

Trevon LATIN

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Trevon Latin Finds Joy in Melancholy*

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Latin’s colorful artworks touch on aspects of queer and Black experience, not in broad strokes, but in exceedingly specific ones.

by Megan N. Liberty | August 7, 2021



Trevon Latin, “Untitled (in blue)” (2021), oil on canvas, fabric stretched on panel, plastic beads and barrettes, 50 1/4 x 58 1/2 x 4 inches (all images: photography by Guillaume Ziccarelli, courtesy the artist and Perrotin)

“Trinket” is an apt word to describe the sewn, painted, and collaged three-dimensional materiality of the works in Trevon Latin’s solo exhibition, *Trinket Eater*, at Perrotin. In “Untitled (Robert)” (2021), a man rides atop a mound of quilted fabrics, his

body rendered in sequins — shades of brown for his skin and blue for his hair. In the background is a lush landscape of green hills made of stretched fabric and pink-sequined clouds. This and similar portraits have a regal air. The figures are centered and poised as if seen from below, their upturned heads and gazes projecting a sense of nobility accentuated by the bright golds, blues, and greens. These portraits are primarily framed in circular stretchers, recalling the tondo format common to religious paintings.

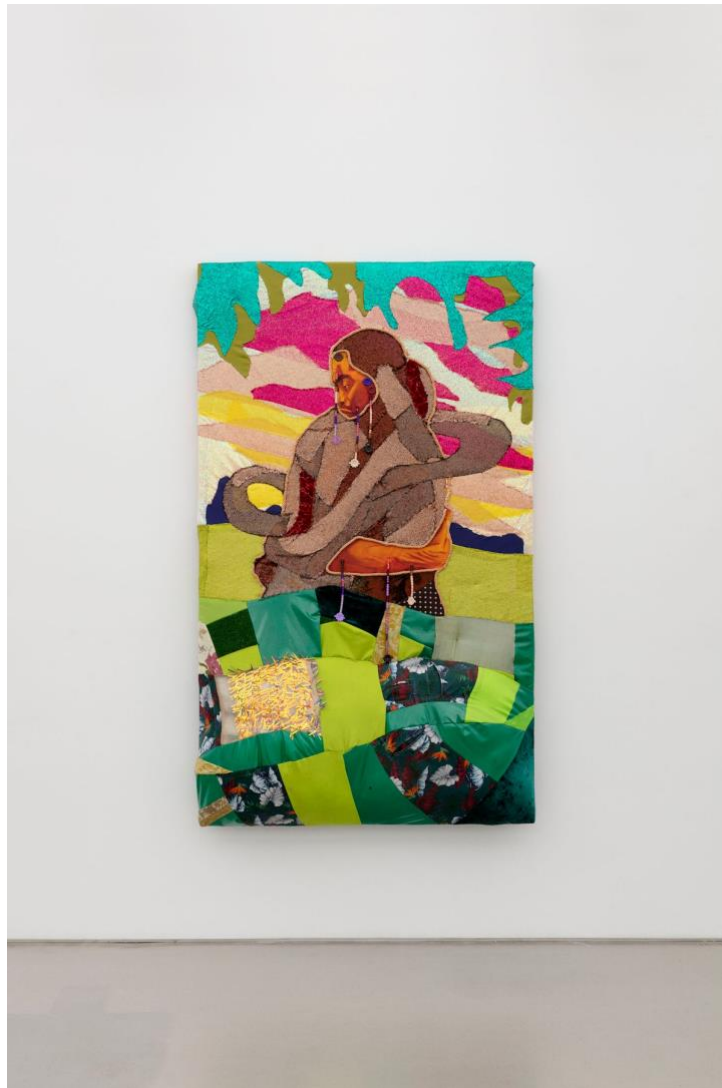
More cartoonish figures break out of the picture plane, with stuffed arms reaching off the panel, in works such as “I May Be Young But I’m Ready” (2021) and “Welcome” (2020). The latter hangs near the entry and features a wooden cabinet that opens to a collaged textile landscape, along with mannequin arms and featureless heads encased in fabric that reach out around the edges.



