



BJORN CALLEJA

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“According to the artist, his new paintings emerged from a three-year hiatus from painting, a period of introspection during which he yearned to locate himself and his work in this contemporary time. Out of that experience, too, came the motif that characterizes the style of his middle period: the appearance of minute, humanoid forms.”

—Postcolonial Rubbish exhibition notes by Marc Gaba, 2017

Good Night, Bad End
Oil and aerosol on canvas
37 x 43 inches
2016





“Bjorn Calleja paints an iconic parade of outcasts, bent out of shape, quirky, and hysterical, all seemingly embracing headlong the end of the world, in celebration of an apocalyptic paradise of release and fulfillment.”



Installation shot
Limbo Construct,
Artery Artspace, 2016

(Opposite page)
Where your Heads' At?
Aerosol, paint buckets, wood
Size variable
2016





LIMBO CONSTRUCT

Two-person exhibition
2016, ARTERY ART SPACE (Manila, Philippines)

Artery Art Space is pleased to present a two-person show entitled "Limbo Construct" featuring the works of Bjorn Calleja and Potti Lesagus that delve into that liminal space between becoming and potential, using contemporary abstraction and representation that speaks of the anxiety of living in a time of synthetic joy and the entropy of desire. The paired works of Calleja and Lesagus bring a strong statement of potential approaches to pop imagery and aesthetic design infused with traces of science fiction and signs of postmodernity that speak of the instability and disorientation gathered from artificial experiences.

Bjorn Calleja paints an iconic parade of outcasts, bent out of shape, quirky, and hysterical, all seemingly embracing headlong the end of the world, in celebration of an apocalyptic paradise of release and fulfillment. Calleja deftly situates these mutant variations into multiple possibilities ripe for meaning, afloat cosmic fields, stoic walls, unusual terrains, even amidst other cataclysms, that somehow produce the exhilarating conditions akin to the danger and reward levels found generally in computer games - a reflection of real life battle between life and death, where one hops out from the proverbial frying inferno and into the pan of limbo marching along with hopes of salvation. Here, Calleja cleverly switches palettes and styles from pop parodies to surrealistic shock like random screenshots in search of man-made nirvana.

– Arvin Flores



The Land That Might Be Ours
(detail)

(Opposite page)
The Land That Might Be Ours
Oil and aerosol on canvas (diptych)
20 x 30 inches
2016



Anatomy of a Party
Oil and aerosol on canvas
9 x 12 inches
2016

(Opposite page)
Anatomy of a Party
(detail)





“...a reflection of real life battle between life and death, where one hops out from the proverbial frying inferno and into the pan of limbo marching along with hopes of salvation.”

That's Here, That's Home, That's Us
Oil and aerosol on canvas
20 x 30 inches
2016

(Opposite page)
That's Here, That's Home, That's Us
(detail)



“Calleja deftly situates these mutant variations into multiple possibilities ripe for meaning.”



Not a Slice of Life But a Piece of Cake (detail)



Not a Slice of Life But a Piece of Cake
Oil and aerosol on canvas
48 x 60 inches
2016



“Calleja cleverly switches palettes and styles from pop parodies to surrealistic shock like random screenshots in search of man-made nirvana.”



Another Brick in the Wall
Oil and aerosol on canvas
8 x 10 inches
2016



COMMON ROOM

Collective exhibition
2016, West Gallery (Manila, Philippines)



Installation shot
Common Room,
West Gallery, 2016

Modern Men Creating Cave Men
Oil and aerosol on canvas
48 x 60 inches
2016



Modern Men Creating Cave Men
(detail)



The Evolution of What 1
Oil on canvas
14 x 10 inches
2016



The Evolution of What 2
Oil on canvas
14 x 10 inches
2016

112,712cm²

Collective exhibition
2016, Vinyl on Vinyl Gallery (Manila, Philippines)

The limitations of the physical space we occupy provide layers of triviality to our reality, influencing predispositions and affect our expectations and reactions. The same restriction taunts its occupant to fully recognize the lurking possibilities within the very obstruction that holds him captive. 112,712cm² utilizes the designated space's dimensions as its title, as a genesis for inspiration, making it a place beyond a room within a gallery. Artists Rene Bituin, Jan Balquin, Bjorn Calleja, Lec Cruz, Neil Dela Cruz, Edric Go, and Joel Quiñones converge under this theme, staging a multifaceted vantage point where the only limit is their own creativity, allowing artistic identity and diversity coalesce in a space.

In 112,712cm² the space becomes the ground zero where Quiñones claims the floor space for his site-specific work, expanding its depth beneath the surface with his abstraction resembling an engulfing yet subservient sea. Calleja surveys the theme using territorial markers seen in parking spaces, appropriating found objects as works of art examining claimed spaces. The act of removing and displacing these markers is his act of liberating the spaces; the same liberation we find in each canvas and surfaces where fingernail sized characters are painted as if claiming their own unhinged territories.

– Lec Cruz

Installation shot
112,712cm²,
Vinyl on Vinyl Gallery, 2016

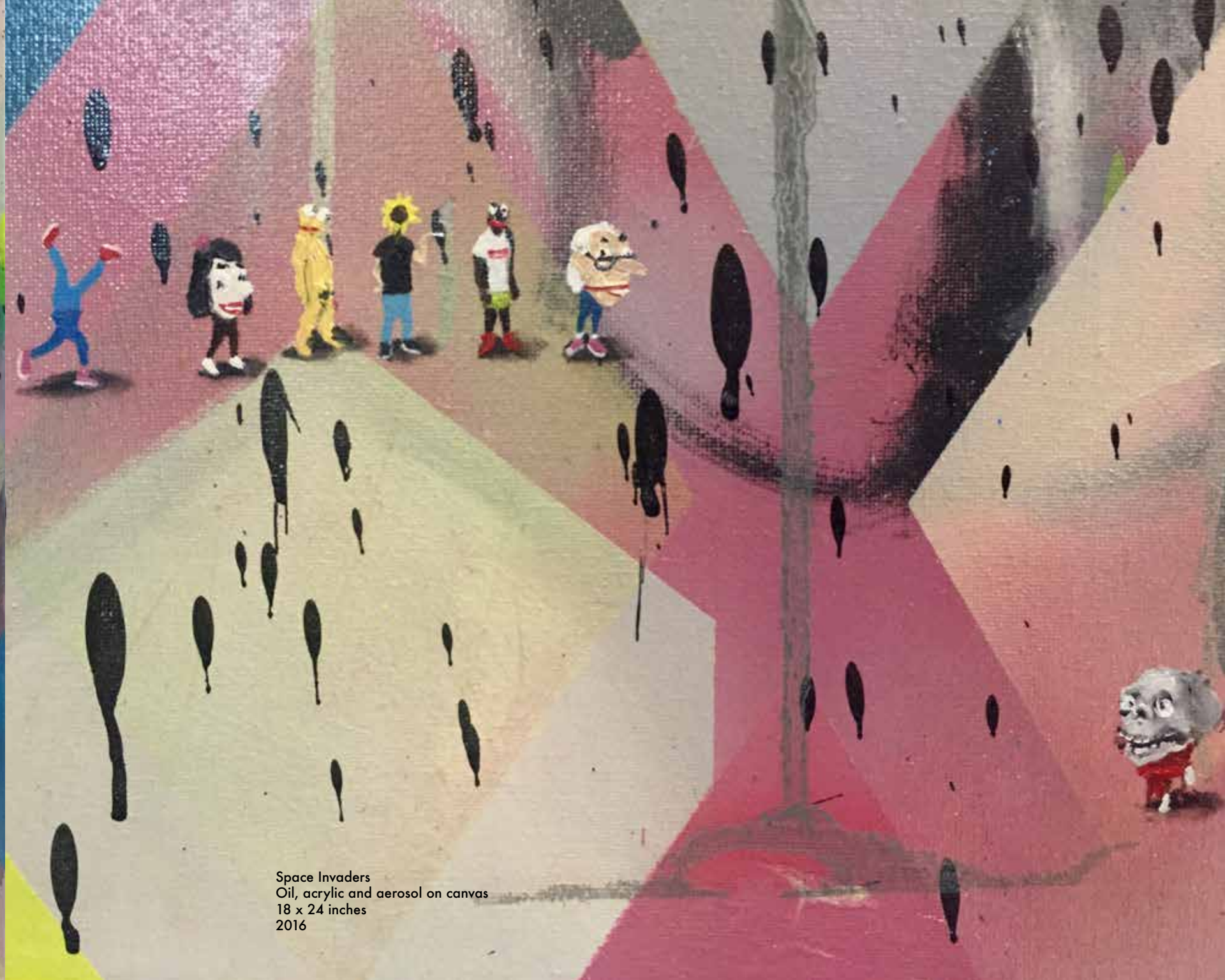
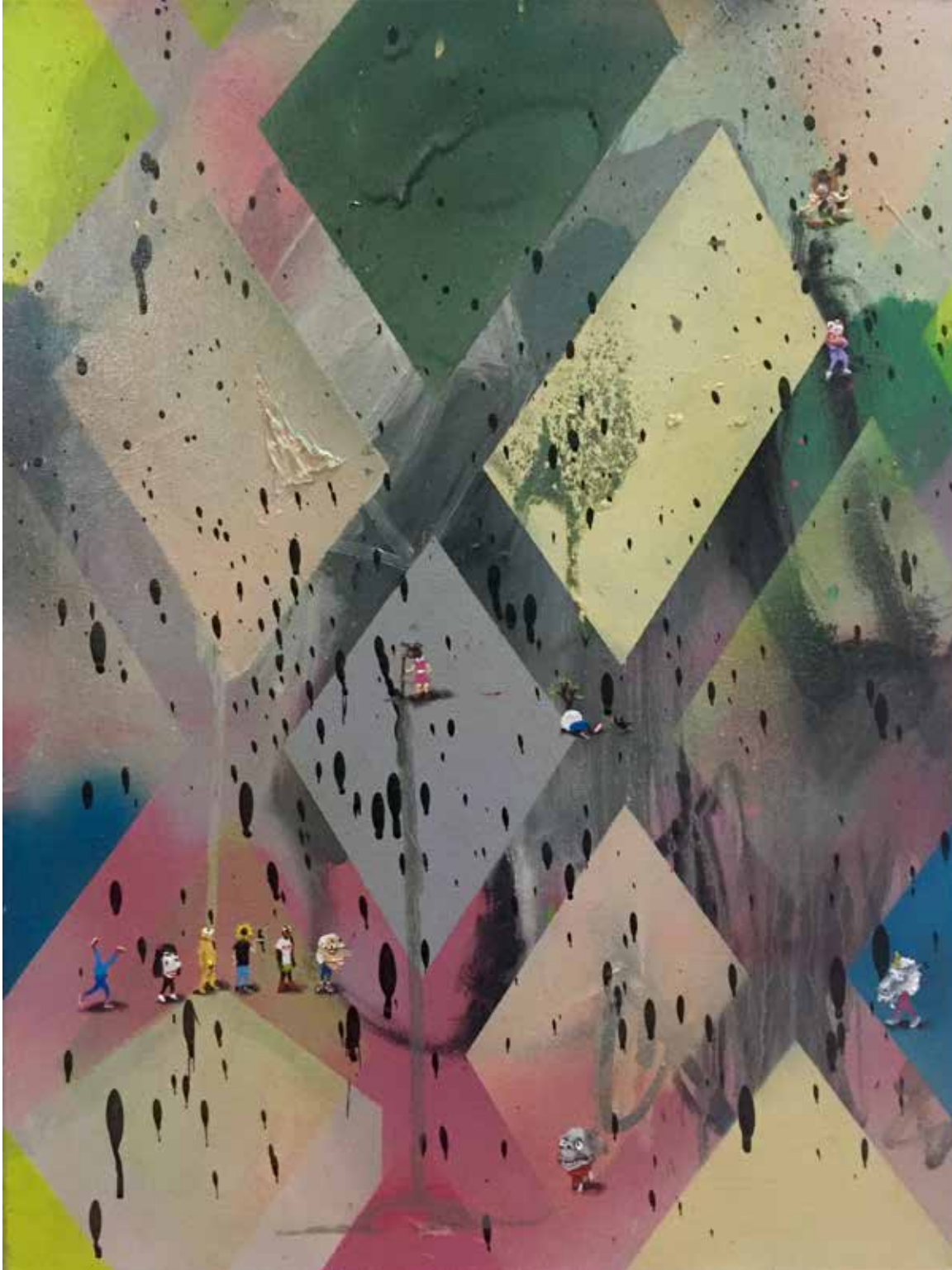




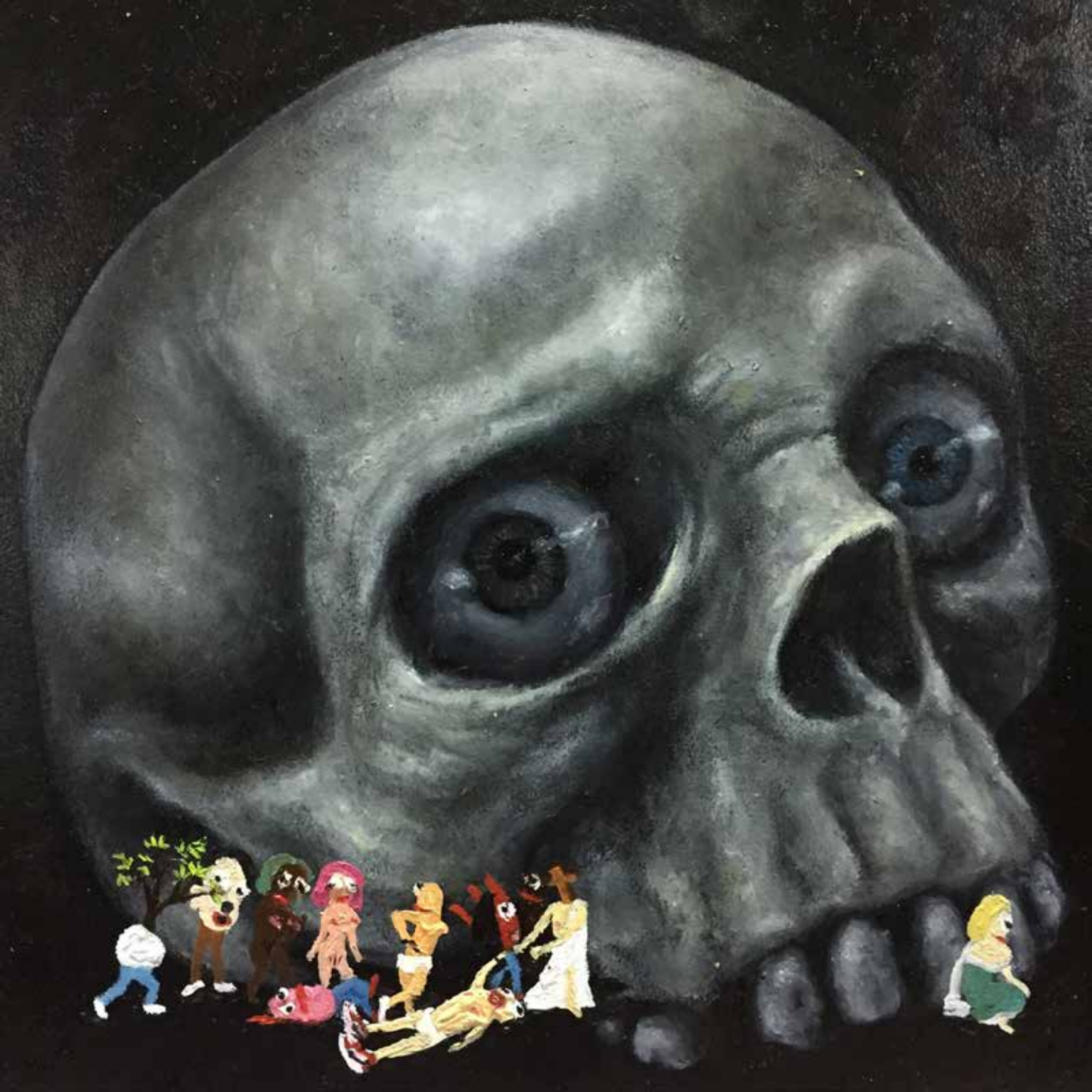
“The act of removing and displacing these markers is his act of liberating the spaces. ”

