

U-jazdowski

07/07—01/10/2023

exhibition

Claudia Clare

Feminist Satire.

No Safe Spaces



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Curators

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Exhibition coordinator

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Exhibition design

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Who does Claudia Clare think she is? A ceramicist entering her sixth decade, she really ought to have learned to shut up by now.

She has no business sharing her critique of the sex industry, for she is not a ‘sex worker’ herself. Neither is she a Muslim, and yet she persists in criticising Islamism without even having the decency to be brown. Worse still, as a lesbian she refuses to embrace her transgender sisters and laughs at their ‘lady penises’.

It’s just as well so many galleries and public museums in Britain have taken it upon themselves to protect the public from her dangerous views. Imagine what would happen if people listened to her.



Islamism

Clare's work is about humanity, and so does not see any topic as what an observant Muslim might refer to as 'haram' (i.e. forbidden).

Postcard from the Caliphate is a darkly comic riff on the Islamic State (IS). The work was inspired by a report about a British jihadi who wrote a travel guide for potential tourists to the warzone.

The carousel is a tribute to Mark Gertler's dizzying *Merry Go Round*, painted in 1916 as a response to World War I. Clare takes this modernist masterpiece and twists it into contemporary satire.

The intensely detailed but visceral compositions that characterise Clare's work are not simply copied onto pots: she works directly on the surface, using the organic imperfections as a three-dimensional canvas. This offers a sense of immediacy and, as with *Postcard from the Caliphate*, almost dizzying movements.

The pot features an international cast of political figures who prop-up Islamic extremism, from Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to British far-left agitator George Galloway. With comic flare, the Caliphate's flag is copied from a version notoriously displayed at London Gay Pride, where the lettering was made up of sex toys. As much as Clare satirises the brutality of patriarchal power, she documents feminist resistance. *Woman Life Freedom* is inspired by the ongoing revolution in Iran, led by girls and young women. Clare lovingly documents a woman cutting off her locks, women dancing around a pile of burning hijabs and schoolgirls in their classroom with 'woman life freedom' written on the whiteboard while they assemble in front of it, hair flowing free, doing the victory salute.

Postcard from the Caliphate
2017
vase
detail



Woman Life Freedom
2023
vase

But it is bittersweet; this celebration of rebellion is also a memorial for those who have been killed by the regime. Carefully inscribed on the inside is a portrait of Mahsa Amini whose name sparked the initial call to action; Nika Shakarami, the first teenage girl to be killed as part of this uprising; and 'the Girl of Enghelab Street', a nameless woman who was 'disappeared.'

As with even Clare's most disquieting pieces, *Woman Life Freedom* is visually alluring, with a vivid blue background and blooms stretching from the base to the lip of the pot. Yet, it is a grave's-eye view.

Most of us instinctively turn away from the ugly, and we drape a discreet veil over death. But by transforming the darkest parts of humanity into beautiful, richly decorated objects, Clare forces the viewer to stare at the bleak reality under the jewel-coloured glaze.



Prostitution

Today, the sex trade has been rebranded. Prostitution, once understood as the sexual abuse of the vulnerable, is now known in progressive dinner party circles as 'sex work' and celebrated as a triumph of women's bodily emancipation. Pimps are 'managers' and trafficked women are simply 'migrant sex workers.' The risk of an untimely death is no longer to be blamed on violent men, but rather it is a consequence of 'stigma.'

This sickening inversion of the truth has been adopted by human rights organisations including Amnesty International, as well as 'progressive' NGOs like UN Aids. Clare's insightful artistic commentary scrapes away such sanitising lies, revealing both the stories of the sex industry's victims, and crucially those of the men and lobbyists who keep the international industry running.

Street Exit is one of a collection made in partnership with Women at the Well, a service that helps women leave prostitution. It illustrates the true story of a young woman who was pimped by a man she thought of as a 'boyfriend'. The pot follows her journey as she begins to consider how she might build a life outside the sex industry.

