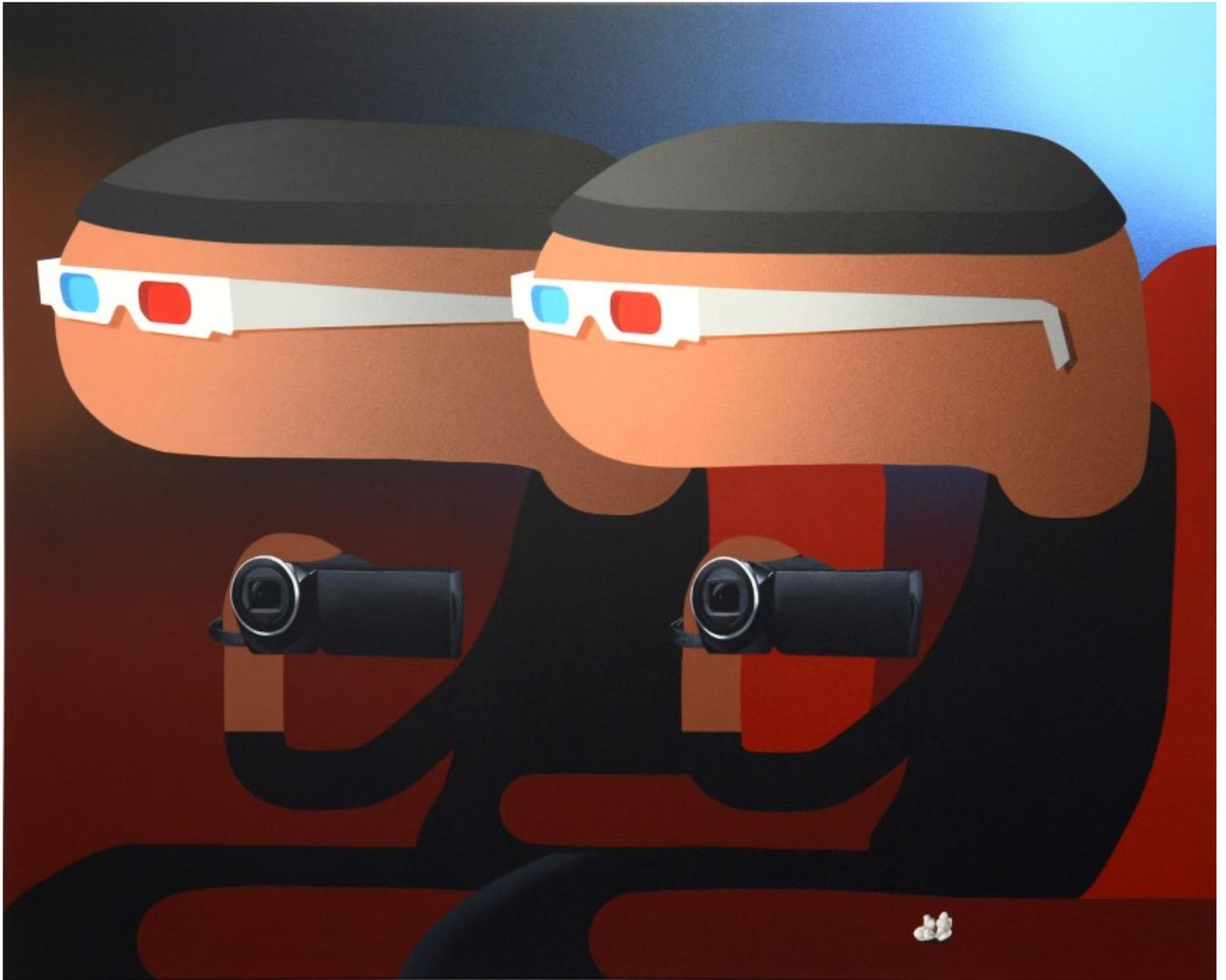


ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Review: Painter-on-the-verge Oli Epp's U.S. solo debut has human folly in full technicolor



"Copycat," 2019, by Oli Epp. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 49 1/4 inches by 61 inches (Oli Epp and Richard Heller Gallery)

By DAVID PAGEL

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Oli Epp, born 1994, may be today's [Roy Lichtenstein](#). Or tomorrow's [Ed Ruscha](#). Or the next day's [Philip Guston](#).

Or all of the above.

Or maybe none.

At Richard Heller Gallery, the London-based painter's U.S. solo debut, "Contactless," raises big questions about art, life and technology — and then ducks and runs.

If you look at art because you want to find out what other people think, you probably will be frustrated by Epp's crisply delineated pictures of humanoids doing what humanoids do: behave like people while getting us to see the folly of our behavior.

But if you look at art because you want to think about the world we live in, you'll find lots to ponder in Epp's iconoclastic icons. Contradictions — and the conflicts they can trigger — take pointed shape in his super-streamlined paintings.

