

positives or negatives and were sometimes hand colored. Usually, Berman added lettering in Hebrew, a language in which he was not conversant. These works seem to present enigmatic messages from some other dimension on the flip side of the social realm: One might think of Andy Warhol's recycled media imagery as a correlative, but Warhol celebrated the surface, whereas Berman seems to imply that there is always an ungraspable meaning lurking beneath. Mass culture harbors unfathomable mysteries.

The recurrent radio motif evokes the poetics of Jack Spicer, who—inspired by Jean Cocteau's 1950 film *Orpheus*, in which a car radio becomes a link to the beyond—declared that “the poet is like a radio receiving transmissions” from what he called simply “the Outside.” Today, we have handheld devices that transmit so much more than sound and keep us all in their thrall: those phones that are indeed smarter than we are. Berman seems to have foreseen our current condition. But he holds out the hope that there might still be an arcane frequency amid the static where some kind of wisdom will be on offer. In *Aleph*, the silent seven-minute 8-mm film the artist began working on in 1956 and never completed, a precipitous montage, reminiscent of the film works of Bruce Conner, mashes up views of some of the Verifax collages with other, mostly found bits of footage, overlaying them with transitory glimpses of words (in the form of Letraset applied directly to the film stock, for instance). These communiqués, which disappear before one can read them, suggest that meaning will always be too abundant and too intangible to do more than tease the imagination. The work's visual and semantic instability is just disquieting enough to suit our own time, aflame as it is with apocalyptic presentiments.

—Barry Schwabsky

Michael Mahalchick

CANADA

The unsung moment of real terror in classic Hollywood monster movies happens when the camera pushes in for a close-up on some blood-thirsty fiend, only to reveal a pair of human eyes peering through the prosthetics. It's a momentary rip in the fiction, divulging the fact that a person, an actor no less, is at the center of the fear, mayhem, and death unfolding before us—proving that underneath it all, we ourselves are the monsters. Michael Mahalchick's aptly titled show “US” starred approximately four hundred latex masks cast from the cheap store-bought kind, to which he then adhered still more layers of latex in a creepy rainbow of colors at once garish and soothingly familiar, including Pepto pinks, jaundice yellows, Hulk greens, and zombie whites. Mahalchick started constructing his creatures in 2018 as a means of understanding and materializing the “deplorables”—as Hillary Clinton so memorably described Donald Trump's supporters in 2016—and would work on them as he watched television. Here, tacked to the gallery wall as a daunting, haunting horde, the masks were literal *no-bodies*: limp, lifeless, inert. No two were the same, but familiar pop archetypes recurred throughout: Witches, clowns, wrestlers, superheroes and heroines all lurk beneath Mahalchick's ogegy weirdos, some of whom were so thickly gunked they hardly looked like masks anymore. A choice few even resembled our reality-television-born, fake-news-spawning former president. In one particularly vivid iteration, his plumped lips were as round and ready to receive as a blow-up doll's.

Mahalchick's “Masks,” 2018–, call to mind the otherworldly oddness of the work of Belgian painter James Ensor, who deployed skeletons, puppets, and carnival masks in tableaux offering up fantastical allegories of mortality. One might also think of the many faces Cindy Sherman has built on top of her own, her shape-shifting often satirizing

the roles women play. (More recently, she has taken to Instagram, posting hilarious and grotesque selfies fabricated via Facetune and other makeover apps. Two of her targets: the digital image and how it fuels our delusions.) Via Mahalchick's IG, one can see *other-ies* of him wearing his masks—un-slick, decidedly analog disguises that renounce any such chic cheek, instead upending the platform's falsely prettified world with their freakish features, #nofilter.



Where does a soul live if there is no body? “US” also displayed other works in latex, including *Cosmetic Case x16* and *Cockring x40*, both 2021. Comprising multicolored casts made from the packaging of their titular tools of seduction, these pieces present themselves as misfit paintings, or steamrolled sculptures. *Bad Guy*, 2019, a vinyl-and-latex Sasquatch of modest size, seemed content just hanging from the ceiling. Far more menacing was *Untitled*, 2021, a pair of Dickies coveralls, stuffed and lying on the floor. Without head, hands, or feet, Mahalchick's working stiff is a bona fide good-for-nothing. “Television produces corpses,” theorist Avital Ronell offered up in her 2010 book *Fighting Theory*, noting that a popular subject, and source, of American family entertainment is trauma. (Let this parenthetical admit the revelations of Ronell's own monstrosities, while holding a place for her public reincarnation.) Screens long ago replaced the campfires around which we once warmed ourselves and told one another scary stories. Tech and media, ravenous beasts, have since cultivated our death drive in such a way that we now aspire to distance ourselves from—or, perhaps more accurately, to rub out—the sacred messiness of life. Mahalchick's unsightly yet tender stuff memorializes, with terrific compassion and humor, what or whom we call grotesque or label garbage or banish from view, without glossing over the uncomfortable textures and unavoidable tarnish of what it means to be human. Just look around to see the horrors that besiege us when we pretend to be otherwise.

