

ARTHUR MARIE

Serenity

April 5 - May 20, 2023

As I'm swiping through snapshots of variations on Portrait of a Young Man (on the forever cracked screen of my retirement-age phone) forming their way to completion, my mind, prone to astral journeys (this will imminently become relevant), is off somewhere else thinking repeatedly about vitalistic fantasies. This, of course, is the term that Isabelle Graw ascribes to painting with its Sisyphean task of producing (with various degrees of success or failure) that false fantasy of liveness, and which I in turn keep fantasising about as the young man whose portrait(s) is in the palm of my hand keeps eschewing my wanton, searching gaze.¹

It would be more honest to call Arthur Marie's latest serial works 'profiles' rather than portraits. For rather than even attempting some lazy half-truth, a less-than-sincere stab at veracity, Marie's paintings are host to well-digested, mutant amalgamations of mugshots, before-and-after photos of reconstructive or plastic surgery patients, elements of the artist's own visage (I won't go so far as to reduce it to self-portraiture) and other anonymous sources gleaned online, which make up his forever-growing image bank of 'types'. Morphed together in hazy Photoshopped assemblages or preparatory drawings to create anonymous facial composites, these are then laboriously transferred on to canvas with layers upon layers of oil paint. The canvas itself is prepared in advance with gesso and then manically, obsessively sanded for hours straight to achieve a stone-smooth, matte finish not unlike that of the carefully powdered face of a waxy cadaver.

Contours are blurred, liveness is just a word that I type, serenity is a false friend, and the space-time continuum is most definitely out of whack. Set within a non-descript non-place rendered in shades of grey – the only point of fixity that Marie allows for, that and the sitter's white T-shirt – the kid in question, let's call them "Exhibit A", is depicted in various states of to-and-fro alteration à la Benjamin Button but without the teleological linearity of the latter. In this 21st century spin on an Old Master portrait gallery, preferably Dutch or Flemish given the cool tonalities of Marie's palette, Portrait of a Young Man maintains their distant stare, face turned resolutely to the right in each and every composition. Yet from one painting to the next, their skin appears slightly more, or less, crumpled. The typical emo haircut of teenagers the world over, thick dark hair swept across the face, a prosthetic shield against the cruelty of whatever lies outside, here shows more, or less, of a receding hairline and then ultimately disappears. Ageless but ageing, foreign but always on the edge of familiarity, the effect is eerily reminiscent of images resulting from AI-powered facial motion capture, or machine learning, with as much interiority as the nameless alien masquerading behind the façade of a femme fatale bombshell in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013). A prototype never reaching finality, a schema for what could or might be, but never fully is.

- Anya Harrison

Queer Thoughts presents *Serenity*, a solo exhibition by Arthur Marie. Arthur Marie (b. 1996, Cherbourg, FR) lives and works in Paris, France. Recent exhibitions include Plymouth Rock, Zurich (solo); The Residence Gallery, London; Palais Carli, Marseille and Basel Social Club, Basel. This is the artist's first solo exhibition in New York City.

¹ Isabelle Graw, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium*, Sternberg Press, 2018

ARTHUR MARIE – *Serenity*

4.5.23 – 5.20.23

1. *Portrait of A Young Man #2*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.8w inches (35h x 25w cm)
 2. *Red Road*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.8w inches (35h x 25w cm)
 3. *Portrait of A Young Man #3*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.4w inches (35h x 24w cm)
 4. *Meditation on Wage Labor*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13h x 9.4w inches (33h x 24w cm)
 5. *Portrait of A Young Man #4*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.4w inches (35h x 24w cm)
 6. *Portrait of A Young Man #5*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.5w inches (35h x 24w cm)
 7. *Portrait of A Young Man #6*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.5w inches (35h x 24w cm)
 8. *Portrait of A Young Man #7*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.4w inches (35h x 24w cm)
 9. *Portrait of A Young Man #8*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.8h x 9.4w inches (35h x 24w cm)
- Office:
10. *Commodité Sexuelle*, 2023
Oil on canvas
13.75h x 10.6w inches (35h x 29w cm)
 11. *Déclassé*, 2023
Oil on canvas
10.6h x 7.5w inches (27h x 19w cm)
 12. *Substitute*, 2023
Oil on canvas
14h x 9.5w inches (35.6h x 24w cm)