Installation view of *Trevon Latin: Trinket Eater* at Perrotin New York, 2021

Trinket Eater, Latin's first solo show in New York, introduces viewers to this cast of figures: bedazzled with sequins, buttons, hair clips, and beads, they burst from the panels onto which they are sewn and stretched. Latin, who grew up in Houston and recently completed his MFA at Yale, has a wide-ranging practice that encompasses doll-making, performance, and video (he performed for many years as the nonbinary character Shaturqua Relentless), sewing, and painting. The quilted fabric at the base of many of these works recalls the traditional art of quilting, a means of telling and sharing stories. Other works feature faces formed by 3D-printed masks; these call attention to the ways in which queer people still must hide and protect their identities at times. Gathered together, Latin creates a complex, narrative-driven world that overflows from the artworks themselves, touching on aspects of queer and Black experience, not in broad strokes, but in exceedingly specific ones.

The visual density of his works, as well as his use of everyday items and world-building, suggest, for instance, Trenton Doyle Hancock and his "Moundverse," while the patterned fabric, sewing, and stuffing have affinities with Tschabalala Self's mixed-media paintings and sculptures. What sets Latin's work apart is the intimacy of many of the scenes, and their celebration of melancholy. "Divinity (I'm Complete / I'm Holy)" (2021) follows the same format as "Untitled (Robert)" and many of the other tondos, but instead of a singular figure at the center, three are intertwined: one brown sequined, one turquoise sequined, and one purple, composed of elaborately patterned fabric (with floral hair clips for facial accents). A gold rope outlines the collective form of the three figures. Intertwining bodies make otherwise formally straightforward portraits more complex.



Trevon Latin, “Two in One Skin” (2021), oil on canvas and fabric stretched on panel, 83 x 51 x 10 inches

While the relationship in “Divinity (I’m Complete / I’m Holy)” is left more ambiguous, other scenes are clear representations of queer love. One of the show’s most intimate works, “Untitled (in blue)” (2021), which is in the entrance across from the front desk, apart from the other works, shows two men rendered in shining dark blue — a nod, perhaps, to the blue-blacks used by Chris Ofili, who’s also known for including glitter and other found materials in his own regal depictions of African and diasporic life. The figures join in an embrace, their bodies rendered in sequins and shiny fabrics, but their faces are expertly painted in flashe — a reminder that Latin’s MFA is in painting. Strands of blue and white beads adorned with floral clips hang from their faces like

beards. One man looks out toward us, his eyes wide open, as his lover plants a kiss on his cheek.

This is a tender scene, staged, much like the other works, with the figures atop a mound of quilted fabric, glittery clouds floating behind them. But the outward gaze complicates it. It does not meet us directly, but instead hints at the separate internal thoughts of one lover, perhaps kept private. Another scene of embrace, “Two in One Skin” (2021), also captures two figures in a hug; in this case, the sequined brown bodies are encircled by what appears to be a writhing tail or tentacle, suggesting that not just pink clouds set this world apart from ours. Only one face is visible, again delicately painted, with a distant gaze. This juxtaposition of bright, bold colors and materials that invoke celebration and joy, with quiet, thoughtful scenes and expressions gives Latin’s work its complexity. We are not given access to the figures’ interior lives, but their interiority is apparent, and their thoughts seem, at times, troubling.



Installation view of *Trevon Latin: Trinket Eater* at Perrotin New York, 2021

The works in the show all date from the past two years, a time characterized by extreme loss, fear, doubt, and, recently, some celebration. Standing in the gallery, surrounded by these plush relief collages and freestanding stuffed sculptures, I felt immersed in Latin's world of deep interiority.

One of the few scenes that doesn't follow a formal portrait layout, "Born to Blossom, Bloom to Perish" (2021), shows two separate figures, one of whom is a painted self-portrait of Latin, partly obscured by beaded threads hanging over his face; they stand on a quilted mound, from which eyes and arms peek and hang out. During the pandemic, Latin told me when I visited his studio in May, he wasn't able to have his friends model for him and was forced instead to look inward. This certainly comes through in the melancholic tone of the works. *Trinket Eater* presents an opening into a world, one full of layered emotions but not yet fully formed. As an early career show, it offers Latin much to build and expand on.

Trevon Latin: *Trinket Eater continues at Perrotin (130 Orchard Street, Manhattan) through August 13.*