

Artillery
May / June 2019

Modern Day Deities

Oli Epp
Contactless
Richard Heller Gallery
March 16 – April 27, 2019

by Jody Zellen



Oli Epp is a young London-based artist whose humorous paintings depict contemporary pop culture and our abject relationship to technology and commerce. The brashly colored works are populated by airbrushed blobs that become quasi-human forms sporting sunglasses or 3D specs, Nike caps or headsets. Entitled “Contactless,” the exhibition explores notions of digital detachment and isolation afforded by new technologies, and the ironies they engender, such as the fact that one can be “in touch” yet have no physical contact with others. Even Epp’s painting process is an example of this: the paintings are created by airbrush, distancing the hand from the surface of the canvases.

Alexa, (all works 2019) is a flat three-quarter portrait of a featureless, purple haired figure wearing blue mirrored wrap-around sunglasses and a circle of sound holes for a mouth. A simplified cartoony headset and microphone emblazoned with an Amazon logo extends from the androgynous figure’s head to its chin, casting a shadow on the lower portion of its face. This sci-fi looking figure has become an emblem of our digitized world.

Epp’s imagery is laden with corporate logos and references both positive and negative aspects of technology. While *Blade Runner* celebrates the idea that an amputee (like Oscar Pistorius) can run with high-tech prostheses, it also acknowledges corporate sponsorship. In Epp’s depiction, the stick-like figure gliding through a starlit night sky has a Nike headband and an ever-present white Apple earpiece.

The Germaphobe is a painting that features a kneeling, bulbous, hot dog shaped and colored figure attached to high-tech, steel-colored contraptions including a hand-dryer. The figure is trapped in a generic blue/green room from which there is no escape. The childlike innocence in

many of Epp's paintings is contrasted with an ironic humor and an attitude of condescension that verges on the pathetic. *Choking Hazard* presents suicide via an Apple charging cable. *Security Threat* warns of the dangers of sharing electronic information. In this painting, two figures wearing sunglasses are mirror images of each other. Together, they are positioned in front of a brick wall, holding a glowing neon green box with a pulsating white rectangular center.

Epps came to prominence via Instagram and is well aware of the pros and cons of social media. He is an emblem of the post digital generation who grew up on the Internet. While his works draw from the language of technology and corporate branding, they also take advantage of the formal color relationships in the works of Josef Albers and Ellsworth Kelly. Epp is an accomplished colorist and his paintings have a formal elegance. His isolated, humanoid characters thrive in environments that parallel and parody the real world and his works are poignant commentaries on digital consumption and communication that articulate dependence, fear and addiction to technologies in humorous but also cautionary ways.

<https://artillerymag.com/oli-epp/>