



**Kenneth  
Bergfeld**

Born 1990, Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany  
Lives and works in Cologne, Germany

#### Education

2016 - 2018 Postgraduate Animation Studies at Kunshochschule für Medien, Koeln  
2009 - 2014 Kunstakademie Düsseldorf

#### Solo / Duo Exhibitions

2021  
Project Native Informant, London  
*Ghost Drop Ruin*, Project Native Informant, Online

2019  
Project Native Informant at Art Basel Miami Beach  
*I, Spider*, Project Native Informant, London

2018  
*The Spire (Part 2)*, Part One, Cologne  
*The Spire (Part 1)*, Hospitality, Cologne

2012  
*Recherche + Archiv*, Project Space of Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf 2011  
*Yourspace* (with Paul Czerlitzki), Kunstverein Leverkusen, Leverkusen

#### Group Exhibitions

2020  
*Group Exhibition*, Project Native Informant, Soho

2019  
*CONDO New York*, Project Native Informant hosted by Foxy Production, New York

2018  
*Icons and Rituals*, Pik Deutz, Cologne

2017  
*Editions*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne

2016  
*Von den Strömen der Stadt*, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach  
*The Politics of Portraiture*, Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco  
*What would you pay for a rotting whale*, Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf

2014  
*Steady State*, Kunstverein Dusiburg, Duisburg  
*Spring Exhibition*, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen

2013  
*No Electricity, No Gas, No Water*, Baustelle Schaustelle, Essen

2012  
*No Electricity, No Plexiglas, No Humor, Folgendes*, Hochschule für Hamburg, Hamburg