Other pots narrate the political fight to decriminalise the victims of prostitution, while pushing to bring perpetrators to justice. *I'm Not The Criminal* features a sgraffito portrait of Fiona Broadfoot, a campaigner who was groomed into the industry as a child. After years on the streets, she exited following the murder of her cousin. Broadfoot has fought to scrub police records for women convicted of soliciting. On the outside of the pot, Clare returns to the

Street Exit
2019
vase
detail



I'm Not the Criminal
2019
vase



Street Exit
2019
vase

carousel image, with a cavalcade of monstrous, naked men who profit from the abuse of women and girls.

The pot, which in its unbroken state was titled *The Invisible Man* (a reference to the impunity enjoyed by the men who abuse women in prostitution), was ritually smashed as part of a ceremony in Bradford during the FiLiA feminist conference. The names of women in prostitution who were murdered in the city were read out as part of this. Clare then gathered the pieces and painstakingly rebuilt the vessel, leaving out shards so that the images on the inside could be glimpsed.

Clare has a deep respect for her subjects and the truth of their stories. Referencing the Japanese technique of Kintsugi, where gold is used to repair pottery, Clare applies metallic paints to edge the holes and cracks when rebuilding. This often serves to frame the faces, which stare out from the interiors of her work. The finished pot exists as a record of both the trauma of destruction and of resilience.

The advocates for the decriminalisation of the sex industry do not escape Clare's satirical eye. *St. Molly the Martyr of Morningside* tells the tale in comic verse of a wealthy young activist and her quest for popularity, a mission she pursues by evangelising about the virtues of prostitution. This mannered, architectural piece mocks the privileged Molly as a religious figure rather than the countercultural rebel of her own vain imagination.





Transgenderism

With an election looming next year, every British politician can expect to be asked the question “what is a woman?” The answer, an adult human female, is deemed offensive to the powerful minority who believe that an internal sense of gender identity ought to take precedence over the reality of biological sex. According to this truth-twisting logic, some men have vulvas and some women have penises.

For the past decade, lobby groups have quietly enshrined this bizarre belief system into the policies of companies and public bodies throughout the UK, effectively allowing males into female spaces on the basis of their professed identity. Over the same timeframe, the numbers of middle-aged men identifying as transwomen have swollen. Tellingly, this coincides with the boom in free online pornography.

The result is that lesbian groups have been overrun by heterosexual men who identify as ‘transbians’, women prisoners have been locked-up with male rapists who claim to be transwomen, and female victims of male violence can no longer find sanctuary in women-only spaces. Compliance has been maintained by smearing critics as unsophisticated and arguing that debate itself is harmful. Arts institutions and public galleries have become mouthpieces for this pernicious propaganda. But public opinion is finally shifting, and protecting women’s rights has become a leading political and judicial issue. The UK is now at the crest of a new, global wave of women’s activism which is amassing in response to the dangers of transgenderism.



The Butch Pot
2020
vase

A long-standing feminist, Clare is an artist on the inside of the resurgent women's movement. This has seen her return to the agit-prop style of pots she first made during the 1980s.

Notably, *The Butch Pot* presents joyful portraits of butch lesbians, who today are diminishing in number. Many young women who might have once been 'out and proud' are today sold the lie that their same-sex attraction and rejection of feminine norms means they are in some existential sense 'men'. This has led to some binding their breasts and taking synthetic testosterone to mimic a male appearance. A homage to proud lesbians, *The Butch Pot* seeks to counter both this destructive trend and its foundational myth.

Gender Circus displays the grotesque burlesque of transgenderism. The lobby group Stonewall, the organisation most responsible for embedding gender ideology in civil society, is presented as a ringmaster corraling crowds of corporate supporters.

Those taking the risks, the performers on the high wire, are the youngsters who identify as trans. Around the pot, male athletes who have identified into women's sporting categories are shown centre-stage, cheating their way to hollow victories. An indistinct mob carrying baseball bats in the insipid powder blue and baby pink of the trans flag march in the background.

