

# WORKPLACE

Artforum  
'Miko Veldkamp'  
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## ARTFORUM



Miko Veldkamp, *Mirror Stage*, 2021, oil, acrylic, and ink on canvas, 54 × 48".

## Miko Veldkamp

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“The collective unconscious,” wrote Carl Jung in 1933, is “the sea upon which the ego rides like a ship.” It comprises “the accumulated human wisdom which we unconsciously inherit . . . the common human emotions which we all share”—everything that makes us jointly human and indissociably alike. We touch it, Jung argued, in dreams: Maybe the figures who populate our dreams are remixed fragments of ourselves, or maybe they’re archetypes who quasi-mystically gesture to the depths of history.

This is the doubled dreamscape, a combination of self and beyond, that Miko Veldkamp’s paintings depict. “Through Jungian metaphors like shadows, reflections, projections, and windows into other worlds,” Veldkamp wrote in 2020, “I dive into my own psychology and traumas.” “Ghost Stories,” his recent show of seventeen works, was a kind of psychological theater: Reflection was a constant—in mirrors, windows, and water, and between groups of

people. Arranged like dolls, they're now in streets, now on terraces, now among blossoming foliage. These pictures are shifting and intelligent, fogged by thin-layered glazes that bestow an oneiric allure. In *Peaceable Flood* (all works 2021), we're beside a river—or so a bridge in one corner insists—by which five figures stand side by side, their reflections inverted below. But those counterparts aren't quite replicas: They've variously grown taller, gained a floppy hat, donned some natty leopard print. One has even assumed a different skin tone. Along the riverbank, a cow becomes a car and a lamppost has no reflection at all.

Veldkamp was born in Suriname, grew up in the Netherlands, and now lives in New York. A few touches in "Ghost Stories" hinted at this history, both personal and postcolonial, about a man and the traditions in which he works. For South America, witness the biracial young men and the chunky colorful fronds; for Europe, the Nabis block colors and intricate patterns, and (in a touch of comedy?) bicycles. The picture planes go dancing between zones of space and time, acting as both windows upon their scenes and surfaces free of illusory depth. In *Ancestors Club*, three ghostly forms are overlaid flatly on a throng of cyclists seen from above; in *Mirror Stage*, the ground has a parquet pattern identical to the street beneath that throng. While disparities in height—large boy toward the bottom of the rectangle, small woman near the top—suggest realistic perspective at work, the lines of the tiles form a grid parallel to the picture plane, refusing to converge on a vanishing point.

*Mirror Stage* also brings a figural mismatch to the fore. The boy stands by a reflective surface of uncertain kind—a window? a swimming pool? the mirror suggested by the title?—pointing at his almost-double while narrowing and averting his gaze; yet the double has hollows for eyes and a mouth and is holding up a hand. The raised hand might be a warning, an admonishment, or a plea to be freed from behind the glass. Personality or politics might enter your reading of the disparity between the boy and his second self. Veldkamp's pictures, with their fine balance of haziness and composure, ask you to reflect on reflection—on how what's reflected might be your view on personal and collective histories. When we think about our dreams, Jung wrote, "the ascertainment of the meaning is . . . an entirely arbitrary affair, and this is where the hazards begin." But no: It isn't entirely arbitrary, and where hazards begin, beauty does too.

— Cal Revely-Calder