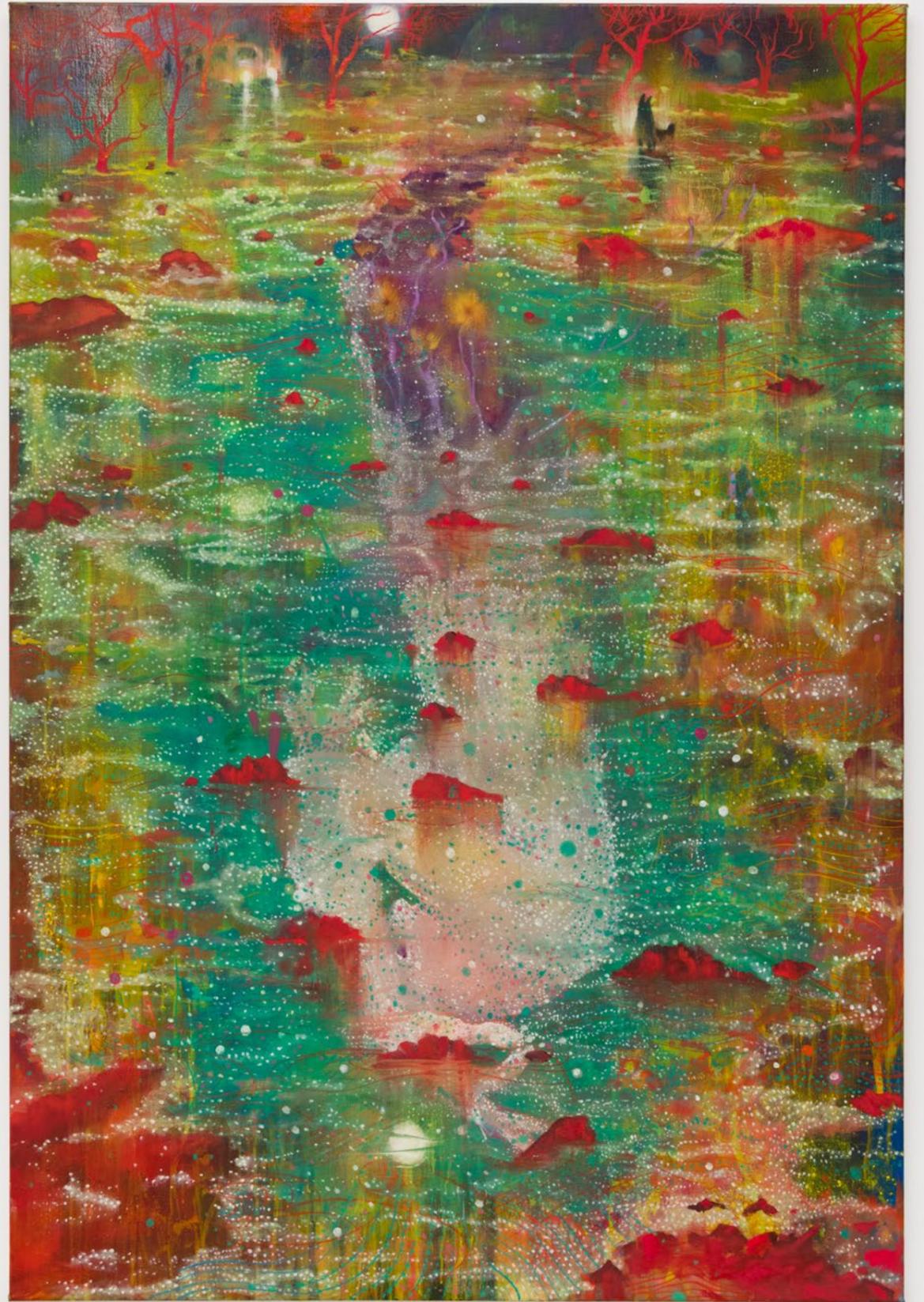
#### Curatorial Projects

2015  
*Performance-Series "Seira's"*, Dan Graham Pavillion at K21, Düsseldorf

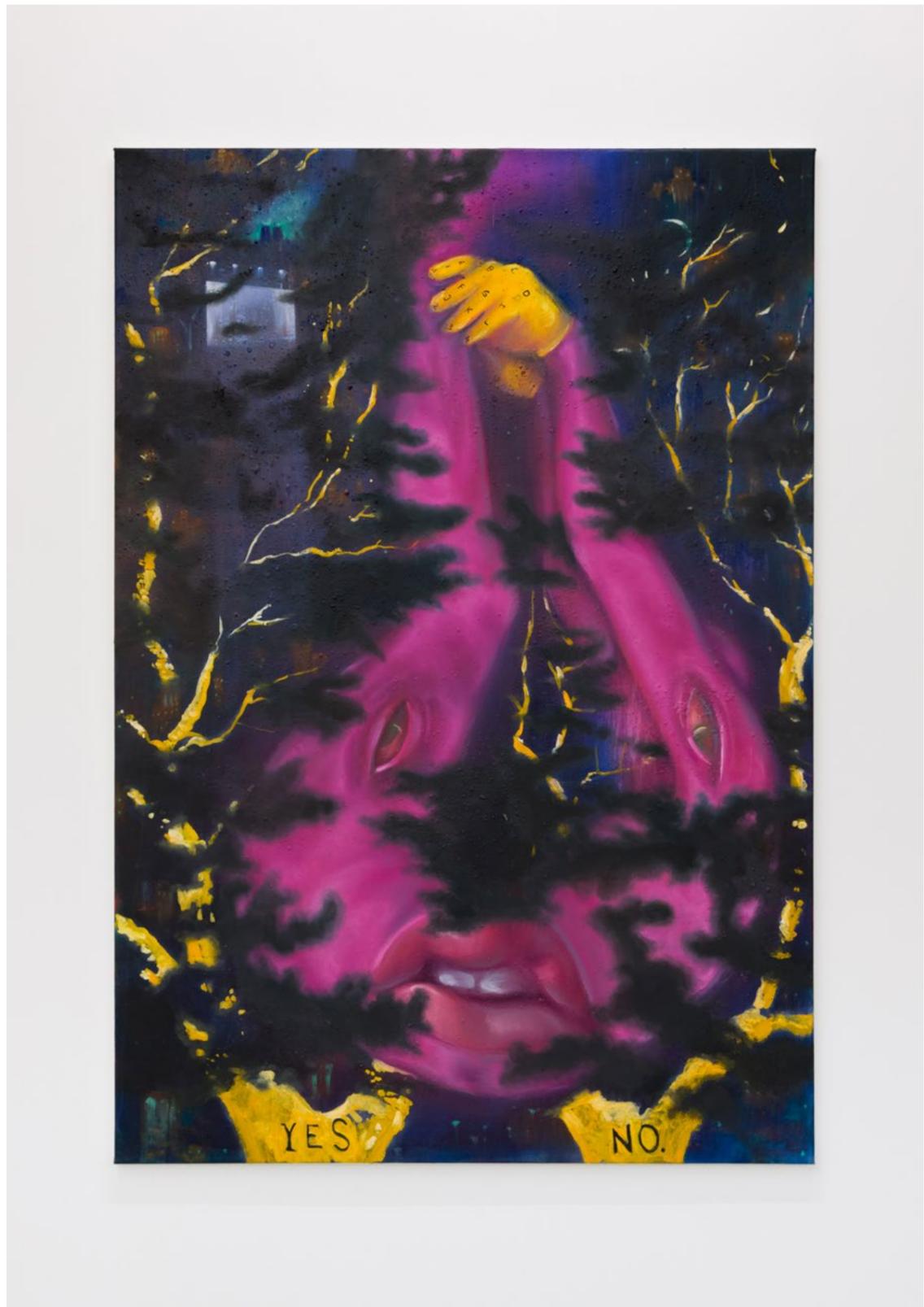
#### Publications / LPs

2019  
*Kenny Unrest x Nasssau 12" LP*, Ana Ott Records

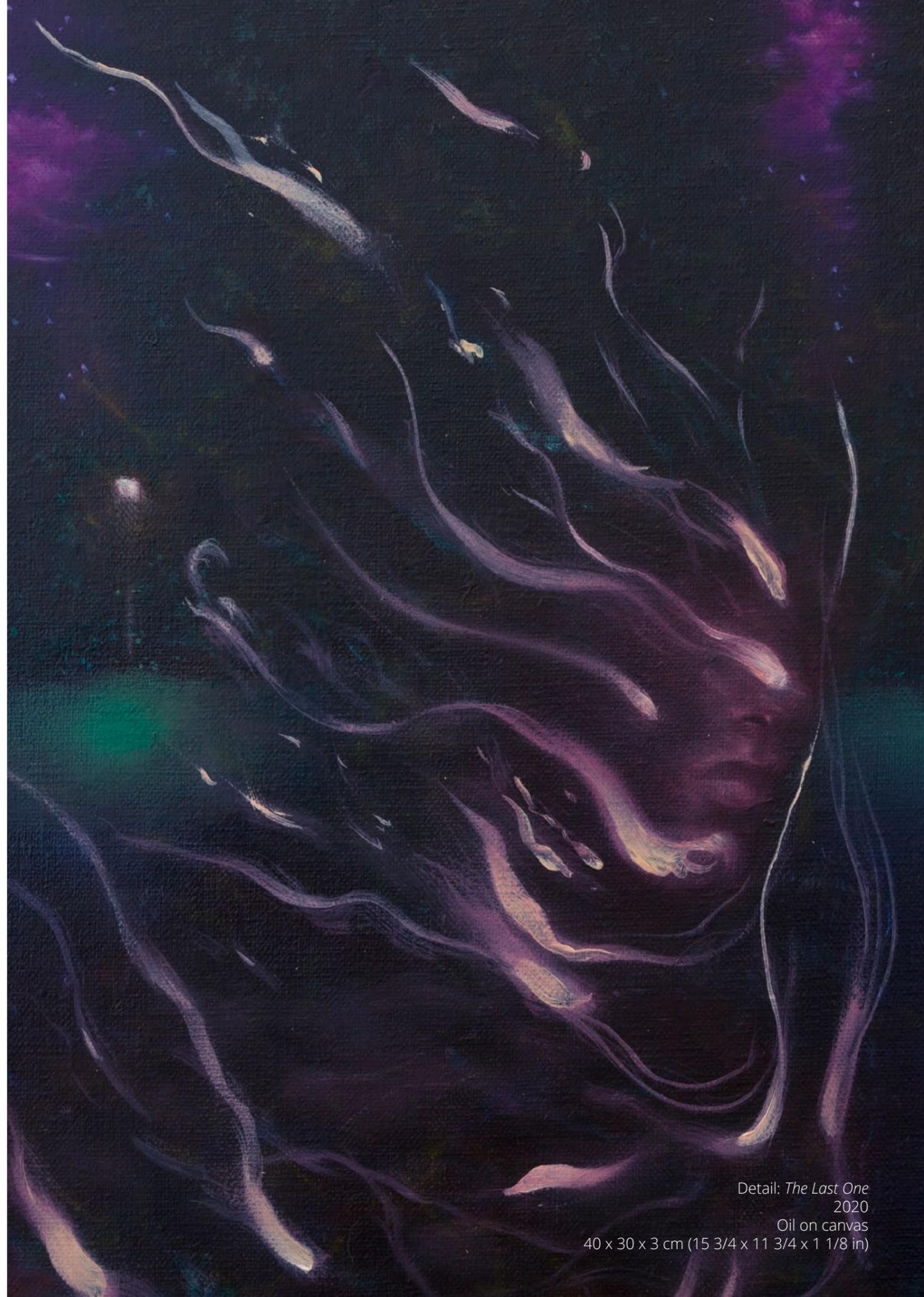
2018  
Artist's Book: *The Spire*



*Ghost*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
145 x 100 x 2 cm (57 1/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/4 in)



*Drop*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
145 x 100 x 2 cm (57 1/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/4 in)



Detail: *The Last One*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



*You came to fetch me from work tonight II*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



Detail: *Untitled*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



*A home with no hands XVI*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



*A daydream*  
2020  
Pencil on handmade paper  
29 x 22 cm (11 3/8 x 8 5/8 in)





Detail: *A home with no hands IX*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



*A home with no hands VI*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
145 x 100 x 2 cm (57 1/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/4 in)



*A home with no hands VIII*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



*A home with no hands VII*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 3 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)



*A home with no hands II*  
2020  
Oil on canvas  
145 x 100 x 2 cm (57 1/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/4 in)



Installation view: Kenneth Bergfeld, *I, Spider*, 2019 at Project Native Informant, London



*I, Spider*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)



*I, Spider*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)



Installation view: Kenneth Bergfeld, *I, Spider*, 2019 at Project Native Informant, London



Detail: *I, Spider*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)