The belief systems Clare tackles are those that deny women full humanity: whether 'disappeared' under veils or put into the earth by Islamic fascists, sold as objects for profit or colonised by men's fetishes, these are the injustices against which Clare rails. But she does not simply narrate woeful tales of oppression; Clare celebrates joyful

resilience. Ruthless yet compassionate, her vital work is part of the feminist resistance. And in this, Clare's pots are not just satirical, they are seditious.

Curator
Josephine Bartosch



Circus Acts
2021
vase

The New Masters of British Art

Artists like to think of themselves as unconventional – renegades on the fringes of society, sticking a paintbrush in the eye of the establishment. Yet today in Britain, those savvy enough to see their work displayed in galleries know that creativity must be exercised within rigid cultural lines, and that the only acceptable palette is the gaudy rainbow of the transgender lobby.

In 2023, the fastest way for an artist in Britain to find themselves permanently riding an Uber Eats bike out of the studio is to tell the truth about biological sex. Acknowledging that all mammals are either male or female and that sex cannot be meaningfully changed has become a taboo. Gallery programming and literature reinforces this message with all the subtlety of an inebriated drag queen bellowing into a karaoke machine.

Over the past decade, Arts Council England (ACE), the national development agency for creativity and culture, has pumped money into ideologically infused projects that support voguish ideas about gender identity and fetishes. These include multiple family-friendly drag queen performances, works exploring BDSM in gay male communities and the “Queer and Now” festival “dedicated to the powerful role of LGBTQIA+ art and culture in the UK.”

In 2017, Tate, Britain’s most prestigious group of public galleries, worked with trans lobby group GIRES to produce guidance for schools. The document referencing Queer Theory’s fairy godparent, Judith Butler, commands children and their teachers to “assert trans women are women” and “assert that non-binary people exist.” This is as contentious as expecting educators to repeat “Jesus is risen”, as a scientific fact.

However, questioning these pronouncements, and the need to assert them, is taken not only as an impolite reminder of human limitations but as incitement to hatred of people who identify as trans. Today, even the statement that lesbians don't have penises is controversial within the arts – it is considered harmful to heterosexual men who identify as transgender lesbian women.

The elite making decisions within the UK arts world clearly believe it is their duty to evangelise to the dumb hoi polloi. And the theories they advance not only hold that we each possess an innate sense of gender identity, but also that those who are white are racist from birth. Such sins can be atoned for by pursuing a vigorous process of decolonisation, requiring the stripping of exhibits from museum displays and the erasure of biological sex as a category.

To avoid cancellation by galleries, rejection from funding bodies and attacks by activists, dissident artists have been forced underground. Groups, like Art Not Propaganda (AXP) have begun to meet in secret and to organise against bias within the arts.

One woman artist created the anonymous persona 'Con She' to allow her to create work "critiquing wokeness, cancel culture, and gender theology." She explains that the "art world has become a suffocating and oppressive place in recent years, where deviation from a single identity-focused viewpoint is not tolerated."

For daring to question, Con She says she has been "shunned by multiple institutions." The cost has been personal and profound, "the zeitgeist has all but destroyed my mental health – you literally can't function as a person of integrity in this climate."

She believes that battling groupthink within institutions is "the fight of our lives, and we need to take an ethical stand for liberal democracy and artistic freedom. But to do that without being cancelled entirely, anonymity is necessary."

And Con She is right to be worried. There is evidence that senior figures within ACE are prejudiced against those who don't share their beliefs.

In 2022, the LGB Alliance, the only charity that advocates for human rights exclusively on the basis of sexual orientation, was awarded a grant of £9,400 by an administrative funding body on behalf of ACE to make a film celebrating the lives of gay men. The grant was withdrawn after an outcry from transgender activists. From 2021–2022, ACE gave a total of £943 million to the arts; the only recipient organisation to explicitly challenge transgender ideology was the LGB Alliance.

As an advocacy group for homosexuals and bisexuals, its constitution rejects the idea that professed feelings of gender identity should take precedence above biological sex. This is because to accept the idea that genitals are irrelevant, as Tate do, is to implicitly undermine the single-sex spaces upon which gay and lesbian communities depend. Despite ACE's carefully crafted image as "inclusive and relevant," today it is funding avant-garde homophobia under the guise of progressivism.

