

Jan Gatewood
'Group Relations'
20 Jan – 2 Mar 2024

Rose Easton

Text by Justin Chance

Rose Easton presents *Group Relations*, a solo exhibition by Jan Gatewood, the artist's first in London.

Like people, rabbits come in a variety of different shapes, sizes and colours, are very efficient at procreating, and can be found strewn across most corners of the inhabitable world. They're mostly timid when threatened, bad at seeing at night, and from an evolutionary standpoint: incredibly malleable when it comes to adapting to difficult and arduous terrains.

Charismatic survivors, when depicted across fiction rabbits are crafty, clever, vain and resourceful. Evidenced by Bugs Bunny and his more interesting and darker ancestor *Br'er Rabbit* – a mythic figure across the Southern United States and the Caribbean (by West African import, much like the people), rabbits are tricksters and escape artists, magicians and athletes. Furthermore (like some groups of people of specific colours, sizes and shapes) rabbits are targets and this has made them agile. Equipping them with the capability of getting in and most importantly, out of places and situations. Not unlike people of certain colours with origins from certain terrains, rabbits: have been historically designated as easy prey: primary and vital steps in universal food chains, or, on a grander scale, as necessary assets within networks of cultural and economical consumption. In other words, rabbits (once again like people) can be weighty, nimble and relatable subjects.

Taking its title from a branch of English psychoanalytic theory that focuses on interpersonal dynamics among groups, factions and institutions, *Group Relations* is an exhibition by the Los Angeles based artist, investigating the outer-limitations of morality, specifically its jurisdiction around discussions of identity and race. Or rather, how we're allowed to talk about how we relate. *Group Relations* is also an exhibition almost entirely populated by rabbits.

Comprised of fourteen drawings (and some pillows) with references as broad and far reaching as: Prince and the Revolution and Poly Systeme, the front woman of English punk band X-Ray Spex (music), the films *Coonskin* by Ralph Bakshi, *Bamboozled* by Spike Lee, *Gone With The Wind* (cinema), Toni Morrison's Nobel prize winning novel *Beloved* (literature) and the work and careers of artists such as David Hammons, Kara Walker, Henry Taylor, Robert Colescott, Merlin Carpenter and most notably Andrea Fraser – whose likeness appears in free sculptural works distributed throughout the exhibition.

Returning to Gatewood's employment of rabbits, like promotional cardboard cutouts animals (whether as puppets, mascots, folk figures etc) can be incredibly efficient stand-ins, allowing the viewer to embody alternative perspectives through the premised and padded arenas of *play* and *pretend*. As educational tools animals can inhabit situations that on human scales tempt danger – particularly reputationally.

And as models, animals offer possibilities to present fun, comical and even harmless opportunities to act in or (especially in the case of Gatewood's rabbits) act *out*: desires, compulsions and propositions that would've otherwise be considered taboo. The rabbits of Gatewood nestle/cower in the bosom of a topless woman (*Candidate for the hand of the boss's daughter*, 2023), vandalize surfaces with depictions of intimacy (*What's your stance on interracial relationships?*, 2023) and wail (*I am a cliché you've seen before. Thank you Poly Styrene*, 2023). Begging us to ask, what are these rabbits (and titles) up to?

One point of Gatewood's rabbits may be for us as viewers to hesitate. As avatars they suggest possible paths for us to connect and relate to material that, if employed correctly, can delay reflexes and soften assumptions and prejudgements. A conceptual concern that can also be seen echoed through the artist's repeated use of glue. As a material glue is abound with contradictions. When it's applied as an adhesive it's fluid until its binding and as a resist, it blocks colours out so when removed, colours can exist beside one another undisturbed. When employed as a drawing medium in an exhibition examining relations across black identity, glue is a loaded substrate: a vehicle (like many other devices, rhetorical or otherwise) for cohesion and/or tension.

Speaking of glue and bonding: a gathering of rabbits can be called a colony, fuffle, warren and/or nest and associating humans can be described as families,

cliques, pods, communities, teams. A grouping or series of related art work is often called a body, and a body, no matter what color, size, shape or origin, is a collaboration of organs, cells, systems working towards similar goals while inhabiting a standalone finite space. The politics, feelings and discussions that take place in any of these forms can all be considered matters of Group Relations.

Jan Gatewood (b. 1994, Colorado, US) lives and works in Los Angeles. *Group Relations* is his first solo exhibition in the UK. In May 2024, Gatewood will have a solo exhibition at Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong. Previous solo exhibitions include: *Discrepancy Essence*, Silke Lindner, New York (2023) and *Tiptoe Hassle*, Smart Objects, Los Angeles (2022). Recent group exhibitions include: *Group Shoe Two*, Public Access, New York (2022); *PEEL*, Europa, New York (2022); *Best in Show*, Jack Hanley Gallery, New York (2021) and *Vivid* organised by Sonya Sombreuil as part of Made in L.A., Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2020).

List of works

Jan Gatewood
Cyclical painting reference to contemplate fanaticism and market trends. (Henry Taylor at Manuela, Los Angeles), 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper, framed
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
What's your stance on interracial relationships?, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper, framed
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
Complications of a fragmented self, 2023
Graphite, coloured pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, matcha, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper, framed
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
I am a cliché you've seen before. Thank you Poly Styrene, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
A literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
What do we think about irreverence as a discussion catalyst? Uncle Ruckus, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel, natural pigment and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
Candidate for the hand of the boss's daughter, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
Children of the Projects. The sequel (Merlin Carpenter 2002/3), 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
The observer and part of the observation, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
How Ya Like Me Now? The sequel, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel, natural pigment and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
Hattie McDaniel's powerful lucky rabbit's foot, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
Willingness to try, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
We have ethics because we are different, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, bleach, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Jan Gatewood
This meeting is being recorded. Colescott meets Beat Happening, 2023
Graphite, colored pencil, glue, salt, fabric dye, oil pastel and oil stick on paper
68×88×4 cm

Private View, Friday 19 January, 6 – 8pm
Open, Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of live events and activations.

Artist Talk

Jan Gatewood in conversation
Date and time to be announced

Film Screening

Six Degrees of Separation
Fred Schepisi, 1993
Friday 26 January, 7pm

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