Territorial Markers
Oil and found objects
Size variable
2016





Space Invaders
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2016

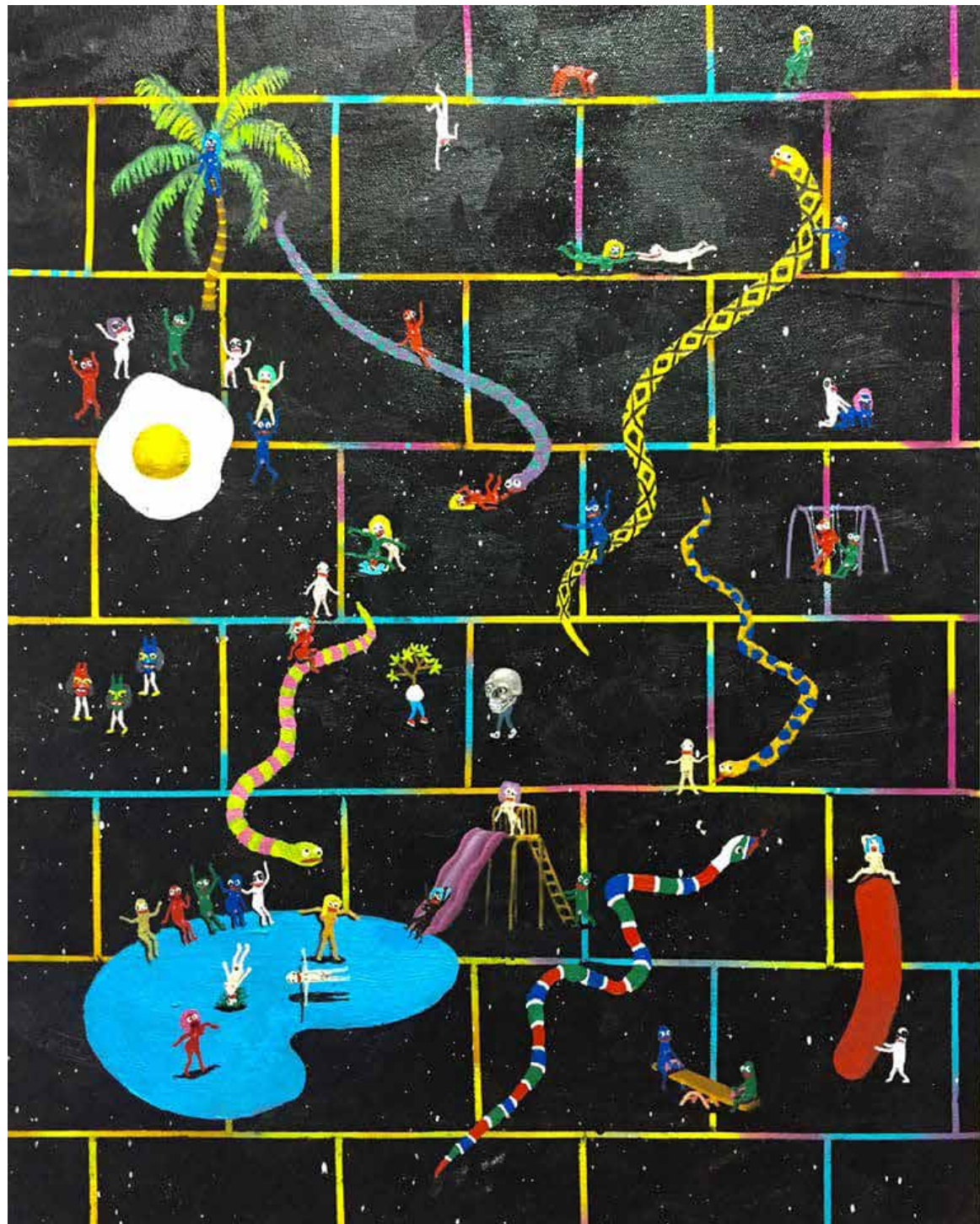


Goodbye Two Eyes
Oil on canvas
7 x 7 inches
2016

Post it Show (Giant Robot)
Acrylic and Aerosol on Post its
2016



Potato #'s 346,347,348
Oil and acrylic on canvas
24 x 36 inches (each)
2017



Snake Shake
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2017





Man
Resin (Edition of 10)
6 inches (approx.)
2017





Can't find a Good Title
for this Painting
Oil and acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2017

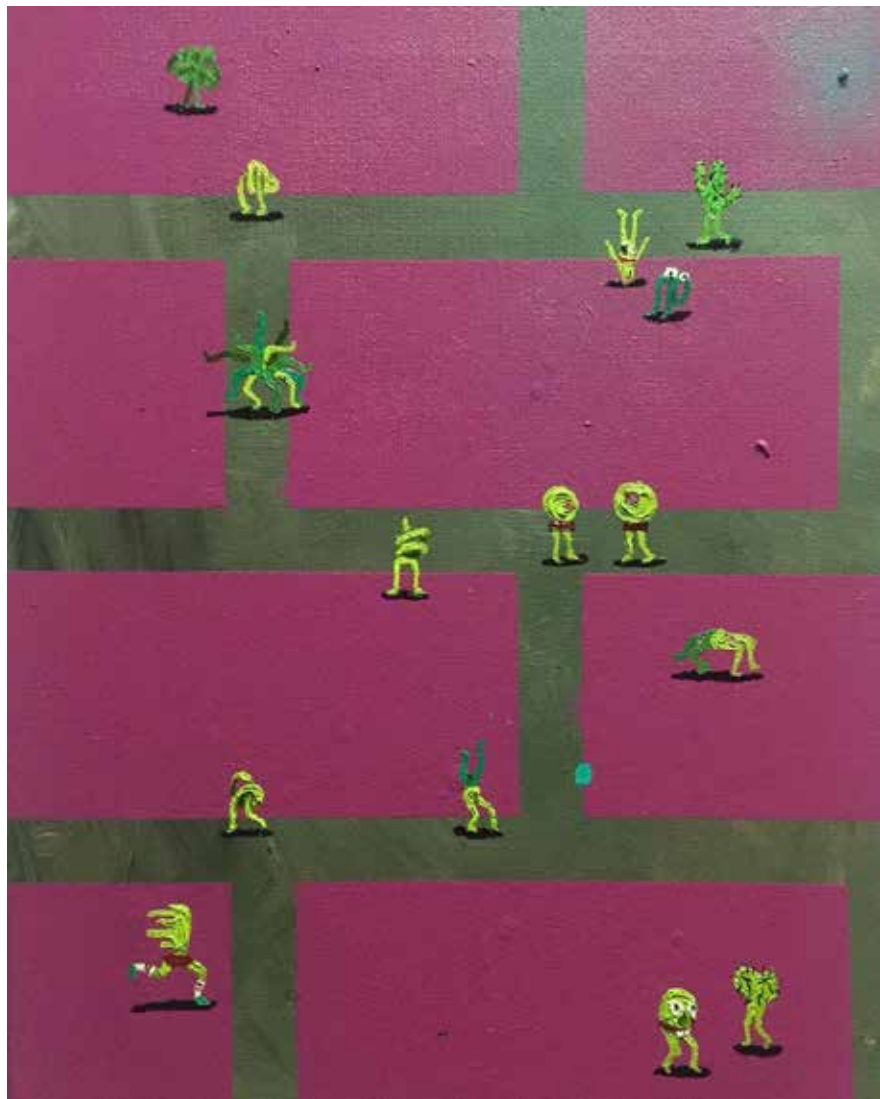
GIVING GOOD PEOPLE BAD IDEAS

Collective exhibition curated by Gene Paul Martin
2017, Underground Gallery (Manila, Philippines)



POSTCOLONIAL RUBBISH

Solo Exhibition
2017, Pablo Gallery (Manila, Philippines)



Postcolonial Rubbish
Oil and aerosol on canvas
10 x 13.75 inches
2017

“However one reads the ground image, here is space for growth, and instead of molds, what we see are plant-like, humanoid forms.”

In Postcolonial Rubbish, Bjorn Calleja presents nothing less than a singular contemporary artist’s manifesto. These quietly daring paintings are amalgams of observation and imagination: everything here is both strange and familiar, both processed and raw. This is the world we inhabit, Calleja seems to say, a postcolonial world populated by hybrids—the hybrid is the new normal, one might quip—where mindlessness is so ubiquitous as to evoke the feeling of what is by default, home. Home, to the artist, is ordinary tension, and by that logic, we are always home and never quite. In the titular painting of the show, we see a section of wall of pink bricks. This wall, however, is an abstraction of a wall, as from a certain angle the bricks appear to be plots, with the spaces between bricks resembling sidewalks. However one reads the ground image, here is space for growth, and instead of molds, what we see are plant-like, humanoid forms. Not only does Calleja suggest that humanity grows between the cracks; he also asks whether walls have an inside and an outside, and if there is a palpable difference between the two. According to the artist, his new paintings emerged from a three-year hiatus from painting, a period of introspection during which he yearned to locate himself and his work in this contemporary time. Out of that experience, too, came the motif that characterizes the style of his middle period: the appearance of minute, humanoid forms. “It was late

last year when I painted the first of this series na di ko sadya,” Calleja said. “I just needed to place tiny people on one of the paintings that I was working on and realized that what I was doing worked for me in a lot of ways, hindi lang aesthetically.” With the play of distances, Calleja creates a choreography out of viewership: his paintings ask us to stand from afar, to step closer, then step farther again. This new work makes a rhythm out of scale. While the humanoid forms are always interesting in themselves—a human made entirely of legs, for example, or one that is an eyeball from the waist up—what makes the innovation important is the way they exist both in the pictorial premise of the painting, as well as in a separate, flat plane of their own constitution. Note how in City, City Won’t You Calm Down, the size of the figures is constant, whether they are closest to the viewer (such as the protesters on the street) or farthest (such as the Christ and devil figure on a rooftop, high up to the right). And yet, it all makes sense, or rather—and here lies the artist’s philosophical gambit: the sense of existence is double. We exist and locate ourselves by paradox, therefore: here as well as not. To say that these new paintings owe a measure of debt to Hieronymus Bosch as well as Pieter Bruegel the Elder is by no means to belittle their newness. Firstly, Calleja handles the influence to conceptual ends, so that their presence in these paintings is rightly understood as part of the

postcolonial haul. Secondly, although the imagery seems to participate in the visualization of a postapocalyptic world, nowhere in these paintings do we see the nonchalant bravado that is the theme’s usual company. Instead, Calleja’s populace of humanoids register as warm judgment, and for all the celebration of the uncanny, the perverse is here rendered as, well, cute. It takes equal parts of bravery and intelligence to make the cute register as idea, and it takes far more to imbue the perverse with the potential for human affection. Tellingly, in the exhibit’s lone installation Man Versus, the tiny figure is heavier than the giant. Viewing this exhibit at length, one is quietly compelled to ask: What are we doing continuing to be alive? Why do we still live? One possible, hard-earned answer comes in the form of a painting. In it, a mutant, multi-colored flower seems to have bloomed via delapidation, rising like a fountain of paint to the upper edge of the picture. Deep below the petals, a human figure with a cactus for a pet stands in shocked, helpless awe. In the landscape of urban decay, mindless sex and state violence, Calleja ventures that indeed, as in the title of the painting, “Life is probably beautiful.” That the adverb “probably” is there only means that here is a painter who refuses the easy answer, opting instead to continue the search for reason today.

– Marc Gaba

“Note how in *City, City Won't You Calm Down*, the size of the figures is constant, whether they are closest to the viewer or farthest. And yet, it all makes sense, or rather—and here lies the artist's philosophical gambit: the sense of existence is double. We exist and locate ourselves by paradox, therefore: here as well as not.”

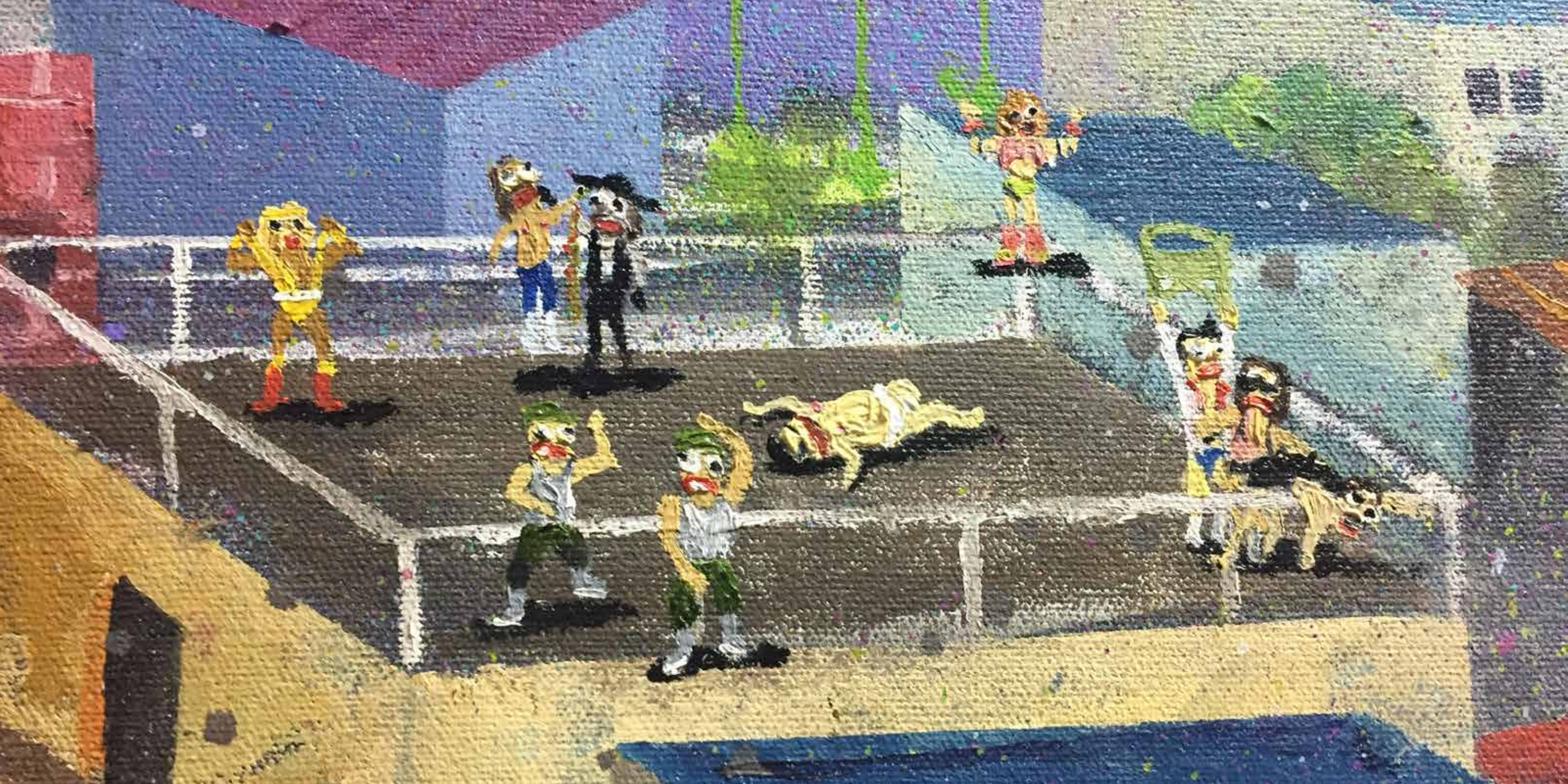
City, City Won't You Calm Down
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
84 x 144 inches
2017