During a meeting in April 2022, Simon Mellor, Deputy Chief Executive of ACE, accused the LGB Alliance of being "a divisive organisation with a history of anti-trans exclusionary activity," saying that it had been a mistake for the group to have been awarded the grant. When long-standing employee Denise Fahmy spoke-up to defend the

decision, she says she was harassed by other members of staff who used the Arts Council staff intranet site to host a petition describing the supporters of the LGB Alliance as ‘parasites’, ‘neo nazis’, and ‘needing to be stamped out.’ Given this febrile atmosphere within ACE, it is no surprise that creatives with heretical beliefs have been pushed underground.

But like the dissident artists, Fahmy is fighting back and taking ACE to court. In a media statement she said, “Spurious allegations of transphobia have resulted in many people losing their careers... I spoke out because we cannot stand by and allow the withdrawal of public funding from organisations simply because they are disliked by some.”

Even as the resistance galvanises, cultural institutions are refusing to listen both to artists and to the tax-paying public who pay to keep their doors open. And when it comes to pushing transgenderism, even death doesn’t deter the extremists. Female artists, including Claude Cahun, Gluck and Marlow Moss, who dared to break the expectations for women of their time, are referred to as “they” by Tate. This is apparently because it is “impossible to know whether these artists would today identify as genderqueer, non-binary, trans, butch and/or lesbian.” All the while, galleries performatively opine on the sexism of the past that ignored the talent of women.

As a journalist with a specialist interest in cancel culture, over the past five years, I’ve heard personal testimonies from scores of people across the creative industries who have found themselves on the prongs of the mob’s pitchfork. Some have settled out of court, others have left the sector to pursue their vocation in private.

Without a shot being fired, the mad, reality-denying ideology of transgenderism has colonised British institutions. The resulting tawdry and tiresome works celebrating ‘trans joy’ and endless drag performances have all the appearance of painting by numbers. Art is not only the creation of artists, it is the product of a culture. And a sterile monoculture produces moribund art.

In some ways, the UK is a puffed-up little country, drunk on the memory of empire, yet with a creeping embarrassment about its excesses. Having avoided the political extremes of our continental neighbours, people in the UK are for the first time learning to navigate the ideological capture of our institutions. Today, a lively counterculture is emerging outside of mainstream galleries, beyond the death-grip of officialdom. The future will owe a debt to these outsider artists, the dissidents who are creating pinpricks of light ahead of a cultural darkness that is sweeping the world.

Text
Josephine Bartosch

Claudia Clare

The Ballad of St. Molly the Martyr of Morningside



When Molly got her million
From an uncle, now deceased,
She raised her red umbrella
Threw a party for the street.

Said Molly, ten years before:
'To Hell with my middle class education!
My first class honours degree
Won't bring me the money and adulation
I deserve, I want so much more than this
I want status and notoriety
A place among the prophets
Of social media society.'

So Molly adopted a theory,
'All work is a crock of shit!
It just props up Capitalist Patriarchy,
I'll have no part in it.'
Forthwith, she prepared to organise,
And joined the Communist Party,
She preached and tweeted and trolled,
Courtied the bearded Wokerati.

She declared herself a Prostitute,
Waved a banner and marched with Pride,
Pleaded 'desperate need and poverty,'
Had forced her to decide
That 'Sex work' was a job,
But one that couldn't fail,
She changed her name, dyed her hair,
Ordered new acrylic nails.

St. Molly the Martyr of Morningside
2020
vase

She joined the Global Sex Worker Union,
Worked with punters, pimps and brothels,
Campaigned for Decrim Now,
And against the Nordic Model.
She demonised Julie Bindel,
Won a medal for hunting TERFs,
Cyber stalked sex trade survivors
But 'really cared,' about Mother Earth.

