

PLASTER

Anthony Cudahy's lessons in perseverance and saintly patience

27/10/23 6 min read Words: Matthew Holman

Anthony Cudahy's two-part exhibition – at Grimm and Hales
Gallery – conjures magic from the everyday



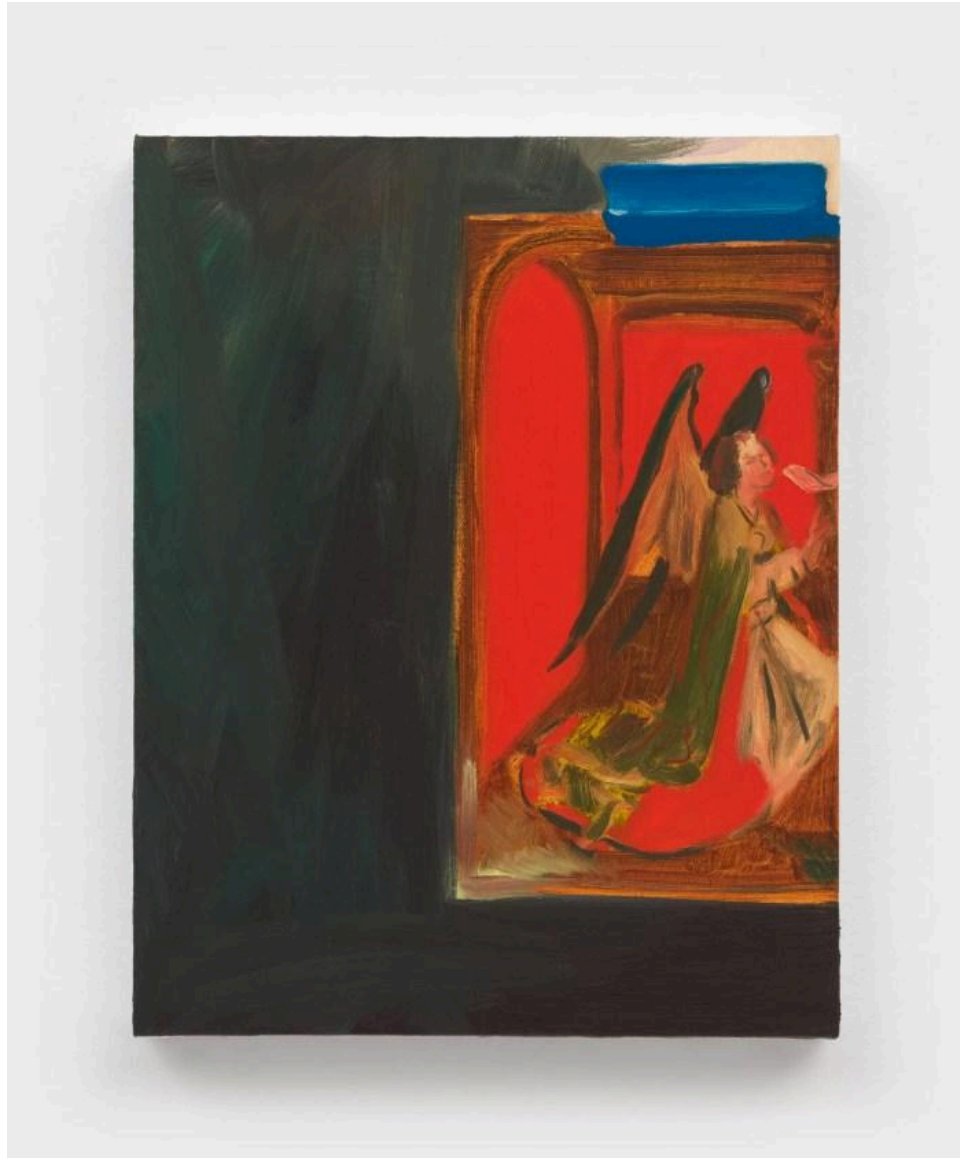
Anthony Cudahy, *Violent echo / rumination* (2023), diptych – left: oil, acrylic, and pencil on canvas; right: oil on linen, 48 x 84 in. Image courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | New York | London

