

Michael Kirkham: *Zero to Nine*

30 Orchard St, Gallery 1 ▪ July 29 - Sept 3, 2023



Harkawik is pleased to announce *Zero to Nine*, the first significant solo exhibition of British painter Michael Kirkham in the United States. Kirkham probes uncomfortable truths about contemporary life, staging his brand of psychological portraiture amidst dim interiors, still lifes, and scenes of urban malaise. While invested in traditions that skew niche and graphic (in all senses of the term), the experience he creates is closer to the unflappable genericness of Koons, the pathos of Balthus, the medium-specificity of Nicole Eisenman, or, occasionally, the despairing filmic worlds of

contemporaries like Gaspar Noe, Andrea Arnold, or the Safdie brothers, than the lineages from which he so readily borrows. In Kirkham's human zoo, activities commonly associated with love, tenderness, familial warmth, joy or ecstasy are evacuated thoroughly of hope, leaving behind a cast of queasy corpses, whose vain attempts at confident repose are as fleeting as the vicissitudes of the viewer, and wholly available to the violence of petty manipulation, the despair of blight, and the indifference of repressive ideologies. Kirkham looks unblinkingly at the problematic legacy of the "muse," bestowing upon his subjects just enough agency to cast a haughty pall our way. His practice also indirectly evidences a careful consideration of not only wet chemical photography but the longstanding and contested relationship between photography and painting. For the past few years, his solarized "negatives" have taken the appearance, but not the function, of film negatives, whose inverted colors allow light to pass through, casting a "correct" chromatic image on a substrate. Here he engenders a subtle dialogue between the ghostly gradients of the negative and the traditions of underpainting employed by the German Expressionists. Kirkham's figures peer out through a grimy patina realized at the meeting point between urban and painterly filth, his brushwork as belabored, despairing and incremental as the lives of his subjects. Lurking in these forgotten moments is something spiritual.