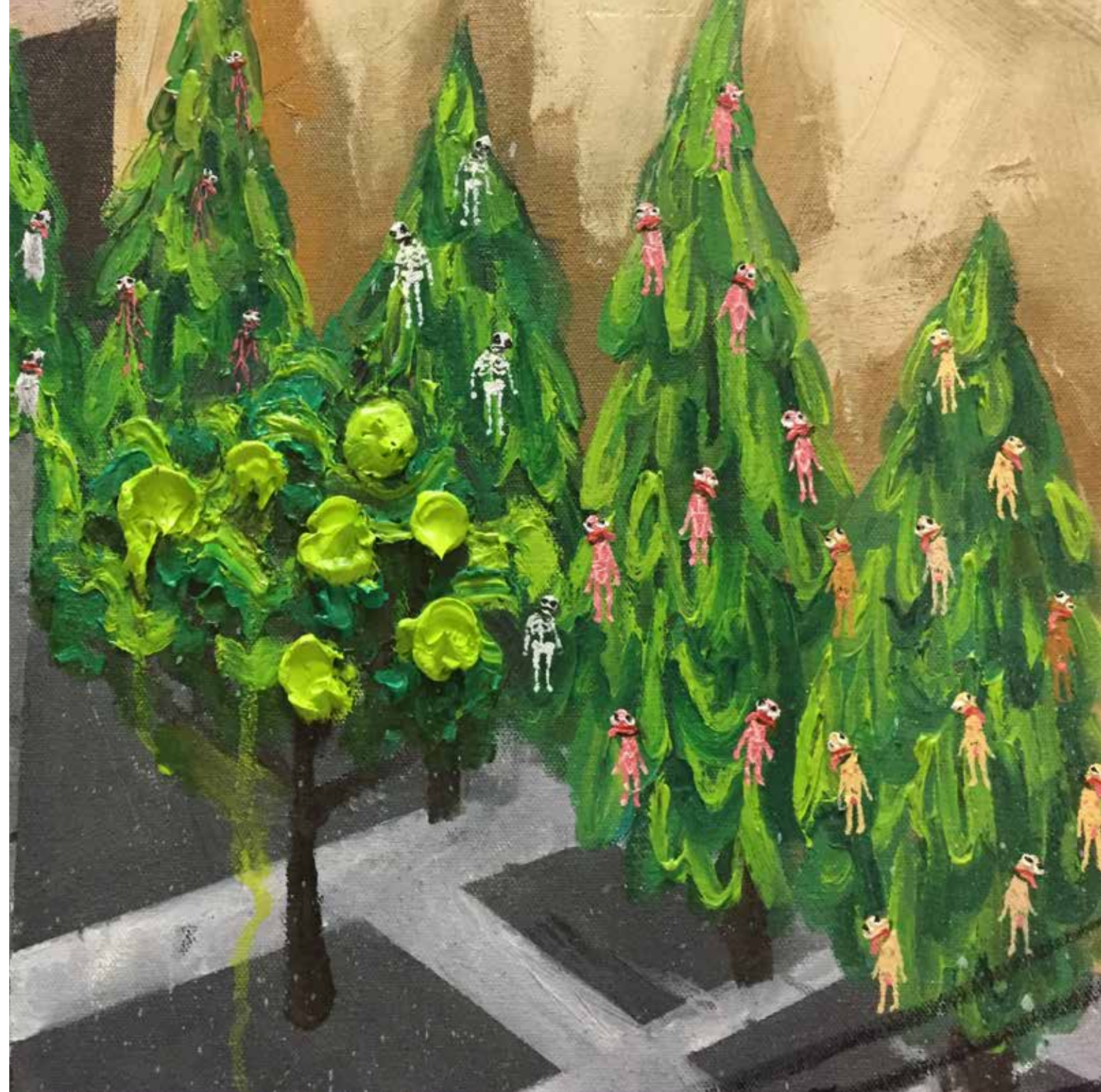
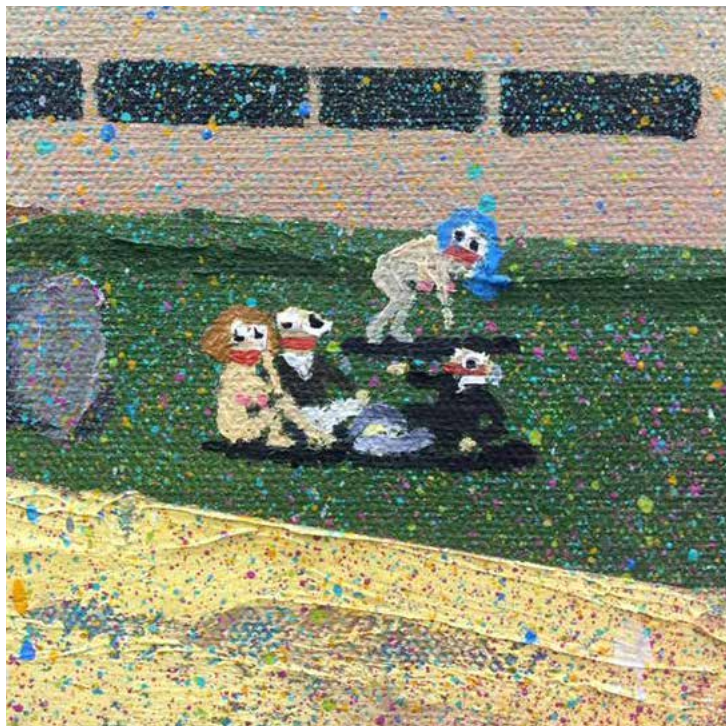
City, City Won't You Calm Down
(details)

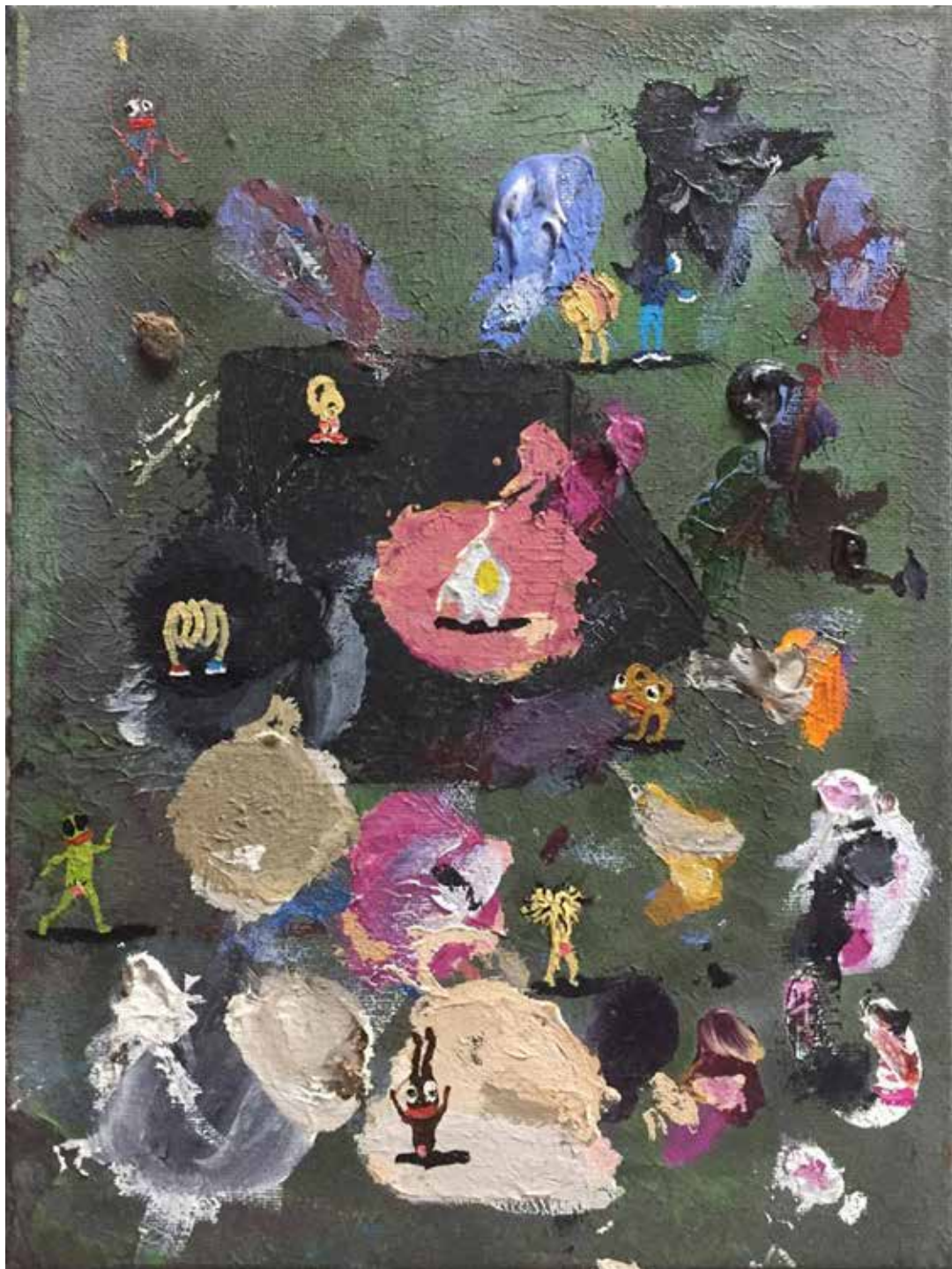




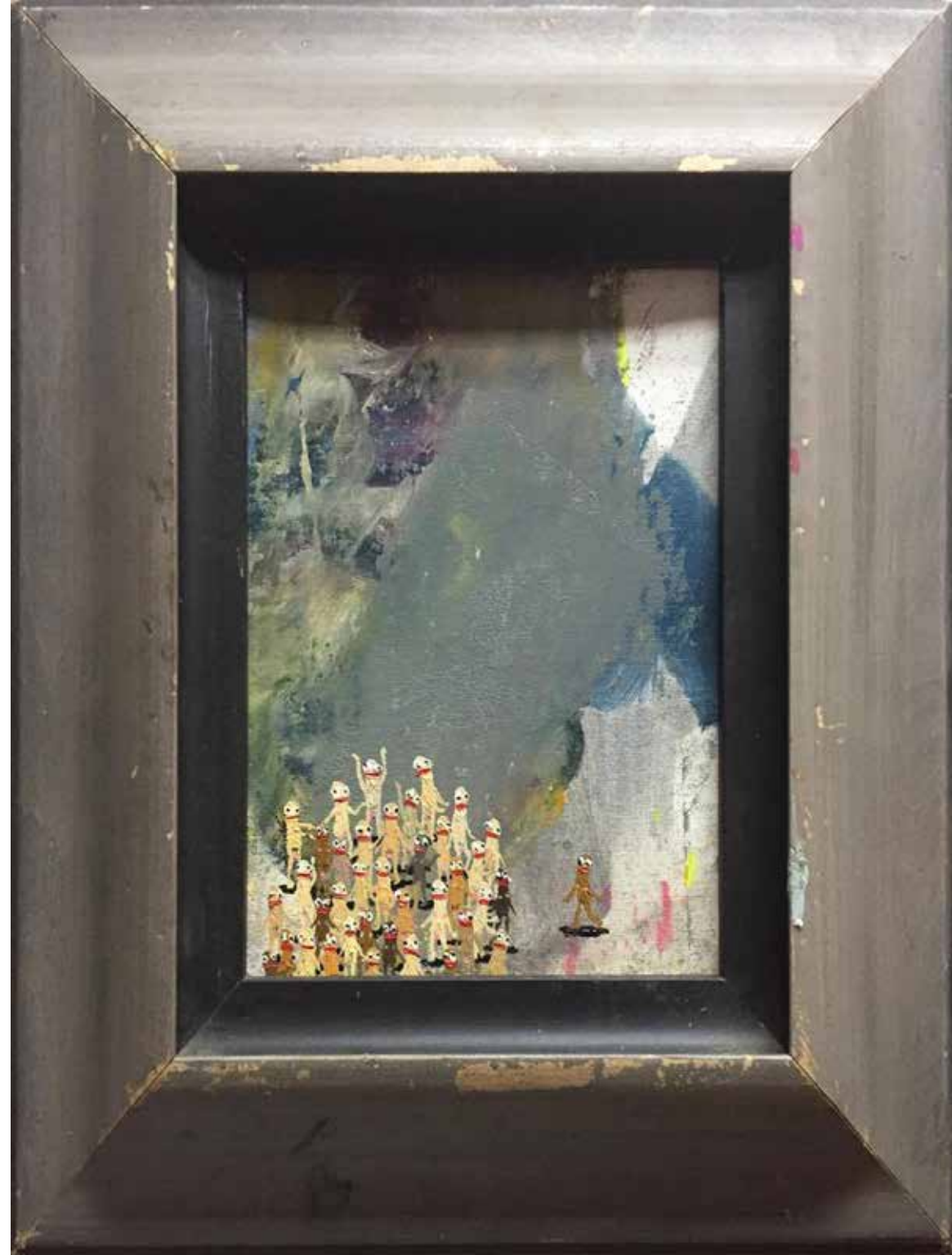








Found Relic
Oil on canvas
9 x 12 inches
2017



Year Old Memory
Oil on canvas
15.25 x 17.25 inches
2017



People Problems, Problem Peoples
Oil and aerosol on canvas
10 x 14 inches
2017



Deciding How to Decide
Oil on canvas
14 x 20 inches
2017

“It takes equal parts of bravery and intelligence to make the cute register as idea, and it takes far more to imbue the perverse with the potential for human affection. Tellingly, in the exhibit’s lone installation Man Versus, the tiny figure is heavier than the giant.”



