

Derosia

Joel Dean

The Dreamtime Particle Pretend

November 4, 2022–December 17, 2022

For his first solo exhibition with Derosia, Joel Dean continues his series *Initials A through Z and the Transformative Power of Symbolism in Storytelling*, in which alphabetical characters are a point of departure for intricate, fantastical tableaux.

Throughout the series, Dean formally alludes to drop cap lettering, the convention dating to medieval manuscripts in which an oversized and embellished character initiates a new chapter or section of a text. The foundational structure of the alphabet becomes a pictorial frame for each unique scene. From this elementary method of signification, Dean forms serpentine narratives that at once refer to a complex personal symbology and proffer common iconic forms. Dean paints symbols known for their formal simplicity—hearts, stars, apples—yet subjects them to various iterations and incarnations across each painting. These motifs flutter atmospherically; imprint onto his figures; wither, wilt and break apart, constituting a form of mark making that renders each narrative of the same universe. Through this formal flexibility, Dean also underscores the prismatic nature of symbolism: allegorical meaning refracts and multiplies between transmission and reception. In addition to Dean’s evolving set of symbols and characters, musical instruments recur, performing a similar function to the emblems and letters on view: an orchestra absent a song, they are distilled signifiers, suggesting a harmony of signifieds. Across the paintings, Dean establishes enigmatic territories, anchored in familiarity yet rife for ethereal interpretation.

Joel Dean (b. 1986, Atlanta) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include *Bel Ami*, Los Angeles (2021), where he exhibited earlier works from *Initials A through Z and the Transformative Power of Symbolism in Storytelling*; *Prairie*, Chicago (2019); *Cordova*, Barcelona (2019); and *Interstate Projects*, Brooklyn (2018). Selected recent group exhibitions include *Someday*, New York (2021); *Annex de Odelon*, New York (2021); *P.P.O.W*, New York (2020); *Bodega* (Derosia), New York (2020); *Tatjana Peters*, Ghent (2020); *Gern en Regalia*, New York (2019); *MX Gallery*, New York (2019, 2018).