Instead of painting somebody or something standing in front of me, I usually start with looking into already circulating digital images, this transport, currency and reflection of mediations we are constantly exposing ourselves to: information, fashion, technology, society.
—Rute Merk

Gallery Vacancy is delighted to present *Solitaire*, Rute Merk's first solo exhibition in Shanghai from June 13 to August 8, 2020. Consisting of the artist's most recent paintings, this exhibition aims to trace fragmented reality in the over-mediated world. Digital image is now perceived as reflection and currency of our sociality in which technologically intervened experiences of subjectivity, privacy and intimacy are accelerated and integrated digitally. Implying not only loneliness, reclusiveness and privateness, the title of the show borrows from the popular single-player card-clearing computer game. Originally released by Microsoft in 1990, the game was designed to teach its PC users mouse fluency, navigation of desktop environments and to soothe office workers' intimidation towards the unfamiliar computer operating system.

Solitariness, now pervasively screen-mediated, dwells in a space of entertaining self-employment and inner experiences of residual privacy, changing beyond recognition both: interfaces as well as boundaries between work and leisure. It is now a common experience of being simultaneously hyper-connected and isolated, socially-overexposed and screen-alienated. This perplexing unclarity reflects a certain passivity in many of Rute Merk's painted characters--a state of automated distraction or a moment of sublime solitude.

Deploying her characteristic discursive strategy to give singular names to many of her works--*Ariya, Jomanté, Juliet, Gilly, Yssa, Cremello, Blue Mystique*--Merk subtly indicates that while being two dimensional surfaces of oils on canvases her paintings nevertheless let appear fragments of real existences. Using soft, romantic brushwork, Merk stages her characters as if they are computer generated figures, with the lack of fluid individuality in their facial expressions and gestures, and their complex and interwoven identities hidden behind a thin but exquisite layer of oil pigment.

In *Ariya* (2020), the anonymous yet familiar character floats on a bed of abstracted background where the sharp and bulky outline around the figure indicates a copy-and-paste embedded existence next to a Dyson purifying fan. The body becomes weightless, with its surroundings erased by endless modification, repeatedly patinated from layers of glitched persona that generates a legitimate malfunction state only in our perception of the digital world. In *Nocturne Rokit II* (2020), Merk introduces two seemingly unrelated subject matters, a lavishly organic plant and a KRK Rokit 5 studio monitor, onto a nighttime-like backdrop that implies speed, delusion of light, and computer

generated digital imagery. In the virtual space that she creates, setting up unexpected juxtapositions of various objects, in a way, equals meeting their digital avatars, "souls" living in various image mediums as if they were artificial bodies.

Rute Merk was born in Lithuania in 1991 and lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Merk received her BA in Painting from Vilnius Academy of Arts in 2013, and is acquiring her painting diploma at Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich. Solo exhibitions include: *SS20* at Downs & Ross, New York, 2020 (forthcoming); *Sprites* at Downs & Ross, New York, 2019; *Virtualacra* at VENT Gallery, Vienna, 2018; and *Spirits Within* at Editorial, Vilnius, 2018. Her work has been featured in group exhibitions at Marburger Kunstverein, Marburg; Kunstverein München, Munich; RUPERT, Vilnius; Contemporary Art Centre (CAC), Vilnius; and included in the collections of M Woods, Beijing; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing; and X Museum, Beijing.

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