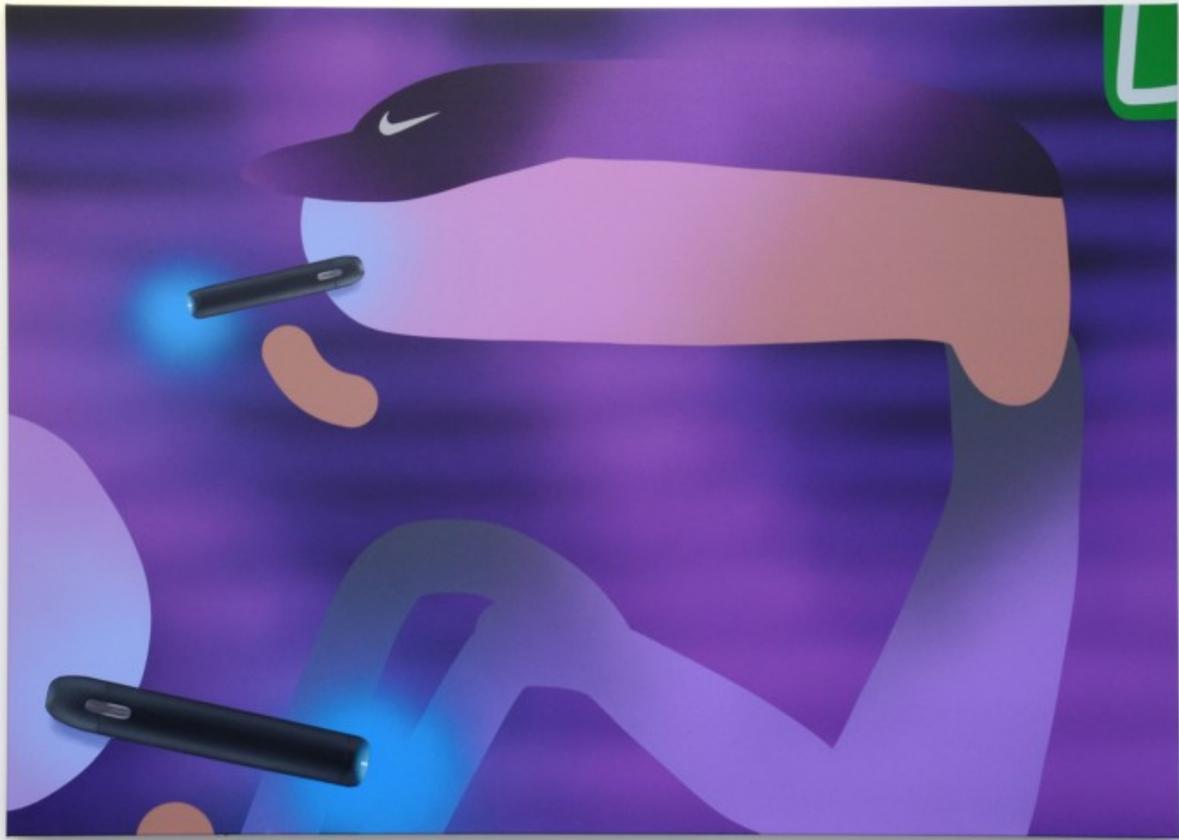


"Biosphobia," 2019, by Oli Epp. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 61 inches by 61 inches (Oli Epp and Richard Heller Gallery)



"Security Theft," 2019, by Oli Epp. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 68 7/8ths inches by 88 1/2 inches (Oli Epp and Richard Heller Gallery)

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"Grape Vape," 2019, by Oli Epp. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 63 inches by 88 1/2 inches (Oli Epp and Richard Heller Gallery)

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In the old days, icons were images that stood in for powerful personages, deities or spirits. Various sects had various icons. They made sense to insiders but were inscrutable to others.

Today, icons are stylized symbols that appear on screens of all sizes, giving users the world over instant access to vast volumes of info. Epp's paintings have both feet firmly planted in this reality while casting an eye on the past.

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Like Lichtenstein's canvases that riffed off of comic-strip imagery, Epp's color-saturated compositions bring the glow of illuminated screens to the surfaces of hand-painted pictures. Like Ruscha's illusionistic graphics, they deflect the sanctimony that makes art seem more serious — and difficult — than it is. And, like Guston's cartoon characters wearing Klan-style hoods, Epp's faceless folks turn anonymity inside-out, catching the general public in acts we'd prefer to be left out of.

Despite the instant legibility of Epp's cypher-style paintings, they get under your skin. Then they set you to thinking about the ways communication technologies transform the messages, along with the people who send and receive them.

Richard Heller Gallery, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through May 4. (310) 453-9191, www.richardhellergallery.com