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## **Charles, Camilla, Biden, Putin, Trump, Harry, Meghan and Annie Zamero**

BY CHARLES THOMSON

Annie Zamero hasn't been invited to the Coronation on Saturday despite, or more likely because of, her paintings of the royals, the latest being titled "The Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla", though that's still a drawing at the moment with a finished painting some months away.

Previously she received a polite letter from Buckingham Palace declining an invite for Queen Elizabeth II to attend an exhibition showcasing Zamero's portrait of Her Majesty on a swing in commemoration of the Queen's 90th birthday. The painting was based on French Rococo artist Jean Honoré Fragonard's "The Swing", where a man has a view up the dress of the swinging lady, who is quite likely not wearing underwear. Those who write royal thank you's may not be students of 18th century painting.



The Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla by Annie Zamero.

The current drawing in progress (over six foot in height) is also based on an 18th century painting, this time “The Triumph of Zephyrus and Flora” by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. The happy classical reference explains the floating robes around Camilla and a bare-chested Charles. Seemingly innocuous details carry a message, not obvious on first sight. The large crown planted firmly on Camilla’s head contrasts with the small one held precariously aloft by the king and manifests Zamero’s belief as to who wears the trousers in the relationship (although in this graphic neither of them do!).

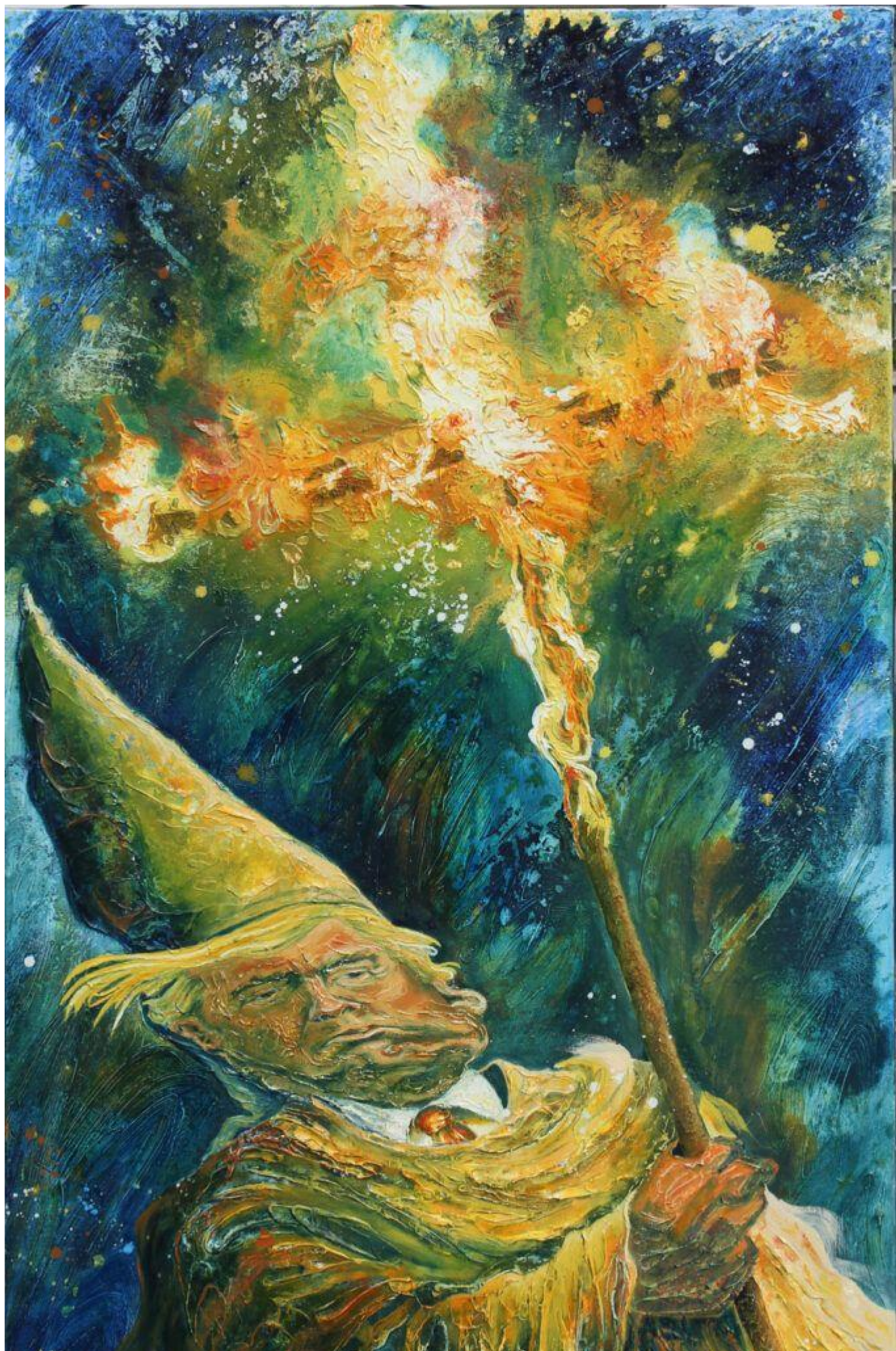
The real shocker comes in the form of Cupid, the bringer of attraction whose arrow causes uncontrollable desire. Cupid’s features are those of Princess Diana. Zamero says evasively, “I like my work to be ambiguous. It’s up to the viewer to make what they want of it.” I really don’t know what to make of that depiction.



Kiss and Make Up by Annie Zamero.

