



Wellington

Claudia Kogachi *Heaven must be missing an angel*

Jhana Millers, 18 April–21 May

KIRSTY BAKER

Claudia Kogachi's *Heaven must be missing an angel* offers up a graphic mix of nostalgia and pop culture, shot through with humorous subversion. The exhibition presents ten large-scale paintings depicting iconic movie scenes, each of them reimaged with a cast of two. Kogachi and her partner Josephine are the real stars of these paintings, regardless of the actors and characters they inhabit. Kogachi approaches her doubled subjects lightly, the artist and her muse depicted as actors playing cinematic characters. By playing painterly dress-ups across lines of identity, the works project a playful approach to gender, race and sexuality, although the weight of representation always sits beneath the surface.

The cinematic source material for *Heaven must be missing an angel* pre-dates the streaming era. These are

big-budget blockbusters designed to be watched with the sugary-sweet smell of popcorn piped into the air. From unconventional love stories like *Ghost* and *Brokeback Mountain*, to that tenuous early-2000s version of girl power codified by *Charlie's Angels*, *Blue Crush* or *Kill Bill*, these movies traverse the line between earnest romanticism and tongue-in-cheek cynicism. Kogachi translates scenes from these films into paintings that crackle with wit and humour. In the wake of endless iterations of Gotham's hyper-masculine brooding billionaire, it is pretty difficult not to smile at a Batman with boobs.

In *Ghost* (2022), Kogachi pictures herself as Demi Moore's heartbroken artist Molly, while Josephine takes the place of the titular ghost—Patrick Swayze's murdered banker Sam. This much-parodied scene of ghostly eroticism is infused with both levity and sweetness here, but it is the painting's background that really wins me over. Painted with an almost audacious simplicity, the chequer-board flooring rushes up to meet

(left) Claudia Kogachi's *Heaven must be missing an angel* at Jhana Millers, with, from left, *Charlie's Angels* and *Ghost* (both 2022)

(below left) CLAUDIA KOGACHI
Batman 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 1225 x 925 mm.

(below centre) CLAUDIA KOGACHI
The Fast and the Furious 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 1700 x 1380 mm.

(below right) CLAUDIA KOGACHI
Brokeback Mountain 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 1700 x 1380 mm.

three shelves stacked with uncannily floating pottery. Precariously weighted cups, squat mugs and pinch-necked vessels are painted in peachy oranges, powder blues and muddy browns, flattened against the chalky pink of the shelves. This adroit use of colour is evident across the show. From the flashes of electric blue edging the trees in *Brokeback Mountain*, to the hot-pink car in *The Fast and the Furious*, Kogachi can pull off unlikely colour combinations with flair.

The visual appeal of Kogachi's style is instantaneous—big blocks of high-key colour mark flattened forms, rendered without tonal modelling. This flatness is emphasised through surface pattern: the brick wall and chequered tablecloth in *Mr and Mrs Smith*, the stripes of a plaid shirt in *Brokeback Mountain* pictured with such utter uniformity that they refuse to articulate the contours of the body clothed within. There is something alluring about this surface flatness. It echoes the seductive artifice of painted backdrops in the theatre, or the early years of studio cinema. In these spaces the willing suspension of disbelief is the anchor between performer and audience. Kogachi's artistic role-playing exploits this foundational tenet—why shouldn't she be Cameron Diaz, Michelle Rodriguez, Brad Pitt or Vin Diesel?