Poor Saint Anthony. Has any other saint endured such an awful time, for all time? In Michelangelo's appropriately titled *The Torment of Saint Anthony* (c. 1487-1488), the grey-bearded Egyptian monk is dragged

across a craggy fort by a squadron of satyrs, centaurs and devilish mutants. Some grip his wrist and hurl wooden clubs at his temple, screeching in their own tortured state, while others have fish faces for assholes and daydream amidst the barbarity. In Anthony Cudahy's extraordinary diptych, *Violent echo / rumination* (2023), we find Anthony's tormentors not soaring above a desert in which the old hermit is tempted, but squabbling in what looks like a garage in a formerly-industrial, now chic part of town. The colours are disconcerting; in their aqueous deep purples and vomit oranges, they bleed across the canvas. It's like the apocalypse is here, and the last chapters of Revelation are all coming true, and it's all refracted in sickening shades of bleached pigment.

The title of Cudahy's two-part exhibition, 'Double Spar', takes its name from a kind of Icelandic quartz which refracts light and demonstrates its polarising qualities. The effects of double-refraction serve as a metaphor of doubling—self and other, subject and object, a lover paying close attention to his beloved's face. The show, too, straddles two spaces: Jorg Grimm's new-ish space in the blue-chip art district just off Berkeley Square and Shoreditch's Hales Gallery in the Tea Building. In Cudahy's pictorial universe—which is at once embedded in the codes and visual alphabet of New York's queer community and lost in a range of transhistorical artistic references, from the Dutch vanitas paintings to Giorgio de Chirico's hauntingly spare imagined landscapes—angels and saints fly, flagellate and forlornly stand. In the miniature *Taped annunciation* (2023), a nod to Fra Angelico, an angel kneels at prayer. Elsewhere, in *Sebastian, before or after* (2023), we encounter a modern-day Saint Sebastian, not from the front as we usually see him but from behind, as he louchely rests against a telegraph pole. Affectionately the queer saint, his trademark ropes,

which are usually there to affix him down while he is pelted by arrows, are thrown off to the side while yellow sprouts of flowers spurt from the dirt. Cudahy is a masterful organiser of his compositions, playing with tight, often geometrical perspectives and luscious interplays between nature and the built environment.



Taped annunciation (2023), oil on linen, 14 x 11 in. Image courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | New York | London



Sebastian, before or after (2023), oil on linen, 72 × 60 in, Image courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | New York | London

On the 7th June, 2023, the sky above Tribeca, Manhattan, where Cudahy lives with his partner, the photographer Ian Lewandowski (the subject of a tender portrait at Grimm), became bathed in apocalyptic reds and yellows, not unlike those in *Violent echo / rumination*, which was triggered by Canadian wildfires. For those who were there, it was a surreal time. *Loop under red sun (2023)* is Cudahy's response to this crisis, a crisis manifested as a warping of colour and form,

reminding us that the cities we live in are subject to the forces of climate change as much as the rainforest and the iceberg. A work on paper, *Loop under red sun* is a study in close looking: what we pay attention to while the world burns, how nature manages to continue spurting through concrete and clay. Indeed, the task of continuing despite all the shit of the world seems to be the show's overarching theme. The best work at Grimm, a sublime portrait of the avant-garde musician Arthur Russell who would die of AIDS at the age of only 40, finds him playing his beloved cello on a beach in Minnesota. His foot is submerged by the lip of the tide, which renders him a ghostly figure, like he has already gone and this is an elegy, but he continues playing. If Cudahy's paintings remind us how much is always threatened by what we cannot control, then they are also testaments to perseverance. If you need reminding of what perseverance looks like, find it on the face of Michelangelo's Saint Anthony.



Loop under red sun (2023), colour pencil on paper, 30 x 22.5 in. Image courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | New York | London



Arthur Russell on the shore (2023), oil on linen, 72 x 60 in. Image courtesy of the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | New York | London

Information

Anthony Cudahy, 'Double Spar' is showing across Hales Gallery and GRIMM Gallery from 9th October – 11th November 2023.

halesgallery.com, grimmgallery.com

Credits

Words: Matthew Holman