MARCH

Aaron Michael Skolnick
Between Two Suns
October 19 - December 1, 2020
www.marchgallery.org

For gay men, cruising was once a means of survival, a way of hiding openly in plain sight. It is a language unto itself, complete with syntax and a precise vocabulary. While overtly the purview of bath houses, bars and other sanctioned gay spaces, its real power is in improvised, in-between spaces like parks, beaches, bathrooms, and bookstores, now mostly cast aside by a generation weaned on Grindr. Artist Aaron Skolnick gives new context to cruising these liminal spaces in his series *Between Two Suns*.

Skolnick's paintings share more than a passing connection with Alvin Baltrop's photographs of the pre-1980s cruising scene along Manhattan's west side piers. His portraits of men, some in wait, with their eyes fixed on the viewer or peering into an obscure distance, others in throes of passion, recall the photographer's tender yet voyeuristic exploration of figures from an opaque culture all-but-invisible to outsiders. But rather than being set at the margins of some postindustrial metropolis, Skolnick's brightly colored scenes are set in nondescript rural America, lit dramatically by the moon and rich with fecund flora. They evoke an alternate present, but also represent the context in which the artist came of age. It is the sort of place in which the stakes of being gay have always been higher than in liberal, cosmopolitan cities like New York.

Together, the works add up to an impressionistic tableau of those wild, anticipatory moments spent feeling around in the dark before Grindr subsumed cruising and transformed it into a superhuman, antiseptic, too-literal gaydar—a cyborg appendage for quick gratification like fishing boat radar or a Geiger counter for men. A great many gay men who have come of age in the past two decades have never cruised offline, and so know only the safety of on-screen taps, woofs, and linear text conversation. Rather than a dance of nuance and body language set within one human-scale space, apps change the locus of cruising to concentric and expanding GPS circles, in which an infinite pool of potential hookups are edited, indexed and preemptively filtered out based on cursory bullet points quantifying physical dimensions, color, status, sexual interests, and all framed by maximally flattering, cherry-picked profile pictures.

Skolnick's evocation of these moments of human vulnerability are a poignant reminder of human dimensions lost in a world smashed flat by the smartphone. Cruising, much like life itself, is wonderful, thrilling, uncertain, fraught, fleeting.

-Tag Christof

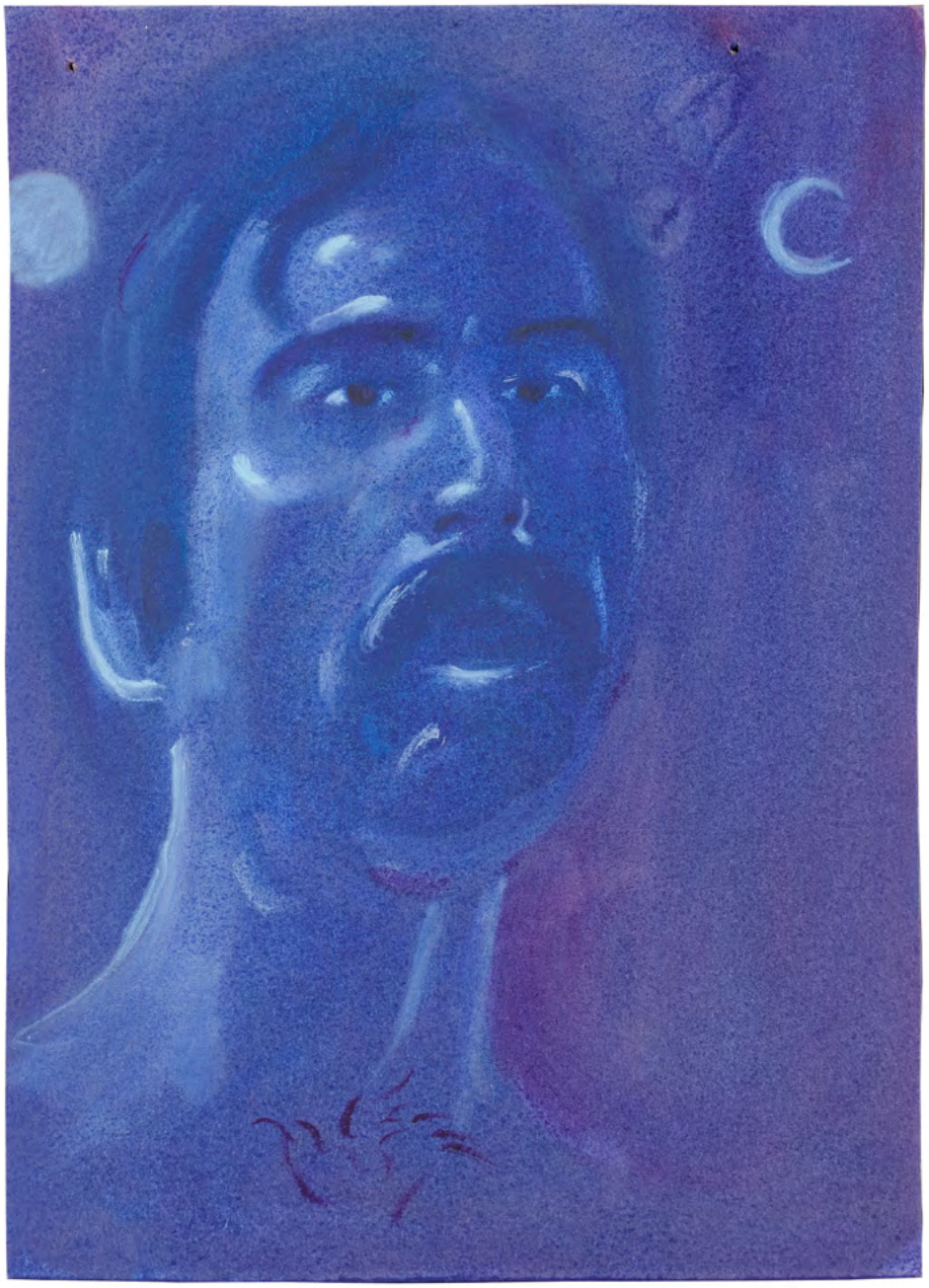
Between Two Suns was installed and photographed in an abandoned farmhouse in Taylor County, Kentucky and is available for online viewing from October 19 - December 1, 2020 at www.marchgallery.org.

For more information: info@marchgallery.org.

Press Release

Night Sky, 2020, oil on linen, 16 x 12 inches

Untitled, 2020, oil on paper, 10 x 7 1/4 inches



Untitled, 2020, oil on paper, 10 x 7 1/4 inches

Relinquish, 2020, oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches

Nest, 2020, oil on linen, 10 x 8 inches