

Hana Cohn, "Review: Jill Mulleady at Freedman Fitzpatrick," *Frieze*, April 2017

Frieze



JILL MULLEADY Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles, USA

I kept thinking of magic: sleight of hand magic; the magic of appearance and disappearance; the magic of perception, misperception and misdirection. The most alluring of Jill Mulleady's paintings in her recent show at Freedman Fitzpatrick, 'This Mortal Coil', are of figures rendered in ghoulish greens or electric blues and awash with splashes of acidic red. Like finger drawings revealed by the fog of a warm exhale onto a window, Mulleady's images come to life suspended in their own hazy world.

The narratives offered by each work are equally slippery and ambiguous. In *Prince S* (2017), a shirtless character in jeans smokes a joint in the foreground, unfazed by the three faceless figures groping each other behind him. Reflected in a mirror alongside, his likeness looks on with bloodshot eyes: while his pose is similar, he occupies a blue room in which the smoke from his joint forms a seductive constellation

around his body. *Prince S* seems less conscious of our viewership than of his own reflection. As in many of Mulleady's paintings, the double is more aware than its original.

At the back of the gallery hangs a diptych: *The Green Room I* and *The Green Room II* (both 2017) depict an aloof man with hawkish features and pea-coloured skin caught in a flail-cum-dance. He stands behind a bar with one arm thrown above his head as his shadow hovers behind him – a sort of theatrical partner. His opposite arm is positioned to emphasize a flick of the wrist, revealing a pink cuff on an otherwise blue shirt. In both paintings, a shallow puddle on the bar from an overturned drink reveals the figure's cocked hand, extended outward in reflection. Perhaps someone else, outside of our field of vision, is reaching for him; Mulleady keeps it a secret.

A Thousand Natural Shocks (2017) depicts a blushing young woman donning a top hat. In her left hand, she holds a red pill; in her right, a blue one. Mulleady has painted the woman mid-gesture, as though we are witnessing an act of choice. The significance of her decision is compounded by

Left
Jill Mulleady,
Kleptocracy, 2017, oil
on linen, 1.7 x 1.7 m

Right
Jill Mulleady,
Prince S, 2017, oil on
linen, 1.7 x 1.3 m

a sinister, pistol-toting silhouette looming behind. Could this be the shadow of her subconscious? Or is it a third party – heroic or villainous, we cannot tell – who might, in fact, be standing right behind us?

Mulleady paints these shadowy figures in delicate and precarious dances with the bodies that cast them. While such imprints typically serve as indices of the human form – reactive and real-time reflections of physical presence – the artist betrays that interpretation: these are characters in their own right. Confessional whispers of our inner mortal coils, these shadows and reflections reveal the parts of ourselves that we aim to conceal. With simple painterly gestures, Mulleady's strange character studies become mirrors for our own self-reflection.

Hana Cohn