



In love: on the art of Angharad Williams

by Stefano Faoro

*Spending time with Angharad Williams' work raises
some questions: how much does an artwork exist?
What are the politics of latency?*

"I feel tired, but in love."

*Quote from a TikTok video by a young intern talking to his boss during the
construction of a temporary stage for a summer music festival on the Italian coast.*

In the text of Angharad Williams' 2021 Vienna solo exhibition *High Horse* at Kevin Space, one can find glimpses of what her practice, in general and on this particular occasion, might be about: "systemic social imbalances", "pathological individualism", "binary world views of good and bad, right and wrong, friend and foe." [1] Among other works, the exhibition displayed a high amount (if we consider a contemporary ordinary painting display) of stretched white canvases that host the acrylic painted serif typeface "Love", each letter a different

color, with different color combinations conjugated in the paintings. The works, all *Untitled*, all 2021, actively occupy the room, block the doorways and windows, adapt to the corners, get smaller or bigger, compress or stretch out.



Angharad Williams, installation view of "High Horse" at Kevin Space, 2021. Photo: Maximilian Anelli-Monti. Courtesy of Kevin Space and the artist.

"Corporate design" is one of the references mentioned in the press release, and one of today's sectors of branding. "Branding is a distinctive mode of capital accumulation, [...] it is one such technique, distinctive because it generates profits by creating and then exploiting various sorts of social dependency. [With it,] multinational companies are making aggressive moves around the globe, pushing the boundaries of law and public expectations." [2] In other words, branding is a powerful contemporary instrument used to increase and differentiate the production of value and to conquer space in new markets and social and economic territories. It is a tool to expand not only corporate powers, but any form of capitalization of human production and life, given that nowadays such forms tend to present themselves through a more or less articulated brand. Branding is closely related to another movement of conquest and social transformation that characterizes these days' metropolitan areas: gentrification, a phenomenon in which artists and the artworld in general, as it is well known, have always had an important role. Going further, we can consider how gentrification is nothing but the continuum of colonialism: "a continued

obsession of modern era settlement in supposed new territories, namely the untamed city.” The “modern man’s land and human exploitation [in which] a number of individuals amass wealth and power [...] while scores of urban residents are displaced.” [3]

Going back to what Williams’ paintings say (“Love”), we could think of how some of the agents of colonialism, gentrifications and unpaid labor operating in the name of the “experience economy” are usually, and somewhat, unaware of the overall process they find themselves in. If they *are* aware, they embed a spirit of conquest and sacrifice that allows them to believe they are acting for a supposed greater good. They believe they are on the right side of history. They think they are, like the interviewed intern quoted in the introduction of this text, *in love*. In this instance, love means structural confusion and the product of manipulation. Think of the settlers in the early occupation of a colonized territory, the exploitation of former industrial areas by the creative communities, or seasonal adolescent workers in the cultural events of a European summer. All of these subjectivities seem to exist, at least at the beginning, on a different ontological level from what surrounds them. There is nothing stable about them; they appear as different, new, and suspicious. They have nothing to lose, seizing moments characterized by classist and racial violence. They are the violent beginnings of any capital’s form of primitive accumulation.



