

NINO MIER GALLERY

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ASHER LIFTIN

Error Signals

November 2 - December 16, 2023

Nino Mier Gallery | New York

Nino Mier Gallery is thrilled to present *Error Signals*, Asher Liftin's debut exhibition with Nino Mier Gallery as well as his first solo exhibition in New York. Liftin's background in cognitive science informs this new series of pointillist paintings rendered in transparent inks. The paintings and accompanying drawings explore the constructed nature of images perceptually, digitally, and art historically. The exhibition will be on view at the gallery's Soho location from November 2nd – December 16th.

It is a privilege to watch someone find themselves in something they love doing – that you also happen to love doing. The process of becoming oneself as an artist is generally slow and fitful but when the pieces finally fall into place it is thrilling. In this case the pieces haven't exactly fallen into place so much as come together in teasing disjunction.

*The artist in question, Asher Liftin, is in his mid-twenties and I have known him since his late teens. He was precociously gifted from the get-go as well as precociously determined to make his mark in the "art world," having started out with graffiti and graduated from that to oil painting while a student in high school where his exigent teacher Katya Arnold was the wife of the Russian émigré artist Alexander Melamid. So in a way his ultimate decision to launch himself into the world as a painter – one among tens of thousands who attend art schools and colleges, and then brave the daunting odds against them – came as no surprise. Indeed, it seemed inevitable and right. The paintings themselves are a surprise inasmuch as they melded exceptional manual dexterity and a keen eye for the subtlest nuances of tone and color with a reservoir of imagery as broad as can be known – which is short for as all encompassing as the Internet – and in formats both stable and traditional – primarily portraits and still lifes. Some of the former are remarkably classical in appearance; for example a haunting, not to say haunted three quarters likeness of a young woman in a green sweater looking back over her shoulder at the artist. Among the latter are flower studies that have a vaguely Vermeer-like formality. However, still other images spill over into the realm of hallucination. They include heroic scale yet perversely anti-heroic works seemingly inspired by Renaissance tableaux and tapestries that are woven from thousands of discrete marks which coalesce into complex shape-shifting/space-distorting compositions. When I say "perversely" the term of art might better be "grotesquely" given the lurking hybrid protagonists – crazed men and horses out of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as reimagined by an entirely au courant American of the 21st century, or beasts from an updated version of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* backdated to the 17th century. Meanwhile, overall think of a cool-headed 17th century Chuck Close in his youth transcribing his fever dreams or pipe dreams by doing manually what it would take a machine a fraction of the time to finish. But, then, the result wouldn't hold the same fascination for the viewer who is fixated not so much on virtuoso craft as by Olympic feats of sustained concentration that such an enterprise necessarily entails.*

Taking all these precedents into account, we are not talking about a Neo-Appropriationist trying to redo what artists of the 1980s such as Sigmar Polke or David Salle did, but rather an artist of the new A.I. Millennium with a penchant for Mannerist inventions that whiplashes the viewer from the remote past of elegant post-Renaissance European painterly painting – albeit by other means, since rather than oil pigments the artist has employed layered ink glazes of various densities – to contemporary prestidigitation, patiently and by that token paradoxically executed by the machine assisted human hand. Thus the visual anomalies that disorient the mind are rendered with a sureness of touch that convinces one that the result could have come out no other way. The mismatching of iconographic and spatial codes involves the most painstakingly refined brushwork,

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and frequently veers off toward what amounts to a kitchen blender or clothes dryer effect, inasmuch as the vortices found in several of these paintings create a powerful visual tornado and undertow that swirls the motif in on itself till its contours are all but lost. In the past such torsion generated forms were a feature of anamorphic transcription whereby the artist faithfully rendered what s/he saw in a highly polished ring that picked up and skewed the reflections of a flat image as in Parmigianino's Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror (1524) but taken many steps further with advanced computer technology. That those results alternate between coy incongruities nested in solid, ostensibly plausible compositions – a woman's arm extending from what appears to be her dislocated shoulder that is in turn clutched by the man she is embracing whose Thalidomide hand kneads that shoulder like putty – and overt monstrosities. In the latter category, is the piece de resistance of Liftin's startlingly sophisticated debut New York show. It is a triptych that might be seen as equivalent to a Roger Corman horror film experienced on acid. The myths it evokes are too numerous to be named which is in keeping with A.I.'s shake-and-bake way of amalgamating myriad disparate sources. But as with John Cage's use of the I Ching, the choice of which recombinant elements to commit to canvas is wholly that of the painter and therein resides his artistry. The most extreme triptych, featuring a loathsomely fleshy man-thing whose gaping, drooling maw appears ready to devour anything and everything within its range, like Goya's rampaging Colossus (circa 1808) who doubtless provided some of his digital DNA while leaving out the Spanish master's lugubrious atmosphere, must be paired with another that has the poise and naturalism of 18th century Danish genre painting, most notably three views of a curtained window whose component webs of descriptive tracery shimmer like layered and tinted tulle. Meanwhile, several mid-sized still lives follow the example of this latter triptych but with extra twists and turns while other larger format panels go further toward the stock in trade of Baroque and Romantic supernatural scenarios.

All in all Liftin is a talent to watch. Take it from me, I've had my eye on him for five years and during the whole of that period his unpredictability and ingenuity have been unflaggingly amazing.

Robert Storr

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