

Ramiro Hernandez: Prism

30 Orchard St, Gallery 1 ▪ June 23 - July 23, 2023



Ramiro Hernandez's *Prism* presents six figures rendered in dusty grays and nuanced with rainbow washes in the painterly tradition of the old masters. The figures are private users, adolescents on the other side of social media profiles whose meticulous curation renders their visages synthetic. The figures pose, aware of the existence of a viewer to a limited extent. Guided by the algorithm, the artist finds the figures, depicts them in great detail, then obscures them in prismatic color. Hernandez repeats this process a number of times, removing and creating distance from delicately formed figures that echo a fading memory and a wondering future at the mercy of today's innocence.

In *Knight Rider*, a boy glances back over his shoulder. He is a vision of a suburban coastal paradise, of beautiful youth drawn in lines that lead to the heart. His hands are gripping his board, and his spine is covered in dirt. This is how he desires to be seen, yet he is covered in the evidence that this picture was not the first take. He is impermanent in the

manner of Baudrillard, yet languid in the disquieting placidity of J. G. Ballard. Value, energy, and desire, like youth, imply irreversibility—the very meaning of liberation, yet the boy is just a simulacrum of freedom contained behind a filter.

Phone Home is a modern retelling of *Venus at her Mirror*. She stands in a playful moment between self-reflection and recognition of the viewer, but the intentions of her viewers can never truly be revealed. The app tracks our movements to make life more simple, then delivers the information to the NSA. The girl is the most recent in a line of images of idolized youths before her: Venus, God of fertility, Shakti, creator of the universe, Mary, the virgin, the mother of God immaculately conceived, a Trojan horse for the brightest and darkest intentions of man.

Hernandez's figures are in the midst of change. It is unclear whether they are of passing or future relevance, if the image is developing or fading. *Fantastico* is a strong jawed Ivy League student, a New Republican in a cable knit sweater in an age where the American Flag is increasingly viewed as a symbol of hate. But Hernandez's treatment of the boy's gaze, thick hair, his chin in hand, carefully feigning a whim, turns his brow and neck to stars and bars in the mode of Jasper Johns Flags. The artist's treatment of his subjects is an anointing that turns an imitation of candid joy into the Three Graces in *Lake Days Forever* and brings the temporal and sublime to the agency of painting in *On High in Blue Tomorrow*. With each wash of color, each redrawing of a button, a collarbone, lace, Hernandez forces us to consider the sacredness of paint, of youth, and to question the difference between exposing something and bringing it to light.

—Toniann Fernandez