

LUNGLEY

Brian Dawn Chalkley

Living on the edge of failure

06/07/2024 - 10/08/2024



Living on the edge of failure (2024)
Pencil, ink, pins and embroidery on cotton

Brian Dawn Chalkley is a visual artist and storyteller. Formative in the trans community since the early 90's, the artist is known for their performances as Dawn a leading figure in London's underground trans clubbing scene in the 1980s and '90s, a time when it was deemed unacceptable and perverse.

Brian Dawn Chalkley has been exploring gender, sexuality and identity for more than four decades, first in private and then in their art. Having started their career as a modernist painter, whilst a transvestite in private, in 1996 he embraced "Dawn", their alter ego, into their public art practice, too. Ever since, this movement "Brian" and "Dawn" has fuelled an odyssey into what it means to perform gender, and to form and reform identities, going far beyond the modernist tendencies of his earlier years, and continuing to build an impressive body of work that uses narrative and costume to construct and deconstruct aspects of their personality and personae.

Brian Dawn is well known for hosting the Salon, an event for performers and performances in which orthodox moral, social, and artistic boundaries are challenged by the representation of unconventional behaviour and the use of experimental forms. For their fourth solo exhibition at the gallery, cotton pillowcases embellished with drawings, handwritten texts and embroidery, line the walls. Recurring motifs appear against vivid landscapes but now their significance has deepened with time, like recurring characters in a long sequence of novels.

The people they meet and the places they go are the subject of the work, memories from the artist's own life and childhood are present, although laced with violence and horror. While we are invited to speculate on, and discover more about, these scenarios, they ultimately refuse to give more than these stark, dream-like symbols, and so refuse any true resolution. Peeling back at these imagined scenarios the viewer becomes a participant unravelling and constructing the clues of these unexplained moments, narratives and motifs caught in action with no resolve. The pictures are laden with clues but interpretation is slippery and as elusive - much like the moment between waking and sleeping.

A series of portraits accompany the textiles. These may be categorised as portraits but they are not portraits in the traditional sense. Rather than representing an actual person, they represent an emotion or a state of mind. Drawn from imagination the image lies somewhere between memory, dream and hypnotic trance. It feels as if the figure were already in Dawn Chalkley's head, somehow and they had no choice but to free it.

Brian Dawn's past collaborations with artists and academics include Jack Halberstam, Charles Atlas, Brian Catlin, Dawn Mellor and Tony Gresoni, to name a few.

Special thanks to Christine for her unwavering support and assistance during the production of this exhibition and her patience with the needle.
