

Farley Aguilar: The Age of Effluence

23 March - 11 May 2024

Opening reception | Saturday 23 March, 11-6pm



Edel Assanti is pleased to present *The Age of Effluence*, Farley Aguilar's second solo exhibition at the gallery.

Farley Aguilar's evocative and unsettling painted scenes question habitual modes of behaviour and the social facade of community. Working from found photographs of crowds, portraits and historical reportage, the Miami-based painter probes social constructs such as group identity, political allegiance and cultural ritual.

The Age of Effluence addresses the moral complexity at the heart of all narratives of human progress. In a targeted juxtaposition, the seven new paintings depict historically noteworthy scientists alongside vulnerable communities, the latter of whom bore the costs of extractive and ecologically unsustainable practices. Informed by *Something New Under the Sun* (2000), J. R. McNeill's environmental history of the twentieth century, Aguilar's latest series explores the dichotomy between human ingenuity and the limitations of nature, showing how creativity, when filtered through an ideology prioritising growth and profit above all else, can have perilous effects.

Double Portrait of Thomas Midgley represents the duality of the American chemical engineer's inventions. Midgley had a prolific career at General Motors in the first half of the 20th century and over the course of his career was granted more than 100 patents. Amongst these, however, were his two most notorious and disastrous inventions:

leaded gasoline and some of the first chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), both of which were eventually banned due to their adverse health and environmental impacts.

In Aguilar's portrait of Fritz Haber, the German scientist stands in a laboratory holding a watch, a symbol of precision and control. Haber received the Nobel Prize in 1918 for his invention of the Haber-Bosch process, enabling the mass production of agricultural fertilisers, supporting food supply for nearly half of the world's population. Haber, like Midgley, however, is a scientist defined by two faces: during World War I, Haber fronted the weaponisation of chlorine gas, an innovation for which he was dubbed the 'father of chemical warfare'.

The uncanny dispositions of Aguilar's renderings of Midgley and Haber reflect a contradiction between good and evil, innovation and destruction, or progress and ethical setback. Aguilar's technical approach adds further layers of ambiguity, combining all manner of brushwork, oil stick and pencil to resurrect his contentious subjects in hallucinant colour. Expressive application meets tight, serrated outlines, springing the figures from their textured backgrounds. At times paint is applied directly from the tube, with markings violently scratched into the surface of canvas. Faces are obscured by ghoulish masks – crossed out eyes, distorted heads and sewn up mouths, summoning the darkest aspects of our raw nature.

Elsewhere, Aguilar utilises childhood as a motif to evoke a future in jeopardy for short-term gains. *Effluent* depicts three teenage survivors of the Minamata tragedy in Japan, caused by the release of methylmercury from a chemical factory, and *The Bereft* shows a group of children in the aftermath of the Aberfan mining disaster of 1966.

Intervening with the construction of history via the archive, Aguilar's use of specific case studies demonstrates the pitfalls of allowing progress and profit to supersede ethical values. Conversely, the series of paintings in *The Age of Effluence* reveal the limitations of interpreting past events through the prism of moral binaries, from a perspective of contemporary hindsight. Aguilar's figures beckon to us from across the void, their gestures rife with frustration, terror and hope.

Notes to Editors

About Farley Aguilar

Farley Aguilar (b. 1980, Managua, Nicaragua) lives and works in Miami. Recent exhibitions include HOW Museum, Shanghai, China (forthcoming); *South Florida Cultural Consortium*, Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Miami, USA (2023); *Fur & Flood*, SPURS Gallery, Beijing, China (2022); *Phantom Limb*, Night Gallery, Los Angeles, USA (2022); *Savage Effete*, SPURS Gallery, Beijing, China (2021); *Closed Game*, Lyles & King, New York, USA (2021); *Preludes*, Edel Assanti, London, UK (2021); *Cleansing*, Lyles & King, New York, USA (2019); *We are the people. Who are you?*, Edel Assanti, London, UK (2019); *Shifting Gaze: A Reconstruction of the Black & Hispanic Body in Contemporary Art*, The Mennello Museum, Orlando, USA (2018) and *Temporary Autonomous Zones*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, USA (2015). His work is included in the collections of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, USA; Long Museum, Shanghai, China; Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China; The Akron Art Museum, Ohio, USA; Pérez Art Museum, Florida, USA; Brown University, Providence, USA; and the Orlando Museum of Art, Florida, USA.

About Edel Assanti

Edel Assanti was founded in 2010 by Jeremy Epstein and Charlie Fellowes. Established in London, the gallery works with international artists whose practices engage with the social, cultural or political realities. Edel Assanti's programme's tendency towards interdisciplinary, research-led work demonstrates how artists are uniquely positioned to witness and distill the complex narratives that define our era.

Having been located in London's Fitzrovia since 2014, in 2022 Edel Assanti opened 4,000 square foot gallery in a renovated listed building on Little Titchfield Street. The gallery's premises play host to a dynamic events programme in parallel to gallery exhibitions: talks, performances, screenings and live music. Edel Assanti's digital presence encompasses a multi-chapter series of artist video interviews, alongside short films published to accompany exhibitions.

The gallery hosts an annual gallery residency, giving overseas colleagues an opportunity to present an exhibition in London. We also produce biannual expansive group presentations addressing subjects of cultural and societal urgency.

In 2021 Edel Assanti founded London Gallery Weekend (LGW), an annual celebration of London's diverse gallery community bringing together 140 contemporary London galleries. Now in its third year, the gallery remains at LGW's helm. Chief amongst LGW's initiatives is an ambitious partnership with Art Fund enhancing the relationship between London's galleries and regional museums across the UK, via a research focus group and a travel bursary scheme for regional curators.

Contact Us

For further press information and high-res images please contact: press@edelassanti.com

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