

Logan Criley: If the future isn't bright, at least it's ours

30 Orchard St, Gallery 1 ▪ July 8 - Aug 5, 2021



Logan Criley luxuriates in the fragmentary, enticing the viewer to contemplate his calculated montages. In doing so he establishes a singular language, one predicated on the mapping of history along the lines of aesthetics and affect. By implementing Baroque allegory, Renaissance color theory, and late capitalist tenets, Criley presents a worldview rooted in a mélange of images and conceits. Think: Dürer's *Melencolia I*, Rodin's *The Thinker*, Richter's candles, Morandi's still lifes; deconstruction and then deliberate compositions. This is Criley's sweet spot; reconceptions of historical ruins, undoing taken-for-granted ontologies.

Time leading up to the creation of these works was marked by melancholy, alienation, and heartbreak. Steeped in the saturnine, Criley presents disturbed landscapes and skewed statues. These depictions operate in favor of the correlation between man and history. He revels under the sign of Saturn, paralleling Benjamin's claim that the essence of art is in mourning.

Criley wields color and brushstroke with conviction, articulating a painterly position marked by confidence and poise. *Danse Macabre* is enlivened by brilliant neons, yet remains mired in the inevitability of death by way of dark hues and the skeletons engaged in a morose celebration. The imagery establishes a clear relationship with allegory, this instance being inextricably linked to the concept's origin in the Late Middle Ages. Misleading conviviality taps into the weirdness of aberrant enthusiasms. Further, there is a weak veil between apparently opposite emotions which is fractured by Criley's hand. By the artist's own interpolation of a particular Kurt Vonnegut aphorism, "laughter and tears are responses to the same things. I prefer to laugh because there's less cleaning up to do."

In this collection of paintings there is a necessary aggregation of allegory, history, and the relic. With certainty, Criley collapses epochs in order to establish the instability of supposedly inherent linearity. As Walter Benjamin asserts, "the only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory." The allegorical dislodges, then suspends matter in order to conceive of historicity as the relation of man to time and space. Benjamin works through this process by correlating man with the inevitability of death, a breach laid bare in his conception of Baroque. Criley extricates morality from aesthetics by frustration of content, basking in Benjamin's "petrified primordial landscape," that is, history. Criley adeptly conjures painterly precedents without overdetermining their constituencies.

With *Purple Painting*, Criley articulates his very own Renaissance, emphasizing that this unfaithful portrayal of the original sits "somewhere between devotion and desecration. Asking a question, not taking a position." He emphasizes Bernini's sublimated subjects by distorting and casting them in shades of purple. The destruction of image calls to question the vitality of the imaginary. His Renaissance meditation recurs in both *Frans Hals Study* and *Shadow Self*, where Hal's technique and subject are perverted in the name of Criley's symbology. Neons dislodge these works from their 17th-century foundations and become further evidence for the problematization of history.

Elsewhere, *Greta* operates as an interrogation of the branding device. This portrait of the Green Girl pokes at big media's impulse to reduce a figure and then produce a cult of personality ripe with use-value; fuel for a pernicious moralizing engine. The lack of green here is an overt gesture, seeing as the color recurs throughout the works on view. Green screens, beings, and letters. Placing these works alongside Greta's portrait emphasizes the associations between color and imperatives; the absence-of becomes pronounced.

In contemplating this show one could easily accumulate a mass of tabs related to art, science, history. But the pleasure of communing with Logan's work is that none of this is necessary to have a meaningful experience with these paintings. His understanding of color and style lends itself to the purity of wonderment, beholding the ineffable.

—Reilly Davidson