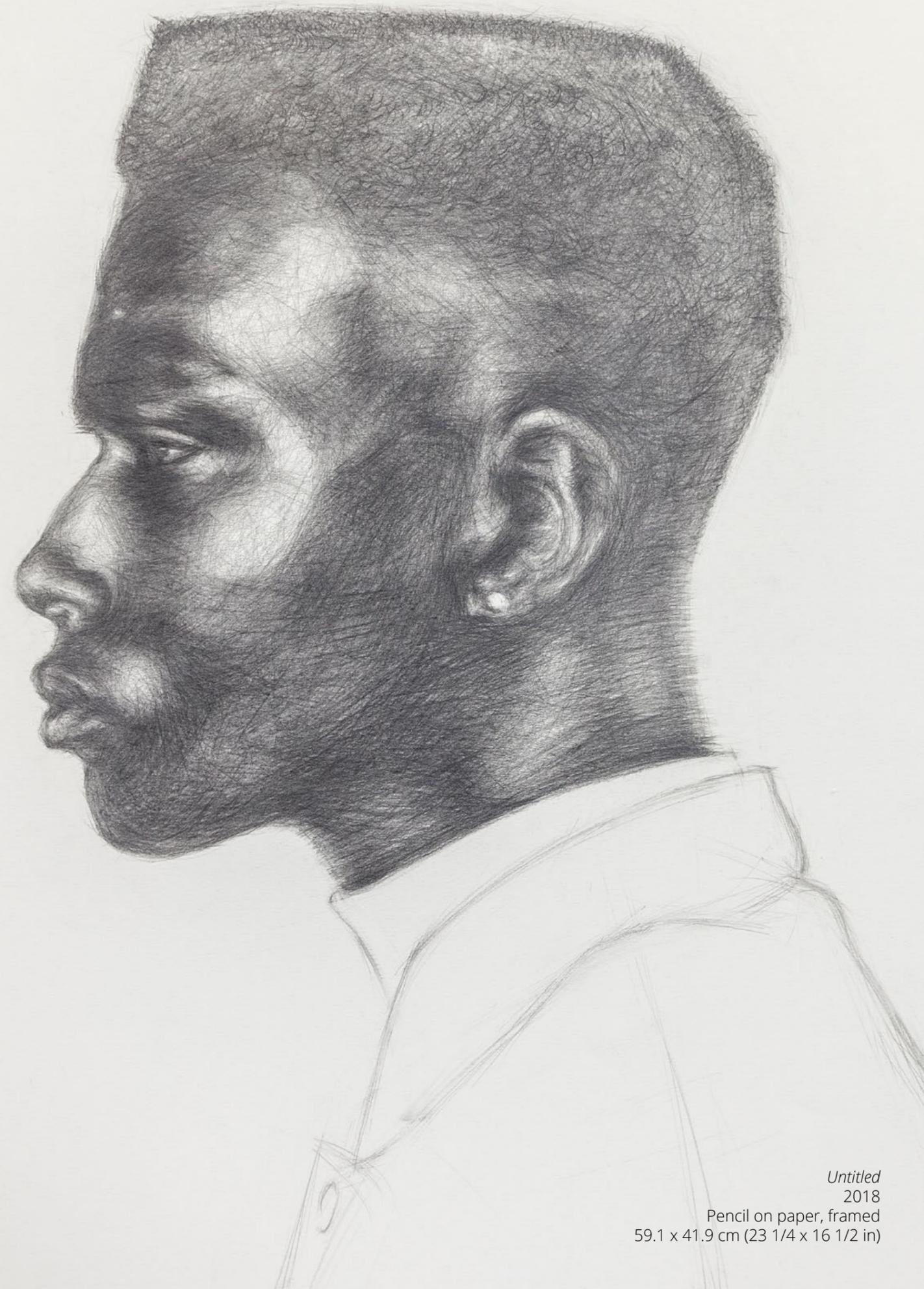
*I, Spider*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
145 x 100 x 2 cm (57 1/8 x 39 3/8 x 3/4 in)



*I, Spider*  
2019  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)



*Untitled*  
2018  
Pencil on paper, framed  
29.5 x 21 cm (11 5/8 x 8 1/4 in)



*Untitled*  
2018  
Pencil on paper, framed  
59.1 x 41.9 cm (23 1/4 x 16 1/2 in)





Installation view: Kenneth Bergfeld, *The Spire Pt. 2 at Part One*, Cologne, 2018



*Androgynous Angel VI*  
2018

Oil on canvas

40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)



Installation view: Kenneth Bergfeld, *The Spire Pt. 1* at Hospitality, Cologne, 2018.



*Androgynous Angel*  
2018

Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)

# Mousse Magazine

## ESSAYS Mousse 68

### Devotional Doubling: Kenneth Bergfeld

Alex Bennett

Dutch Mistress (2013) is profiled in softening summer-hot glow, her bowl cut snappish in cantaloupe orange. Her bouffant hair, plumulaceous, secludes the skull itself. What does the shape achieve? Powder puff, acorn, vessel, rotunda, halo. Holbein's stoicism meets Steven Shearer's boys of willowy lustiness—or Russian icon painting; the silhouette serves as a template for Androgynous Angels, a series of profile portraits modeled on and by Kenneth Bergfeld.

