
undercurrent

70 John Street /Brooklyn /NY /11201

/Thur /Fri /Sat 1-7 pm

TRAVIS LEROY SOUTHWORTH / I Am a Portrait

01.10 – 02.8 /2020

Opening Reception Friday, January 10, 6–9pm

Undercurrent is excited to present a solo exhibition of work by Travis LeRoy Southworth entitled *I Am a Portrait*. Drawing heavily on portraiture, temporality, and computerized labor, Southworth's work trivializes the beauty industry and challenges us to reflect on our own self-presentation.

As an Image Correction Specialist – or, to the layperson, a photo retoucher – Southworth pulls content from his day job, salvaging digital detritus of what advertising companies label flaws. Reshaping this digital material in Photoshop, Southworth presents it in a new physical skin – imperceptible wallpaper, silk sculptures, and a collection of figurative paintings printed on canvas, paper, satin, or suede. Tiny pores, stray hairs, color adjustments, and blemishes become sustainable resources for Southworth's paintings and sculptures. The bright and airy color palette of magentas, lavenders, and flesh tones, derived from the imagery, transcend a dreamlike atmosphere while clouding its origin of soft violence; a digital scalpel extracting and pushing pixels; imperfection is abstracted and beauty confounded. Floating in the space are Southworth's silk sculptures. Suspended by wire, these objects are ghost-like, reminiscent of another lifeform, levitating between the two worlds of digital and physical, posing metaphysical questions of the state of being in a digital era. Hanging alongside the Photoshopped work are analog pieces created from the laborious act of mashing up beauty magazines. The amalgamation of imagery is illegible, creating a gritty, dirty gray, presented in the classic scale and format of portraiture. Ad, image, and origin are indecipherable, mirroring the confusion of self-perception within a culture inundated with digital manipulation and filters.

Pulling content from Southworth's day job underscores the context labor plays as an artist today. Rather than juggle, Southworth disables the hurdle, enabling him to work as Artist and Image Correction Specialist simultaneously; a meta vocation in the complex world of freelance and capitalism. Within this workflow, creative freedom is unchained from time restraints and the artist's dilemma burns: Does art imitate life or life imitate art?

Inconspicuously, the largest piece in the exhibition is the wallpaper installation, entitled *Similar Seemingly Absurd Infinities*. Southworth arduously removed dust particles from roughly 100 NASA space photos and overlapped the remains into a single image. Aptly and ironically, 70-80% of dust is made up of human skin, the largest organ in the human body. Subtly, Southworth presents us with an anti-portrait, humbly reminding us that we are all the same: ubiquitous, organic matter, dust, vulnerable inside and out, physically and digitally. In a culture inundated with self-centeredness, image, and manipulation, Southworth, literally and figuratively, saves the undesirable, forging its fragile nature into a looking glass and reminding us of our own human condition.

Daina Mattis, Co-director



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