



IAN SHULTS

Smile, Darlin'



In the wake of the #MeToo movement and a shift toward greater empowerment for women in modern society, artist Ian Shults aims to shed light on the slow-burning toxic masculinity still permeating our culture. "At first I was going to take on a larger, wider scope of everything that was wrong in the world...but then I had to narrow down what was really happening at the time, which was the #MeToo movement," says Shults, whose new body of work reflects the many subtle ways that women are patronized and beleaguered on a daily basis. "I was really bothered by all the toxic masculinity around...As a guy...I've painted women almost [the entire time] I've been a professional at it, and I feel like I owed it to them to say something about it...I just wanted to move the conversation in a positive direction."

An exhibition titled *You Should Smile, Darlin'* at Wally Workman Gallery in Austin, Texas, showcases the artist's new work. The title is a reference to a common phrase



Shults says he hears constantly directed at women—sugary on the surface, but riddled with condescension underneath.

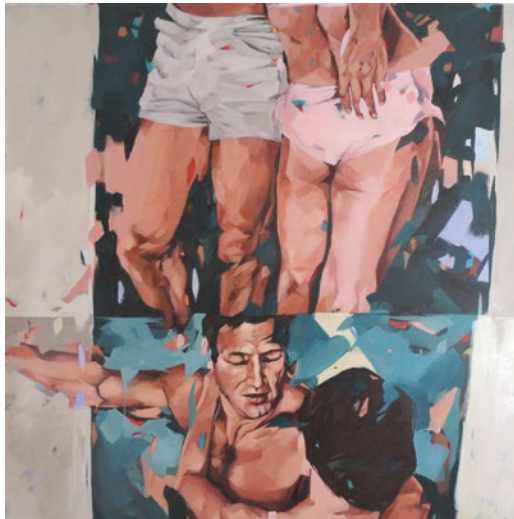
Shults' work is undeniably eye-catching with a sense of calculated chaos. Some compositions look like collages of disparate figures while others feature doubles of the same image layered on top of one another. *A Good Chance for Bad Happenstance* depicts multiple layers of a man and woman locked in a seductive embrace, while bug-eyed cartoons stare from the background, giving what the artist describes as an unpleasant, voyeuristic vibe. The cartoon characters themselves, which likely came from an outdated comic, were a result of hours spent each week going through found photo blogs and old movie clippings, Shults says. "The idea was that old-fashioned ideas go on looking old," he adds. In *The Walk Right In and The Walk Right Out*, a piece that depicts the same scene from two separate perspectives, Shults says he was experimenting with the idea that "women are moving in a different direction than men have taken it for a long time."

"Ian Shults is a brilliant and wise captor of the human condition," says Michael LeBurkien, a collector of the artist's work. "His subject matter is on the edgy borders of culture. Yet he paints empathically and not judgmentally...He makes the mundane and sometimes unpleasant a wise social commentary and always aesthetic."

Shults' style is distinct, and while he endeavors to put his thoughts out there, he says the visual appeal is still the most important element to his work. "My job is to make things that look cool, and if the statement overtakes the aesthetics then I'm not doing it right," he says. Shults' latest body of work is still in progress, and the artist says he's continuously figuring out the direction in which he wants to take his work, both on a visual and analytical level. "Nothing is static, ever. Everything is constantly in motion." ●

Wally Workman Gallery

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1
Broken Mirror (diptych),
acrylic on panel, 16 x 32"

2
Melancholia Errabunda,
acrylic on panel, 48 x 60"

3
*The Walk Right In and The
Walk Right Out*, acrylic
on panel, 48 x 48"

4
*The Plight of the
Straight White American
Mansplainer*, acrylic on
panel, 48 x 48"