Inaugurating his Angels, Kenneth Bergfeld took a fancy to Hokusai's Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (1830-1832), whose ombré skies and undulant clouds accumulate in Androgynous Angel VIII (2018). Repetition and attention intensify into saturation: if one pays attention, one sees “it” everywhere. William Gass knows this in *On Being Blue* by tracing the color it bleeds: “Russian cats and oysters, a withheld or imprisoned breath, the blue they say that diamonds have, deep holes in the ocean.”<sup>1</sup> Blue: private, cosmic, characteristic. Gorging on obsession, Gass's attention becomes a portal, a fantasy you can almost step into. Bergfeld's solo show, *I, Spider* at Project Native Informant, knows this: “I know now that it—I, Spider—was not about possessing, but about being possessed / by the forces that ran through me and this work unifying us eternally.” Each Angel is a twofold figure: Bergfeld viewing himself through the eyes of others. His lips—pink and beige and prominent—relay the constancy alongside each crest: a cloche-like cushion of luminous angora, it mushrooms into a dome, shrouding the head in a chatoyant shell. Each Angel is tailored to their environment. Angel VI (2018) is a princely apple of pulsatory red; trees littered with superfluous blossoms occupy the pointillist backdrop, in turn blurring into his turtlenecked torso of medieval gem embroideries. See, in other works, Georgia O'Keeffe white flowers floating in planetary blue, the face levitating; hair of beryl and seafoam green, its outline licked in flames; a tree of cinnabar lacquer deconstructing with branches lurching like antlers behind an angel's crest of lynx-like spots splintered by spikes. Each angel is satiny and pearlized—with canvases primed repeatedly—encompassing, like a Raf Simons silhouette, a starched cowboy hat.

The repetition of form dissolves essentialism: it breeds difference. Bergfeld's series' most recent iterations, titled *I, Spider* (2019), resemble textual devices of mimesis. For Jacques Derrida, the text is always “double,” bowing to perpetual, infinite precedents, while for Roland Barthes, the text is woven, and in this making, “the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web.”<sup>2</sup> Yet through these very secretions, the subject resurfaces, albeit in disseminated form. Bergfeld echoes this; in his paintings' independent reality, the self is deconstructed and strained by the existential. It is a scrutinizing reflection on color, texture, and structure over time, viewing one's subjectivity through the eyes of others, as well as how one changes over such a period. It is this oscillation between repetitious form and form's fundamental change that renders precision and extravagance, a combination of form and formlessness, a pristine structure's lurch toward collapse.

Where icon painting emphasizes the eyes, Bergfeld erases the eye with a snowy orb; the lips, however, coax lyricism. Reinforcing the metaphysical relationships withheld by his angels, his spiders, Bergfeld has performed to his paintings with readings of messianic purple prose. For *The Spire*, Pt.1 (2018) at Hospitality, Cologne, Bergfeld adopted the persona of Kenny Unrest in an aural phantasmagoria: birdsong, little bells and stinging synths, talk on heat and stringency, the baking of challah, a violin's bow. In a small loft populated by his plush-headed figures veiled at the neck with silk neckerchiefs, the effect echoes a woozy Carthusian cloister. Scenes of deep introspection worm into Bergfeld's repertoire, reminiscent of Ezra Pound on his short imagist poems as concentrated equations: “record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.” In a larger canvas, one stands in a heady violet marshland swathed with white calla lilies, great lounging leaves and magnified pansies—some stippled, others waterlogged. Monastic, the figure echoes Charles Rennie Mackintosh's ethereal women unfurling into tulips, roses, and filigreed trellis, indivisible from their structure. Scarlet red, another sits among Impressionist roses, shadows swallowing the eyes, narrative spilling into the dark. Echoing Picasso's *Garçon à la Pipe* (1905), whose original flowers sweep like wings, Bergfeld gestures toward the struggle of painterly justification. Made during Picasso's Rose Period, the boy is immortalized. Rose: a period, a tone you see everywhere; no doubt it matches Bergfeld's own attention, it is already double. On Bergfeld's terms, it may also be devotional.

[1] William H. Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Enquiry* (New York: New York Review Books, 1976), 1.

[2] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 64.

# AnOther

## The Vibrant Retrofuturism of Kenneth Bergfeld's Paintings

Antonia Marsh

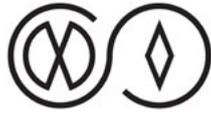
The other evening, someone was visiting me at *Soft Opening* on Herald Street and on leaving asked me if I knew whether *Project Native Informant* was open. Around the corner from us in Bethnal Green (nowadays there are a few galleries keeping each other company on the block, thanks to the eponymous Maureen Paley), *Project Native Informant* recently moved from their former ex-garage space in Mayfair to a storefront, glass-fronted corner on Three Colts Lane. I tend to work late so this question was posed firmly after dark and I quipped in response that even if the gallery wasn't open, you'd be able to see the show. With a storefront space in a tube station, I obviously have a thing for windows. Clear but strong, both physically present and absent, protective and powerful markers of territory, windows decide where inside ends and outside begins and can render galleries uncharacteristically welcoming, democratising the viewing experience.

