

HYPERALLERGIC

The Absurdist Echoes of Tudor Tyranny

Cate Giordano's immersive tableaux hurl the viewer headfirst into a historical clusterfuck that eerily recalls the present day.



by **Cassie Packard**



Installation view of *REX*, Postmasters Gallery, 2020 (all images courtesy Postmasters Gallery)

King Henry VIII of England is perhaps best known for founding the Church of England and having six wives, two of whom he executed. *REX*, Cate Giordano's solo exhibition at Postmaster's Gallery, recounts Henry's brief, awkward relationship with his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, whom he married sight unseen on the advice of his political advisor Thomas Cromwell. The two divorced within six months, largely because Henry found her to be less attractive than her court portrait by Hans Holbein suggested.

Giordano's immersive tableau-cum-visual wormhole hurls the viewer headfirst into this historic clusterfuck, chronicling a tale of duplicity: the inconsistent portrait, the wedding initially conducted by proxy, and the "surprise" first meeting in which Henry donned a disguise. Navigating cartoonish faux stained glass and banquet tables of spray foam meat, visitors encounter a cast of courtesans crudely fabricated from materials such as wire, duct tape, and cling wrap. Giordano confounds gender and power dynamics by playing both Anne of Cleves and a drag king Henry in short, soapy scenes projected on the walls. Slippages and doublings abound, as characters and props in the gallery space — [Anne Boleyn](#), a leg of ham — materialize onscreen.



Installation view of *REX*, Postmasters Gallery, 2020

The histrionics of a monarch who — enabled by his pandering court — was egotistical at best and tyrannical at worst feel all too familiar: I leave seeing double.

REX continues through December 19 at Postmasters Gallery (54 Franklin Street, Manhattan, New York).