

# Clark Filio: Betrayal & Vengeance

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Opening reception July 15, 7-10

**KIMBERLY-KLARK**  
788 WOODWARD AVENUE  
QUEENS, NY 11385  
[KIMBERLY-KLARK.COM](http://KIMBERLY-KLARK.COM)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

At least three episodes of Charlie Booker's Netflix sci-fi anthology series *Black Mirror* feature the classic Irma Thomas ballad, *Anyone Who Knows What Love Is (Will Understand)*. It's something of a recurring theme on the show, and you know what, I get it. I understand. I understand what Thomas is singing about, and by virtue of quotation I understand what Booker is getting at too, essentially because there have been times when I thought I knew what love was. That song breaks my heart. I don't even like *Black Mirror* that much, but I recognize what Booker probably wants me to feel when he inserts that song into dystopian visions of the technocratic future. Is our society doomed to always feel increasingly alienated from ourselves and from others? Are we completely fucked? How would you even know if you were fucked? You might not ever know, unless, if for the sake of comparison you were able to refer back to a time in your life when you had the fortune of knowing love, and in the experience of knowing it you had noticed a pleasant lack of tragedy for once. Perhaps you felt connected to someone or something other than abject spiritual poverty.

In his show of new oils-on-canvas, Clark Filio includes a portrait of a fictional soldier in the not-too-distant future named Stripe. He's the protagonist from one of the *Black Mirror* episodes to briefly feature that Irma Thomas song, entitled *Men Against Fire*. Clark paints Stripe in a moment of extreme disillusion and psychological distress. At this point in the drama, Stripe's eyes have been opened to the grim reality of war in the form of state sanctioned discrimination, mass brainwashing, and merciless killing on a vast scale. In the scene that Clark represents here, Stripe has just been given the choice by a military doctor to live the rest of his life in full-sighted awareness of the pain, misery and injustice to which he has played part, or

else be reconditioned to go back under state control and see only what they program him to see, without the capacities for independent thought, judgment or emotional response, in order to kill again with meaner efficiency. Earlier in the program, one of Stripe's military colleagues serenades a prisoner of war with Thomas's love song before lighting the poor captive's house on fire. It isn't long after witnessing this atrocity that Stripe begins to regain his humanity.

All of Clark's paintings partake in various dramas set in loose, wet, sometimes sloppily rendered fantasy worlds. Booker's futuristic *Black Mirror* is just one example. Clark either devises these worlds in his imagination, informed by tropes commonly found in the paraphernalia illustrating RPGs, DeviantArt and other things of that nature, or else quoted directly from well-known cinematic/televisual media. I think Clark's best art floats questions about contemporary life and leisure not dissimilar to what Booker's military doctor demands of Stripe. Questions like, if life is filled with suffering and is fundamentally miserable, is escape into fantasy a justifiable recourse? Or, by deploying the messiness of oil paint, as in juicy, slapdash tactility applied to scenes first viewed on computer, TV or movie screens, unfeeling screens mass-produced and installed everywhere to promote the massive desire for violence, consumption and escapism to we, the alienated masses, does Clark's endeavor signal an effort to redeem time, toil, vision and experience into something else more individuated, sincere, thoughtful and worthwhile? Or else, like, would I understand these paintings better if I knew what love was?

-Sam McKinniss