

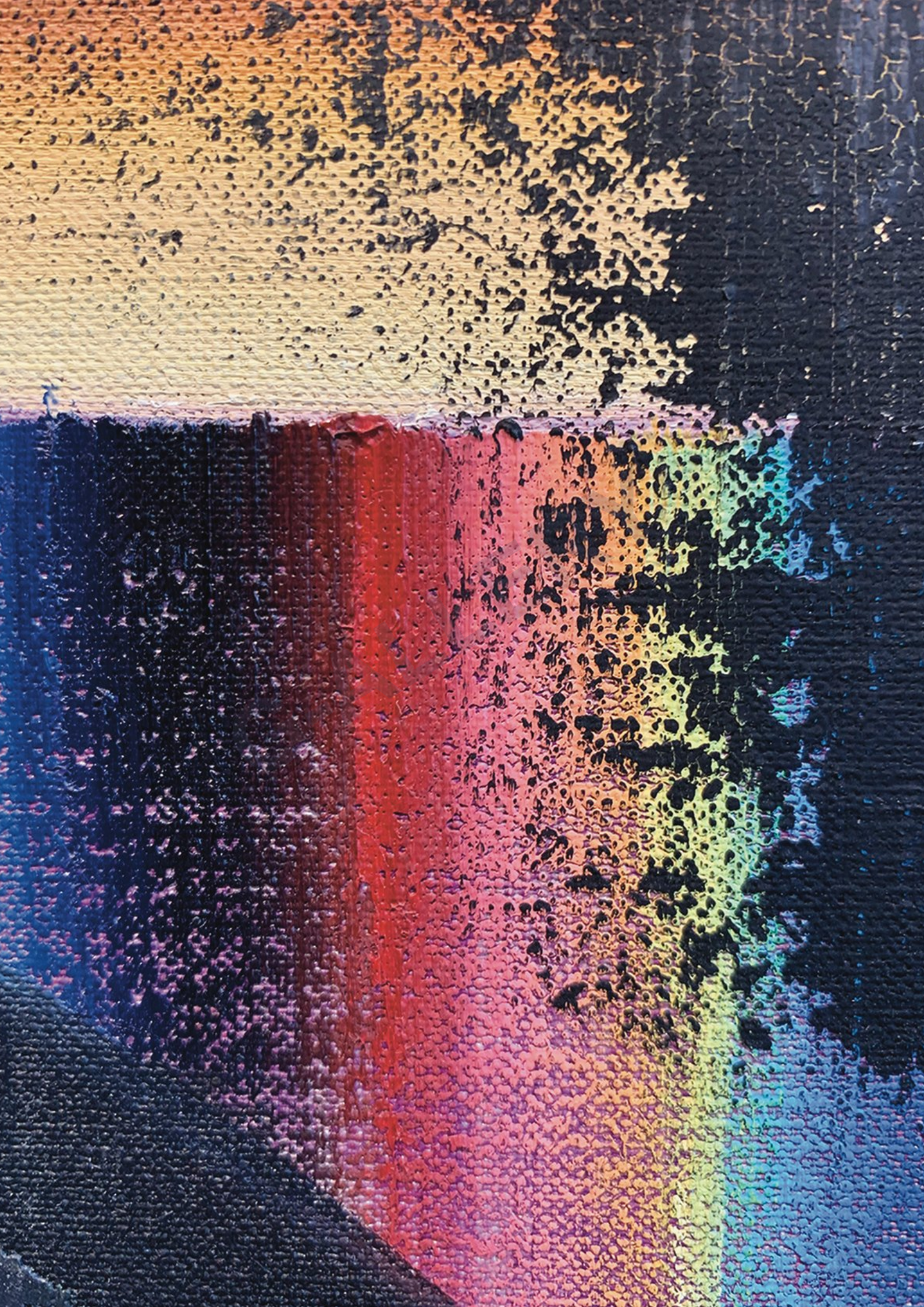
Justin Bower



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Justin Bower

PAINTINGS

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2026

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A Sustained Encounter

A face can be recognised in an instant. A painting asks what happens after recognition. Justin Bower holds these two kinds of attention together: the rapid identification of a human presence and the slower examination of a surface that continually unsettles it. A head becomes a field of competing structures; a seated body seems to occupy several positions at once. Yet the figure remains insistently present.

