



BLUE CHIP

Austin Martin White FAMILIAR DYSPHORIA
at Petzel Gallery
September 13 - November 4, 2023

Austin Martin White: Familiar Dysphoria

Born in Detroit, the artist Austin Martin White's first show at Petzel Gallery debuts a materially layered body of work navigating the complex histories of identity. The works in Familiar Dysphoria feel very contemporary in their aesthetic contradictions. Leveraging frequent use of grid patterns, burnt umbers, and ornate floral framing devices, there is an intentionally baroque visual construct that houses a world of high saturated colors. Filled with the soft, boundless edges of spray paint, White shows us that just like the materiality of these works, history, and identity along with it, can always shape shift.



Familiar Dysphoria is filled with malleability. Worlds are decaying and born at the same time. The show is contextualized with five, large (on average 75X50" portrait), paintings in which a heavy, conservative energy, pulled from the history of caste painting, sets the initial tone. This is quickly upended as gestural figures float gracefully in and out of the pictorial boundaries. The five large paintings + an eight-piece installation of medium sized paintings are complimented by five medium-sized drawings on paper in ball-point pen (~30x18" portrait) that have an incredible optical presence and are just as compelling as the larger paintings. Lines converging, piling up, overlapping, disappearing and reappearing again, they showcase White's *disegno* abilities (to use an historically apt term). In limiting material tactility White builds a singularly illusionistic picture plane filled with twinkling patterns and value shifts. Pure eye candy to hallucinate on problematic pasts and the comically absurd futures to come.

White's work reminds me of a passage Dierdrich Dierdrichsen wrote about the amorality of Rebecca Morris' work. Dierdrichsen advocates that in such amorality, Morris' work has an ability to open up the possibility of alternative futures in the face of organized religion's vice grip on cultural identity formations. "On a certain level it is a question of carrying on, of continuing to "make" in a tradition of making that is already underway. This carrying on or continuing to make—without believing or not believing—is precisely what cannot be done with religions, but can be done with social and political attempts to construct the world."*

Two framed works (casta), 2023
Acrylic medium, pigment, spray paint, vinyl, 3m reflective fabric, nylon mesh
82 x 72 inches



*Deidrich Dierdrichsen, "Modernity's Secularized Monastery: The Relaxed Painting of Rebecca Morris" in Rebecca Morris: Paintings 1996-2005, 80 (Chicago: Renaissance Society, 2005)



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The complex construction of identity politics is a timely conversation given Israel's recent escalation in the continued onslaught of Palestinian peoples. It offers a chilling reminder that while reciprocal communities in service of identity reconstruction exist, there is simultaneously a reality where humanitarian atrocities rooted in lineages akin to the caste paintings that inspired these works are absolutely present. It is in the face of these atrocities that the light-hearted element of play in White's work can catalyze our individual and collective power to shape shift. Taking an oppressively concrete history and making it as light as air. It's a spirit of possibility in the face of despair, something Detroit knows well. White's work embodies this unique sensibility and in doing so, creates a powerful coagulate connecting the high art world, to the industrial midwest, to the middle-east, to eighteenth century Mexico. The past and the present converge, reminding us that we are all connected and no one is free while others are oppressed.

White's Familiar Dysphoria implicates us directly in the heat of this contemporary complexity. The heavy, the light, the deathly serious, the absurd, the known, the unknown and of course: a dash of the "IDGAF, what is life?" attitude that permeates so much of the 21st century. His work makes me ask myself: "where would I rather be?" Flying searingly close to the sun, the steel and iron of white-capital-religious-nationalist-patriarchy burning away—let us hospice it. Let the atomic dust cloud melt your eyelashes and singe a new vision for the future. Let work like White's wash over you and call you to action. To risk vulnerability in the face of fear. To risk failure in the face of severity. To risk lightheartedness in the face of parochialism. Creativity is rooted in play after-all.

Chris

likeaprizepig (after Ibarra), 2023
Ballpoint pen and watercolor on paper
35 5/8 x 23 15/16 inches

