

UNION PACIFIC

17 Goulston Street

London E1 7TP (UK)

+44 (0) 207 247 61 61

ULALA IMAI

LOVERS

20 APRIL - 16 MAY 2020

At first glance, Ulala Imai's paintings—depicting closely cropped views of simple foods, figurines and ornaments grouped together on display, or dinner tables cluttered with toys and ingredients—seem like glimpses of a personal routine; each one a little homage to the details of her daily life. But something about their focus and simplicity also reminds me of the writer and psychoanalyst Marion Milner's study *A Life of One's Own*—her pursuit of a keener self-awareness through recording each of her fleeting observations, and their connection to the life she shared with others, or to "the whole intricate texture of communal living," as she described it. In *LOVERS* this "intricate texture" finds its form where light appears to spill over, or even glow from within, the objects of Imai's attention. As with all of Imai's colours, white for example is never a stable entity but always on the cusp of shifting into the palest of pinks, greens or yellows—even when awash with grey the light here seems to be in constant movement. Taken together they form less a narrative of a life, than a stream of images in what feels like a continuous present. This movement could be a telling of its own kind; as David Batchelor describes in his slim defence of colour, *Chromophobia*; "to attend to colour, then, is in part to attend to the limits of language. It is to try to imagine, often through the medium of language, what a world without language might be like."

In many of her paintings toys loop their arms around each other as though posing for a photograph, or they're caught surprised in mid-motion, wrestling each other to the ground. At other times they stare into the middle distance, wearing a bowl as a hat and ruminating over a glass of wine, or leaning on one another for a family portrait. The figures of the *DON KOARAONE FAMILY* (2019) (one toy's genuine resemblance to Marlon Brando aside) actually seem intent on being taken seriously. There is something absurd about so lovingly depicting the objects and materials at hand, in the flair of staging such mild events. The register is very slightly but undeniably comic, in that the earnest expression of each portrait contrasts with a more diffuse absorption in everyday detail—the works are all of course observations of an intimate universe, but they sit somewhere between straightforward depiction, and the re-enactment of a memory or a scene. As such they illuminate the habits of attention that form consciousness, but they also speak of imaginative association—and importantly, of companionship and care.

Ulala Imai, born in 1982, graduate of Tama Art graduation school, recent exhibitions include *The Sentimental Organization of the World*, Galerie Crevecoeur, Paris, nidi gallery, Tokyo, XYZ collective, Tokyo. Upcoming shows include a solo show Nonaka Hill, LA.



UNION PACIFIC

17 Goulston Street

London E1 7TP (UK)

+44 (0) 207 247 61 61

GIOVANNI COPELLI

AMOR SACRO

20 APRIL - 16 MAY 2020

Amor Sacro, is the most transcending experience. Meaning "Sacred Love" in English, there is no such higher form of love: it means to give oneself most fully and completely to another; yet as suggested by its very wording, that another is supposedly God. This is the sacrifice of the clergy. Nonetheless, Copelli's figurative paintings of strong colour, offer us a less virginal sight to consider — one that is equally devoted and even Catholic, but mostly queer.

Aligned with Italian Renaissance aesthetics, Copelli's paintings take us to the streets of Venice, Florence and the cathedrals of Rome, the architecture is fully dominant of its scene. It creates a tragic setting for intimate desire and dark romance, worthy of a Casanova's tale or a Vivaldi's Opera. The subjects of the paintings are represented in the middle of the piazza, at night or dusk; yet curiously they are tied up with ropes, naked, their bodies depicted as muscly with long penises — profusely homoerotic. Or, at times the figures are hidden whispering to each other, as if in secret.

Giovanni Copelli takes his inspiration from real characters of the Renaissance, such as Frederick Rolfe also known as Baron Corvo. An English man and writer, who converted to Roman Catholicism and spent most of his life in Venice writing eccentric tales of saints behaving like pagan gods. A number of British homosexuals converted to Catholicism or returned to the faith (most notably Oscar Wilde) because they would identify with elements that would touch directly on their life as a closeted men. Along with a fascination for the Church's emphasis on the absolution of sins, or more cultural components. Like the incredible and heterogeneous pantheon of saints and rites that embodied a queer and camp sensibility and escaped the rigour of Anglican tradition of the time. Furthermore, Italy was then a society that was ambiguously tolerant (the famed Italian omertà) of the sexual taste of foreign tourists.

The idea of total submission to one another of Amor Sacro, is performed in the paintings through the image of sexual submission, which opens up a space for queer imaginings of desire and eroticism from within the luxurious aesthetics of Catholic devotion. But also, the figure of the chained man, resembles the martyr and represents the condition of the closeted man. Rather than telling a particular story, Copelli's paintings shape a specific mood, through this exhibition the work frames the idealisation of aesthetic and cultural values that can be made extremely personal and idiosyncratic.

Text By Mariana Lemos

Giovanni Copelli, born 1989, graduated at Goldsmiths college, University of London, recent exhibitions include A cavallo (Monumenti equestri e altre pitture), Operativa, Roma; In the Spirit of Being With, cripta747, Turin

