



DOMINA

A SOLO EXHIBITION BY MARK KLEINE | LOGAN ART GALLERY | 29 JULY - 3 SEPTEMBER 2022



Mark Kleine, *Crimson*, 2022, archival photographic print

Foreward

Logan Art Gallery and Logan City Council are pleased to present *Domina*, the Gallery's second solo exhibition by Logan Village artist Mark Kleine. Since graduating from Queensland University of Technology in 2013, Mark has exhibited widely in Brisbane, Korea and Japan. In 2017, Logan Art Gallery presented the highly successful exhibition *The method* introducing the Logan community to the artist's specific form of story-telling through performative photography.

Since the invention of photography in the early 19th Century, artists have experimented with both technical innovations and in ways this new medium could be used for creative expression. Initially imitating the more popular subjects in painting – landscapes and portraiture, artists quickly began to set up theatrical tableaux to photograph. These scenes often echoed the contemporary fashion for both historical or biblical scenes in paintings and for 'genre' painting, scenes from everyday life

that invited the viewer to ‘read’ the story portrayed.

This form of photographic storytelling has continued and evolved through the subsequent decades. Mark Kleine’s art combines self-portraiture with staged story telling to tell stories that are both universal and personal. In previous work Mark has engaged their family as well as their self to create various scenes that use humour to comment on the stereotypical identities in culturally diverse communities. In this new series, Mark has chosen a single narrative, portrayed through a number of ‘Acts’ that tell the fictional story of a mother and

their gender fluid child. By playing both characters, Mark simultaneously tells the story from the viewpoint of each, sometimes blurring the distinction between the two characters.

Mark’s stories are both humorous and very serious. By speaking openly and honestly about racial identity and gender fluidity, these scenes from *Domina* normalise what many Australians might find ‘different’ and in the mere act of doing so, exposes levels of racism and prejudice that unfortunately remain inherent in our modern society.

Michael Wardell, 2022

“It is time for parents to
teach young people early
on that in diversity there is
beauty and there is strength.”

- Maya Angelou



Mark Kleine, *Domina*, 2022, archival photographic print

Domina

Mother and child

My work as an artist is about identity. In my view, identity develops over time – it evolves instead of remaining fixed. This is inspired by lived experience. My life as a *mestizo* (i.e. a person of ‘mixed’ Filipino descent) shows me that race is a limited descriptor of people. My gender identity is more about shifting experiences than satisfying criteria. I am also inspired by the learning that comes from differences - identities shift meaning when we encounter different perspectives.

My favourite type of project is the photographic series. I depict myself in a certain guise in different scenes across several photographs. The guise mutates every time it appears because the different scenes give it new meaning. This process reflects my idea that identity evolves over time – the guise represents an identity that alters when new meanings attach to it.

However, *Domina* was conceived a bit differently. Unlike previous

work, this project would express a linear narrative. It expresses a fictional story about a child who discovers and asserts their gender identity. It is also a story about a parent during this process.

I am still unsure why I made this decision. Possibly self-reflection imposed by the pandemic produced an urge to explicitly depict the experiences that inspire my work. I now want to address *why* I make art rather than merely express a premise. In *Domina*, this would focus on my experience with gender.

The bulk of *Domina* is inspired by lived experiences – real events

have been recontextualised into a fictional story. But it also owes much of its creation to several media. I watched many scenes from the period dramas *I, Claudius* (1977) and *Rome* (2005-2007) on YouTube and read up on ancient history. I came across plenty of source material to organise a story arc. I also found the Latin term *domina* - a woman with authority. This term would become the title of the project.

I am always watching drag artists and incorporate their aesthetics into my work. I am now a little obsessed with the drag queen classic *Mommie Dearest* (1981) where Faye Dunaway delivers her

camp impersonation of film actress Joan Crawford. Funnily enough, the film is about the relationship between a mother – a *domina* in her own right – and her child.

The lived experiences that inform *Domina* involved research into my Filipino background. This returned me to my childhood and its experiences with Roman Catholicism. I found that the Virgin Mary remains an archetypal figure to me. She is a *domina* that has influenced me despite my agnostic worldview. The Virgin represents the unconditional love between a parent and their child - a theme that would become central to *Domina*.

All of these influences – period dramas, drag queens, *Mommie Dearest*, and the Virgin Mary – connected in my mind when *Domina* was conceived. The connections were too uncanny to ignore. They also influenced me to focus the project on a woman and their child. The parent's gender subsequently became significant to the story. Thus, the title *Domina* was attached to the project.

Multiple Readings

Domina follows a linear narrative style that is common to novels and plays. The first two ‘Acts’ serve as world building – the initial tensions between mother and child are followed by the mother’s marriage with a ‘man’ figure. The final two ‘Acts’ express the child’s assertion of their gender identity and ends with the reconciliation of mother and child. Accordingly, *Domina* can be read as a work of fiction about a gender diverse individual and their evolving relationship with their family.