Man Versus
Mixed Media
Variable size
2017





Peoples, Persons, Humans 1, 2,3
Oil and aerosol on canvas
6.125 x 11.25 inches each
2017

“In the landscape of urban decay, mindless sex and state violence, Calleja ventures that indeed, as in the title of the painting, “Life is probably beautiful.” That the adverb “probably” is there only means that here is a painter who refuses the easy answer, opting instead to continue the search for reason today.”

Life is Probably Beautiful
Oil on canvas
14 x 16 inches
2017



Only Happy Accidents
Acrylic on paper
(detail)
2017



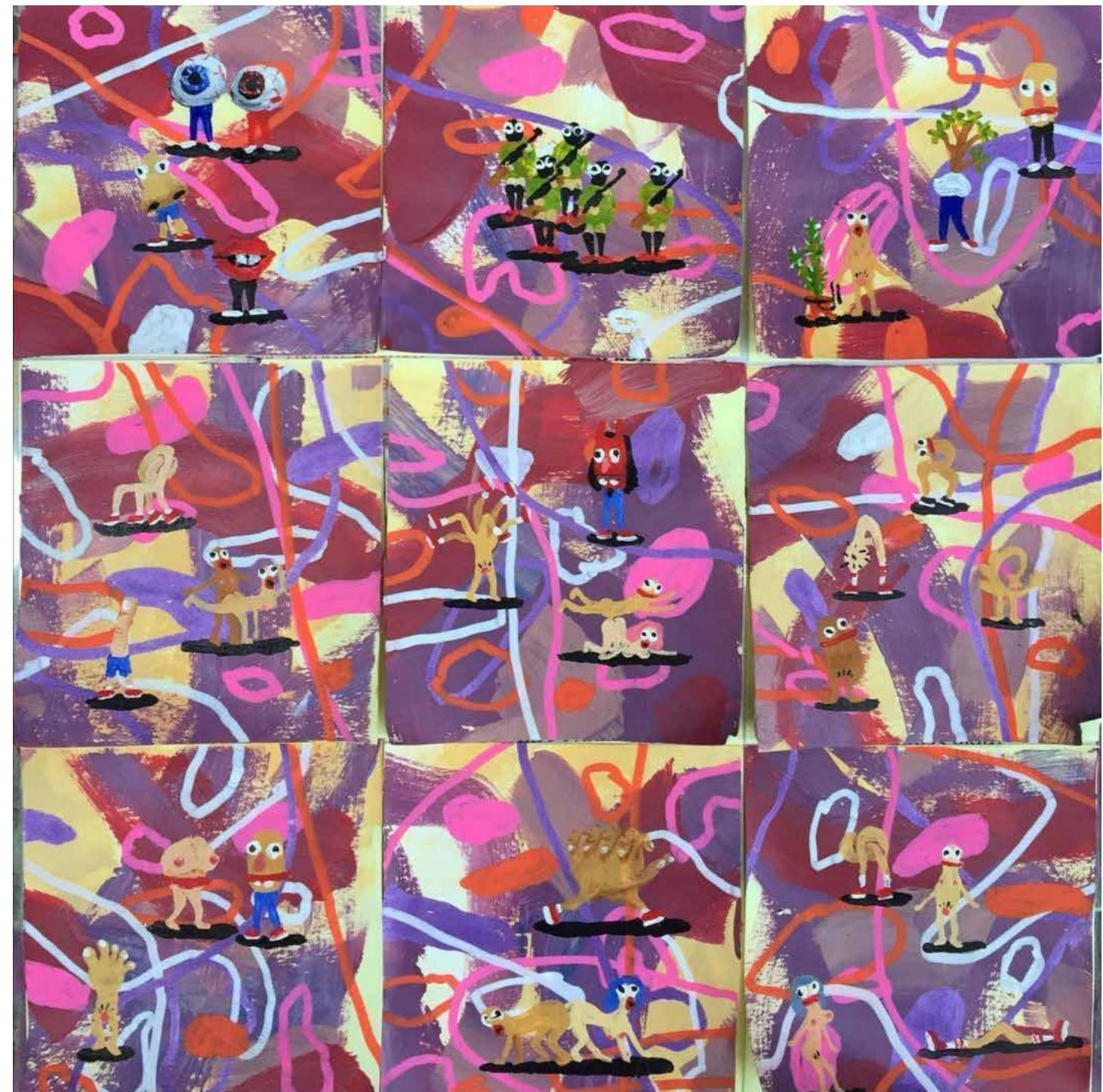
Not to be put down to any particular style, artist Bjorn Calleja approaches each exhibit differently, always looking for ways to surprise himself and viewers. However, in recent years, Calleja has been repeatedly working with fleshy, awkward-looking characters as a concept, a toy to play with and remix among the other building blocks for his paintings and sculptures.

These characters are rendered cartoonishly and clay-like, deliberately goofy or ugly. At times staring back at the viewer, their expressions and form brings to mind the proverbial idiot, perhaps a Homer Simpson, a Mad Magazine character. Emerging from holes, engaging in daily activities, hidden in plain sight, playing among abstract pops, splashes, and brushstrokes, you have to observe Calleja's paintings closely to really see them. They are the community of gremlins, pranksters, squatters living in his current images. With their presence, each of Calleja's pieces become an object of laughter, amusement,

or surprise, upending the artistic traditions we take so seriously.

-Vintana.ph

“Calleja has been repeatedly working with fleshy, awkward-looking characters as a concept, a toy to play with and remix among the other building blocks for his paintings and sculptures.”



Post it Show (Giant Robot)
Acrylic on Post its
2017



Balumpare
Oil and aerosol on canvas
36 x 36 inches
2017



Garble Garble
Oil and acrylic on canvas
12 x 18 inches
2018



Love
Oil on canvas
14.5 x 18.5 inches
2018



We (study)
Oil on canvas
9 x 12 inches
2018



We
Oil and aerosol on canvas
36 x 48 inches
2018



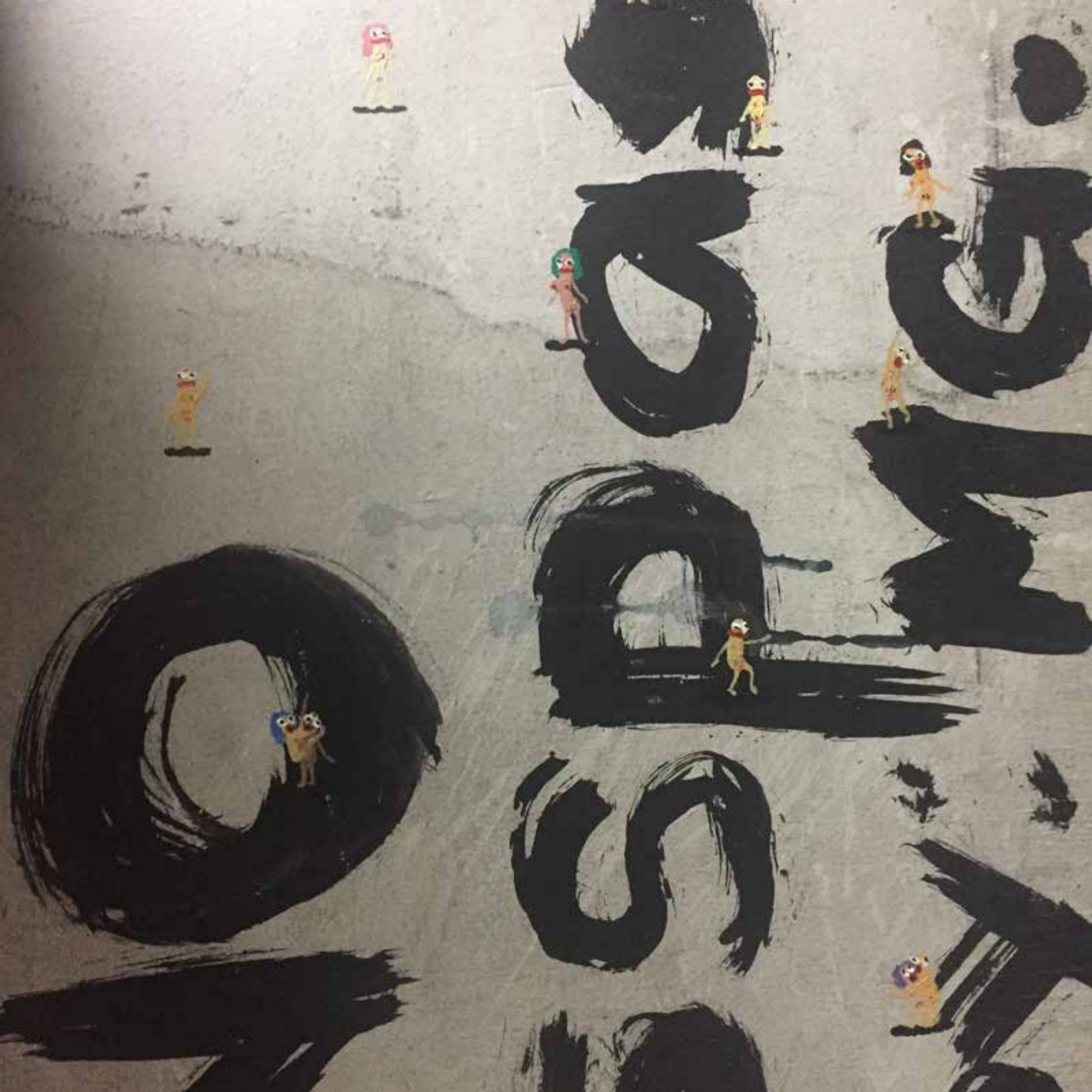
COUNTERCLOCKWISE

Collective exhibition
2018, Mono8 Gallery (Manila, Philippines)



Hole
Mixed media on wood
18.5 x 14.5 inches
2018





Those Who Trespass Against Us
Oil on found signage
Size variable
2018



GLOBAL PROBLEMS HOUSEHOLD SOLUTIONS

Collective exhibition curated by the artist
2018, Pundido Gallery (Manila, Philippines)



Not Yours Either
Airdry clay and found objects
Size variable
2018





Neurofibroma
Oil and aerosol on canvas
48 x 60 inches
2018



A Very Unintelligent Picture
Oil and aerosol on canvas
22 x 28 inches
2018



Dear Death
Epoxy and found objects
Size variable
2018

ACME

Solo Exhibition
2018, West Gallery (Manila, Philippines)

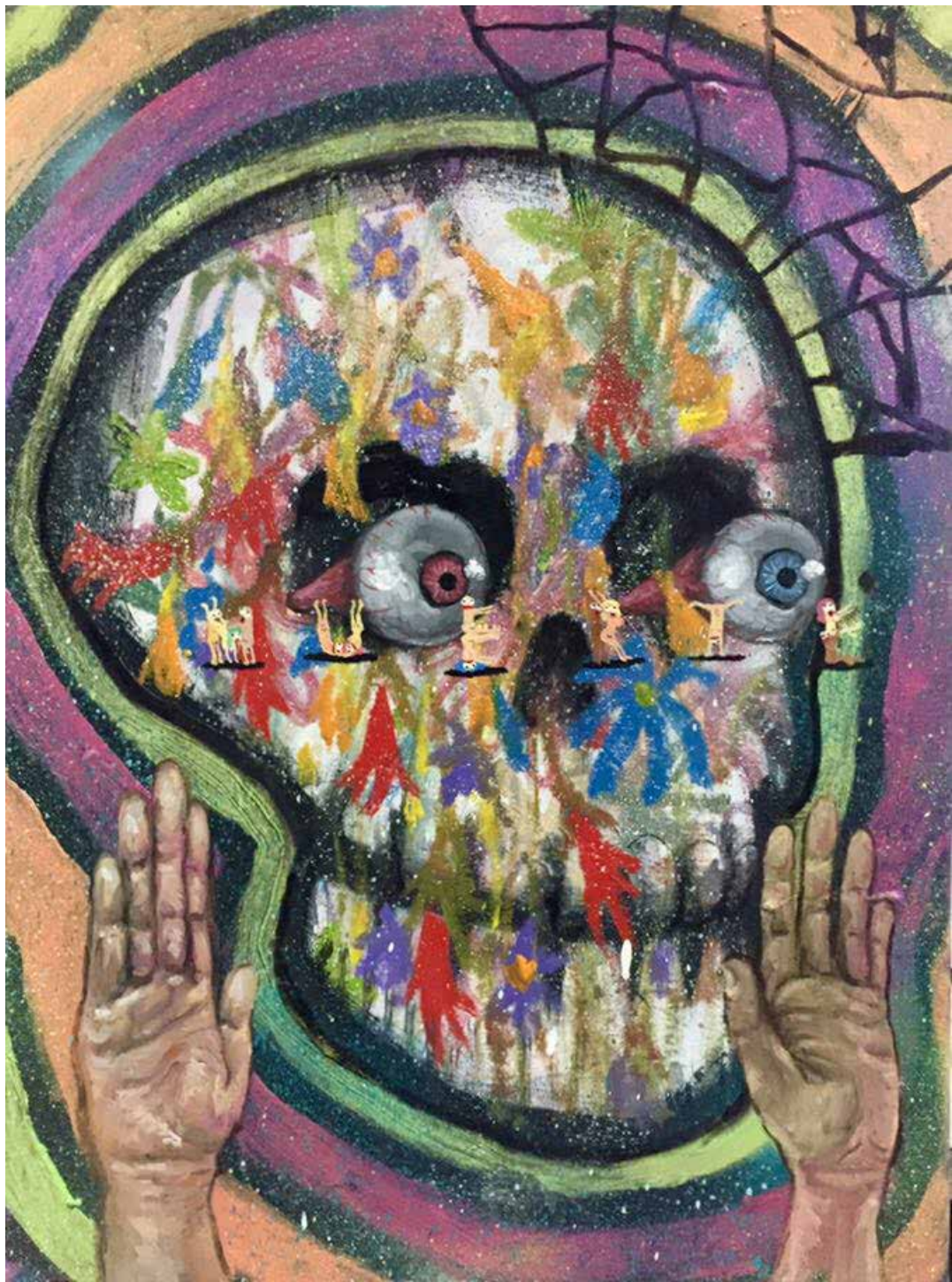
“Humanity
has peaked
and it’s all
downhill from
here.”



