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At Night Gallery, Chaz Guest Paints His Own Superheroes

by Ricky Amadour
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Artist Chaz Guest's current solo show "Gaining Pride with Promises Broken," his first at Night Gallery in Los Angeles, opens with a grouping of intimate paintings exploring themes of war, domesticity and Black life. In this milieu, the artist uplifts the Black experience with dignity, while negotiating the many instances in which race has been interpreted in American culture and media. Guest aims to build new meanings to historical events with the creation of fictional superheroes, including his Buffalo Warrior—an imagined figure based on the Buffalo Soldiers, Black members of the 10th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. His paintings not only serve as documents to an almost forgotten history but help to capture the beauty and temperament of quotidian life.

Ricky Amadour: What is "Gaining Pride with Promises Broken" about?

Chaz Guest: Oh boy. This show is pretty much a continuation of the greater story our American fabric. I am a painter and I have established a personal and prideful voice about these individuals that come from my own imagination.

RA: What materials do you use for your paintings?

CG: I use everything I can get my hands on, but most of the time I'm using Japanese Sumi ink. I try to abandon too much thinking. And then I go back into it with my oil paint. If you look at the body of works that I have created, I try to move so desperately towards authenticity that I will find myself using actual things like Japanese *zori* sandals, or rope, or sand from a bull fighting ring or wood, or, you know, those kind of things just help me move myself closer to what it is I'm trying to investigate in the most authentic way.

RA: As a largely self-taught artist, how does this translate into your process of choosing figures?

CG: First of all, I haven't been introduced to the idea that someone is telling me where something goes, or how you should put this here or put this there. I get to rely solely on my feelings and information that I get from nature, strength and I feel that I think that resonates with others. My paintings are void of academia; I think it speaks to our experiences as people.

CHAZ GUEST

RA: Do your characters ever manifest from dreams or real-life experiences?

CG: Definitely real-life experiences. My superhero comes from a desire to have a hero that looked like me. I've conjured this whole saga of Buffalo Warrior and I hitch that to historical war scenes of Buffalo Soldiers from the Civil War. I want to introduce the public to a Black household that you never got to see. My superhero is trying to write these wrongs as a universal citizen, a universal superhero.



Chaz Guest. Photography by Mark Hanauer.

RA: Do your figures play on other representations of superheroes?

CG: Yeah, they used to have these horrible cartoons. As a child I saw the incredible Hulk, Captain America and the Mighty Thor. I didn't recognize it then but growing up watching white America make Black, Brown and Asian people look their worst ever... they made everybody look crazy. From all of that, as an adult now, and as an artist, I try to change the dynamics. My superhero and everything about my whole person are about wanting to reintroduce the world to who we really are, instead of what the media



Chaz Guest, *She's Got His Back*, 2020.

Photography by Nik Massey, courtesy the artist and Night Gallery, Los Angeles.