—Jennifer Krasinski

View of “Michael Mahalchick,” 2021.

Joey Terrill

ORTUZAR PROJECTS

Joey Terrill's *Remembrance*, 1989, a seminaturalistic stylized acrylic, appeared in “Once Upon a Time: Paintings, 1981–2015,” a modest but powerful survey of the artist's work at Ortuzar Projects. In this canvas,



Joey Terrill, *Tom Gutierrez*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 36 × 48".

Terrill and a former boyfriend are depicted within a lush tropical forest, foraging for birds-of-paradise while surrounded by towers of agave whose spiny tendrils cast black shadows that give the background a striking sense of depth. The painting was made the same year Terrill discovered he was HIV-positive, at a time when the diagnosis was considered a death sentence. In that somber context, the brilliant flowers, with their blue-and-tangerine blooms, take on a multiplicity of meanings. Although the plants symbolize Los Angeles, they are in fact native to South Africa and, like Terrill's gay and Chicano identities, are both loved and loathed in the city for their omnipresence, foreignness, and beauty.

Like the Pop artists who inspired him—he studied at LA's Immaculate Heart College, where Sister Corita Kent taught and was a major influence on the student body—Terrill in his earlier works used mass-market aesthetics to celebrate and critique popular culture, while elevating the sundry aspects of his racial and sexual identities. In 1978, he put out the first issue of *Homeboy Beautiful*, a zine that parodied tabloids with its fake scandals and even faker ads. The headline for one issue reads H.B. EXPOSÉ: HOMO-HOMBOYS! In its pages, Terrill's muckraking journalist persona describes being pulled into an orgy pit full of mustachioed men as Judy Garland songs fill the air. What the artist borrows from print publishing in his earlier paintings is the way it cleverly marries image to text—after all, so many of Terrill's works feel as though they were lifted from comic books. The tripartite suite *Chicanos Invade New York*, 1981, follows Terrill and a group of Angelenos visiting Manhattan in the winter. One of the panels has the separate title *Making Tortillas in SoHo*, which is also written in the canvas's lower-left-hand corner. Looming over the otherwise calm domestic scene is a poster for *Bent*, a 1979 play by Martin Sherman that starred Richard Gere as a gay man in a Nazi concentration camp. In another panel, the central figure wears sunglasses on an overcast snowy day (he's too cool and too cold) as he poses before the icy facade of New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

The exhibition's largest piece, *Breaking Up/Breaking Down*, 1984–85, was made up of ten canvases and documented Terrill's path to recovery after the bitter end of a relationship, during which a lot of blood (and some semen) had been spilled. Two self-portraits that function as “before” and “after” pictures flank eight scenes that feature the artist variously packing, masturbating, drugging, and eating (this last activity, portrayed in the panel titled *Crying*, shows Terrill digging into what might be a pint of ice cream; behind him is a poster for the 1967 neo-noir film *In Cold Blood*). All kinds of cultural and personal symbols infiltrated the artist's works in this show: The birds-of-paradise,

for instance, appeared once more behind two men in *Not All Our Lovemaking Had to Smell of Poppers*, 1982.

After *Remembrance*, Terrill began capturing his subjects through photographs, and the works he made during the 1990s and early 2000s in this presentation seemed uncanny in their supersaturated realism, especially when hung beside his flatter, more graphic creations. That was due in part to their settings, several of which featured rooms elaborately decked out for the Halloween parties the artist threw at his home between 1989 and 1991. Many of his characters appeared in flamboyant costumes; in *Tom Gutierrez*, 2001, the titular subject is dressed as Pierrot, his brilliant red pout punctuating his voluminous all-white ensemble. This type of execution felt most poignant in *My Last Day in New York, Fire Island—1981*, 2015, a self-portrait of the artist reclining on the gay beach's pristine white sands. Terrill's paintings are everywhere marked by the fragility of life and give the viewer a generous amount of space in which to pause, reflect, and rejoice.

—Coco Romack

Jill Freedman

DANIEL COONEY FINE ART

All cops are bastards! This antiauthoritarian rallying cry originated in England about a century ago and pervaded certain pockets of New Left activism during the 1960s and '70s, a period when Jill Freedman (1939–2019) found her footing as a self-taught documentary photographer. She picked up a camera for the first time in 1966; two years later, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., she participated in the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC, and documented the Resurrection City protest camp around the National Mall. Having witnessed mass arrests and police brutality, Freedman was far from being an apologist for law enforcement. A decade later, however, she embarked on a three-year ride-along with officers from Manhattan's Midtown South and East Village precincts.

“Street Cops 1978–1981,” Freedman's exhibition here, featured more than fifty gelatin silver prints from the eponymous series, which was originally published as a book in 1981. A central wall in the gallery displayed an eight-by-seven grid of police portraits—with few people of color and women pictured—along with the introductory text from

Jill Freedman, *Family disputes are dangerous for cops.*, ca. 1978–81, gelatin silver print, 11 × 14".

