

ARTFORUM

Nolan Simon
by David Everitt Howe
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Nolan Simon. *Dark Droste. Black Matter.* 2019. oil and dye sublimation on linen. 48 × 42".

In “Other People,” painter Nolan Simon presents figurative, nearly photorealistic portraits of the most economical kind, zooming in on feet, chests, hands, and other appendages and objects instead of on a full body or face. Hung sparsely, the modest canvases are surrounded by swaths of white wall, giving them an almost religious aura. Two ankle sock-clad feet rest butterfly-style on the floor in *Ankle Socks, Pre-Owned* (all

works 2019). Small in scale, the painting is hung alone on its wall, giving it the appearance of a tender, fetishistic devotional. Adjacent to it we see *Dark Droste*, *Black Matter*, which features another foot, shod in an oxford and stepping onto a floor. The laboriously speckled ground causes the exposed ankle to dissolve into hundreds of allover paint splatters. The image becomes a malignant species of monochrome, swallowing background and foreground both.

Allerleirauh plays similar optical tricks. A found image of a man reading the *New York Times* is sliced straight down the middle, revealing another man's smooth, unblemished chest—a friend photographed by the artist. At first glance, the work seems to be showing someone loosely wearing a dressing gown printed with the *Gray Lady* all over it, though its lack of folds betrays the painting not as an image of the most spectacular sort of loungewear, but as an altogether different kind of picture—one that scrambles up the viewer's sense of depth and perspective. More straightforward compositions are equally, if not more, suggestive. A pair of hands holding an iPhone above dark swirls of bathwater evoke photographs by [Josephine Pryde](#) but with more moody existentialism, while two woozily painted martini glasses joined by a handcuff imply a kinky night in—or a union gone awry. In either case, a lot can be said with very little, if one knows the art of efficiency.