At both exhibitions prior to his current solo show at *Project Native Informant*, Cologne-based German painter Kenneth Bergfeld presented paintings fixed onto the inside window of each gallery. Hiding shyly from an external viewer, these paintings both depict a figure with an averted gaze and impressive, sculptural hair. In a night time installation image of *What would you pay for a rotting whale*, at Max Mayer, Düsseldorf in 2015, the reflection of the glowing sign for a hotel provides the backdrop for Bergfeld's *Dutch Mistress* (2013). Spatial and temporal depth both feel flattened as the dark Düsseldorf exterior interacts with the pastel daylight in the work. At his exhibition *The Spire (Part 2)* in 2018, the artist's *Androgynous Angel VI* (2018), a painting hung on the glass window at *Part One* in Cologne, similarly engages with its environment. A trippy Arcadian scene floats off the figure's clothing and into the background, as the boughs of trees in a local park surround the work in soft green.

At *Project Native Informant*, Bergfeld presents *I, Spider*, the artist's first solo exhibition in London. While no paintings sit directly on the gallery windows, every work is visible from the street. 12 paintings, limited to just two sizes, illustrate a continuing project to revisit the same portrait. Since his first *Androgynous Angel* (2015), Bergfeld has been examining this figure, with their hidden eyes, full lips, slick bouffant hair (although hairstyle does vary momentarily in the newest work) and colourful backgrounds that seem to perfectly match the mood of Bergfeld's imagined subject. Sometimes quaint, sometimes camp, sometimes sinister: these backgrounds are either loaded with decorative detail or kept in block colour, which undermines any momentary certainty that they function usefully as indexical signifiers of deeper meanings within the inner psyche of the figure. Perhaps instead, these backgrounds enable a means to a formal end, space to investigate two-dimensional spatial organisation or even painting itself.

Oozing retrofuturism, the figure in Bergfeld's larger canvases ignores or retracts from the picture plane, while in the smaller busts they seem to nonchalantly lean into our personal space. Vibrant, uncomfortably unusual hues and shiny, plastic textures suspend the paintings in an animated space of non-reality. This mysterious figure, not so much confrontational as aloof, perpetuates an inner inaccessibility through a glossy exterior veneer. But why repeat this one figure? Besides painting, Bergfeld works in music and animation film, both disciplines that engage with activities of repetition. In an interview with Christina Irrgang, Bergfeld explains that “repetition creates ‘cracks’ in our everyday lives and is a form of change in itself”. Repetition constitutes a marker of change and progress, of time passing between identical actions. By repeating this single figure, Bergfeld tracks the change in himself as he moves through time. “I didn't want to solidify my identity as a young artist, but instead sought out the immersion into *Androgynous Angel* and locate myself through painting views of *Androgynous Angel*. I felt like committing to *Androgynous Angel*, not as a painting, but as a person.” Extending this assertion in her essay *Scrambled Aches*, Jessica Gispert writes “Kenneth Bergfeld's *Androgynous Angel* series depicts an array of characters portraying fragments of his subconscious... One could even say these figures represent Bergfeld himself... The artist existing inside of his paintings.” Approaching this figure from multiple perspectives, whether pictorial or psychological, seems to allow the artist to navigate and examine a more complex understanding of himself.

A few days after my conversation with the gallery visitor, I was again leaving late and wanted to see the paintings at *I, Spider* again. This time the gallery was closed and it was dark outside, so I could just about make out the work. Bergfeld's angels loomed spookily in the darkness, staggering into the space before me, only separated by the windows. Not dissimilar the interaction between painted surface and glass at the shows in Düsseldorf and Cologne, at *Project Native Informant*, the window marks not only the break between interior and exterior, but between embodied and virtual identity, between reality and fantasy.



## Project Native Informant

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Cover image: I, Spider, 2019, Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 x 2 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3/4 in)