

ARTFORUM

Eric Wesley



Eric Wesley, *myspace*, 2018, oil on canvas, 40 x 40"

NAPLES
FONTI
Via Chiaia 229
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For his latest exhibition, Eric Wesley conducted some very routine online research: He googled his name. The results were more or less embarrassing for a practicing artist; various photographs of strangers came up—mugshots, portraits of soldiers in uniform, and profile pictures of everyday people. A shared “reputation” (the show’s title) materialized, established solely through name and algorithm. The artist emailed a selection of these images to a Chinese company that makes hand-painted oil reproductions on commission, and then to a Neapolitan copyist, who refined the paintings. These works hang at thoughtful distances from one another in the exhibition, an intimate and slightly comical response to the congested, clickable, and low-quality “galleries” of internet search engines.

“Reputation” also includes objects that bear Web-sourced images. The watery blue of studio portraiture backgrounds both the unsettling T-shirt visage of *1984* (all works 2018) and the punning *401k*, for which a man’s blank mug has been plastered onto a white coffee cup. Some works’ titles describe the profession of the depicted Eric Wesley, such as *The General and Doctor*. Others reveal where the images originated, as in *myspace*, a painted snapshot of a man lounging about, smoking hookah. The show’s meandering focus reflects on the obsolescence of authorship but also the increasing elusiveness, or ambience, of individuality. Wesley’s process—inspired by online marketing and brand crisis-allaying custodianships such as ReputationManagement.com—suggests that the anomalies that make identity seem beyond one’s control need not be managed out, that in the digital age one’s essence, like a painting, comprises originals, copies, and gift-shop souvenirs.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.