



# KING'S LEAP

105 Henry Street (Store 5)  
New York, NY 10002  
[www.kingsleapfinearts.com](http://www.kingsleapfinearts.com)  
[info@kingsleapprojects.net](mailto:info@kingsleapprojects.net)

**Joe W. Speier**

*Self-Portraits*

September 6 to October 21, 2023

Exhibition text by Pieter Schoolwerth

I ran into Joe last week and he invited me to his opening: “Hey, I’m making self-portraits of other people, sounds confusing, I know, but you should come see them.” I was in fact uncertain as to whether he meant I should see his self-portraits or the non-Joe figures they apparently portrayed? After having seen *them* myself I now realize the ambiguity of his invitation was an appropriate trapdoor into apprehending his metaphysical description of the show. The notion of depicting oneself through another presented a perfectly pixelated allegory of the intrinsic challenge in ‘expressing oneself’ in a disembodied era of augmented identity construction.

*Self-Portraits* departs from a series of drawings by art students shared on peak aughts déclassé social platforms such as Facebook and Pinterest. The found images were completed assignments by recent art students instructed to overlay a grid onto a staged photograph of themselves – in an effort to teach them how working through the rectilinear filter can be instrumental in achieving a likeness – the originary vehicle of artistic authenticity.

Speier proceeds by sifting each students’ work through his own lo-res via machine-cut vinyl stencils - enacting an improvisational and wrought composition. The compression of the preening, “printed” student-body floats lost and layered betwixt a shallow field of gestural abstraction and depersonalized, stenciled dots. Ephemeral hand painted passages drift through and hover over vaporous zones of masked-off and trace-transferred digital motifs which collectively compete for views through a smooth, labored surface. Once glossy, now precociously lossy, the aggressive abstraction in his scraped-off acrylic deletions down-rezzes and often entirely removes the articulated painterly gestures applied to the support. Speier’s suppressive procedures mine the space like an algorithmic censor controlling and limiting a profile’s visibility to their peers through the dissociative haze of youth.

A decade or so ago ‘dismantling gesture’ was a politically charged modish motivation in inventive abstract painting aimed at disavowing the bravura-laden lexicon of the Modernist canon. But burdened

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by six figure debt in the scaled-up art world of today, in which just glimpsing a few precious likes through the grid is hard to imagine for many young artists, even making a single gesture can feel a long way off. Perhaps it goes without seeing then that the closest one can come to knowing the feeling that you have 'seen them' is to live through others who have been seen, whether they're like you or not.

-Pieter Schoolwerth

**Joe W. Speier** (b. Cincinnati, OH, 1992) lives and works in New York, NY. Selected solo and two-person presentations include Freddy (Harris, NY), Felix Art Fair (Los Angeles, CA), King's Leap (New York, NY) and Springsteen Gallery (Baltimore, MD). Recent group exhibitions include Mickey (Chicago, IL), M+B (Los Angeles, CA), Sebastian Gladstone (Los Angeles, CA) Hans Gallery (Chicago, IL), Shoot the Lobster (New York, NY), In Lieu (Los Angeles, CA), Harkawik (New York, NY), and Pik Deutz (Cologne, DE).