

# Danielle Roberts

## *Phosphorescence and Gasoline*

October 24 through December 7, 2024

Opening reception Thursday, October 24, 6pm to 8pm

Fredericks & Freiser is pleased to announce, “Phosphorescence and Gasoline”, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Danielle Roberts. Her dark and psychological paintings combine the Neo(n) Noir buzz of ambient lighting with a Hopper-esque sense of wistful longing. The hazy loneliness of these works depicts a generation set adrift in a world of eerie beauty and permanent unrest.

In each of her works, illumination plays a central role. The sources of light vary. Some are electric—neon lights at parties, hazy bathroom scenes, or the bright halos of car headlights. The use of artificial illumination in these spaces recalls Marshall McLuhan’s ruminations that electricity “confers the mythic dimension” onto everyday life. Roberts goes further in these works, however, contrasting these electrical lights with the light of the natural world. Dark woods that absorb all light and ocean waters filled with bioluminescent algae provide an organic reflection of the familiar spaces of bars, parties, cars, bedrooms, and strip malls. These spaces are recognizable and uncanny at once. The viewer is placed on the outside of these scenes, looking in over someone’s shoulder. Like stepping outside a party but still hearing the music inside, the viewer is afforded a sense of detachment even as they are immersed in the experience. Often physically distanced from the lights and action by trompe l’oeil glass doors, bathroom steam, or forest mists, the viewer is both fully enmeshed in the scene and one step removed from it.

In “Phosphorescence and Gasoline” Roberts presents paintings that have the quality of modern myths drawn from an unwritten theology. A woman pulling a rope out of a depthless ocean reincarnates some ancient mariner. Parties full of disillusioned faces commence, while lovers fall under the hypnotic spell of a psychedelic light machine or seek refuge in the eternal darkness of the woods. The emotional treatment of these figures—and the unsettling sense that one has left one’s back exposed—recalls Ernst Kirchner’s acidic city scenes. Her handling of paint underscores her empathetic focus on the individual. Sometimes gaseous and almost watercolor-like when rendering atmospheric effects, Roberts’ signature brushwork condenses into stylized, opaque planes of color on her figures’ faces. Fragmented but not shallow or hollow, these figures are parables for shared generational struggles that nevertheless feel deeply individual and personal.

Contemplative, rather than explanatory, these works project an echo of sensorial memory in the viewer. The wooded coastline of North America envelops the works in a strong sense of place drawn from the artist’s childhood. Appealing to a universal experience of early twenty-first century America, the simultaneous familiarity and alienation of these scenes dredges up half-forgotten memories and fragments of past experiences. Unsettling and seductive, the atmospheric fog and haze of Roberts’ works paradoxically exposes a vibrant sense of clarity. In Roberts’ work, the unnerving beauty of our contemporary moment is nothing short of intoxicating.