

## Logan Criley: *Cruel Arithmetic*

5538 Santa Monica Blvd ▪ Oct 21 - Nov 25, 2023



Harkawik is pleased to announce *Cruel Arithmetic*, our third solo exhibition with Logan Criley and his first in Los Angeles since 2018. *Cruel Arithmetic* is comprised of twelve new paintings that exist as records of their own progressive development and re-working, introducing classical portraiture as a readymade into the stream of Criley's now well established signal-jamming.

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To be a painter is to engage constantly with the clichés of the medium. The artist might feel a sense of pride having done something novel, only to sit with it for a few weeks, despairing as it slowly becomes ordinary, prosaic, cliché. The brief sensation of thinking oneself a maverick is quickly dispelled, fizzling into the abundant company of others thinking the same. There's humor in the kind of hubris needed to continue, perhaps even consolation. Leo Brasani addresses this in a 1959 introduction to *Madame Bovary*: "Cliché is, in a sense, the purest art of intelligibility; it tempts us with the possibility of enclosing life within beautifully inalterable formulas, of obscuring the arbitrary nature of imagination with an appearance of necessity." Cliché is to trade in representation of experience, to transform nuanced feeling into something symbolic, recognized as typical. It allows for this "enclosing of life" as Brasani puts it.

Logan Criley finds himself in a position somewhere between earnestness and irony. He becomes something of a gleeful cliché himself, playing into it with an almost eerie ease. When I visit his studio he has a bottle of Jack Daniel's next to a large Hackett tome of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. It's hard to tell if it had been staged prior to my entrance. His jeans are splattered with paint, but they are almost as thoughtfully applied as the marks on his canvases. He talks about what he expects from art—that it should be aspirational, extraordinary, something better than nature and outside the ordinariness of real life.

Each painting in *Cruel Arithmetic* suggests a specific configuration of hubris and cliché. In a way they function as portraits of the artist himself. *Articles of Doubt* (2023) is an appropriation of Carravaggio's depiction of the Apostle Thomas, a skeptic who refused to believe Jesus' resurrection until he felt his crucifixion wounds. Criley hones in on the moment of contact, Thomas' finger lodged in the body of Christ. It's a moment of humility, or perhaps embarrassment, as the subject confronts his own lack of faith. Jesus' face is obscured in swaths of teal, lending an unfinished air to the work. The jewel tones of these paintings give them a kind of pristine quality, and they become a simulacrum beauty, the kind only Criley could demand, or originate. *Pat Tillman's Last Stand* (2023) depicts the late football player, in full armor drawing his sword, a false martyr of the Bush administration, here, a real martyr in the old style. In *Blue Avicii* (2023), Criley chooses the Swedish DJ as his subject, his sharp Scandinavian features rendered in contrast to the blue of the underpainting, left visible for us to complete mentally. The problem of his almost supra-humanness is our problem, not the painter's.

The raw power of Criley's paintings is indexed by their complicity; they never provide you with a wink. They make you look for it, or else accept that there might not be one at all. Most importantly, was the wink there, the artist might not be able to identify it himself. In Criley's aesthetic dimension, moments of truth and irony are blurred together, inextricable.

—Gracie Hadland