

GLASGOW

Walter Price

THE MODERN INSTITUTE

The paintings Walter Price showed in “Pearl Lines” are a joyous combination of the carefree and the committed. Their sensibility is earnest, and their carnivalesque style engaging without looking labored. Price finds redemptive qualities in the most apparently dashed-off and blasé decisions. He takes risks. Figurative detail competes with compositional expediency, and at their best the paintings edge into abstraction and sit back, relaxed. Scrapped and scattered marks read both descriptively and as gesture, as in *Different day, same confusion* (all works cited, 2019), where daubs of orange and red catching the sharp edges of older acrylic layers are set aflame.

For this show, the floor of the gallery’s Aird’s Lane space was carpeted gray and the walls painted black, heightening the lurid colors of Price’s acrylic-and-Flashe paintings and creating a sense of containment analogous to their composition. Many works depicted small rooms, like stage sets, dominated by a single hue. The colors’ neon saturation made the works feel busy and nocturnal. *Facetime* looks past an empty shopping cart in the extreme foreground at a nude figure, outlined in red and lit by the glow of a television, bent over a footstool. The treatment of the paint is lively, but the mood is devastated and tragic.

The paintings were both notional and notational. The recurring images of palm trees, ships, armchairs, and hats, along with the abbreviated motifs of books and dumbbells, could be read as the flotsam and



Walter Price, *Florida man*, 2019, acrylic, gesso, and encaustic on wood, 18 × 24".

jetsam of the artist's life. Price grew up in Macon, Georgia, and attended art school on the GI Bill following several years in the US Navy. However, the variations, reimaginings, and painterly alterations of these symbols—sometimes they are canceled or barely suggested—places them beyond a biographical decoding. Their vitality lies in their poetic openness. They are hard to pin down.

Like Price's rooms, his landscapes feel curtailed, with *The Truman Show* edges. The Fanta-orange vista of *Florida man* incorporates wobbling palms, a toilet, and a simplified laptop icon, all variously deformed by scratches and poured encaustic. The painting's enigmatic quality and fractured painting style are reminiscent of Ken Kiff's work but with a less mythical bent. Both artists mix the uncanny and the comical while resisting linear narrative; scenery disintegrates dreamily around animals, loosely painted human figures, and random detritus. In *Fencing the truth* an incomplete red room with a chaise longue or sun lounger opens onto a cartoonishly flat green-blue landscape. A broken tree stands to one side, and a threatening black dash—a wall?—cuts across the work's bottom.

In the gallery's adjacent Bricks Space, Price showed a group of drawings that provided insight into the vocabulary and sources that dissolve in his paintings. Their mix of materials (marker, color pencil, graphite) and motifs drawn from Americana (five-pointed stars, the Road Runner, boxing matches) recalled the drawings of Larry Rivers. Figures were augmented, their bodies flattened or interrupted by pop-cultural elements. The combinations were oddly disarming. As in the paintings, Price's fearless enjoyment of media and sense of play made each piece breezily uncynical. The works didn't feel isolated; instead they pulled together, socialized, contradicted, and elaborated on each other. They had a look but not just one view.