

CLIFTON BENEVENTO

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ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Miller Updegraff

MICHAEL BENEVENTO 7578 & 7556 Sunset Boulevard September 15–
October 27



Miller Updegraff, *This is how it is and has always been*, 2012, mongol watercolor pencil on arches paper, 19 x 16”.

Dark ecstasy, expertly withheld, haunts Miller Updegraff’s latest exhibition. The drawings feel enveloped in an ominous silence, while in the separate gallery of paintings, the tinkle of old-timey music seems to leak through a peephole cut from the wall, which when peered through reveals a slow-motion séance. The paintings are quite fine but the drawings are finest. Drawn in an almost holographic coloring of red and violet watercolor pencil and painted with oil, each precise scene murmurs with otherworldly potential, nothing untoward or overtly occult beyond a stilled cinematic cross-fade (well, there is that one with the gorilla, the goat-man, and the radioactive cemetery angel). Each of these paintings and drawings feels tremulous with some mystical feeling of perdition and esoteric ritual. Many of the men bend sinister with searching, foreign eyes while the women smolder hypnotic and hypnotized, all of them held in the gossamer haze of some unnamed spectral power. The pretty girls in knee-length dancing dresses atop animal masked cohorts invite speculation (*It’s not meant to be dissected, rather enjoyed*, all

works 2012), the man's suited back framed by the aristocratic chair feels right on the edge of certain death (*This is how it is and has always been*), and the supine temptress with the opium-den eyes glows with the lurid lineaments of gratified desire (*The bird sings with its fingers*). With an implied violence hiding beneath a pristine surface, Updegraff has inked with quietude a beguiling arcana. Perhaps his references can be parsed by a more astute cinephile (the gallery reveals the images are often taken from prewar German movies), but they are in the amateur's eyes mostly allusive to the mood of an illusive era. They channel some moment in film surely, stark and powerful, ruled by the face of Garbo and the morals of Weimar, definitely disappeared.

- Andrew Berardini October 19, 2012