

Au Jus at Bel Ami

By Erin F. O’Leary June 16, 2023



Au Jus (installation view) (2023). Image courtesy of the artists and Bel Ami, Los Angeles. Photo: Paul Salveson.

For five or so years, my private New Year’s resolution was to “consume less, create more,” thus, it has at times been difficult to reconcile the fact that my creative practice relies on consumption. The same can perhaps be said of artists Juliana Halpert and Parker Ito. In the press release for *Au Jus*, their two-person show at Bel Ami, Ito writes that his website “is like a Tamagotchi; I have to keep feeding it images or it will die.” I think that without images I might die, so I keep scrolling and screenshotting and downloading and printing and pasting them to my wall.

This is what Halpert and Ito have done in most of the works on view at the gallery—fed images through various cameras and scanners and printers to see what comes out the other side. But they are not mere recipients, cogs in the machinations of image-making: After an (ex!)-boyfriend told her she was a hobbyist photographer, Halpert lugged a heavy camera across state lines to photograph an orchid competition. One of the resulting C-prints, *Orchid Dreams (ribbons)* (2023) is too green, but who cares. The red-black rebate of the negative seeps into the top of the frame and she doesn't crop it out.

Jules Olitski's gloppy impasto painting, *Power Switch* (1990), hangs nearby. Ito apparently acquired it in a trade: an image for an image. A scan of a reproduced Olitski painting from a book also appears in Halpert's *Beyond Bounds* (2020). The work initially reads as a subversive one-liner until I realize that the scanning and the photographing have shifted the color of the canvas slightly, and now it's the same red-black as the film rebate. The tape-like shapes around the edges make the whole thing look like the peel-apart layer of old Polaroid pack film, just the residue of an image.

Across the room, textured images of religious icons make up the backdrop of Ito's panoramic *Clear Sushi* series (all 2023). They look like gravestone rubbings, another kind of residue. Smaller images are layered in the corners of each canvas, including various art historical reproductions; images of the glitchy, colored bands generated by a malfunctioning photo scanner; and an AI-generated image of a busty "fantasy barmaid," which I learn by feeding a screenshot through Google's reverse image search. As with the works on view, the images here don't always make sense together, and certainly don't add up to something neatly-defined. Instead, they seem to suggest that consuming and making images is fundamentally part of how we live.

Au Jus runs through July 8, 2023.