

ALEX ISRAEL

Solo

May 2 – June 15, 2019

It was the Lisa character in *The Simpsons* and then seeing Bill Clinton's appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show* in 1992 that inspired the artist to take up the saxophone and join his middle school band. For *Solo*, his third exhibition at Reena Spaulings, Alex Israel returns to his childhood instrument and delivers an a cappella rendition of a heartfelt pop song. Written in collaboration with renowned saxophonist Mindi Abair, the composition eases into a steady verse/chorus/verse structure and builds to a dramatic solo.

Solo employs a Hollywood special effect while referencing the industrial magic of images such as the illusion of Tupac Shakur's posthumous appearance at the Coachella music festival in 2012, the holographic playback of a live Elvis concert in *Blade Runner 2049* and Princess Leia's ghostly transmission in the first *Star Wars* film. "Pepper's Ghost" is an illusion first used in haunted houses and stage shows to create the appearance and disappearance – as if out of thin air – of phantasmagoric objects and bodies. *Solo* presents both the illusion and the technology of its mediation, so that from certain angles the apparatus assumes a sculptural presence in the gallery.

With this life-size holographic self-portrait, Israel extends and updates a practice marked by canny and strategic uses of his own image. His self-portrait first appeared as an Alfred Hitchcock-like logo in his talk show *As It Lays*, 2012. In the meantime, Israel's graphic profile has been rebooted and returned as an ongoing series of shaped paintings, five of which are currently on view in *As It Lays 2*, the second part of this exhibition at Greene Naftali in Chelsea. If the self-portrait functions as a sort of matrix for a practice that tests the ever-more fluid boundaries between art, commerce, entertainment and branding, here Israel suggests that the contemporary artist has become not only his own medium and product but, ultimately, an illusion: *Solo* is a self-portrait, a ghost, a performance and a special effect all at once.

Recent Alex Israel solo exhibitions include *Waves*, Kunstraum Innsbruck (2018), *New Waves* at Gagosian/Hong Kong (2018), *Alex Israel: Examining Floors, Ceilings and Walls*, The Jewish Museum/New York, *#AlexIsrael*, Astrup Fearnley Museet/Oslo (2016) and *Alex Israel at The Huntington*, The Huntington Art Gallery/Los Angeles (2015). He has collaborated with author Bret Easton Ellis on two gallery shows and an accompanying catalog. Israel's debut feature film *SPF-18*, 2017, has been screened at high schools across the U.S.A. and trended on Netflix. In 2019, *SPF-18*, the coffee table book, was published by Gagosian and Westreich Wagner. The artist collaborated on a fragrance for Louis Vuitton and a special edition Rimowa suitcase, both out this spring/summer season. "*Alex Israel*" will open at MAMO, Centre d'Art de la Cité Radieuse Le Corbusier, Marseille, in June, 2019. A special project with Snapchat will debut at Cannes Lion shortly thereafter.