Her recently-finished painting “Kiss and Make Up” is not likely to get her an invite to either the White House or the Kremlin. It is based on Auguste Rodin’s “The Kiss” statue, where the original embracing figures have been replaced by Presidents Biden and Putin in a clinch, naked apart from shorts and wearing boxing gloves. They do not look entirely happy being in such intimate proximity. Her comment on the painting is likely to make them even less happy: “I want them to kiss and make up and stop fighting.” It is deliberately, she admits, “slightly homoerotic”.

Another artist in my circle, Joe Machine, is a reformed youth offender, who has been involved in his fair share of violence, which he has observed in many young men is an expression of repressed homosexuality. Could this have anything to do with the invasion of Ukraine?



Trump Lights Up the Darkness by Annie Zamero.

Meanwhile, Zamero is determined to not be invited to as many places as possible. Mar-a-Lago is next on the list with her painting “Trump Lights up the Darkness”. The title might have gained her admission to the Donald Pleasure Palace, were it not based on Francisco Goya’s “The Inquisition Tribunal” and were Trump not holding a burning cross and wearing a tall, conical white hat. Zamero’s customary ambiguity pervades the image. I have pieced together an analysis, partly confirmed by a brief phone call to the artist. The Klu Klux Klan-like burning cross symbolises when Trump refused to condemn white supremacist violence. The hat simultaneously references the Klan and also the traditional “dunce’s cap”, placed on the head of a slow school learner as a humiliation and punishment. (I’m not sure it would have done much to speed up their learning.)

The cap also features in Goya’s painting, where, known as *coroza* or *capirote*, it is worn by four accused unfortunates, clad in *sanbenitos* — symbols of crimes on yellow sackcloth garments. World-renowned author and critic, Edward Lucie-Smith called Zamero’s work “prophetic”. so who knows.....



Take One by Annie Zamero.

“Take One”, her portrait of Harry and Meghan, flying through the clouds on a chariot, is relatively benign with the Duke in the military uniform he is no longer allowed to wear at royal occasions and the Duchess protecting her modesty with a towel, alluding to her role in the TV series, *Suits*, as is the clapperboard in the corner. It was offered as a wedding gift. A letter from Kensington Palace said the couple were “touched”, but could not accept something from a commercial gallery or artist, presumably as part of the royal family and presumably a barrier that no longer presents a problem. I don’t think the painting is being offered again, however.

A previous take on Prince Charles was on display in East London, when it evoked wrath from an American tourist, who said it was “outrageous”, “a disgrace” and “a real insult” to the then-heir to the throne. All that because it showed him pushing his mother, the then-Queen, out of a flying chariot. To be precise, it showed him in the chariot in the sky with a tumbling woman’s hat beneath him

and a handbag attached to an outstretched hand. Perhaps his own outstretched hand was trying to help, rather than having just pushed. More ambiguity. We shall never know.

Zamero is a Stuckist artist, who has taken part in demonstrations outside Tate Britain against the Turner Prize, when she arrives with so many layers of clothing to stave off the cold it is hard to find exactly where she is in the middle of them. She runs a “French style art salon” called Salon Noir, whose speakers have included well-known critic Matthew Collings and Pandemonia, an anonymous performance artist, wearing a latex female mask and dress, who transitioned from gate crasher to London Fashion Week VIP guest.

Zamero founded her own Magma Group, which not only holds shows but made the news at the opening of Tate Modern’s Damien Hirst show, when the members, wearing huge red wigs and long white gowns, staged a masked performance at the gallery’s door, ironically protesting at publicity-hungry artists.

She managed the rare feat of getting her paintings featured in the *Evening Standard* diary page, which revealed that the painting of Prince Charles mentioned above contributed to a furore resulting in artists withdrawing their work from a group show and the whole exhibition being closed down. Hugo Boss, chairman of the Art Society Soho, said the show by member artists was called *Revolution*, because it was to “examine the underlying fears in society.” The gallery manager at the Black and White Building in Shoreditch condemned the show as “off-brand”. Everyone is still confused at that, as am I.

The diary later featured her painting of Meghan and Harry. Zamero protested the work was not in poor taste. (Friends had wanted her to portray Meghan without the towel.) Zamero is, surprisingly not a republican: “I like the royal family, because I like the pageantry — visually stimulating for artists. I’m not enthralled by any of the individuals. I think the individual characters are a bit weak. I’m for the royal family. I think they add to our tradition. It adds something to the UK to have it.”

Presumably it also adds to the tradition of royal satire and caricature, particularly in evidence during the Georgian period (at the time of the American Revolution and the Napoleonic War). Regarding her choice of subject matter, she comments: “I have to find characters stimulating for some reason. I couldn’t paint Rishi Sunak [current UK prime minister], because I’d fall asleep.”

Zamero trained as a scientist in physiology at Manchester University, and worked as a credit analyst and account manager at Hill Samuel merchant banker for several years, but felt like a “square peg in a round whole”. She came out

with controversial statements such as “Glenda Jackson for Prime Minister” to shock her colleagues and spice up the “rather dull environment”.

I have known Annie Zamero for nearly 30 years. We have only fallen out badly about three or four times. She is petite, refined, well spoken, sensitive and intelligent, but with a bit more going on inside than meets the eye, as you may have gathered already and as I found out many years ago, when I had arranged to meet her at Café Rouge in Highgate. I arrived at the appointed time, looked inside where she was nowhere to be found, assumed she was running late and decided to wait outside. As it happened she had been in the toilet, then waited inside for me. She finally decided to look outside, where she saw me and exclaimed in a loud, angry voice that caused the heads of all the nearby al fresco clientele to swivel round: “Where the fuck have you been?”