

Contrariety: Farley Aguilar at Edel Assanti

18 October 2019

Jillian Knipe



Farley Aguilar, *Breaker Boys*, 2019, oil, oil stick, and pencil on linen, 185.4 x 259.1 cm Installation images by Will Amlot Studio. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Edel Assanti

Farley Aguilar is a figurative painter. At Edel Assanti he presents his crowds and pairings of adults and children from a recognisable past of top hats and parasols, beside their barefooted opposites. Some are dressed in the well worn, gently painted clothing of labour. Some bask in decadent surroundings, the paint globby blobbing here, scratchy scribbling there. His images are rich with symbols of overentitled wealth, cruel poverty, civil war, the American flag, and the looming presence of the oppressive ruling class in a series, prompted in part by Thomas Piketty's seminal 2013 book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* which declares that increasing inequality results from the inherited wealth of pre and post war eras.

If "figurative painter" is Aguilar's classification then the assertion is there will be some sort of representation of the body in the paintings. And indeed there is. Though their visible outlines push them towards sketchbook drawings, more caricatures than characters. Still, they're not illustrations, they're paintings. And it's their colouring in and erratic patterning embedded in drama which makes them sing, or moreover, scream. They could be viewed in the same way as

the work of UK's Grant Foster or the Australian painter Helen Johnson whose *Warm Ties* draped the ICA in 2017. At their heart they are the stuff of paint.

Contrariety is the name of the show and of course there's the drastic contrast between the presentation of the have lots and have nots; the blatant, blackened wrongness of the former. But it is the sheer application of paint which carries the work and delivers the political message, the despairing frustration, the shrieking terror. The devil is not only in the detail, the devil is smeared all over the surface! And so, do we still refer to Farley Aguilar as a figurative painter? Perhaps the contrariness is not only in his subject but also lies with entrapping him and others like him in these shorthand categories. These are works which share at least equal ground with the drastic urgency of their abstract expressionist predecessors as they do with age old, meticulous renditions of the aristocracy.

Farley Aguilar's solo exhibition *Contrariety* at Edel Assanti runs until 19 October.