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After Midnight

February 25 – April 9, 2022

Nathan Abels, Laura Berger, Jillian FitzMaurice, Aitor Lajarin-Encina, Robert Martin, VLM, and Xi Zhang

(Denver, CO) RULE Gallery is pleased to present *After Midnight*, a group show featuring the work of Nathan Abels, Laura Berger, Jillian FitzMaurice, Aitor Lajarin-Encina, Robert Martin, VLM, and Xi Zhang. A public reception will be held Friday, February 25, from 6-8 pm and will be on view to the public through April 9, 2022.

Under a sheet of deepest blue
Beneath a clear basin filled with shining white
Watched by the nocturnal lights
I walk someplace found in the night
~Rachel Harris

Night seeps predictably in, the sun's visible spectrum replaced by the electric neon of a buzzing city or by a moon exquisitely illuminating the landscape. It's that mystical duration of darkness; its atmosphere a hum, a stumble, or a moment of quietude. Night is where secrets can be revealed, where the self can explore and play, and where menace and fear can hide. Night is both a time and place, a universal available to everyone. As the work in this show reveals, night's symbolism and meaning shift depending on who we are, what we look like, how we identify ourselves, and where we come from.

In a series of paused moments, Nathan Abels explores the ethereal nature of night. His hushed, moody paintings bring to life haunting narratives and moments of introspection, where light is as much of a character as the landscapes it illuminates.

Aitor Lajarin-Encina's paintings in the *Nocturne Series* portray the night in deep, rich, brilliant blues. We see it as both a vessel of cosmic time and something more intimate, lone figures silhouetted in the windows of houses. In these paintings, night is the backdrop against which mystery, solitude, and rumination unfold.

Night can also liberate us from the tyranny of social pressure, and Robert Martin explores this in their paintings of cheeky vintage bar signs. By adding coded language and suggestive imagery from the LGBTQ community, they reimagine typical Midwestern bars into beacons of community that shine across rural America. Martin reminds us that night can be a place for refuge and safety.

VLM's *Honey Moon* is a video piece that explores the connection between the celestial and the terrestrial. Viscous honey is poured onto a moon-like orb, held up into a jet-black frame by a single white-skinned hand. The effect both delicate and base, calming and ominous. The juxtaposition of the size of the moon and that of the hand unmoors us; we end up floating in the void.

In Laura Berger's paintings, feminine figures understand light as if it was a language. They fill the canvas, seemingly moving parts of themselves in and out of beams of light, holding candle flames close to their faces, illuminating only the parts they wish to share while keeping the rest hidden.

Jillian FitzMaurice paints secrets, stolen flashes of night from the perspective of the city's forgotten creatures, the strays and street animals. Her subjects inhabit the pre-dawn time, where a silhouette can convey menace or camaraderie. Her paintings remind us of the feral force of night - that this is not only a human world though we often mistake it for one.

In Xi Zhang's work, figures made of thick gestural swirls of ghostly blues and violets crowd together on a train. Though they are near each other while they travel, the language of their bodies conveys an un-breachable distance. They embrace themselves, their arms wrapped tightly out of anxiety, exhaustion, and loneliness. Zhang, here, calls into question our perception of the threats held in the night.