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Justin Fitzpatrick, *Cat infected with daisies*, 2017, oil on canvas, 37 x 28 3/4".

## Justin Fitzpatrick

GALERIE SULTANA

A gas pump with two backward-counting clockfaces in place of a meter (*Time Pump*, all works 2017) established the theme of time travel in Justin Fitzpatrick's recent show. Suggesting ghosts from the past poking urgently into the present, several white-cast resin fingers protrude from the braided-rope base of the sculpture. Creepy though this imagery may be, the inspiration for Fitzpatrick's work is not science fiction, but rather a cult historiographical text by author and activist Arthur Evans, whose 1978 book, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, argues that accurate accounts of gay culture are nonexistent due to systematic suppression by the heteronormative patriarchy. Taking up Evans's revisionist cause ("We will have to write our own history"), Fitzpatrick has reappropriated iconography from Art Deco posters, social realist murals, medieval heraldry, and Celtic illumination and—to borrow the artist's own terminology—has "infected" these disparate art-historical references with queerness.

Infection as a metaphor for any foreign entity that enters a body and alters its constitution from within spread across several small oil paintings on view. In *Cat infected with daisies*,

a silhouetted feline slinks down a flight of stairs toward a distant rainbow-crowned doorway. Delicate curvilinear brushstrokes in pale pink and coral, which alternately circumscribe and penetrate the cat's body, emphasize the animal's graceful posture, transforming it into a kind of calligraphic flourish—a response, perhaps, to Théophile Steinlen's iconic 1896 Art Nouveau poster advertising the *Chat Noir* cabaret in Paris, wherein a cat's curled tail interrupts the typography. As made clear by the title, infection comes from three small flowers hovering near the cat's body. Innocent though they appear, these ostensibly malignant blossoms cropped up again in *Medieval Hare infected with daisies*. Permeated by excessive ornamental curlicues, this green rabbit revives the flamboyancy of medieval heraldry.

In two slightly larger and more complex compositions featuring human figures, Fitzpatrick injects gay themes into civic and religious scenes. *Town planners (Demi-Urges)*, a romantic Diego Rivera-esque ode to urban development, shows three muscly workmen symmetrically posed against a moonlit sky. A central figure in a tank top, work boots, and yellow hard hat faces away from the viewer with his hands on his hips and is flanked by two identically clad men. Rising up between the straddled legs of the triumphant main figure, a single daisy contests the typical macho, nationalist, and utopian implications of the tableau. In *Uranian Monks* (whose title uses a nineteenth-century pseudoscientific term coined by German writer and gay activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs to describe homosexuality), two male bodies overlap and conjoin into a single contorted form, recalling the figures on a face card. A glowing yellow double-sided phallus appears where the figures' midsections come together. Pointedly, the abstract shape of the coital embrace recalls the ornate historiated initials found in medieval manuscripts. By embellishing historical iconography with flowers, flourishes, and phalluses, Fitzpatrick convincingly rewrites the past and its mythologies in his own terms.

—Mara Hoberman

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