

Alessandro Pessoli: Carousel

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Alessandro Pessoli's bright and loose paintings of naked teenagers with wings and claws float a few inches off the wall on the third floor of Anton Kern Gallery. His characters, which include Adam, Eve, and a young William Blake, are joined by more generic figures like a boy king, a spring devil, and a sunflower angel. It's a mostly nude assembly—except for Adam and Eva who have presumably departed the garden—and the blissed out and unbothered expressions Pessoli has given this merry band signal the kind of pleasure that fears no consequence. It's the look of insouciance, reckless and joyful, unblemished by trauma. The exhibition feels just right for the coming of spring.

There are 11 paintings of figures and one smaller work that shares the name of the exhibition, *Carousel*. The 11 figurative works are all the basic shape of body-length mirrors and nearly the same size. This scale sets up a proportional relationship with the



Alessandro Pessoli, *Carousel*, 2021. Oil, spray paint, and pencil on wood panel, 30 x 24 1/2 inches. © Alessandro Pessoli. Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York.



Alessandro Pessoli, *the Justice*, 2021. Oil, oil stick, oil pastels, spray paint, colored pencils, and pencil on wood panel, 60 x 30 inches.

© Alessandro Pessoli.

Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

viewer's body that gives the paintings a sense of weight, despite the ethereal quality Pessoli achieves with his surfaces. It looks like he paints fast, but with a clear and determined sense of how he wants the composition to evolve. Many of his choices, like the tail on the figure in *Jung William Blake* (all works 2021) that is simply a shape outlined in

pencil, communicate the desire to capture something in emergence, a feeling that emanates potential rather than any kind of conclusion.

The surfaces of Pessoli's paintings teem with a diversity of mark making, which is part of what gives them their sketchbook quality. He uses pencils and stencils, oil sticks and spray paint, pastels and oil paint; all of them come together in an elegant play of texture which is especially charged when the viewer moves around the wooden panels and the gallery light rakes across the matte and reflective zones. Getting within a nose of the works is irresistible—something about the size drew me in—and is often rewarded with delightful little details. A thin pencil inscription just above the hilt on the sword of *the Justice* reads “Love Forever,” which seems comical because the nonchalant lady has her foot on a cartoony serpent in ridiculous distress.

In his artist statement, Pessoli likens the shape of his panels to smart-phone screens and tarot cards. This comes from their rounded corners and the dark band of paint that frames each painting, as well as pencil-written titles at the base of the works. While I find the physical relationship somewhat trifling, I'm compelled by the symbolic interplay between phone, tarot card, and painting. Knowing that the artist produced these works during a pandemic, the sense of connecting with people (or not) as well as connecting with something more mystical (or not) feels heightened. Pessoli places references to the Bible beside references to Disney—lots of chirpy bluebirds—and collapses the distinction, which feels right in the sense that entertainment has become an ideology in the US, where the Italian artist has made his home.

Additionally, Pessoli draws on the western canon of art history for motifs and posture. *the Justice*, *the Destiny*, and *the Victory* all bring to mind classical images of bathing nymphs, but with their weapons on display and their opponents—serpents and some sort of winged,



Alessandro Pessoli, *Jung Adam*, 2021. Oil, oil pastels, spray paint, colored pencils, and pencil on wood panel 60 x 30 inches. © Alessandro Pessoli. Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

ground with perhaps a serpent or a bird or a few flowers and skulls. The figures are not only isolated, but many of them are delightfully beastly: Adam's hand is a colored pencil paw, rainbow winglets adorn the angels, cheerful worms emerge from the breasts of various characters. The transformative nature fits well with the youthfulness of the figures and the essential lack of resolution mirrors the aesthetic qualities Pessoli set out to achieve. While all these generic symbols send out lines to myriad referents, they are not dependent on any of them. The works are a pleasure of their own.

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