

Why You Should Not Buy This Painting (So That Michael Connor Can)

MICHAEL CONNOR | Wed Jan 29th, 2014 11:26 a.m.

Postmasters Gallery is now showing a solo exhibition of work by Austin Lee, a young painter whose work you should really not purchase. If his prices remain flat for long enough, it's possible that in the future, when all my babysitting bills are paid, I might stumble across it in the Postmasters sub-basement and offer whatever I happen to have in my wallet. Recent history shows us that the artworks that I have come to own do not significantly appreciate in value. Therefore, an important tip to prudent buyers: do not purchase this painting, or really any other painting by Austin Lee. Are you following my logic?

Anyway, this painting by Austin Lee deserves to languish in the obscurity of my personal collection because it somehow captures so well the haphazardness of digital image culture. What I mean by this, partly, is that it's blurry, and I like blurry artworks. There is, by now, a proud art historical tradition of blurriness in representations of technological imagery: Vija Celmins, Gerhard Richter, Thomas Ruff. All these people have offered us large works (in painting or photography) depicting familiar scenes or objects mediated by the distorting effects of popular culture.



Austin Lee, *Profile Picture*, Acrylic on Canvas, 11" x 14"

In *Profile Picture*, the distorting lens of technology is more than a mere visual filter. It's not just a blurry painting, but it seems to have unhinged the object of the painting itself. The work is partly a careful replication of the blurring effects of a smartphone, but it's also more than that. This *Profile Picture* represents a discombobulated subject, a person in anxious movement, eyes bulging from screen burn, hair and clothing in the latest garish netart colors. It is not only the image that is blurred by technology, it is the person represented in this *Profile Picture*.

This blurry netart person, this one-eyed jack from a deck of cards designed in MS Paint, speaks to me in a way that a lot of internet-aware painting does not. *Profile Picture* conjures both the aesthetic of an era of pocket snapshots and generally haphazard image-making, and the need to stage public identity in a manner that makes a bold impression, but leaves our outlines indistinct.

In short, savvy collectors should stay well away.

Tags: Austin Lee internet-aware art Postmasters Gallery surf report