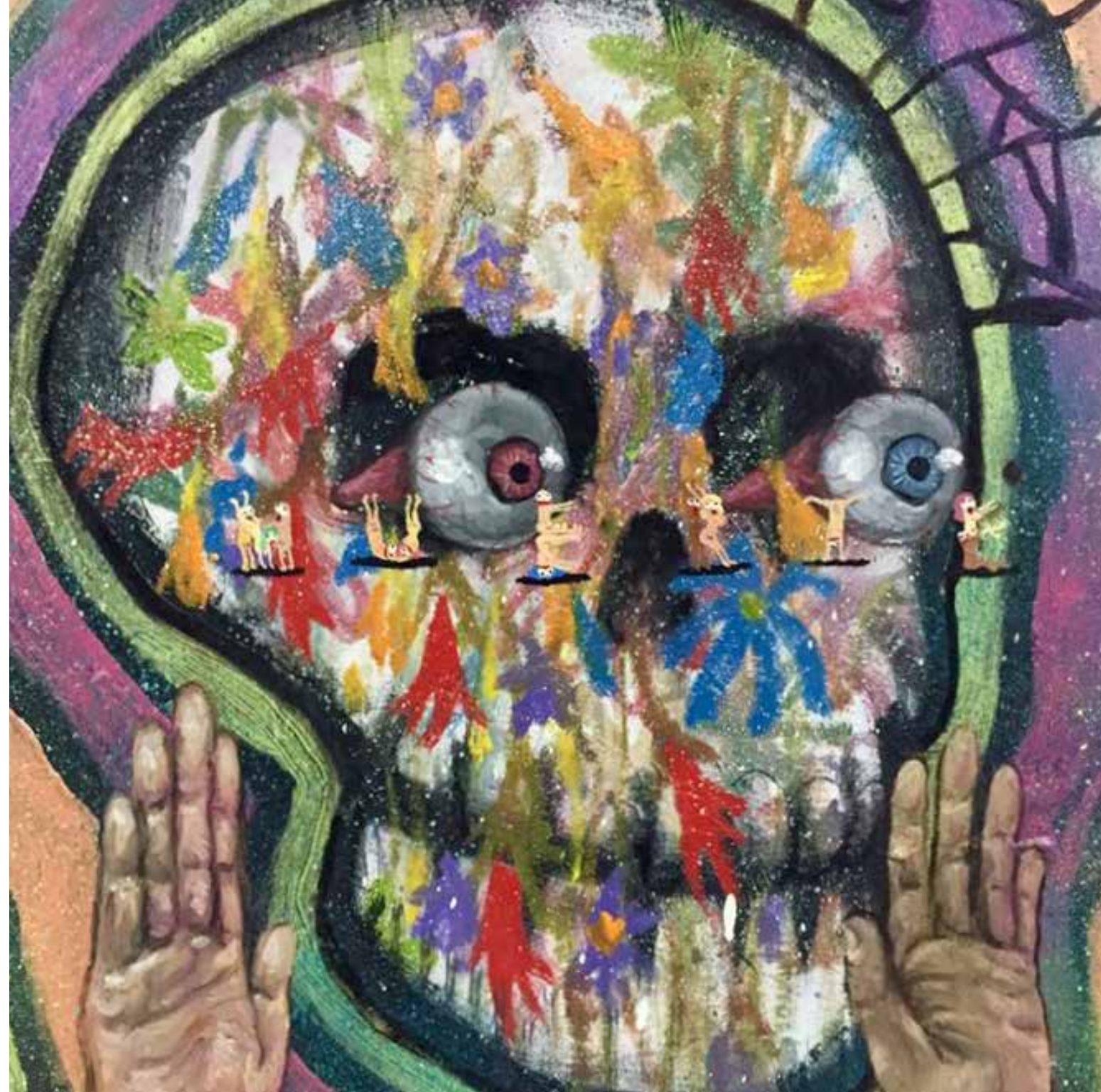
Installation shot
ACME,
West Gallery, 2018



ACME
Oil and aerosol on canvas
(triptych)
12 x 18, 22 x 28, 12 x 14 inches
2018



I Thought About Death
Then I Changed My Mind
Oil and aerosol on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2018





A Series of Unanswerable Conondrums
Oil and aerosol on canvas
12 x 140 inches
2018



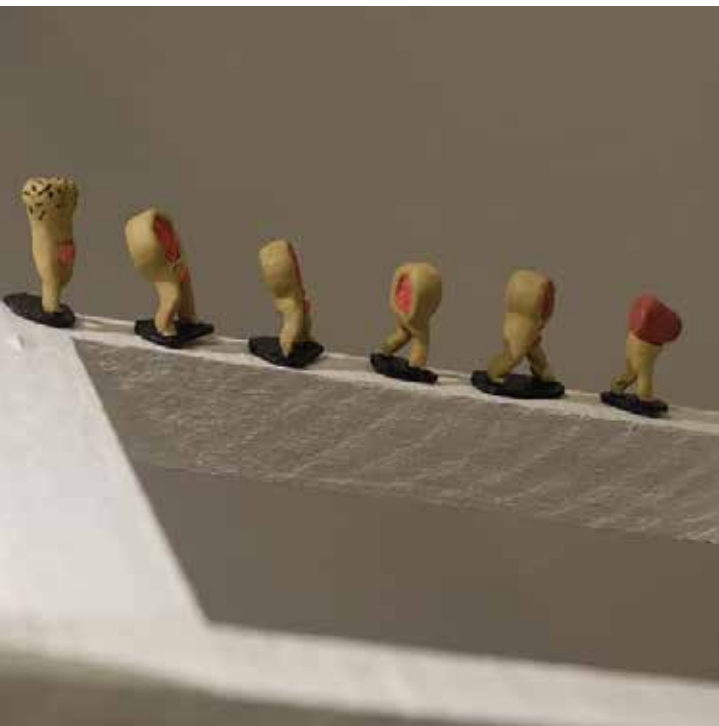
A Series of Unanswerable Conondrums
(detail)



A Series of Unanswerable Conondrums
(detail)

99 Lives
(detail)
Mixed media
Size variable
2018







PLANES OF EXISTENCE

Collective exhibition curated by Jason Montinola
2018, Art Cube Gallery (Manila, Philippines)

“The definition of landscape as purely an environment becomes liquid and transgresses beyond technique, framing, orientation and subject-matter.”

Planes of Existence exhibition notes, 2018

Gobledygook
(detail)

(Next pages)
Gobledygook (after Hieronymus
Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights)
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
(triptych)
39 x 132 inches
2018







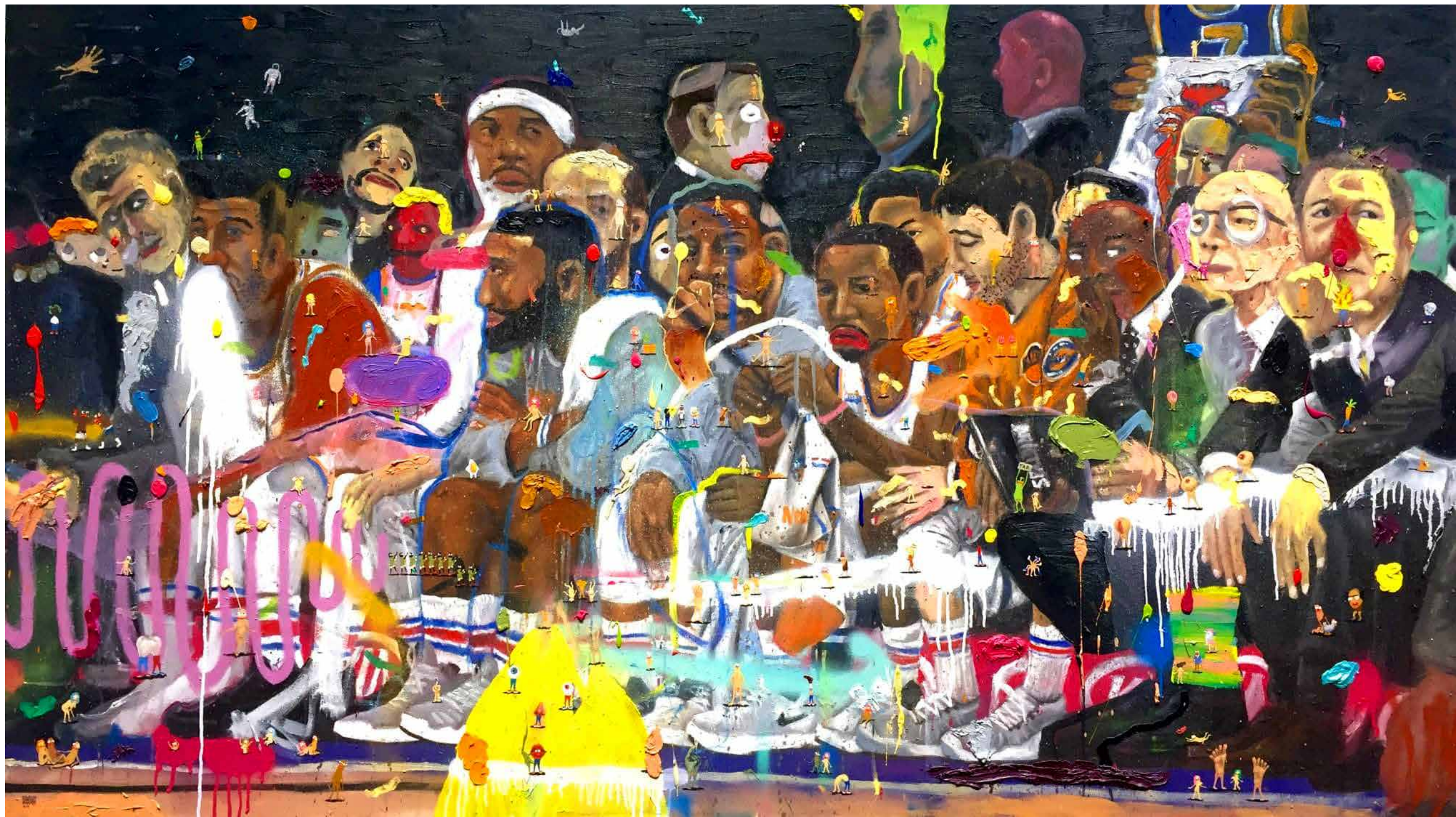
ARE YOU KIDDING ME?

Collective exhibition
curated by Chalk Zaldivar
2018, Vinyl on Vinyl Gallery
(Manila, Philippines)



Machine Not Machine
Epoxy, Aerosol, Wood
Size variable
2018





Bad Apples
Oil and aerosol on canvas
48 x 84 inches
2018



Easy Contemporary Paintings for Beginners
 (Series of 8)
 Mixed Media
 10 x 14 inches
 2019



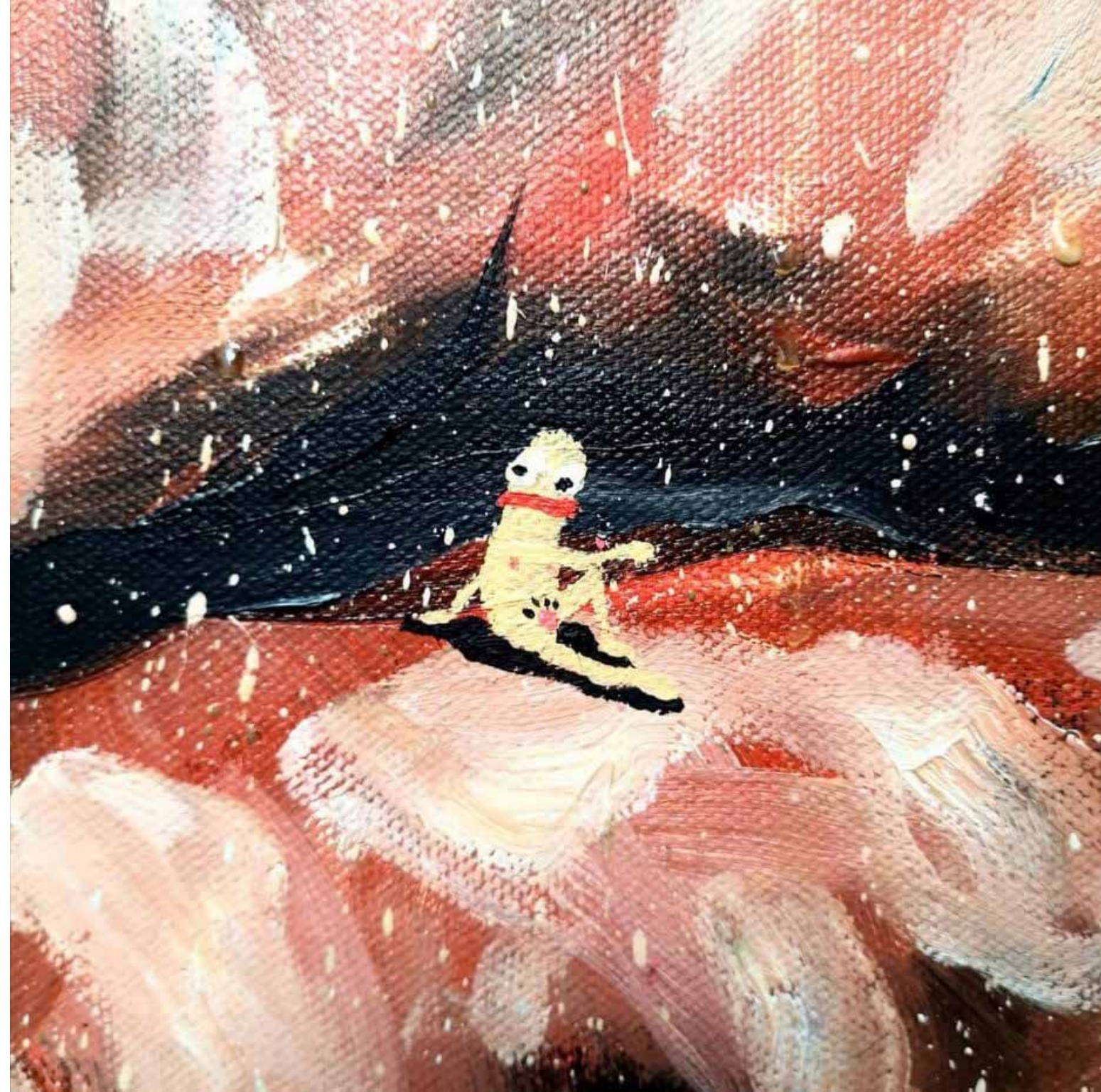
Kid Gelato
 Resin (Edition of 20)
 6 inches (approx.)
 2019

