



The Village
An exhibition of works by
Adam Alessi
CLEARING, New York
May 31 - July 9, 2023

Adam Alessi's unforgettable vision is unfurled on a grand scale in *The Village*. It is Alessi's first solo show in New York, and the most thorough presentation from a singular member of a new generation of Los Angeles painters.

Through a series of the artist's largest-ever canvases as well as a series of drawings, Alessi conjures arresting figures that seem pulled from the grotesqueries of Germanic fairy tales. They could be barflies in the dankest absinthe boite in fin-de-siècle Paris. Or dancers at a masked ball in a fargone Venice of the mind. But *really* they come from the deep recesses of the mind of the artist, who maintains a darkly comic tone throughout the show. He's always winking from behind the curtain.

To be in the presence of these paintings is to drink them in. Over the course of several visits to Alessi's studio in Highland Park (and over Belgian beers at El Prado after), we talked about these creatures that emerged from his brain and became real on the canvases. In time I saw the evolution of a group of townspeople that emerged from the subconscious. They came from a nowhere place that haunted the artist and will now haunt the viewer.

"I used to have a lot of really insane dreams, a lot of crazy sleep paralysis dreams," Alessi told me, walking around the studio. "It's not something I seek out. There's so much impending doom, I constantly feel like something's on my back, and especially in the last few years it's been so heightened, and I think that's *why* I'm able to dive into it. But I don't know where it came from."

Alessi is self-taught, which may account for the eerily funny, removed-from-time mood he creates. The unearthly figures seep right into your skin. He's not toying with the idea of queasiness in a postmodern way. The horror is gothic in its directness. He starts with drawings as an initial idea then moves to oil on canvas, first incorporating a color field or calico backdrop. Then he allows for the figure to arrive by improvising, birthing twisted visages that seem both uncannily familiar and completely novel.

And when the warmth of familiarity meets the shock of the new, the paintings transcend. They bring to mind the oddity of Ensor meets the tipsy brattiness of Toulouse-Lautrec. They revel in a Rose Period-ish obsession with minstrels, vagabonds, clowns and harlequins. There's a deranged chef in *Chef*. There's a set of murder-eyed twins in *Dancers (Twins)*. There's a twisted nightclub stomped by spiky heels in *Masquerade*. But these, these, these... *things*, they're all mired in an otherworldliness that makes them camp vampires, or kooky Cronenbergian extraterrestrials.

There's simply nobody making paintings this deeply alluring and deeply strange. It's almost as if Alessi, with his dreamy dandies drawn from Klimt and Manga comics and Tuymans, is airdropping his paintings in from a Victorian era that possibly never existed.

And after I returned to the studio weeks before the show was set to open, Alessi showed me a nearly complete work. It was a jester in a cap 'n' bells with a face clenched in agony and ecstasy. His shadow is immense in the background as if he'd been hit with a globe-destroying flash of light. It's something of an anchor to a bold group of spellbinding works. It's a show of lost thoughts died and reborn as gives-no-fucks self-assured paintings on canvas, the inception of a world inhabited by gorgeous phantoms. The monster is a dream and it's real.

- Nate Freeman

Adam Alessi (born 1994 in Camarillo, USA) lives and works in Los Angeles.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at C L E A R I N G Brussels, and Smart Objects, Los Angeles.

His work has been included in group exhibitions at C L E A R I N G, New York and Los Angeles; NADA House with Zoe Fisher Projects, New York; Felix Art Fair with M+B, Los Angeles; and Public Gallery, London.