She wrote the sex worker Bible,
With money from Open Society,
Where she fiercely denounced all feminists
Of the 'carceral' variety.
She railed against exiting projects,
Declared them 'religious rescue,'
While podcasting her weekly sermons,
'How Radical Feminists Opress You.'

Her inheritance safely banked,
Molly bought a bigger umbrella,
With her sandwich board and speakers,
She's out there in all weathers.
She's seeking the 'right side of History,'
Where fame and fortune reside,
T'is said she may have found it,
Near Edinburgh's Morngingside.

Now I did hear a scurrilous rumour
She's desperate to disavow,
That a radical feminist
Grafitti'd her board with
"NORDIC MODEL NOW!!"

Vocabulary of Radical Leftist Feminism

sex work

a new term for prostitution, promoted by the far left

Julie Bindel

an English writer, feminist, co-founder of the law-reform group
Justice for Women, which helps women prosecuted for using
violence against their male oppressors

TERF

an abbreviation for "trans-exclusionary radical feminist", used as a
vulgar invective to discredit women, often feminists, who reject the
transgender ideology

feminists of the 'carceral' variety

those who demand that pimping be penalised

exiting projects

referring to Street Exit, an organization supporting women to leave
prostitution

Nordic model

based on the idea that prostitution can be reduced primarily
by stifling demand; in Sweden and Iceland, it is the clients who
are penalised

Compiled by

Agnieszka Kołek

Dr Claudia Clare

(b. 1962) is an artist whose work *they* don't want you to see. To *them*, Clare is an Islamophobe, a transphobe and a whorephobe. But to those who can look beyond labels, Clare is a satirical ceramicist who transforms the darkest stories into works of exquisite beauty.

She is a woman who knows her craft. After training as a painter at the Camberwell School of Art in the 1980s, Clare completed an apprenticeship with Winchcombe pottery. In 1997, she became a regular contributor to the magazine *Ceramic Review*, and a decade later completed a Ph.D. at the University of Westminster.

A published author, Clare's book *Subversive Ceramics* traces the hidden history of pots as propaganda across millennia. She believes ceramics has long been dismissed as a domestic craft, too functional to enjoy the status of 'fine art'. But in creating work that is at once public, political and executed with supreme skill, Clare defies the derision of elitist artistic groupthink.

Public museums, private galleries and even pop-up spaces in shopping centres have exhibited Clare's work. Latterly she has collaborated with grassroots women's organisations, incorporating the ritualistic smashing of pots into feminist activism. But for over a decade now, Clare's career has been punctuated by controversy and cancellation.

The first time the censors came for Clare was in 2009. She was invited to exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Isfahan, Iran. A Farsi speaker with a deep affection for the people of Iran, Clare enjoyed the support of the gallery who rejected a governmental edict to shadow her during her visit. Two days before she was due to arrive, the Iranian Foreign Office withdrew her visa.

A lesbian driven by a passion for women's rights, the cancellation of an exhibition of Clare's work in the theocratic republic of Iran perhaps comes as no surprise. However, more recently it has been the self-appointed moral guardians within the UK who have sought to remove her work from public view. This is because central to Clare's art are her feminist principles: she rails against the sexist stereotypes that underpin transgenderism; takes aim at the jihadists who create hell for women so men can enter heaven; and shatters the fashionable glamour of the sex and surrogacy industries.

Unlike in Iran, within the UK, gallery owners could not muster the courage to resist activists' demands to censor Clare. The first complaints about her work came in 2010, from those who thought the vivid depiction of a vulva might be offensive to Muslims. Next came the removal of pieces created in response to an Islamist terrorist attack. More recently, Clare's work with sex industry survivors has triggered outrage. A pioneering collection of work narrating the stories of prostituted women called

And the Door Opened was cancelled following complaints from self-styled 'sex workers' rights activists'. Finally, by daring to critique the idea that people can change sex, Clare drew the ire of transgender activists. But as with the political pots of ancient empires, Clare's ceramics will inform future generations about these frantic, febrile times.

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Claudia Clare, *Postcard from the Caliphate*, 2017.
Courtesy of the artist.

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