

and fable—each story (and each of his pieces read like one) is not simple or direct enough to be fable, nor does its fantastical imagery culminate in a present reality as in myth. I am both taken by Fallah’s imagery and frustrated at the seeming development of points both handwriting and never quite made.

Science is the Antidote, Superstition is the Disease, the largest work in the show, offers a diptych of imagery seemingly concerned with bygone geopolitics, right down to the poorly drawn continents of its central world map. A cherubic, American colonial figure holds a pile of fireworks in the composition’s upper left; two brooding groups of men, illustrations from a mid-20th century book on Middle Eastern costume and headdress, appear in the upper and lower sections. Like many of Fallah’s works in the exhibition, *Science is the Antidote* suggests equivalence. No hierarchy or ordering principle is readily apparent; instead, each piece spirals open like a chain of events. Scale and detail conspire to fascinate. If Fallah’s aphorisms overwhelm broad interpretation, his more oblique works frustrate any coherence the aphorism might lead us to expect.

Image obsession has been a favored, beleaguered indicator of contemporary culture for decades. The steady stream of juxtaposing, vibrant imagery in Fallah’s work keys into what we have come to expect from images—distillation, heroism, eroticism, narrative, evocation. Differing images composed in this manner might be intended

as clues to meaning (fable) or simply an originary scan of one person’s own mind (myth). Fallah’s autobiographical encounter with various images is framed as an index of the broadly accessible histories—regularly shared images, texts, and information networks—of our own time. In this sense, the artist’s proliferation of imagery represents a reinterpretation of the products of culture, and a repackaging that is geared to a child’s lack of preconception. If this rearrangement of autobiography undercuts the making of meaning—or even a clear sense of the soup of references we find ourselves within—it also obliquely emphasizes the validity and richness of real, lived experience.

Cody Critcheloe at The Gallery @

August 14–
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☞ Twice this week, while driving around Los Angeles, I’ve seen a model posing, trailed by sweaty men with cameras. The first stood in a bikini with a hula hoop on a residential street in Hollywood; the second leaned against an apartment building on Sunset Boulevard in a cowboy hat and jean shorts. Across Sunset, I saw a woman, entertained by the scene, take a picture with her phone. It is precisely this position—the amused onlooker, standing one step removed from the photographer’s gaze—that Cody Critcheloe takes on in the new body of paintings presented in his show *Chips* at The Gallery @. By taking the source photos

that would later become many of these paintings, Critcheloe positions himself as a kind of voyeur, peering over a photographer’s shoulder to snap his images from a secondary angle, able to capture the artificiality that the primary camera aims to conceal.

Critcheloe comes to painting from “the Industry,” where he works as a musician, photographer, and art director. Each painting in the exhibition originated from an iPhone photo or video, most taken by the artist while on the set of a photoshoot or music video. For additional images, Critcheloe cruises the internet for bizarre scenes or strangely photographed images—paparazzi snaps, movie stills, and family photos (not his)—that include a dark humor mimicking the voyeurism of his on-set shots. In painting these subjects, Critcheloe carries out a process of transference from screen to canvas, another layer of voyeuristic removal. When I visited the gallery, I asked the artist why he didn’t show the original photos. Critcheloe responded that he thought of painting as a form of retouching, an analog Photoshop. The work proposes a state of painting in which the camera is an essential companion. The medium of painting becomes denigrated, acting here as the final filter—a way of equalizing Critcheloe’s subjects through a cohesive style. In this final step, the subjects are slightly altered (several figures are obscured by a white blur, evoking a camera’s flash, over their face or torso; elsewhere the artists’ own head is swapped in for that of his subject). In altering these photographic images, Critcheloe denies his

subjects the satisfaction of an on-screen existence, ossifying them instead within the synthetic material of acrylic.

For his subjects, Critcheloe favors images of B- and C-listers—people whose celebrity has been made by sheer vigor or who have hung around long enough to have their picture taken—over the type of famous person who may have grown weary of photographic attention. These people, still early in their careers, crave the camera's gaze, making them far more compelling subjects than those who feign bashfulness—all the more so, given there's an amusing perversity in their desire for attention. King Princess, the lesbian pop ingenue with a palpable appetite for fame, makes a number of appearances in the show. Like a proud child who has learned a new trick, she looks straight out at the viewer in *Splits (KP)* (all works 2020), with her leg held up almost parallel to her torso. The two models in *Being Blonde (side parts)* look like celebrity impersonators of Mickey Rourke and Lady Gaga. They play blonde perfectly, their hair a shade of platinum that could only come from a box. And what's really the difference between being and playing?

In other works, the false fabrication of on-screen images is disrupted by the exposure of what can be found beyond the frame. In *A scene from an indie film with a big budget and a short script, disrupts The OnlyFans Economy.*, a man stands in a darkened room backlit by a white glow through vertical blinds. His look is bemused, like a drunk uncle who's barged

in on his niece's sleepover, and shows no sign of leaving. The subject here is in fact the owner of a house in the Valley that he rents out for film productions. He watches and lingers around the film shoots, getting his 15 minutes.

The strange appeal of these paintings is interrupted by stylistic interventions that distract from the images' own weirdness and the artist's attention to his subject's unsettling, desiring looks. Hung salon-style, the installation of some of the works mimics the layout of a music video or photo shoot storyboard, the canvases sometimes touching. In other compositions, the subjects are interrupted with dark color fields that weigh down the more nuanced three-way relationship occurring between the subject, camera, and painter.

The informal centerpiece of the show, *Some Basic Instincts (Pt. 1)*, depicts a striking scene of nascent homosexuality. A young boy turns to the camera, eyelashes batting, arm straightened, posing for the flash. His father is passed out on the couch to his left, while playing on the TV screen is the iconic scene from the 1992 film *Basic Instinct* in which Sharon Stone flashes her crotch. The image holds the viewer in an erotic suspension, seconds away from the R-rated reveal. Existing in between the glowing TV screen and camera lens, the movie star on screen and (likely) his mother taking the picture, the boy beams with excitement at the exchanging looks. Critcheloe relishes in this web of looks. They extend beyond the canvas as the viewer becomes the ultimate observer of these

interwoven vantage points, seeing everything.

Critcheloe's approach to painting seems to be a reaction to an excess of images: as if, exhausted by the constant stream of pictures, the artist needs an outlet for the rejects. To preserve them in paint is one attempt at giving them a second life, like a strange scrapbook to recontextualize the unseen moments. His subjects *want* to be photographed—to go viral, where the degree of viewership and onlooking becomes unruly and untraceable. But Critcheloe fastens his subjects to a painted image, ensuring their immortality in paint while also limiting their digital virality. Here, he foregrounds complications not only in how his subjects look, but also in how they are seen.



Cody Critcheloe, *Chips* (installation view) (2020).
Image courtesy of the artist
and The Gallery @, Los Angeles.