MARQUEE PROJECTS INC.

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It's so good to look at art again. This weekend, I visited the Bellport-based Marquee Gallery's exceptionally ambitious group show titled, after the science fiction writer Robert Heinlein, Strangers in Stranger Lands. A real labor of love and a perfectly-pitched response to our surreal moment, the exhibition, featuring the work of a dozen artists, is a testament to our collective disorientation — our shared landscapes of anxiety in which the impossible suddenly feels all too possible, and where, as the announcement proposes, "everything that feels familiar is rendered foreign." The star of the show is Genevie Figgis' bravura Las Meninas After Velazquez (2016) in which the figures of the Spanish masterpiece are transposed into a visual world channeling Ensor and Munch in an interior-exterior landscape of indeterminate texture and dimension. It's an astonishing painting. The soul of the show, however, may be Janet Maya's 2017 painting, Blessing, with its single faceless female figure holding her hands together in a redemptive gesture of prayer, rendered with the forms and pastels of Milton Avery. Another work by Maya, placed in the gallery's window, speaks to the hopes and fears of the moment: two almost identical female figures, one black and one white, that achieve a poetic unity despite their outward difference. The rest of the show provides immersion in landscapes of fanciful humor and ghoulish fantasy. I loved Mary De Vincentis' tiny picture of humans being sucked up into a UFO. I reveled in Philip Gerard's colorful garden of eden fantasy after Caravaggio. It was a joy to see a new ceramic work by Peter Schlesinger, one of the local artists in the show. There's more, and you must go. With the big museums closed, galleries like this are rising to the challenge of injecting wonder and delight into our gloomy little moment. They deserve our gratitude. @marqueeprojects