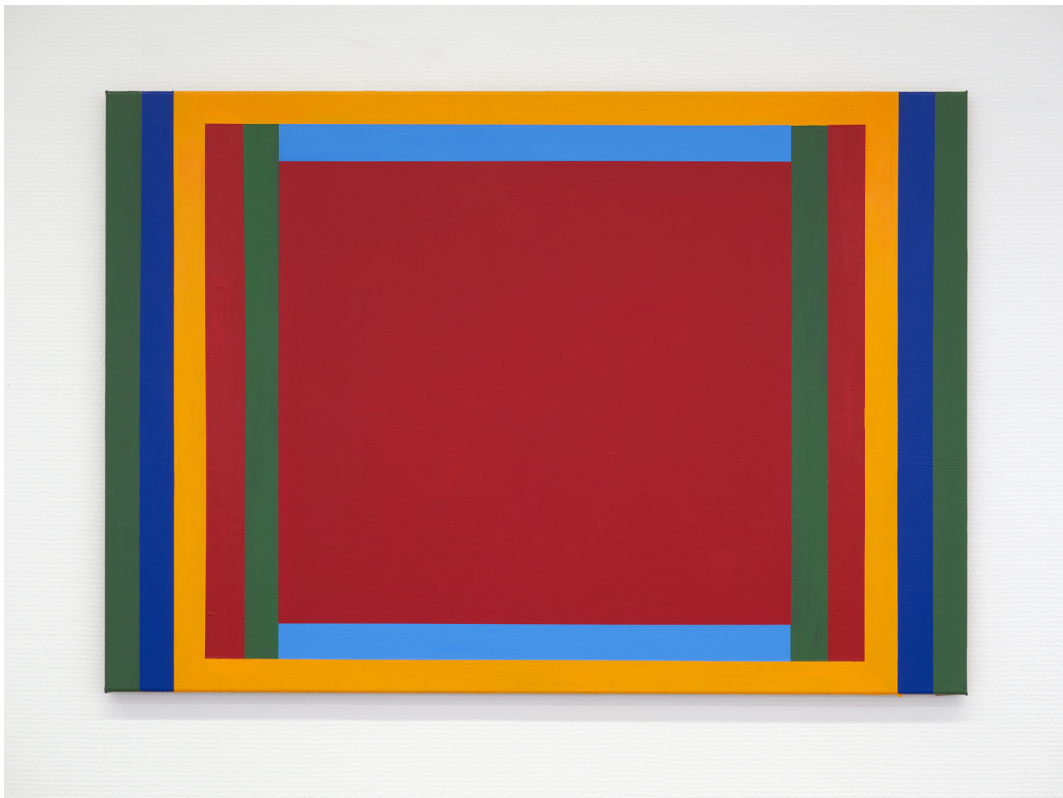
Angharad Williams, installation view of “High Horse” at Kevin Space, 2021. Photo: Maximilian Anelli-Monti. Courtesy of Kevin Space and the artist.

The last fifty years of neoliberal politics has advanced such a model for the construction and perpetuation of society in its entirety, a world where affects and desires are exploited and employed to exercise social violence within different classes and populations. Williams' paintings for the Vienna exhibition, and many works that characterize her practice, critically perform those forces and forms of existence. They present that version of love and being in love, actively inhabiting the rooms they are in: the spaces, times, and cities of the exhibitions. Like the forms of contemporary agency that they are tuned in with, they seem, in their precarious position, not to *exist fully*, or, in other words, to be partially undefined, vibrant. They exist as a continuous exercise of a certain force or drive.

But there is something else. The works, through their materiality and care that went into them, are able to exercise a counter move. They resist the conditions they find themselves in, in solidarity. They become another form of "love", one that is worth falling for. In this regard, Williams's art operates as a self-collapsing way of constructing systems of performative representations, a mechanism that contains its own failure. These are its politics.



Angharad Williams, *A dedication: broomstick*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and the Bonner Kunstverein.



Angharad Williams, *A dedication: broomstick*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and the DREI Gallery, Cologne.

At the moment this text is being written, the last entry on Williams' [website](#) refers to her participation in a group show at the Bonner Kunstverein. The show is titled *The Wig* and is curated by Haus der Wig. It includes works by some 21 artists. [4] In the exhibition guide for her 2022 solo exhibition *Picture the Others* at MOSTYN, a contemporary gallery and visual arts center in Llandudno, Wales, *The Wig* is described as an “ongoing, accumulative [5] project between Gianmaria Andreetta, Jason Hirata, Megan Plunkett, Richard Sides and Angharad Williams.” [6] In the Bonner Kunstverein iteration of *The Wig*, Williams installed a 100 x 70 cm oil painting titled *A dedication: broomstick*, 2021, a piece that was exhibited a few months before in the Mönchengladbach rooms of the Cologne gallery DREI. The show, conceived by Williams together with Gianmaria Andreetta was titled *The Wig* too, and it featured works by three of the same artists found in the Bonner version of what might as well be the same exhibition: Jason Hirata, Megan Plunkett, and Williams herself. In Mönchengladbach, *A dedication: broomstick* was tilted by 90 degrees compared to how it was shown in Bonn, thus measuring 70 x 100 cm instead of 100 x 70 cm. The piece is an abstract painting of geometrical symmetry. A 1970s color palette defines the equally sized lines that surround a red background. Rotating through time—the Cologne and Bonn iterations were about a year apart—a hypothetical center appears in the painting, a pivot on which the work slowly spins; one wonders if the rotation will continue in the next Williams show.

The last lines of the Bonn press release read: “the works selected for this exhibition signify a particular kind of surplus, and the accumulated materials lead us to a divergent understanding of what can be extracted from specific environments.” [7] This is a text of Marxist flavor, which brings back the question of extraction and accumulation, and what might be called “the upcoming”, i.e. the messianic idea that a revolution is always about to happen. Tomorrow, later today, in one hour, time shrinks more and more, but it never reaches the “now”. What is upcoming is just a pervasive atmosphere of diluted existence, or latency, one that could be used to define certain aspects of neoliberal ideology, or the way this hegemonic form of governance of today was confusingly built as subsuming counter-revolutionary movement: What is potential—yet to exist—produces more freedom and more value extracted from it than what is actual. As we know now, “freedom” doesn’t mean freedom at all.