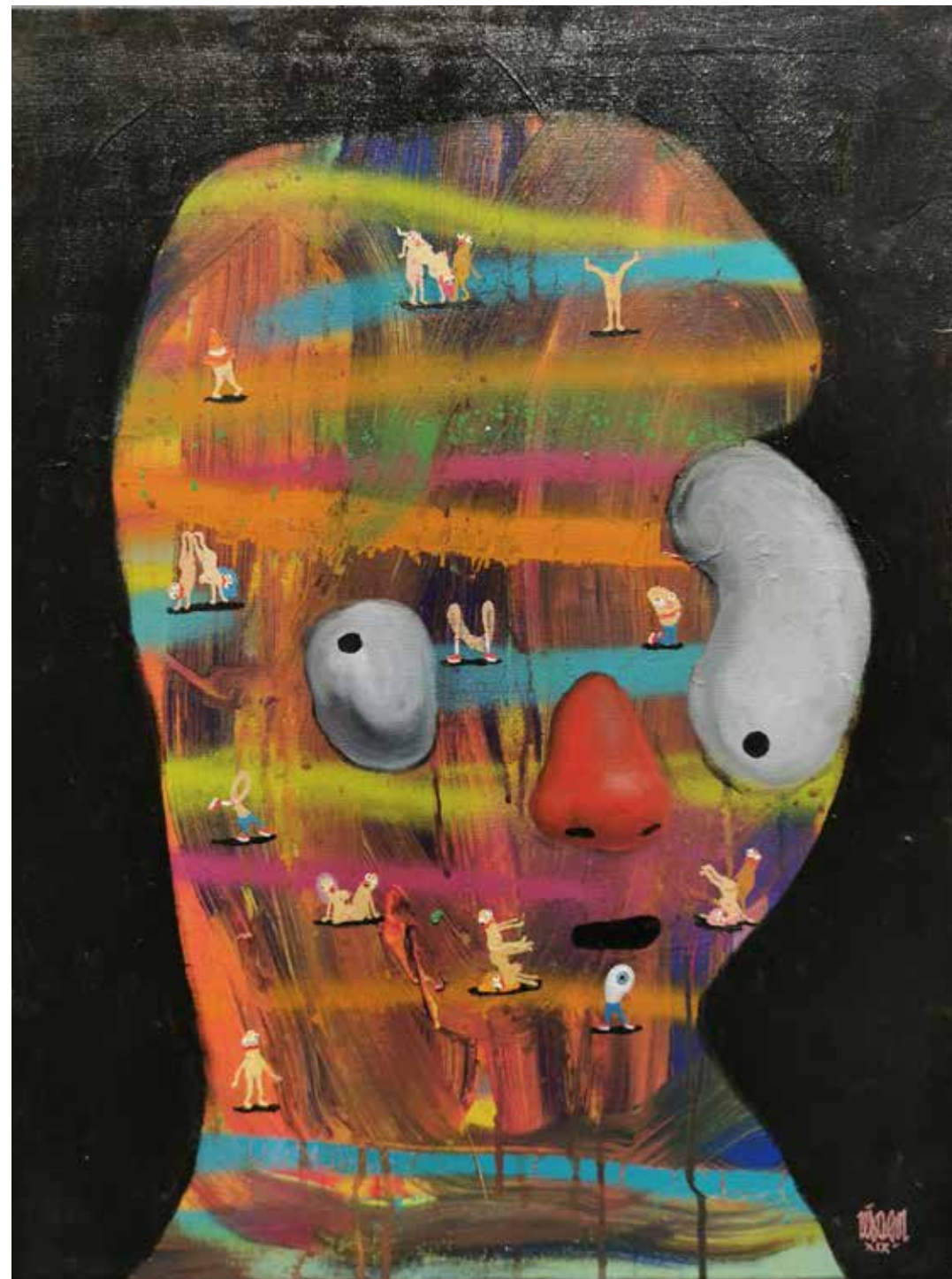


It's All About the Nerves Now
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
48 x 60 inches
2018



Celebrate
(Self-Portrait)
Oil and aerosol on
canvas
48 x 60 inches
2019





Any and Every
Oil and aerosol on canvas
15 x 20 inches
2019

(Opposite page)
Art and Humanities

(detail)

VERY SPECIAL

Collective exhibition
2019, Project 20 Gallery (Manila, Philippines)





Art and Humanities
Oil on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2019





Language of Flowers
Oil, acrylic and aerosol
on canvas
36 x 48 inches
2019

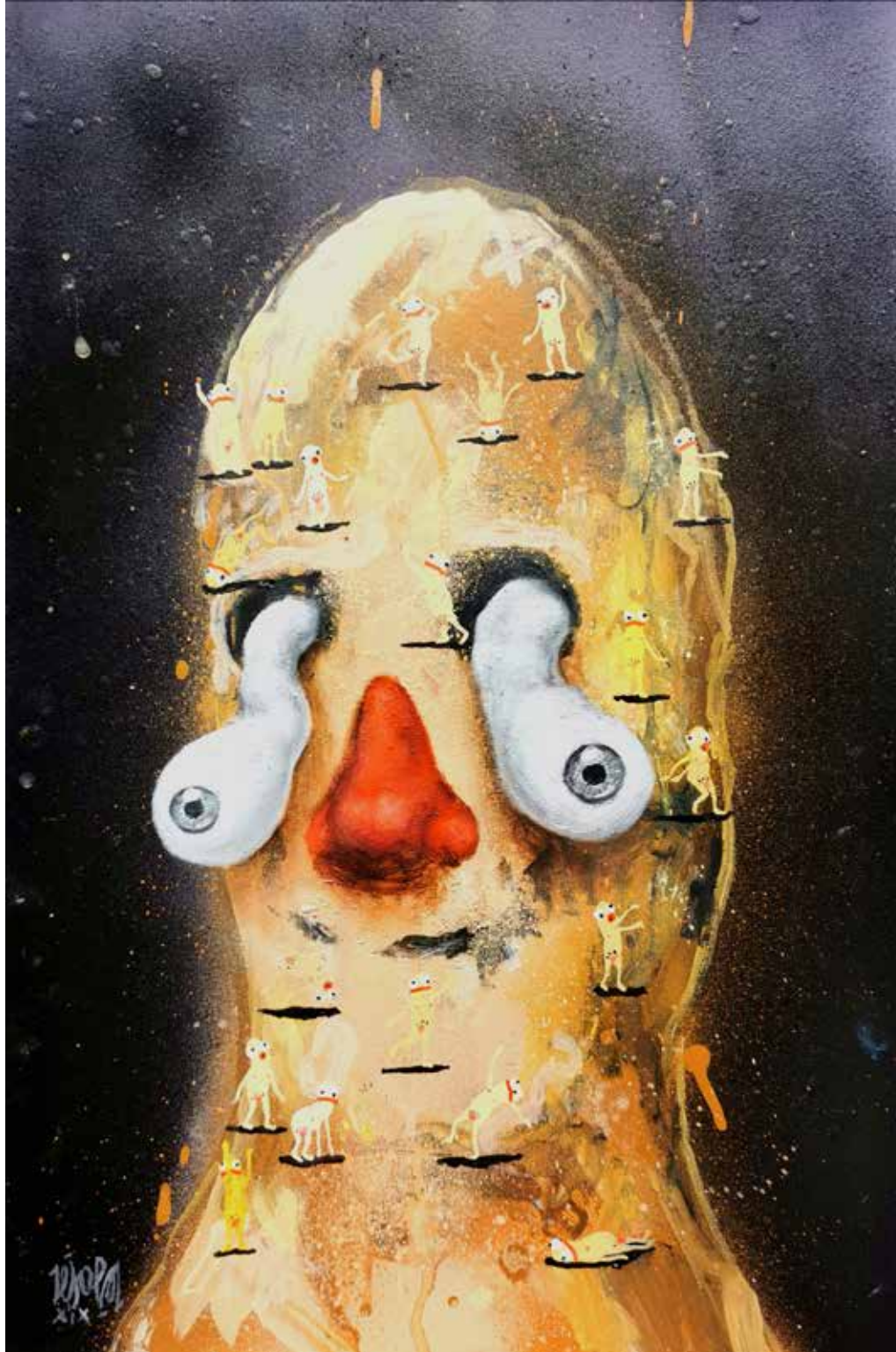


On How to Be Hooman
(Humata, Hukhta, Huvarshhta)
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on paper
12 x 18 inches (each)
2019



Remember You Must Die
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on paper
12 x 18 inches
2019





The Known
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on paper
12 x 18 inches
2019



The Unknown
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on paper
12 x 18 inches
2019



Goodbye Motherf*ckers
Oil, acrylic and aerosol
on canvas
36 x 48 inches
2019

Now Soon (after Tono Camacho)
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
12 x 18 inches
2019





Pure Comedy
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
24 x 24 inches
2019



Oh Life
Oil and aerosol on canvas
36 x 36 inches
2019





Adam
Aerosol, Airdry Clay
6 inches
2019

(Opposite page)
The People Who Make Me
Oil on canvas
12 x 12 inches
2019





I Think It's Gonna Be Over
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
48 x 60 inches
2019

ABORTION OF CUTE

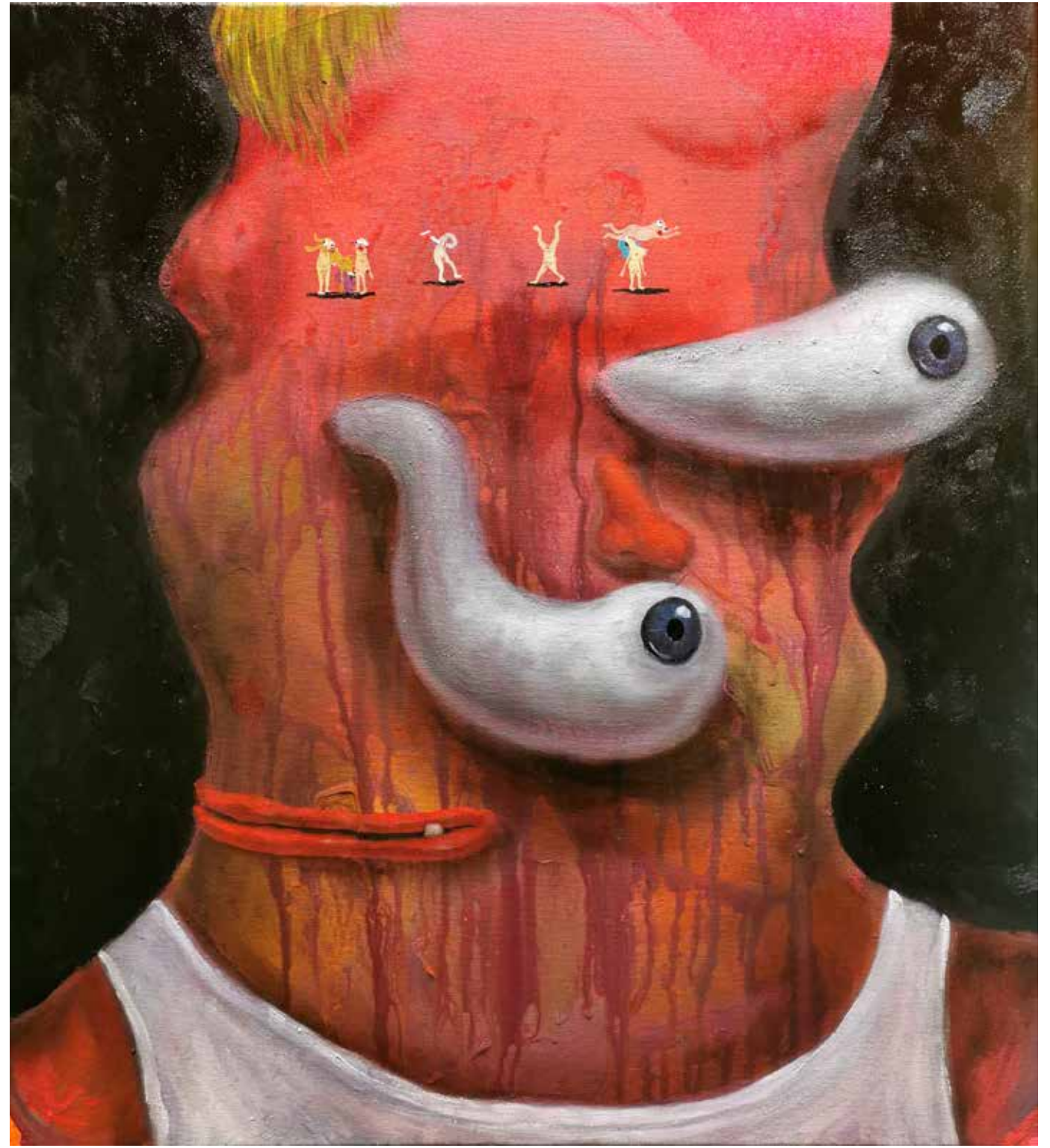
Collective exhibition curated by Manuel Ocampo
2020, Art Informal Gallery (Manila, Philippines)

"Art is above all a celebration of our freedom, of the extent to which we are uncoupled from the material world and the constraints of organic life. It is a celebration of life. It is a celebration of life lived rather than merely endured; of our ability to face the world rather than merely be absorbed in it. Think of a landscape painting: through it, we can visit places without being exposed to them. A portrait allows us to look into the face of another without being ourselves gazed at. Art also enables us to cultivate our emotions - fear, delight, sadness - for their own sake. Such emotions are purified by being gathered up into the perfected forms of music, of narrative, of a canvas. We do other things for their own sake, as when we dance for the joy and the spectacle of movement, rather than walking in order to get somewhere.

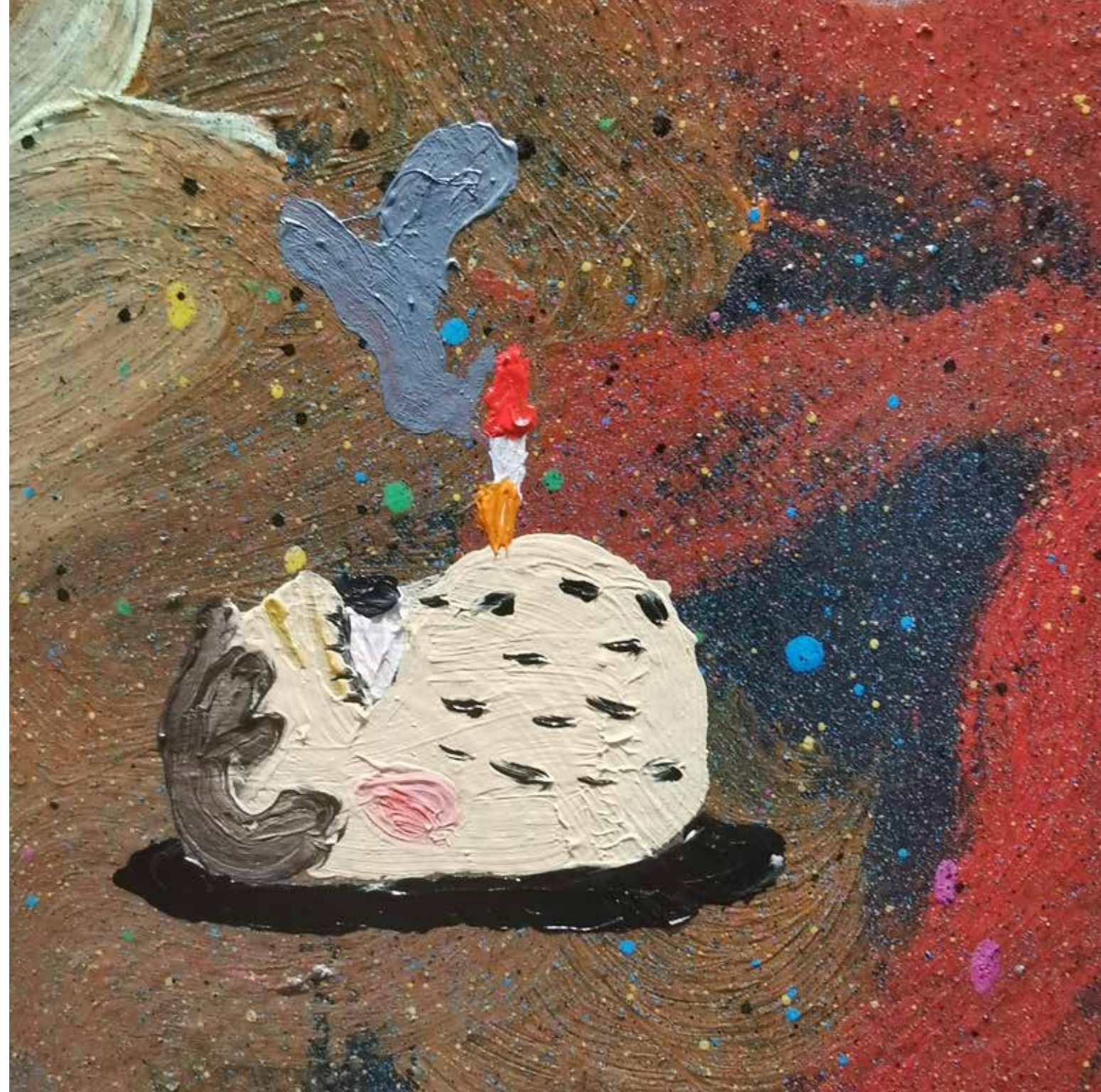
In art we play with the time that otherwise has a tight grip on us; music connects its successive moments with its beginning and its end creating a journey that is all arrival; the opening and closing of a narrative makes past, present and future co-present. These are different ways of healing the wound in the present tense- where ideas of experience hollow out actual experiences such that what is expected when experiences are sought for their own sake does not match reality - and of giving us fullness of presence, self- presence and of the presence of the world."

