

HESSE FLATOW

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Betrayal and Vengeance: Clark Filio Shows Fantasy-Inspired Paintings at Kimberly-Klark

BY JOHN CHIAVERINA  July 21, 2017 12:36pm

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For "Betrayal and Vengeance," Clark Filio's debut New York exhibition at **Kimberly-Klark** in Ridgewood, Queens, the artist is presenting six narrative-dense figurative oil paintings whose process and feel are in part informed by his 2009 experience studying with the legendary fantasy artist Rick Berry, who is renowned for, among other achievements, his work on *Magic: The Gathering* cards and the cover of William Gibson's classic 1984 novel *Neuromancer*.



Clark Filio, *Frodo*, 2017.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

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"I had heard he took students on, and I really wanted to do Magic cards," Filio told me at his Bushwick studio last week. After dropping out of the Art Institute of Boston in 2008 (he returned to school years later, earning a degree from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design), he did some research and found the address of Berry's residence, which happened to be right outside of Boston, in the suburb of Arlington, Massachusetts.

Filio walked to the artist's house and knocked on his door—and, to his surprise, it happened to be Berry's birthday. "He was having a BBQ and his whole family was there," Filio said. "His wife was like, 'Does he know who you are?'" Filio said no, but Berry proved accommodating. "He was really nice and we met up later that week," Filio said. At that point, Berry was retired as an illustrator and focused on a new painting career, so they ended up working together with a focus on painting for about six months.

Although Filio had been making images—both traditional and computer-generated—long before his time with Berry, "the bulk of my actual painting technique was developed then," he said. "In these pictures, you can probably see that." For his part, Berry worked in a method that is often loose and fast, painting on board with matte medium and using tools like squeegees. "I think more than [the medium], it was just the habit," Filio said. "He goes to the studio every day and makes paintings—he never knows what he's going to make, he just starts scribbling and an image starts to form."

A few days before the opening of "Betrayal and Vengeance," which runs through August 20, Filio explained that he made a good amount of his paintings using methods he discovered with Berry. "When I'm not doing a quoted painting that's from a film still or TV or something like that, the paintings start out as kind of scribbles," he said. "Like this painting, the guy with the sword"—he gestured to a painting that looked a bit like a loose, painterly rendering of a video game character—"that's definitely the Rick Berry Method."



Clark Filio, *Phaseblade*, 2016.

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You could roughly split the show between gestural works of the kind and images that are in part cribbed directly from popular culture. One small painting depicts Rihanna in the movie *Battleship* (2012), while another larger canvas directly references a scene from the 1990 Jamie Lee Curtis film *Blue Steel* in which the actress has a gun drawn inside of a skyscraper. "The sort of really juvenile art-school read of it is 'she's pointing the gun at the viewer,' " Filio said. "But I kind of like that too—that's OK for me."

Although his gallery show firmly places him firmly within the contours of the contemporary art system, Filio said there is still plenty he admires about the world of illustration and fantasy art. "They focus really hard on trying to make art that they think people are going to like," he said.