Enchantment by Greg Ito at Arsenal Contemporary
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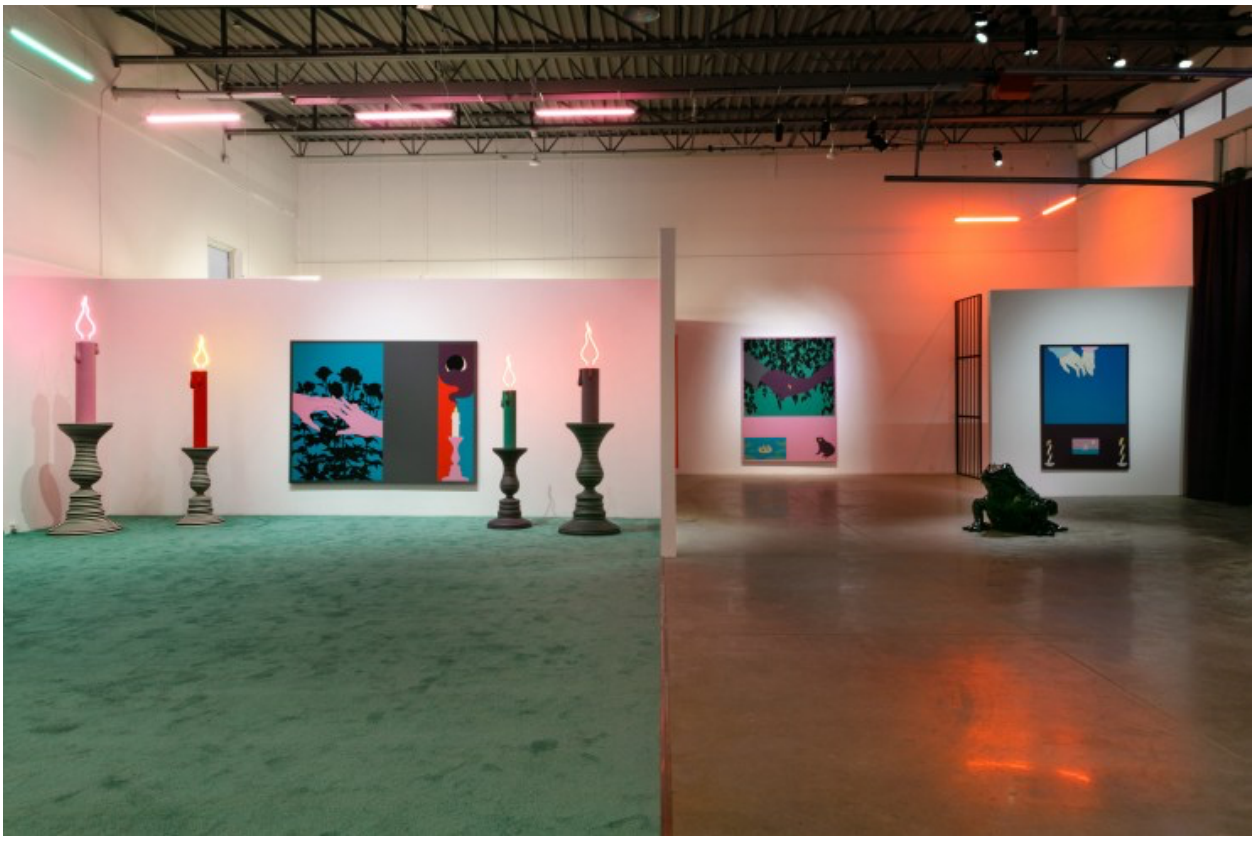
Greg Ito, Enchantment installation shot, 2019. Courtesy of Arsenal Contemporary Toronto.

At the opening reception of Enchantment by Greg Ito, I met a woman who was very intrigued to discover what the symbolism in the show meant. As a result, she wanted to find the artist and have him explain it to her. Courteously, he did and explained to her not only the general symbolism but also how the neon lights and the tinted glass windows worked. He went into detail about how the warm and cool colours correspond within the paintings. There's a sense of theatricality behind the exhibition—once you entered you could tell that you'd see photos splattered on social media of people posed beside the life-sized neon candles or beside the gigantic frog. But what's underneath? Surely something so seemingly strong is inspired.

This woman disclosed to me afterward that although it was kind of him to explain, somehow having the exhibition explained to her ruined the mystery of it all. Ito's paintings are technically amazing, so crisp that they first appear like silkscreened prints rather than acrylic paintings. However, the magic that elevated the show is its surreal quality and the wonderment within it. The exhibition engages in the emotionality of his family history, Ito's grandparents falling in love despite being imprisoned in an Arizona internment camp. The symbols used in the paintings such as a rabbit, a spider, and snake, could symbolize rebirth and resiliency, addressing love as a powerful force of spiritual rebirth after significant trauma. The following is a text that I wrote as a response to the show in a Toronto cafe.



Greg Ito, Enchantment installation shot, 2019. Courtesy of Arsenal Contemporary Toronto.

Within a warm bog, an oily frog leaps
mushrooms grow on the peripheral.
A romance ignites, the lovers' hands reaching out for each other.
If you wander deeply enough, witness the neon flames
Fire growing from tragedy, candle wax trapped in time and space

The lovers met entrapped
the cell gave way to a new life.
Still together, their hands joined
since the night is long without one another.
Without hope, life becomes a perpetual spiral

Black and white swim with cerulean, teal, rose and blood red
The blood the colour of the hourglass tipping
acting as a thread.
Whatever time they had they spent it together

The snake with two heads are the memories haunting them
slipping and sliding unexpectedly
they can never prepare for when it arrives.
They gaze at themselves through a magnified keyhole
sailing on a ship across the Pacific

What does it mean when from great suffering, love grows?
Could there be anything more poetic,
than two lives binding after the panic?
Is there anything more powerful
than love emerging from darkness, a white rabbit running

Greg Ito, Enchantment installation shot, 2019. Courtesy of Arsenal Contemporary Toronto.