Angharad Williams, *My first suit*, 2020. Tailored suit to the dimensions of artist’s body summer 2020, shirt, tie, shoes, stolen flowers from Milano public parks. Variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist and Fanta-MLN, Milan. Photo: Roberto Marossi

In the group exhibition titled *Il Sogno di Una Cosa*, hosted by Fanta-MLN in spring 2022, Williams presented *My first suit*, 2020. The work description reads: “a tailored suit to the dimensions of artist’s body summer 2020, shirt, tie, shoes, stolen flowers from Milan public parks.” The double-breasted pinstripe was hung as a flattened human figure. Rotting flowers gushed from its pockets and grew from the leather

shoes. On the other side of the gallery—a large semi-squared garage underneath a busy railway line in a former “peripheral security-risk” [8] area of the North Italian city —the framed picture, *Untitled (performance documentation, Munich)*, 2020 portrayed Williams acting like she was cutting some flowers from a well-gardened park while wearing the same suit, holding a pair of scissors, one flower already in her pocket. Noah Barker, one of the artists in the show, wrote in the press release what he was told (by whom we don’t know) about Williams’ piece: *My first suit* is a reenactment of an original performance in which “flowers from public parks were stolen from around the city and brought to be bought at the gallery.” [9] Williams’ looks in the picture, her pose, is one of a pantomime figure, a 20th Century furtive character transforming into a flattened caricature when her clothes are exhibited in a gallery. One might ask what kind of weight fell on her, what German or Italian steamroller passed over our unlucky protagonist?



Angharad Williams, *My first suit*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Kunstverein München.

The same piece was part of a group show titled *Not Working – Artistic production and matters of class* at the Kunstverein Munich in 2020, where the suit was presented like it was in Milan, but the Bavarian flowers exhaled a different fragrance, inviting the Munich visitors to think about the baroque garden as a prototype for leisure/industry overlap, as they suggested the Milanese the question of public space in the most privatized region of Southern Europe’s Italy. The mysterious character performed by

Williams could also be found in the Munich show, framed in a picture: a portrayal of her/it, at night this time. The face is partly covered, and the character seems angrier, or just very aware, afraid of something or someone lurking behind every corner of one of the most prosperous German cities.



Angharad Williams, *Cars* (2022), installation view Eraser, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 2022, photo: Cedric Mussano

These days, one can visit Williams' solo exhibition, curated by Kathrin Bentele, at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf. The invitation card is light gray and contains the white silhouette of a spinning wheel, some practical information, and the exhibition's title *Eraser*. In the exhibition, two of the Kunstverein's longer parallel walls are fully covered by charcoal hyper-realistic 1:1 drawings of cars, *Cars*, 2022. Similar to the paintings from the Vienna exhibition, these works cover the two walls in their entirety and adapt to doors and architectural elements. The cars stand vertically, in a precarious balance, but the charcoal marks are fast and precise, traces of secure arm movements. The black dust from which they are made is there to stay. There is a motionless yet frenetic dance happening; Visitors find themselves in the center of the Alice in Wonderland Caucus Race. In the next room, behind a corner, Williams shows *Enver's World*, 2022, a video portraying a man sleeping in an urban park. Finally, some rest?

[1] Consulted July, 21st 2022. [Link](#).

[2] Holt, D. B. (2006). Toward a sociology of branding. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 6.

[3] Wharton, Jonathan (2008). Gentrification: The New Colonialism in the Modern Era. *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*.

[4] Gianmaria Andreetta, Nancy Dwyer x Swatch, Matthias Groebel, Jason Hirata, Kirsten Johnson, Devin Kenny, Louise Lawler, Ed Lehan & Lena Tutunjian, Lorenza Longhi, Fred Lonidier, Megan Plunkett, Josephine Pryde, Sarah Rapson, Su Richardson, Lucien Samaha, Richard Sides, Mareike Tocha, Angharad Williams, Camilla Wills, and Reece York.

[5] The term “accumulation”, as mentioned before, is important to understand the political implication of a latent existence.

[6] Consulted July 25th, 2022. [Link](#).

[7] Consulted July 25th, 2022. [Link](#).

[8] «Nolo, Milan». In Wikipedia, consulted 4 May 2022

[9] Consulted July, 25 2022. [Link](#).

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