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Jonny Negron, *Cosmic Dancer*, 2021, acrylic on linen, 54 × 74".

Jonny Negron CHÂTEAU SHATTO

In Jonny Negron's acrylic-on-linen painting *Untitled* (all works 2021), a muscle-bound man, facing the viewer, luxuriates in a soapy bath. His large cartoonish eyes are turned down as a pout curves his ample lips, accentuating the picture's moody, contemplative atmosphere. Both his body and the pillowy drifts of bubbles that cling to his sculpted physique are awash in sensuous shades of red as he sits before a humming monochromatic field of luminous crimson. This piece, one of six new canvases in "Spirits," the artist's second solo show at Château Shatto, represents Negron's move from modestly scaled works on paper to much larger canvases following his 2018 exhibition at the gallery. Pivoting from his experiences in making comics, wherein one hypothetically has as many frames as needed to tell a story, Negron has turned to Renaissance painting conventions, which provide plenty of tricks for conveying complex, emotionally laden narratives in a single image. In this presentation, many of Negron's subjects are often oriented toward the viewer as they elaborately pose and gesture in tableaux rife with symbolic objects. Take the aforementioned work, in which a conch shell and a bar of *jabon esoterica ogun* (a soap sold in botanicas) rest on the edge of the tub while a lily and a hibiscus with carefully rendered pistils, imbued with a quiet but unabashed eroticism, stand delicately in the foreground.

Cosmic Dancer, a fifty-four-by-seventy-four-inch painting, invokes Botticelli's *Primavera*, ca. 1480, with its lineup of curvy female revelers who theatrically show off their bodies. Negron's beauties are Gen Z partygoers in Y2K-inspired outfits and chunky heels. A DJ in a bucket hat and a Guess sweatshirt spins in the background. Like Botticelli's nymphal spring dancers, each woman intricately gestures with her hands: Taloned fingers point, fan out, or press against the bodies of their owners. The selfie-taking figure at the far-left side of the canvas

positions her left hand in the same manner as Botticelli's central Venus, performing a welcoming gesture that scholars have compared to the one displayed by the Virgin Mary in Annunciation scenes. Negron's subjects, who at first glance seem like your typical cool girls with their Telfar bags and belly-baring looks, are actually something else, conjuring club-going goddesses out for a good time on the mortal plane. The nocturnal otherworldliness of the setting is further emphasized by the curious inclusion of a ghostly, transparent, miniskirted woman who appears to be exiting the picture, stage right.

This particular group of nightlife paintings has been described in various press accounts as orgiastic, hedonistic—as representations of partying run amok. But Negron's formal decisions felt more serene than bacchanalian: Each canvas is awash in calming blues, blushes, and purples. And his figures always appear self-possessed and poised even as they dance, sniff poppers, or wait in a queue outside the club. These works were hung alongside a number of video pieces featuring soundtracks written and performed by the artist. The songs were soft, trance-inducing. In one of these works, *pink flowers*, he intoned repeatedly: "Whenever I am down you bring me pink flowers." In Negron's world, nightlife is ameliorative, a healing realm that exists outside of regular time and space—a place where spirits are either imbibed or received as welcome visitors to the dance floor.

—Ashton Cooper