- Raymond Tallis excerpt from Human Nature and Animal Nature, Becoming Animal exhibition catalogue, Hatje Cantz

Last for the Year (Next)
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
20 x 22 inches
2019



Painter's Head
(after Philip Guston)
Oil, acrylic and aerosol
on canvas
36 x 48 inches
2020





“If there’s a ‘birth of the cool,’ what’s the opposite?” asks the exhibit’s curator, Manuel Ocampo. “Abortion of Cute.”

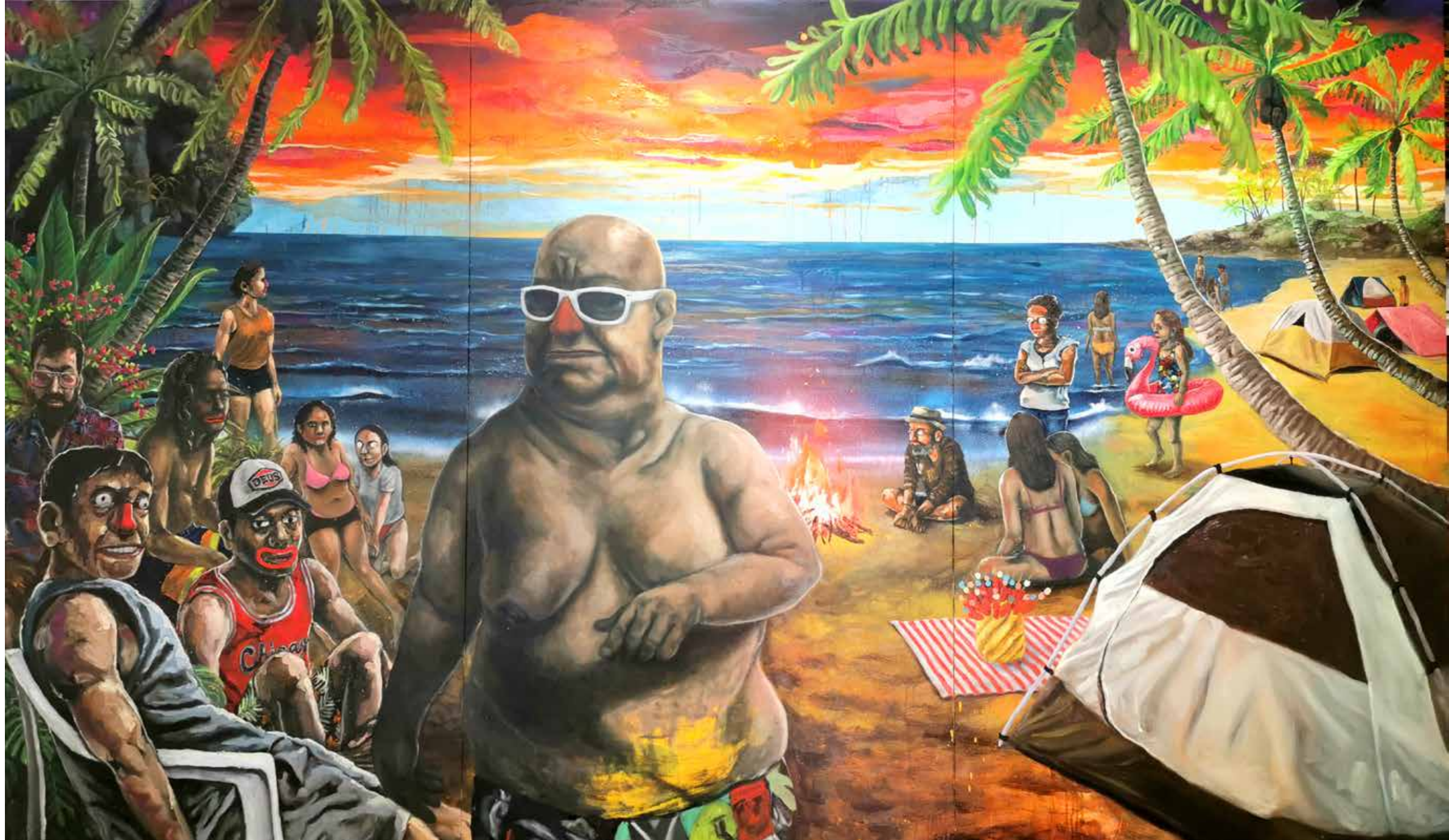
Outsider art by insiders: ‘Abortion of Cute’ at Artinformal
By: Eric S. Caruncho
Philippine Daily Inquirer
February 26, 2020

Lifescape
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
22 x 20 inches
2020



Why Flowers
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
48 x 48 inches
2020





I Was Never Here
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
84 x 144 inches
2020











KAFKA TWIST

Collective exhibition curated by Arvin Flores
2020, Artery Art Space (Manila, Philippines)

Kafka Twist presents a diverse narrative of the body transformed in psychological space. Featuring works that push the boundaries of line into dissonant imagery, possessed with a movement matching a peculiar rhythm asymmetric to passive consensus, twisting the ordinary into tales mixed with humor and horror, a satirical picture of our contemporary psyche.

The exhibit explores the refashioning of the self that are guided by internal echoes of estrangement and dissent surging under the beat of banality on top of multiple tracks of rote. We see marks move about various chambers and fold, mapping extremities that compose impressions of animated absurdity into monsters of creation.

Ordinary settings turn odd with the invasion of diminutive radicals bringing a hilarious shock to the acceptable, while the event is presided over by such an indifferent and grotesque metamorphosis. Gestures of nigh incomprehensibility are made within the enclosures of a disorienting landscape, this labyrinth of exquisite illusion brings out the panic within, an anxiety of an endless unrealizable horizon which is the loss of human perspective within the social.

– Arvin Flores



La Verre De Porto
(after John Singer Sargent)
Oil on canvas
36 x 30 inches
2020

“There is a sense of irony in their movements that echo identity, life and the cultural landscape.”



The works of Bjorn Calleja are marked by humanoid figures with bulging eyes. In past works they were central characters. More recently the figures have shrunk to accents of larger subjects. There is a sense of irony in their movements that echo identity, life and the cultural landscape.

These paintings have eyes is a part of a charitable series. Thick applications of acrylic and aerosol swirl in a sporadic manner. At the center of the chaos are surveilling eyes. One is an amorphous eyeball. Both eyes bulge with veins, on top of humanoid legs.

Artist.online: Artist feature
April 2, 2020

These Paintings Have Eyes
(11, 14, 15, 17, 13, 9)
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on paper
12 x 18 inches
2020

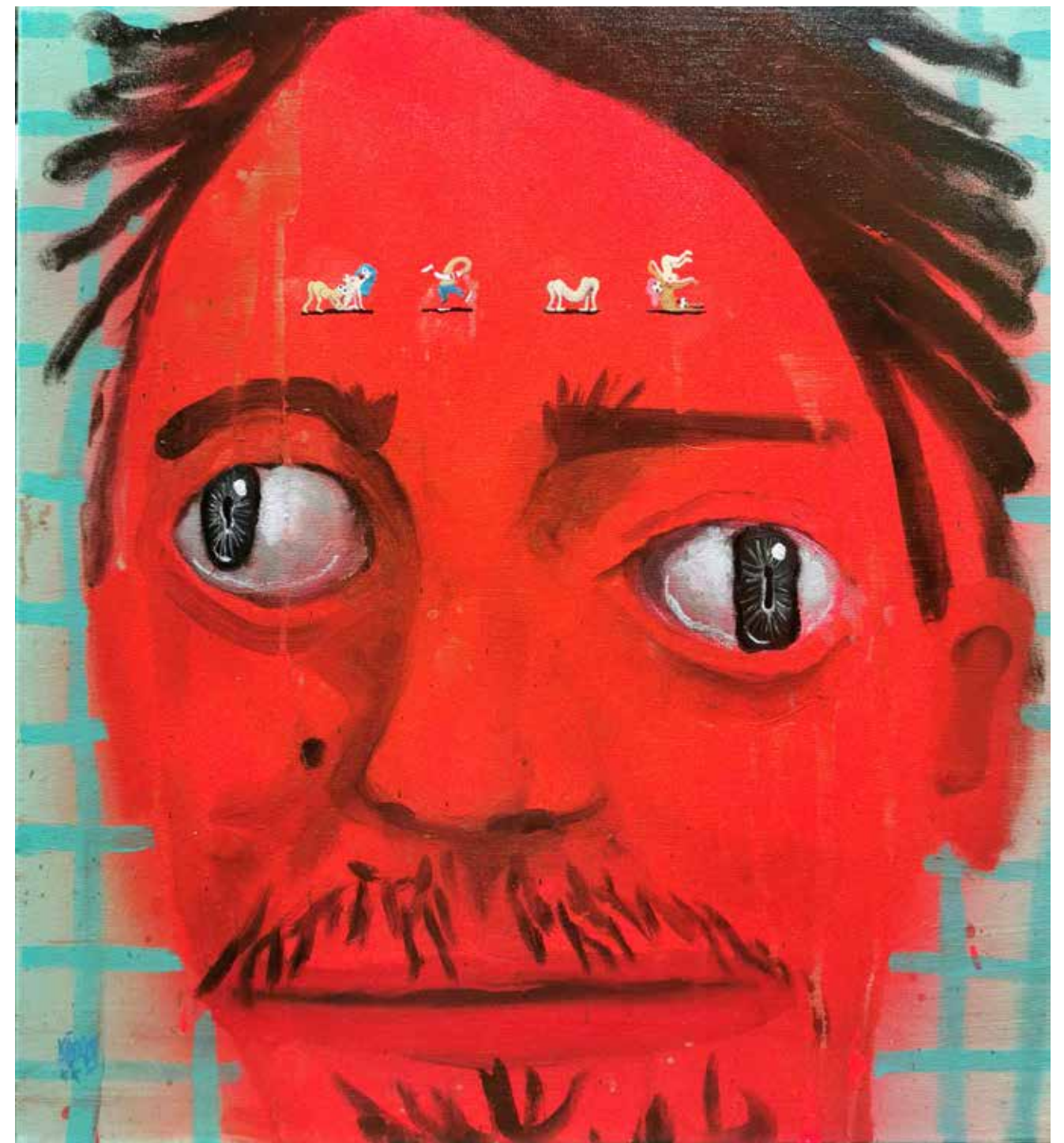


The Longest Pause
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
30 x 36 inches
2020



Fire Emoji
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
16 x 20 inches
2020

(Opposite page)
Such A Big Idea
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
20 x 22 inches
2020



A Handful of Fools
(after Bosch)
Oil, aerosol, epoxy
resin, airdry clay,
wood
21 x 32 x 24 cm
2020

(Opposite page)
Viva la vida
(Frida's Watermelons)
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
135x148 cm
2021



ISANG DAAN TAON ISANG ARAW

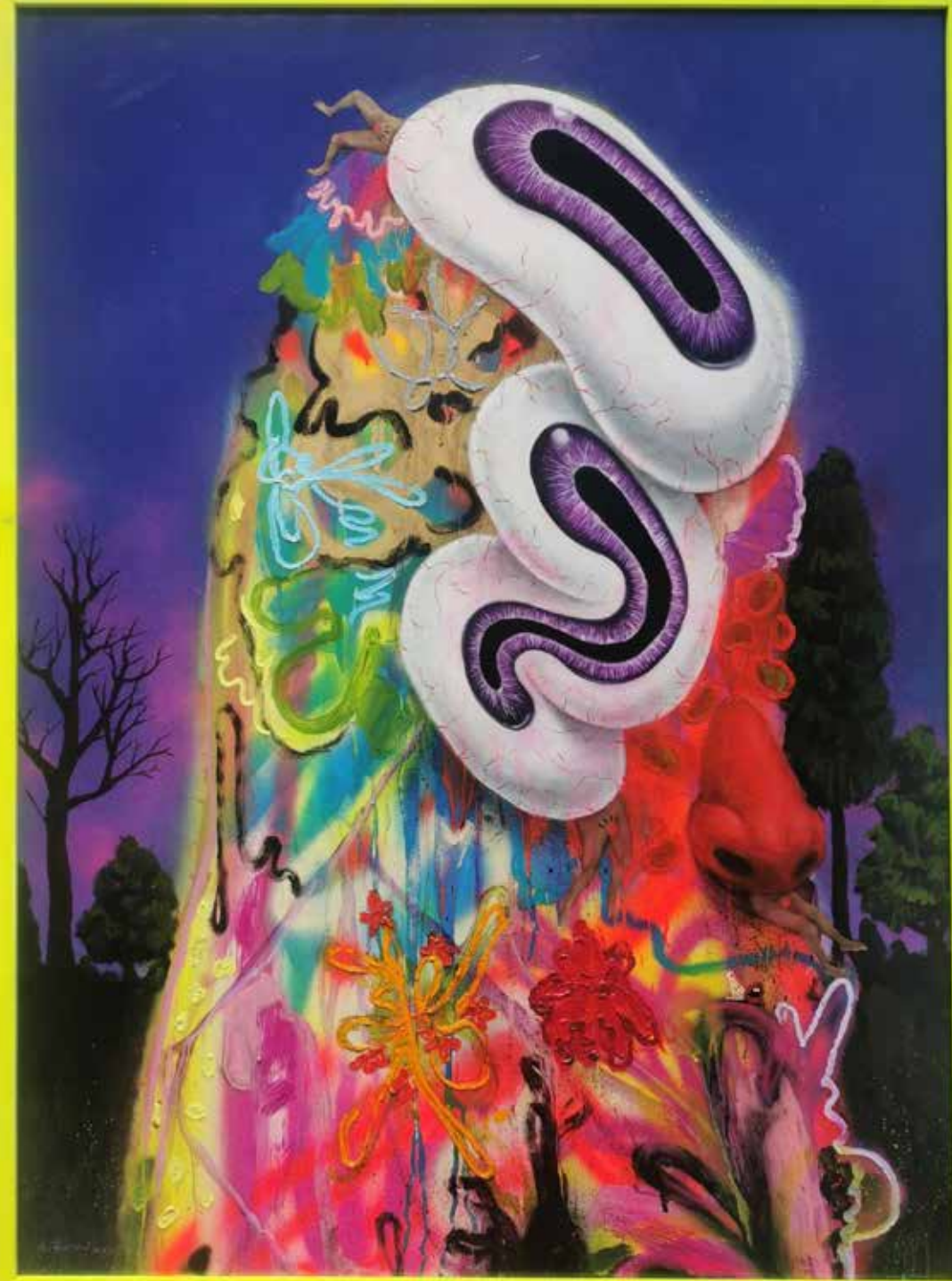
Collective exhibition curated by Norman Crisologo
2021, Art Informal Gallery (Manila, Philippines)

One day *isang araw* i saw *nakita ko*
One bird *isang ibon* i shoot *binaril ko*.
I cook *linuto ko* i eat *kinain ko*.



