

Jonny Negrón's Darker Portraits of Party Life

Jonny Negrón captures the disappointment and delights of Dionysian narcissism.



by Jennifer Remenchik
January 2, 2022



LOS ANGELES — The air of someone on the verge of disillusionment with party life hangs heavy in *Spirits*, a solo exhibition of videos and paintings by Jonny Negrón, all made in the past year, at Château Shatto. In an era of restricted social interaction stemming from the ongoing pandemic, one could take the party-going subjects of Negrón's artwork as a nostalgic nod to happier times, but the mood is simply too dark and the figures too solitary in their togetherness for that to be the overarching narrative at hand.

In paintings like "Untitled" and "Desire Develops an Edge," the figures are alone, caught in a quiet moment of bath-time contemplation or eagerly inhaling a popper-esque party drug, respectively. In "Cosmic Dancer" and "Cosmic Puppets," more disturbingly, the figures look alone amongst friends — interacting not with each other but for the viewer, or, perhaps more apropos, the camera. The people in these paintings come across as the highly self-conscious denizens of the Instagram age, always ready to break conversation to take a picture. The loneliness of that comes through in the rampant substance abuse, highlighted in a sometimes too-literal way, as is the case with "Negroni," a painting which contains sculptural elements that include a cocktail, pills, and drug baggies.

Negrón's videos — the artist's first time exhibiting the medium alongside his paintings — add to this sensibility with their dreamy, melancholic music and sad, sentimental words overlaid on top of hastily shot footage at various social gathering spots. While cheerier in the sense that the relationships he captures on camera feel authentic, the saccharine nature of the music betrays an almost-comically mournful undertone. The real subject on display in *Spirits* is not the people depicted either in the videos or the paintings, but the disappointment and delights of Dionysian narcissism — the empty promises it seduces with, impossible to understand except in retrospect.