

Interview

Into: Austin Lee's Uncynical Day-Glo Humanoids

By Sarah Nechamkin

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"Walk," 2019, by Austin Lee.



"Great Again," 2019.

"Into" is a series dedicated to objects, artworks, garments, exhibitions, and all orders of things that we are into — and there really isn't a lot more to it than that. Today: Sarah Nechamkin reflects upon the fluorescent, stupefyingly dopamine-firing art found in Austin Lee's latest exhibition, Feel Good, on view at Jeffrey Deitch New York until May 18."

I'M INTO Austin Lee's *Feels Good* because I've always wanted to peer inside the Claymation-ized mind of a child high on Elmer's glue and Lisa Frank. Lee's portraits of happy-go-lucky humanoids, painted in various shades of Day-Glo, can only come from the imagination of someone not yet corrupted by the cynical forces of fine detail. For the bedraggled masses, his rainbow wheel squiggly-faces and winking flowers offer a chemical-free high. Thanks to Lee's proficiency in Photoshop, and with the airbrush, his work retains a quality of digitized amateurism. Texture, both in his paintings and his fiber resin sculptures, is slathered on in thick, fuzzy, joyfully gloppy layers reminiscent of the large brush tool in Microsoft Paint. In Lee's wobbly world, globular intentions take precedence over the portrayal of humanoid subjects. I can attest that the psychedelic jubilation of *Feels Good* is undoubtedly feel-good — in part due to its flippant relationship to the white cube it lives in. To wit, an encounter with one of Lee's blobbed-out figures is akin to bumping into your imaginary friend, shooting malformed peace signs at you from across the room — or something like a glimpse at your own id, perpetually moving through space and time with the coordination of a minutes-old fawn learning to stand. Be warned, though, if you spend enough time near Lee's work to truly feel good, brace for something like a return to the emotional depths you once found in your parent's basement, knee deep in potato chips and hours into some indistinguishable Adult Swim cartoon. This is the hyper-fluorescent fever dream of Austin Lee, and I'm not sure I want to ever wake up.