

PASSAGE

FOOLS ARE EVERYWHERE, features a striking portrait triad, including two diptychs.

Present throughout history, the archetype of the Fool has lurked in the backgrounds of medieval courts, camouflaging itself in satirical humour. Often the only individuals who could mock high society, engaging with unconventional taboos and addressing societal issues that no other dared discuss. Fools have played significant roles in culture. Shakespeare's King Lear's Fool and Yorick from Hamlet offered wisdom masked in humor, while German folklore's Till Eulenspiegel and Nasreddin Hodja from the Middle East exposed hypocrisy through their pranks. In Arthurian legend, Dagonet served as both jester and knight, and in Italian commedia dell'arte, characters like Punchinello and Scaramouche mocked the aristocracy. Modern representations like Charlie Chaplin's "The Tramp," symbolises social issues through slapstick, and even mythological figures like Loki, the Norse trickster god. These Fools, whether real or fictional, use humor and satire to reflect societal truths and challenge the status quo.

The desire for acceptance leads us to hide what we fear might be judged, including our true selves and our inner Fool. Adopting a role provides protection by signaling a recognizable character type, allowing us to become invisible and blend in. As survival concerns increase, we suppress primal instincts and conform. Socially, this means presenting a façade or 'false self' as called by Donald Winnicott, focused on manners and protocol rather than spontaneous expression, ensuring the true self's survival. This psychological slouching is rooted in the belief that standing out is dangerous. However, the Fool defies this by openly expressing what's inside.

This character serves as the starting point for Marcus Nelson's latest presentation *Fools Are Everywhere*, where the Fool becomes a metaphor for the self and the macabre thoughts that lie beneath the surface of society. Continuing his exploration of performance and the architecture of theatre, Nelson uses his own body as a vessel to create a series of self-portraits, embodying the Fool. By assuming this role, Nelson questions ideas of identity and self-representation, prompting viewers to reflect on their own internal landscapes - what masks do we hide behind when we leave our homes? These self-portraits become an eerie depiction of repressed emotions, spilling out into the U-Bahn station of Hermannplatz. Conforming to societal expectations often grants us the benefits of belonging, typically achieved by prioritizing others. Public places like subway stations reflect this social contract: avoid eye contact, don't interfere, and don't take up space. The work confronts the apathetic behavior that can arise from being trapped in the city's rhythm, urban infrastructure and the interiority of one's mind. By placing the portraits against the windows of Passage's exhibition space, the glass acts as a mirror. As viewers gaze at Nelson's Fools through the glass, they are compelled to contemplate their own reflections. This mirrored interaction blurs the line between observer and performer, leading viewers to question who the real Fool is as they engage with the characters on both sides of the glass.

For Nelson, the painting process itself becomes a performative act, governed by strict time constraints and physical movement. The immediacy of this method allows only the most essential elements to be discovered through paint, reflecting the artist's interest in capturing a specific moment in time - one charged with emotional force. The thrill of this process is set against the potential risk of failure, echoing the precarious position of the court Fool. Looking out at the passersby, Nelson's Fools perform on their canvas stage, behind the glass, drawing viewers into their darkness and awaiting a reaction.

***FOOLS ARE EVERYWHERE* : 06.08.24 – 06.09.24**