

Obscuring Assumed Identity: A Review of Chambers and Weinberg at Hawthorn Contemporary

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Artists today navigate conceptual hurdles of identity, leaving many gun-shy about how to represent the human figure. What is important or relevant about the figure in our cultural moment? What might be seen as an intrusion or an unfair representation? The earnest quest for deeper understanding, and the complexities of this search are in evidence in the paintings of two emerging artists in their self-titled exhibition, "Chambers and Weinberg," at Milwaukee's Hawthorn Contemporary gallery.

The figurative paintings in the show vacillate between cartoons, obscured silhouettes and abstraction. Both artists can coax an awareness of cultural and societal moments while remaining vulnerable to penetrating self-reflection.

Dominic Chambers trusts his mark-making to portray the human figure with shrouded and ephemeral gestures. His layered, scratched and pitted paintings on paper and canvas reveal a deep search into their interior. He discusses the concept of the veil as proposed by W.E.B. Du Bois and how African Americans are defined by it, living behind and within the veil. The paintings show silhouetted portraits and figures that have layers of paint applied and wiped away, revealing indiscernible bodies floating ethereally behind built-up surfaces. They are no one, or perhaps anyone, obscured from our view. On top of these figures abstracted raindrops push the body even further into the distance. Within these nebulous spaces, Chambers' artistic project becomes a representation of how society observes African Americans, and how African Americans see themselves. This process of image-making appears as a tactile struggle on the very surface of his complex paintings.

In contrast, the comic-creepy protagonist in Samuel Weinberg's paintings are maximal in detail and specificity. The Pink Man is a trope, an endlessly fascinated everyman who wanders a world curated by our aspirations and dreams. Weinberg uses locations, landscapes and interiors that he culls from Instagram, Google searches and television. He then intricately weaves the Pink Man into someone's vacation selfie or other locale. The result is an uncanny collaging of cartoon, verisimilitude and social critique. The hero has no home, no origin story, no ethnicity. Thusly, perhaps he becomes an inner consciousness, a dream, a desire. He appears as the personification of millions of people that we swipe past on our screens, people like us, doing what we do. The Pink Man is a palimpsest of knowing and mystery, the culmination of digital becoming.



Samual Weinberg, "Holographic Security Measures."
2018, oil on canvas.



L-R. Dominic Chambers, "Veil (Cloud Dancers)," 2019, charcoal on paper. "Veil (Shatter)," 2019, charcoal and spray paint on paper

Both artists obscure or push against assumed identities. Chambers' figures are unresolved ghosts, made so by a cultural forgetting. Weinberg purposefully denies the Pink Man a foundation, a purpose. He moves through the world in existential emptiness. Through this obfuscation, the artists discuss identity with an oblique depth.

Chambers is a recent graduate of the star-making MFA program at Yale University, and Weinberg is similarly poised to expand his footprint in the Midwest and East Coast art world. This exhibition feels like a launching point. (Rafael Salas)

"Chambers and Weinberg," is on view at Milwaukee's Hawthorn Contemporary, 706 Fifth Street, through November 18.