As mentioned, the series was inspired by real life. Several of the themes depicted speak to my own experiences. Some themes have been inspired by events that came to me second hand. As such, *Domina* speaks to the cultural contexts that have informed my gender identity and that of others. This includes the Filipino diaspora in a predominantly white Australian community.

Domina also has a more abstract – or symbolic – reading. The



Mark Kleine, *At First Sight*, 2022, archival photographic print







Mark Kleine, *Blue and Red*, 2022, archival photographic print

experiences that inform the project have been communicated by a variety of means, such as light, shadows, costume, and references from art history. A colour code was developed to express the project's themes. Blue and white signifies the "child" while shades of red distinguish the "mother".

Importantly, *Domina* expresses my personal understanding of gender identity as something fluid rather than fixed. It also reflects the fragility and performative aspect

of gender that I experience. These perceptions are primarily depicted by my dual performance. The technique can make it difficult to distinguish the characters from one another. It also makes the gender of the characters plastic - their gender relies on the scene and the viewer to determine rather than their physical make-up.

Representation

We often look for things around us to represent ourselves. In my case, I searched for things that spoke to my experiences. I did this to give my life validation. As I was growing up, the notion of being the “man” that I was expected to become did not match my feelings. Later on, I realised that neither “man” or “woman” could capture who I felt was my true self. The packages of expectations that dictate a “man” and “woman” felt abhorrent. I was challenged to justify my understanding of gender

in a society that is partial to the genders that I personally rejected. I could not find a person, figure, icon, or tradition that I could rely on to represent me – I could not validate my life.

I learned that men and women get married, have children, and ostensibly have a happy life. But I often asked, where do I fit in? How can I be happy if I am not a man or a woman? In hindsight, I can see how I would have benefitted from role models that spoke to



Mark Kleine, *Barong*, 2022, archival photographic print



Mark Kleine, *Nenang's Blessing*, 2022, archival photographic print

my feelings as I grew up. If I had found them then, I would have had a ready means of justifying my life when the questions inevitably came. Maybe I would have saved myself from the self-doubt, self-hatred, disconnection, and general displeasure that I am only starting to manage.

Thankfully, developments in science, gender discourse, and acts of bravery have made representation for gender diverse individuals more readily available.

A more connected world has allowed some of us to find forms of gender expression outside a binary – people from the past and present, such as the *fa'afafine* in the Pacific and *baklâ* in the Philippines, are examples of third or non-binary gender expression that can represent people like me. I also subscribe to the motto, “I am enough,” as wonderfully corny as it sounds. In an individualist society, we can justify ourselves without needing legitimacy from an external source.

However, there is a lot of work to be done. The LGBTIQ+ community remains one of the most vilified communities on Earth. Gender diverse children need role models to help them navigate a harsh world. Representation is sorely needed – we must voice our stories so that our communities can learn to embrace us. Our self-assurance is not enough when we are preyed on and killed. It isn't enough when we cannot get jobs because of who we are and not our credentials. Our lives require systemic change.

I hope that *Domina* can serve as representation to those who explore their gender identity

without support from their communities. I hope it can serve to normalise our place as valued members of society so that we can safely participate in public life.

Nonetheless, representation must also be authentic. I stress the importance of telling our stories in our own terms. Otherwise, our stories are diminished, conflated, and lose their unique strength. Too often we are excluded from the discussion table about our own stories and then taught to accept varnished versions that do not reflect us. Rejection of these diluted truths result in yet further alienation, discrimination, pain, and helplessness.

In response, I have ensured that *Domina* remains resolute in voicing the experiences that have informed it – undiluted depictions of love, violence, pain, and revelation have not been censored. I am so grateful to Logan Art Gallery and Logan City Council for believing in *Domina* – the story about a relationship that is both rocked and strengthened by the boldness of choosing truth.

Mark Kleine, 2022

List of Works

Main Series

Domina (2022), 20 x archival photographic prints (900 x 600 mm each)

Act I: Crimson

Blue and Red

Chicken

Adobo

Sea Dreams

Crimson

Act III: Parallel Mothers

Arrival

Troubled Sleep (Manang)

Abaniko

Barong

Parallel Mothers

Act II: Nazarena

At First Sight

Nenang's Blessing

Despidida

Nazarena

After Party (Tabi Tabi)

Act IV: Confluence

Missionary Lane

Drinking Game

Decision

Confluence

Domina

Supporting Works

The Lady from Midsayap (2022), HD Video (1920 x 1080 px)

Maraming (2022), 100 x archival photographic prints (150 x 100 mm each)

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I also want to thank *Fotofast* for printing all the photographs and *Mad Hatter's Festival* for helping me with the grant application process. They have been a major help to me since I first started out as an artist. Thanks to local framer *I've Been Framed* for framing all the prints of the main series.

The LGBTIQ+ community continues to drive my work as an artist. I would like to thank the gender diverse community for their resilience. *Domina* is a celebration of their strength.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful for the assistance that I received from Logan Art Gallery and Logan City Council. *Domina* would have been unthinkable without their ongoing support. Thank you for helping me tell this story.

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