Ben Quinn: *Fish Tank* (Vitrine)
November 12, 2022–January 21, 2023

STARS is pleased to present *Fish Tank*, a solo presentation of new paintings by Ben Quinn, presented in the gallery's project space.

Ben Quinn's paintings play with fragmentation, distortion, and pictorial boundaries to question and subvert dynamics of viewership. His mixed-media process begins by layering inkjet photo prints over canvas, becoming the surface for paintings made using a unique mixture of glue and watercolor pigment. The content of the resulting works thus appears, depending on your perspective, either somewhere beyond the paintings' built-up layers or upon their complex surfaces.

Fish Tank consists of three paintings that employ this process on star-shaped canvases, presenting images of feeder goldfish swimming against backdrops of rich synthetic blue, evoking the manufactured environments in which we normally see them. Sold both as household pets and as food for predatory fish, feeder goldfish are known for their great abundance, making them infinitely available for a variety of human purposes. Within the constraints of the star shape's cropping, each composition features more goldfish than the canvas can fit, giving the works a window-like presence that suggests a whole environment tantalizingly enlarged and yet definitively removed from the viewer, as though behind glass. Presented in STARS's vitrine space, the works actually are behind glass, another layer of remove that puts viewers at a greater distance, literally and figuratively, from the suggestion of an inviting world on the other side of the picture plane.

Beyond suggesting an environment beyond the paintings' surfaces, Quinn's paintings also position the viewer in the fictive space surrounding them: bold, tubular white lines intercede upon the surface of the paintings, suggesting the reflection of a pet store's fluorescent lights. Both the viewer and the subject are placed within contexts of artifice that define them in terms of distinct – and distinctly mundane – purposes. A dynamic of mutual spectatorship emerges between two vastly different subjectivities: the fish whose impassive eyes look outward at the viewer become viewers themselves, looking back at us cryptically from the other side of the divide. In this way, the paintings do not just contemplate the fish in their tank but also pose the question of who we are to them. The fishbowl is typically a metaphor used to describe the arbitrary yet immersive nature of human experience, and here we are reminded that our observers are already all around us.

Quinn has described these paintings as "parts of an ever-changing composition, small shapes moving fluidly in the water." Indeed, the many goldfish that swim through Quinn's paintings are each rendered with care that makes each one distinctive, despite their seeming transience. Here the many layers of artifice and distortion at play in Quinn's work reveal an underlying depiction of life in flux, isolating and individualizing the animal beings whose existences are put to use for decoration or for slaughter. Fish Tank honors the passing existence of the goldfish, finding in their inorganic experience an allegory of transcendence amid tedium.

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Ben Quinn (b. 1991 Dayton, OH) is an artist living and working in Los Angeles, CA. Recent solo exhibitions include Et Al. Etc. (San Francisco), Sebastian Gladstone (Los Angeles), Pt. 2 (Oakland), Fused Space (San Francisco), and Littman Gallery at Portland State University. He collaborated with Acne Studios in 2021 for the Women's Spring/Summer runway collection, and has participated in numerous group exhibitions. Quinn received an MFA from California College of the Arts in 2016.