

FULL FANTASY, Christian Santiago, 23 February - 24 March 2024

Press Release

...a vast ruined stone building with square marble columns in a green underwater light...a luminous green haze, thicker and darker at ground level, shading up to light greens and yellow...deep blue canals and red brick buildings...sunlight on water...a boy standing on a beach naked with dusky rose genitals...red night sky over a desert city...clusters of violet light raining down on sandstone steps and bursting with a musky smell of ozone...strange words in his throat, a taste of blood and metal...a white ship sailing across a gleaming empty sky dusted with stars...singing fish in a ruined garden...a strange pistol in his hand that shoots blue sparks...beautiful diseased faces in red light, all looking at something he cannot see...

– William Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night* (1981)

A drawn line has no inside nor outside – it simply demarcates a space, traces a volume or points to the permeable seam between membranes. It exists in the ‘interzone’ to borrow a term favored by the above-quoted Beat scribe who threw it around somewhat casually (no doubt in opiate-induced delirium) to describe that space between states of consciousness, dreams and reality, hallucination and perception and perhaps even those inchoate intervals in the transfiguration of flesh and matter. It is an everywhere and nowhere all at once.

This is an important principle for Christian Santiago whose practice unfolds precisely in this unmappable region. A splice of Clive Barker and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (with a hybrid tropical bent), Santiago harnesses his frothy linework to conjure a wide array of familiars, bestial avatars and monstrous projections. Armored bio-warriors, fleshy shapeshifters and more nefarious and hard-to-define corporealities populate his strange worlds. Orifices and wounds emerge untethered to bodies, comingling and opening up onto dimensions untold and forgotten realms of sensorial exploration. All of this is minutely rendered, yet their outlines remain porous and pulsatile, open to those unexpected encounters where the boundaries between figure and ground, inside and outside, self and other become increasingly blurry and difficult to maintain.

This might be a fully fleshed out fantasy but also a conscious rejection of the gravitational processes that congeal and crystalize our primordial goop into the functional husks we refer to as our ‘fixed selves.’ Santiago finds something much more compelling in the bubbling underneath, spilling onto the surface and the spoiling of facile categorizations (is it painting? Drawing? Neither or both?). For the sake of argument, let’s call it ‘concept art’—but of a cosmic, metaphysical strain that envisions the messy and convulsive process of outgrowing, shedding and regenerating our epidermal sacks as they evolve and project themselves into incarnations heretofore unknown.

Text by Franklin Melendez

Christian Santiago (b. 1990 Bronx, NY) studied illustration at Parsons. He has exhibited throughout the U.S. and Europe, most recently his solo show, on a cellular level, at Collaborations, Copenhagen as well as the group exhibition, ENSEMBLE at Chateau Shatto, Los Angeles. He currently lives and works in New York City.