

Mousse Magazine

EXHIBITIONS

Dalton Gata "The Gaze Is Downstairs" at The Sunday Painter, London



In "The Gaze is Downstairs", Dalton Gata mines the tropes of theatre, stagecraft, and exhibition-making to illustrate the ways in which performance and artifice impact our collective idea of migration. The exhibition revolves around a reclaimed wood life-raft packed with over a range of characters, all of whom display an uncanny awareness that they are being looked at. Wooden rafts not unlike this one are commonly used by Cuban immigrants attempting the crossing to the United States mainland. In Gata's installation, the characters aboard it are engaged in a spectacle of some sort, with dramatic poses and extravagant outfits, a chaotic aesthetic that can only result from design and focused intention. The audience is portrayed in black and white on the large canvas facing the raft, a carnivalesque row of figures staring at the production with inscrutable expressions that belie their outward eccentricities. Positioning the viewer in an unstable position somewhere between subject and audience, the viewer is able to walk around the raft and notice the rough construction of the figures hinting at the insecurity that lies beneath the artifice and outward portrayal – no effort is made to hide the staged nature of the scene.

Misleading perspectives and impossible expectations are at the centre of Gata's interests. Through his multi-disciplinary practice, he consistently explores the new dynamics that play out when cultural symbols and imposed registers of meaning disrupt personal narratives and familiar contexts. The subjects in the life-raft are performing for the benefit of their audience, displaying symbols of the materialistic success that migrants are often led to expect, with the reality usually being much less attractive. The black and white figures can be taken as a stand-in for their compatriots who remained, gazing at the spectacle of apparent wealth with which their relatives try to communicate peace of mind and future luxury. The expectant figures could also signify the new society that greets them with scrutiny, not unlike the way in which a viewer gazes at a portrait. Gata's work seizes on portraiture and the legacy of surrealism to encourage psychological intimacy between his subjects and viewers, prompting questions about preconceived notions of identity and one's own image-building.

Gata's unique vision and aesthetic signature bubble across a multitude of mediums, occupying the entire space of the gallery. His work in painting, photography, drawing, and installation is characterized by a highly stylized realism that, although deeply referential, frequently borders on the imaginary. The male figure is often centralized amongst the Caribbean landscape and flora. Friends, lovers, pets, internet findings, fashion, drag, design, and fantastical creatures are a few of the elements that inhabit his charged universe.

PERES PROJECTS



Imagen destacada: Vista de la exposición *It ain't necessarily so*, de Dalton Gata, en Galería Agustina Ferreyra, Ciudad de México, 2019. Cortesía del artista y Galería Agustina Ferreyra, México. © Dalton Gata