ILY
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2021

(Opposite page)
All of the Crisis,
None of the Life
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
100 x 135 cm
2021



(pages 182-185)
Flowers fighting
over its Image
(after James Ensor)
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
300 x 135 cm
(triptych)
2021





UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS

Solo exhibition
2022, Art Fair Philippines
/Projects
(Manila, Philippines)

In this age when the so-called supremacy of painting has come to pass, Bjorn Calleja offers a glimpse into the inexhaustible possibilities of the medium, deliriously expressed by his works in Unknown Unknowns. Large-scale, sweeping, and obsessive, the paintings testify to an imagination steeped in the images of a globalized culture, flattening conventional hierarchies, accommodating impulsive marks on canvas, as well as encompassing the allure of digital realities.

Having emerged as one of the more authoritative names in NFTs (non-fungible tokens), Calleja embeds and distributes his self-created characters throughout the pictorial plane, which may stand alone or be animated as minted digital assets. The humanoid figures, characterized by their outsized lips and googly eyes, enact a Sisyphean loop that captures the folly of human routine and time-related mutations, only for them to revert back to zero and commence their journey anew.



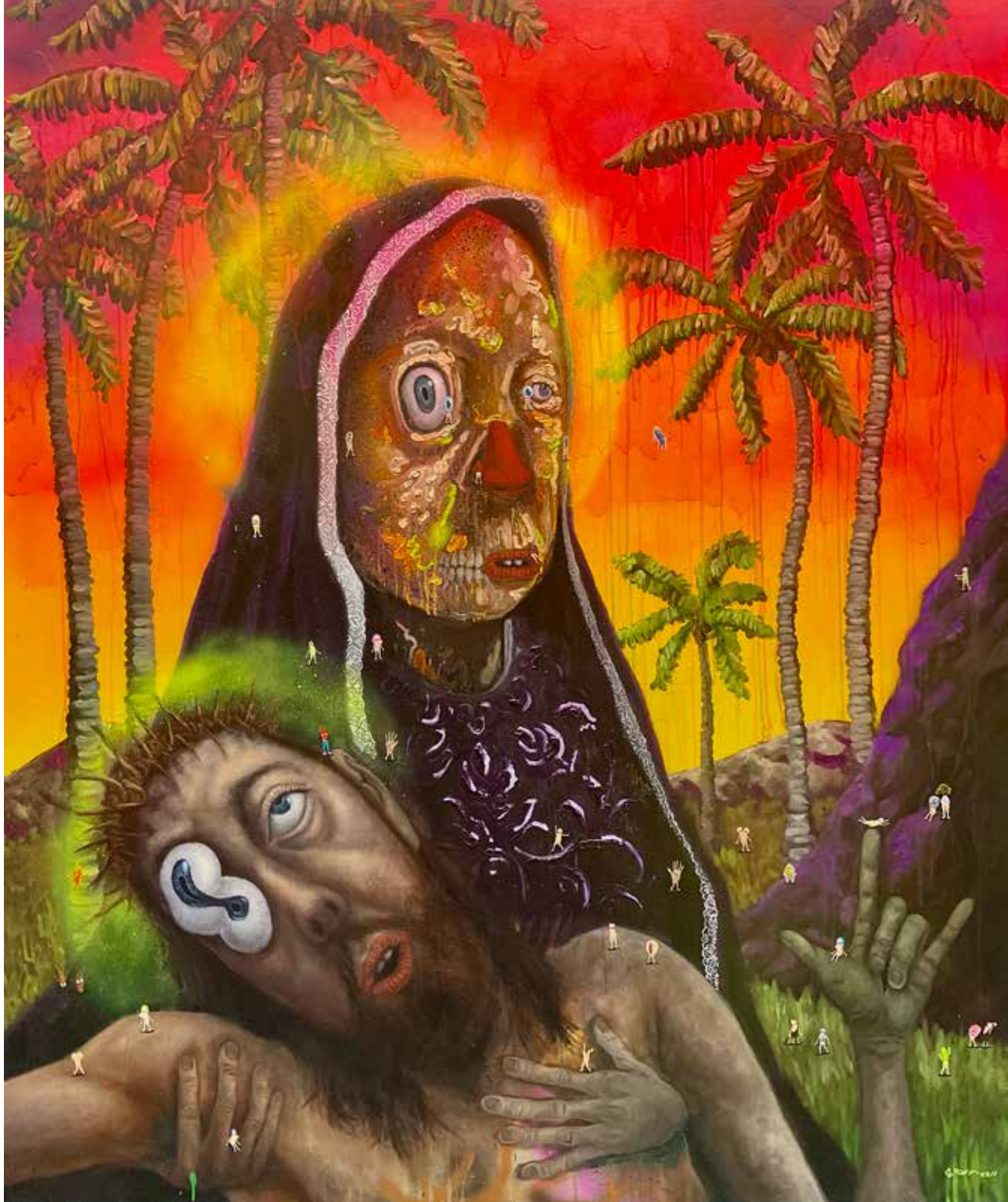
NGMI
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
135 x 148 cm
2022

The Exit
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
148 x 160 cm
2022





Pieta Tropicalia
Oil, acrylic
and aerosol on
canvas
150 x 180 cm
2022



Viencia
Oil, acrylic
and aerosol on
canvas
150 x 180 cm
2022



“The works’ skepticism toward social structures portrays not exactly an absurdist view of humanity but an acceptance, with a tinge of humor, of what the world has become: reality fractured through media, experienced through the mediation of glowing screens (the proverbial black mirror), internalized as bits and pieces of digital information.”

(pages 192-193)
Son of a God
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
270 x 148 cm
(diptych)
2022



If any, the works of Calleja may be seen as a casual stroll on the landfill of accumulated images throughout art history, inspecting the wreckage, using whatever is usable and trying to salvage it by hybridizing elements, adding a neon veneer onto things and surfaces, transfiguring icons into the freshened characters of his phantasmagoric world. Take, for instance, the artist's re-envisioning of Leonardo da Vinci's Salvador Mundi in "Nothing Left to Save Here," which offers Christ as a lump of melting colors, dangled with Lilliputian figures, the crystal sphere now transformed as a jiggly globe in which no destiny may be foretold.

The works' skepticism toward social structures portrays not exactly an absurdist view of humanity but an acceptance, with a tinge of humor, of what the world has become: reality fractured through media, experienced through the mediation of glowing screens (the proverbial black mirror), internalized as bits and pieces of digital information. Calleja's paintings have the quality of an Hieronymus Bosch orgiastic sprawl, but depicting the controlled chaos of the 21st century, absent of the itch to make sense of everything, at peace with all the unknowns that we will never get to know.

Carlomar Daoana

"Take, for instance, the artist's re-envisioning of Leonardo da Vinci's Salvador Mundi in "Nothing Left to Save Here," which offers Christ as a lump of melting colors, dangled with Lilliputian figures, the crystal sphere now transformed as a jiggly globe in which no destiny may be foretold."

Nothing Left to Save Here
Oil, acrylic and aerosol
on canvas
18 x 24 inches
2022



biam calleja



NFTS + THE EVER-EVOLVING WORLD OF ART

Collective exhibition curated by Tezos Asia Pacific
2022, Art Basel Hong Kong (Hong Kong)



ANTONYMS OF MEANING

Solo exhibition
2022, West Gallery (Manila, Philippines)

How can one know existence? Within a pluralistic world, Bjorn Calleja paints to seek answers to questions not written in stone. Rather, he breaks dictum by interpreting philosophical theories, wisdom literature, and allegories in art and epic poetry that span from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. In a style that consistently blends the grand and the cheekily small, the works are more than interpretative depictions. Instead, the scenes on the large-scale canvases act like experiments that question, unlearn and relearn schools of thought and art historical movements. He displays what philosophers call hermeneutical generosity – a willingness to enter worlds other than one's own.

Crowded in one frame, amoebic figures exemplify how in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, "existence precedes essence". Their consciousness pulsates, with surfaces expanding from outstretched irises to quivering contours. Another focus hardens into a visual expletive of Nietzsche. The focal subject clutches a brush, a cigarette curling unsmoked. Backed by a landscape with very real dark skies and trees, luminous, featureless specters hover near its crown, dropping hints of existential nihilism.

Besides depictions of recent, slightly-solipsistic philosophies, Calleja's *Paraiso*, *The Absolutes* and *Gobbledygook* delve into century-old God theories. A fresh recreation of Dante's boat ferries souls of the damned, balanced by a fleshy tattooed mass. Local calligraphy adds a touch of tropical gothic to the design of the Barque. The miniature humanoid figures distinct to Bjorn's practice are numerous on the *River Styx*.

Bjorn shows commitment to mimesis, reproducing an image of the Devil as a black goat from Goya's *Witches' Sabbath*. Not without light and lurid colors, a group relaxes alike Edouard Manet's pastoral *Luncheon*. While further in the meadow another group gathers in a circle, this time in joyous reverie after *Le Danse* by Matisse. Characters of Bosch also spill into the diptych.

Crowded in one frame, amoebic figures exemplify how in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, "existence precedes essence".

Being and Nothingness
Oil, acrylic and aerosol
on canvas
48 x 60 inches
2022







“Calleja questions through visions possessing an implicit art of understanding, all the while asking, how does one imagine existence?”

Paraiso
Oil, acrylic and aerosol on canvas
79 x 54 inches (diptych)
2022



The Absolutes
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
60 x 36 inches
(diptych)
2022



“Another focus hardens into a visual expletive of Nietzsche. The focal subject clutches a brush, a cigarette curling unsmoked. Backed by a landscape with very real dark skies and trees, luminous, featureless specters hover near its crown, dropping hints of existential nihilism.”

Although the intent and meaning have never been confirmed, Bjorn's reproduction of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is faithful to Eden in the first panel, with its elegant blue mountains and Adam and Eve (characters which he has also trademarked into NFTs). While at the center the same hoards of lustful figures convene in rivers and ponds. The last realm is also ablaze in fire and filled with freakish creations. Like the original, a face offers its hollow back for tiny sinners to take both drink and shelter. Another monstrous being simultaneously eats and excretes live beings. Yet Calleja's individual touches differentiate from the source with his own humanish miniatures, a basketball, and giant roach.

Antonyms of Meanings appear to echo Søren Kierkegaard, one of the artist's preferred philosophers who asserts irony is paradoxical. Either a "pure" object of thought or a "position", these paintings reference the world in paradox, moving from existential angst, nihilism and nothingness, to chaos superfluous with metaphor, meanings and religious faiths. Calleja possesses concepts of God that harken back and move forward through different phases of beliefs, picking up something from everything. Conveyed through his inter-disciplinary traditional and virtual practices, while exposed to possibly infinite schools of thought as a former educator, Calleja creates a flexible discourse that instead of simply agreeing, mixes contemporary styles with archaic literature to explore the essence of being. While definitions can constrain us, these paintings ask free-thinking questions that attempt to unveil the layers of fabric in the world. Like a thought experiment where viewers are invited to both contemplate and play, Calleja questions through visions possessing an implicit art of understanding, all the while asking, how does one imagine existence?

Angela Singian

Nietzsche's Bitch
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
30 x 36 inches
2022



TUTTI FRUTTI: S.E.A. GROUP EXHIBITION

Collective exhibition
curated by Michela Sena
2022, Tang Contemporary Art
(Bangkok, Thailand)

A Celebration for
No Reason
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
158 x 180 cm
2022

Dawn of the
Fragile People
Oil, acrylic and
aerosol on canvas
158 x 180 cm
2022







Stoopedest Stooped 1
(Stoopedest Stooped Collection)
Stooped Avatar Project
minted on objkt.com
2022

By observing a play on scale, my work encourages looking, and then looking slowly and deeply, allowing the viewer enough breathing space for meaning to either materialize or evaporate. The subjects I use in my paintings, range from the familiar, i.e. pictures of flowers, landscapes and portraits, to referenced historical images, photos of sports events, to portrayals of imagined, surreal individuals and scenarios, these images are purged of their original meaning and is reframed as a landscape where tiny beings would be painted over and exist. These minute cartoonish characters in humanoid forms are the central unifying theme that collates my recent body of works, populating my paintings, sculptures, installations, and animations.

These beings are depicted in diverse range of human activities and eccentric identities that personifies both mindless and intelligent fragments of ideas connecting visible and invisible relationships between man and environment, symbols and meaning, space and time, identity and the cultural landscape. My work is my reflection and response to the world, it examines how we humans, through all our advancements and destructions caused, are responsible in shaping the bigger image which is this plane we inhabit.

Bjorn Calleja (b. 1981, Manila, Philippines) is a Filipino contemporary painter and interdisciplinary artist. He earned his BFA from Far Eastern University, where he later became a part-time lecturer. Aside from exhibiting his work, his early career involved corporate jobs and stints as a graphic designer. He also co-founded Design. Other Things. (2012-2014), a design studio that worked with a team of visual artists.

Calleja's work draws on identity, spirituality, art, general and personal history, and the everyday politics, utilizing perspective and a play of scale as metaphor to how we as humans affect the world at large. His paintings, sculptures, installations, and animations are heavily influenced by 80's and 90's popular culture, kitsch, the internet, and the aesthetics and textures of Manila's landscape.

Solo exhibitions; Antonyms of Meaning; West Gallery (2022), Unknown Unknowns; ArtFair Philippines/Projects (2022), The Ennead; Secret Fresh Gallery (2018); Acme; West Gallery (2018); Postcolonial Rubbish; Pablo Gallery (2017); Self-Portrait as a Hamburger; Secret Fresh Gallery (2016); There is no Solution because there is no Problem; Underground Gallery (2016); Confessions of an Almost Artist; West Gallery (2013); Bubblegum Stories; Secret Fresh Gallery (2012); Eat my Daddy; The Crucible Gallery (2012); Some Failed Attempts in Creating a Good Image for Painting; West Gallery (2011); The Color Bringer; Secret Fresh Gallery (2011); Fear Made me Do This; Lost Projects (2011).

Calleja's work has been included in various group exhibitions both local and international, published in Toy Art 2.0 (2014), Philippines: Inter Tropical Convergence Zone Contemporary Artists from the Philippines Imago Mundi - Luciano Benetton Collection (2014), and his animations have been featured in a number of NFT exhibitions including "NFTs + The Ever-Evolving World of Art" at Art Basel in Hong Kong (2022), he is also the creator of Stooped Avatar Project (2021), a satirical PFP project minted on the Tezos blockchain.



2016 - 2022

Manila, Philippines

 @osongkalye