

Dalton Gata
Portrait for Loneliness
October 15 – November 11, 2022
Opening Saturday, October 15, 6–9PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *Portrait for Loneliness* by Dalton Gata (b. 1977), the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery in Berlin.

Born in Cuba and based in Puerto Rico, Gata takes the Caribbean diaspora as his central subject. Using bold and vivid colors he imbues his canvases with an energy that draws on the vibrancy of Caribbean visual culture, lending brightness and vigor to the painted surface.

Although visually rich, *Portrait for Loneliness* addresses the motif of the passport photo – a typically colorless portrait – through which Gata considers the parallel realities of privilege and marginalization that are embedded in such forms of official identification. He recognizes the passport photo as a constrictive genre of image, one which classifies and segregates individuals based on nationality and presumed birthright.

As reflected in the title, through this series Gata emphasizes the experience of solitude that is particular to the immigrant: leaving one's home is often a sacrifice of the familiar. Yet, while *Portrait for Loneliness* addresses this by making reference the passport photo as an alienating visual form, Gata renders his portraits of ambiguously gendered figures deliberately inadequate to official standards. They are images that do not comply with border control and the bureaucratic management of people in transit. Certainly, the characteristics of passport photos are narrow: sitters are photographed against a neutral background; hair is pulled away from the face; accessories or adornments are not permitted in the frame. They are typically uncreative images, used to control and organize bodies, thereby concealing individual personality and true expression of identity.

In answer to this, Gata accentuates the unusual or eccentric features of his sitters. They wear extraordinary costumes, or are elaborately made-up with colorfully shadowed eyes and painted lips, effectively subverting the government sanctioned criteria that determine not only the visual qualities of a passport photo, but a person's right to citizenship. Through these works Gata also reveals the psychology of each sitter, making visible both their unique physical characteristics in an expression of defiance and empowerment, while also divulging the interior life of the figures he paints. Thus, Gata draws a link to the ways in which people often construct "characters" or personalities as a type of armor, or as a means of personal security. His approach to this is complex: while building a facade or affectation can indeed be a tactic for survival — the effort to disguise one's true self out of a need to self-protect can be immensely lonely — unique expressions of personhood are equally a cause for celebration.

Gata's background in fashion design is evident in this body of work, expressed via the sartorial choices of his figures. The gaze is significant in these paintings as well: whether staring directly at the viewer, or off into the distance, his subjects regard their surroundings with serious attention, and it is through these eccentric and elegant figures that Gata also reflects on conventional standards of beauty and gender in contemporary society. The uniqueness of Gata's painted figures addresses the mounting instability of our times, as well the experiences of migrant communities in the Caribbean and elsewhere. His work recognizes the myriad and fluid expressions of gender and sexual identity in Caribbean culture, while also celebrating the racial diversity in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Gata pulls this spirit of celebration together with a subversion of the standard passport photo in order to propose expansive and queer forms of self expression, self-actualization and acceptance.

This is Gata's second solo exhibition with Peres Projects in our Berlin gallery. Gata has exhibited in a number of international exhibitions including solo exhibitions *The Way We'll Be*, curated by Alex Gartenfeld, Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA Miami), Miami, *Cabeza de mango*, Chapter, New York, *Allí*, Galeria Agustina Ferreyra, San Juan and at the Sunday Painter, London. Group exhibitions include *Tropical Is Political: Caribbean Art Under the Visitor Economy Regime*, curated by Marina Reyes Franco, Americas Society, in collaboration with the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico, New York, *FUTURISMO*, Mendes Wood DM, Sao Paolo, *Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night!?*, curated by Natalia Sielewicz, The collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Municipal Art Center, Gorzów and *To dream a man*, curated by Samantha Ozer, Clima Gallery, Milan.

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