



GEELHERME VIEIRA

FRAGILE MASCULINITY

Spazio Punch, Giudecca Island, Venice
March 23—April 5, 2024 from Wednesday to Sunday 3pm—7pm
Opening March 23, 6.30pm—10.30pm
Finissage April 5, 6.30pm—10.30pm

A group of boys has exchanged their mountain shorts for pink silk underpants. Half-naked, they play the tickling game amidst the solitude of a forest (*Tickling competition*, 2023). A pink car is stuck in a snowy expanse (*Untitled*, 2024). Its seats adorned with pink tulle (*Untitled*, 2023). Two twin brothers, wearing pink lifebuoy-like vests adorned with ribbons, share a kiss (*Twins*, 2023). A young blonde boy prepares for a climb, the usual mountain gear replaced by a pastel pink silk backpack (*Backpack*, 2023). Alongside the lake banks, two young lovers, dressed in silky nightgowns, take a leisurely stroll (*Untitled*, 2023); while another pair is captured in an affectionate gesture of care, concealed within an orange satin mountain tent, waiting for the sun to rise (*Lovers*, 2023).

Initiated as an exploration into the capabilities of generative AI tools, "Fragile Masculinity" breathes life into an imaginary, hyper-sexualized, yet still plausible representation where the boundaries between the real and the unreal are blurred. The artist's models—always a reproduction of a beauty stereotype that blends Vieira's fantasies with his personal stories—are suspended in a state of longing, sexual tension, desire, and love; one that doesn't adhere to any mainstream ideas of temporality and sociability. By mimicking and consequently misrecognizing certain heteronormative protocols, Geelherme Vieira reclaims the presence of another space of existence where the experiential possibilities of his eroticized models veer from the norm and disjoint from pre-existing currents of discourse that shape us into what society expects us to be.

«While expanding this universe, a lot of my personal stories and experiences came to mind», Vieira says, «and many of the contrasts seen in the works of this exhibition are direct references to moments, people, habits, or simply "normal" male stances that to this day I struggle to understand.»

"Fragile Masculinity" marks Geelherme Vieira's first solo exhibition in Italy. It features a selection of 20 photographs, one video and a group of objects and site-specific installations. It includes a reconfigured version of a sling commonly used in BDSM and other gay cruising clubs; fishing equipment repurposed into sex toys and vice versa; mountain gear designed and crafted by the artist himself in collaboration with expert designers in the field. These physical objects manifest in the exhibition as a bodily incursion of Vieira's imaginary universe into the real world, a more tangible outcome of his experiments with AI tools. Contrary to what we are often used to, images came first and objects afterwards. Ultimately, they create a bridge between the conceptual and material aspects of Vieira's research and work.

In particular, AI software provides Vieira with a powerful tool to envision and create the representation of a reality that, although recognizable, seems yet to exist. After generating a wide range of almost abstract images using the text-to-image device, the artist transitions into highly crafted image-to-image manipulation. The instructional text generates specific themes and styles, blending custom models carefully chosen by the artist—often based on personal memories and fantasies. «It's fascinating to see how an abstract form can transform into a photorealistic representation», Vieira says. Once a final selection is made from the initial set of images, more refined compositions emerge by blending elements from different images. Simultaneously, specific prompts, intentionally infused with eroticism and desire, are generated. «I ensure my prompts are detailed and specific, using powerful keywords to define designs. I've been exploring both online



generators and advanced Graphic User Interfaces to enhance this process.» Lastly, the artist addresses post-production, correcting defects in the images, often employing techniques like face restoration and inpainting, and occasionally incorporating additional AI models for facial restoration.

By harnessing the almost infinite potentialities offered by AI to explore the most contradictory ideas about what gender entails, Vieira's images appear to raise the following questions: How far can a body already highly gendered and a localized desire, both bodily and emotional, transform themselves? To what extent can they become something other than the narratives and discourse we have been given to deal with and ultimately understand them? And how can such a gesture of addressing otherness become a tool to question and resist social expectations?

In this sense, "Fragile Masculinity" extends beyond a visual exploration of the old stereotypical ideal of masculinity and impossible beauty standards—strong, fearless, and muscled. The portraits the artist creates serve as a starting point to defy society's inclination to dictate how we, without exception, must perform gender and sexuality. The fragility of Vieira's characters doesn't hinge on their bodily appearance and strength; on the contrary, it serves as a metaphor to open up to scenarios alluding to a different way of imagining eroticism and the sex drive. It is not the attributes of their "masculinity" to be fragile, therefore at risk; but rather the qualities and etiquettes society attributes to "masculinity" that are put at stake.

«AI generative tools», Chiara Bardelli Nonino states, «allow us an unprecedented look at our collective visual unconscious. This is particularly evident in AI photorealistic images: when prompted by a visually fluent person they can become a distilled reflection on our biases and desires, they can expose hidden patterns and forge new ones. It's the case with Geelherme Vieira's project "Fragile Masculinity" – the pastel pink frills, ribbons and delicate features usually associated with femininity are used to subvert the traditional imagery of masculinity, using one set of stereotypes to dispel another. Vieira's intent to subvert the codified vision of masculinity overlaps with his fantasies and desires, creating a layered, ambiguous narrative that draws you in – and keeps you questioning.»

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