



H A R L A N L E V E Y P R O J E C T S

Sean Crossley *Liberalism*

Harlan Levey Projects

65 Rue Isidoor Teirlinckstraat, 1080 Brussels, Belgium

Opening: Saturday, September 12, 2026, 11:00 - 18:00
September 12 - October 24, 2026

Ask ten people what "liberal" means, and you may get ten different answers. At its root, the word points to freedom, but over the past two centuries it has come to mean very different things depending on where you are. It can refer to civil rights, free markets, social democracy, or limited government; in one country, a liberal party may be center-left, while in another it may be center-right. Safer, perhaps, to define away from politics: a liberal take on the rules may get you in trouble; a liberal serving of drink will have you stumbling.

Sean Crossley's *Liberalism* begins from that gap between language and interpretation, and from a coincidence the work finds hard to shake: liberalism and contemporary painting emerged together, grew together, and are now in crisis together, for more or less the same reasons. Painting has become content, and much of it is content with itself as a mirror of liberal individualism rather than what it has historically been: a practical, secular exercise in learning how to look. Crossley's exhibition begins from that problem, and from painting's capacity to register conflict, hesitation, and what cannot quite be said.

In his third solo exhibition with Harlan Levey Projects, Crossley presents a new series of two-by-two-meter paintings. Each work is composed from the visual identities of four liberal parties, chosen from different countries. Their symbols are selected and overlapped according to the formal qualities of logo, colour, and slogan, without privileging any particular political alignment. Arranged in groups of four, one for each side of the square canvas, the paintings were made through continual rotation, producing works with no fixed top or bottom. Each image asks its parts to coexist, compressed into a hybrid form that can be read from any direction, without any single viewpoint becoming final.

Though it draws on political imagery, *Liberalism* is, at its core, an exhibition about painting: about what painting can hold, and what it can keep open. The canvas becomes a site where competing signs do not resolve into a message, but remain in tension. Crossley takes the centre as both subject and problem — a compositional and political difficulty at once. The generally understood problem of the square format is that you find yourself composing around the centre, creatively constrained by it. That crisis at the centre of the paintings rhymes with the crisis at the centre of contemporary liberal politics, giving charge to everything that occurs within each work: the blurred edges, the ambiguous overlaps, the murky entanglements. The conventional goal of the resolved painting begins to feel beside the point.

The works function as world paintings: images that hold multiple positions simultaneously without collapsing them into agreement. Unlike the fixed and often instrumental language of political discourse, they remain open systems, self-reflexive, unresolved, and available to renewed reading. By giving stable form to accumulated tensions, they arrive, in their strange way, at a kind of common ground, one that is pictorial rather than programmatic.



H A R L A N L E V E Y P R O J E C T S

The exhibition title reiterates this, naming a condition rather than a programme. Before becoming a political identity, "liberal" belonged to the liberal arts: the education of a free person, and the cultivation of judgment, attention, and sensibility. To look carefully, to attend to colour, form, and relation, is itself a free act. Crossley's paintings begin there, pursuing the possibilities of painting as a space for plurality, contradiction, and unresolved thought.

At a time when language is often pressed into slogans and positions, *Liberalism* reaffirms painting as a medium capable of holding ambiguity without resolving it. Its relevance lies in that openness: in the possibility that freedom may still be found not in certainty, but in the space between meanings.

Sean Crossley (b. Australia, 1987) lives and works in Brussels. His practice utilizes painting as a pragmatic tool to examine the friction between abstraction and realism, both within the discipline itself and the broader social landscape. Crossley's work engages with painting's historical continuum while treating the canvas as a conceptual object embedded in contemporary visual culture.

*A foundational moment for his practice occurred during a residency at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, where he developed a series of one hundred paintings, later compiled into his 2024 artist book, *Excess/Support* (MER. Books). This project established his approach to painting as a system of exchange: a reflexive, non-literal method for navigating the complexities of the information age. His process often begins with quotidian or conventional subjects (faces, objects, or public spaces) which are gradually woven into complex, fused compositions. Through the buildup of surfaces and the revelation of pentimenti, the work maps haphazard connections between disparate subject matters, creating an ongoing dialogue between bodies of work.*

Crossley has held solo exhibitions at the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre (Brussels), the Orpheus Institute (Ghent), Campus Biotech (Geneva), Harlan Levey Projects (Brussels), and FUTURES Gallery (Melbourne). His work has appeared in group exhibitions at Flux Laboratory (Geneva), Emergent (Veurne), and nGbK (Berlin), among others. He has participated in residencies at the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre (2019), the Embassy of Foreign Artists, EOFA (Geneva, 2021), and the Cité Internationale des Arts (Paris, 2025).

Press contact:

Eva Dobbels - eva@hl-projects.com