

**Tell us we belong****Clara-Lane Lens****04.06 - 23.07.2022**

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"Tell us we belong" is the latest exhibition of Berlin-based Belgian artist Clara-Lane Lens, and a continuation of her 'genderless series'. Here the duality of individualism vs collectivism is put on a pedestal. A series of portraits of friends and acquaintances Clara Lane has met throughout her years in Berlin and Brussels, becomes a chronicle of the collective desire to be seen as individuals, in a world where a sense of belonging has never been more elusive.

Clara-Lane seeks to illustrate the most intimate moments of one's existence in her portraits; the moments when one's metaphorical 'walls' are down, and vulnerabilities become visible for others to bear witness. She places her models in intimate settings in their own homes, namely bedrooms or bathrooms. These are spaces in which they often find themselves alone and emotionally unfiltered. In her portraits, Clara-Lane highlights the specific characteristics that, to her, define who her subjects are. These characteristics need not be physical; she paints her subjects until they become recognisable to her. In a way she meets them for a second time on the canvas.

Clara-Lane paints her subjects as androgynes, transforming their physical characteristics beyond conventional masculine or feminine forms, focusing on their emotive power. The snapshots of her subjects, frozen in a moment like statues, have a presence beyond masculine or feminine. Their appearance may be soft, silent and withholding of secrets only they could know, but their emotional charge radiates loudly and instils a sense of familiarity in viewers. Perhaps you know this person. Perhaps you are this person. To see yourself in another human, to empathise irrespective of gender allows for a new sense of belonging.

In her previous works, Clara-Lane avoided painting sexual organs or other parts of the body typically defined to certain genders. The works on display here, do not hide these parts, marking a conceptual development which came out of her process. Gendered organs, for her, as well as for her subjects, do not define gender. The works - now more daring - show an evolution not only in the choice of colour, and expressivity in composition, but in ideology. Nothing is to be hidden. Nothing is to be censored.

Another important development in her recent work is the inclusion of animal subjects in the scenery. In 2021 Clara Lane was gifted a fertilised quail egg, in which she and her partner incubated and cared for until the Quail, later named God, was hatched. For two months God was a significant part of her life, and an exercise in itself in care, responsibility and dependency. She began to see the same expressivity, the same emotional intricacy she had always seen in her human subjects in another species. In the two paintings featuring God, any sense of cross-species hierarchy is destroyed

The walls of the exhibition are adorned with stars. Rough, naïve, and unfinished, the stars become the leitmotif, finding themselves alongside some of the portraits. The simplicity of the stars, devoid of any emotion, further exaggerate the emotional complexity of the portraits. The idea of looking to the stars for answers, present in astrology as well as in the idolisation of pop-culture "stars", is of particular interest to Clara-Lane. Stars, today, are a kind of living Gods, and her subjects, frozen in thought like sculptures, become stars in and of themselves.