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ART

Julien Nguyen

The imagery of this buzzy Los Angeles painter feels informed by the strange, shifting hierarchies of life online, where a Sienese altarpiece and a pulp sci-fi paperback cover have equivalent value. But his elegant work is complicated by the fact that Nguyen often paints from life, practicing an observant, detached strain of realism. The dozen or so recent canvases in his solo début at the Matthew Marks gallery are united by their silvery palette and pared-down style. “Jake” is a naturalistic portrait, in profile, of a gaunt young man posing in a straight-backed chair, his features concealed by a lock of hair; the subject of “Richard” is similarly lithe, but he’s also part monster, with pointed features and blank yellow eyes. The art-historical references here are clever, if unrelenting; “The Temptation of Christ,” in which a Giacometti-esque Jesus faces off against a demonic dragon, may spark thoughts of Duccio’s take on the theme, at the Frick. To accompany his captivating show, Nguyen has compiled a soundtrack and digital clips on the gallery’s Web site, including a shirtless TikTok (who might have stepped out of a Nguyen portrait) brushing his teeth and a violinist serenading a beluga whale.—J.F. (matthewmarks.com)