection between (my) Queerness, the rural, and the tradition of portraiture and landscape painting. The paintings started as a spontaneous gesture that arose after I suddenly became aware of how my Queerness might be perceived in the rural community where I was living. I started feeling a

rebellious and subversive energy arising in me, which led me to create an imaginary rural world where I arrived as a Fag (I consciously adopt this term as a way of hijacking the language of the abuser) and affronted the status quo of those who commanded social power.

As I reflected further on this series, I also started thinking about these paintings in relation to the historical context of portraiture and landscape painting and how at some stage these were combined to create a new genre. For example, in 'Mr and Mrs Andrews' (1750), Gainsborough was not merely putting two distinctive painting genres together on canvas, he was creating a painting, naturally of its time, that reflected how both portraits and landscape paintings were symbols of wealth and status. In these paintings the sitters invariably displayed their best clothes and showed off their estate, whilst often excluding their workforce. My next gesture was to intentionally subvert the tradition of landscape and portraiture. In 'Fag Attacks the Country' the main protagonist is an outsider - a provocatively (un)dressed gender bender antagonist who invades the rural landscape and affronts the locals. In these paintings I am Queering both my living environment and the tradition of painting."

About the artist

Claudio Pestana was born in Portugal in 1974, and lives and works between London and Dorset, England. First trained as a psychologist, Pestana also engaged in art making as a self-taught artist before receiving his MA in Fine Art Painting from Camberwell College of Arts, London, in 2020.

Pestana has collaborated with other artists on several art projects and in 2020 his work was included in the London Grads Now exhibition at The Saatchi Gallery in London. In 2021 Pestana was awarded the Abbey Scholarship in Painting 2021-22 with a residency at The British School at Rome.

Pestana's practice is eclectic and encompasses painting, drawing, ceramics, found objects, photography, video, sound, and text. Pestana recurrently explores themes of identity, history, nature, and violence. The artist draws particular attention to how violence is exercised through the Spectacle and representations of myths. The artist also has an interest in the politics of memory and how certain stories get to be told and remembered whilst others are suppressed and forgotten.

For additional information, please contact:

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Espacio Gallery
159 BETHNAL GREEN ROAD LONDON E2 7DG

OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY – SATURDAY 1 – 7 PM
SUNDAY 1 – 5 PM

Images: © Claudio Pestana

Claudio Pestana
Fag Attacks the Country XXIII
2021
Acrylic on canvas
148 X 118 cm

Claudio Pestana
Fag Attacks the Country XXIV
2021
Acrylic on canvas
148 X 118 cm