



## LOS ANGELES

**James Case-Leal: "Grow Light"  
at Parrasch Heijnen Gallery**

Light and shadows. Unless you're a photographer, or Edward Hopper, those would seem to define the sort of elusive ephemeral phenomena that is nearly impossible to pin down. So it's a testament to his dedication that James Case-Leal's art is based around doing just that. Dallas-born and New York-based, Case-Leal has no direct ties to the Southern California-based Light and Space movement, but his labor-intensive, object-oriented paintings—a term one must use here loosely—do point outward into the realm of perceptual experience, enough to suggest an affinity. The fact that he received his MFA from Columbia with a focus on sculpture and new genres gives additional clues to his approach, which uses painting as a sort of armature and laboratory to examine, and attempt to recreate, optical phenomena.

To get a sense of their object-hood, a checklist of the materials used in one of his works might be in order; a typical list includes "cotton, pva, pigment: carbon, ash, lead carbonate, and stolen IKB" (International Klein Blue). Like all the pieces in this quietly mesmerizing show, the work in question, *Plant Shadow (Daemonorops Draco) ii*, (2016), ostensibly depicts the shadows of some form of leafy greenery, or equally, the dappled spray of light that seeps from between the fronds. But, taken further: Case-Leal attempts to depict the (highly subtle) neurological phenomenon of prismatic haloes that form around the edges in between the light and the shadow, adding colors, an effect generated not even in the human retina, but in the brain itself.

It's not something that you'd notice every day; thus, Case-Leal's goal could be called a quixotic attempt at highlighting and valorizing a form of looking so subtle and instinctive we forget to do it. Paradoxically, these ineffable nuances are rendered through a massively labor-intensive process, which involves building up and sanding down multiple layers of paint, almost like a sculptural plane. Indeed, examining each canvas from the side reveals the thickness of his application; beneath the pale gray and white surfaces, the gallerist discloses that a panoply of brilliant colors has been applied and covered up. The resulting voyage into phenomenology remains almost beyond the viewer's perception, but following the artist on his quest provides a stimulating endeavor: an often radiant reminder that seeing lies somewhere between nature and culture, involving optics, experience, intention, interpretation, and perhaps, a leap of faith.

—GEORGE MELROD

"Plant Shadow (Daemonorops Draco) ii," 2016

**James Case-Leal**

Cotton, pva, pigment: carbon, ash,  
lead carbonate, stolen IKB, 30" x 24"

Photo: courtesy Parrasch Heijnen Gallery