This volume brings paintings, close views and studio photographs into a sequence designed for looking back as well as forward. The movement from an entire work to a detail is especially important. At one distance, a passage resembles an interruption in an electronic image. At another, it reveals the pressure of a brush, the resistance of canvas and the meeting of distinct colours. The book follows that exchange between image and material.

Five contributions from the 2015 catalogue Justin Bower: Thresholds accompany new editorial writing. They retain their individual voices and their historical setting. Read beside the paintings gathered here, they open a continuing conversation about the body, perception and technological life. The purpose of this publication is to give that conversation room: room for sustained attention, for disagreement, and for the particular intelligence of painting.

Images of the Present

Painting, perception and the divided figure

Justin Bower's paintings make the relationship between the body and its image difficult to settle. Eyes multiply, facial contours slip and the apparent integrity of a head gives way to overlapping fragments. Recognition nevertheless persists. We continue to see a person, even while the painting denies us a single, stable account of that person's appearance. This tension gives the work its particular force: the human figure remains legible without becoming secure.

The questions raised by these paintings extend beyond the likeness of an individual sitter. What relationship exists between embodied experience and the images through which we present ourselves? Does an identity remain coherent as it passes through different systems of representation? Bower's figures make multiplicity visible. Their fractured construction suggests that the conditions of identity belong as much to a shared environment as to a private interior life.

Despite their interruptions and doublings, the figures often sustain a remarkably steady gaze. This composure complicates the agitation surrounding them. The surface appears to move while the subject holds its position; eyes that ought to anchor a face become sources of uncertainty. Looking is therefore reciprocal. We examine the image, but the persistence of the gaze also makes us conscious of our own attention.

Bower has described the digital as an environment in which to reconsider the human subject. In his 2015 interview with Jorge Perezchica, he connected his practice to the experience of having lived both before and after the spread of the internet. He also identified technological control and individual autonomy as

continuing concerns. That account locates the work within lived historical change, rather than treating its electronic associations as a decorative vocabulary. [1]

In the paintings, no device needs to be depicted for a technological condition to become perceptible. Repeated bands, grids and small rectangular interruptions can evoke the organisation of a display or the partial transmission of a signal. These associations are invitations to interpretation. The painted fragments are not readable code, and their resemblance to an interface does not exhaust their function. They also divide space, interrupt a contour and redirect the eye.

The digitally inflected appearance can obscure a decisive material fact: these images are made in paint. Modelling, sharply bounded planes and passages of loose colour coexist on the same support. A fragment may describe flesh while also displaying the action that formed it. The work draws much of its intensity from this double status. We read an image, then find ourselves looking at a mark; the mark becomes a figure again without surrendering its material presence.

The distinction matters in a culture where an image can circulate independently of the object from which it was made. A reproduction communicates the arrangement of colour and form, but changes the scale and suppresses aspects of the painted surface. Bower's work is attentive to that interval. Its resemblance to a mediated image is produced by a process whose physical evidence remains available to a viewer standing before the canvas.

Geometric order provides a recurring counterweight to the body. Fine stripes, patterned fields and schematic enclosures establish a measured space against which the figure seems to shift. A comparison with Frank Stella clarifies the different tasks such structures can perform. Stella's Black Paintings emerged in the late 1950s; the Aluminum paintings of 1960 introduced his first shaped canvases, linking their edges to the organisation of their surfaces. In Bower's rectangular paintings, geometry instead enters into a sustained conflict with depicted volume. This is a formal comparison, not a claim that he follows Stella's programme. [2]

Francis Bacon offers another, more explicit point of contact. Bower named Bacon among his influences in the Perezchica interview. The connection is particularly suggestive in the seated figures: a chair, a shallow enclosure and a body whose boundaries will not hold. Bower's sharply differentiated colours and multiplied structures, however, give that instability their own register. The body can look divided between incompatible visual systems rather than displaced by a single force. [1]

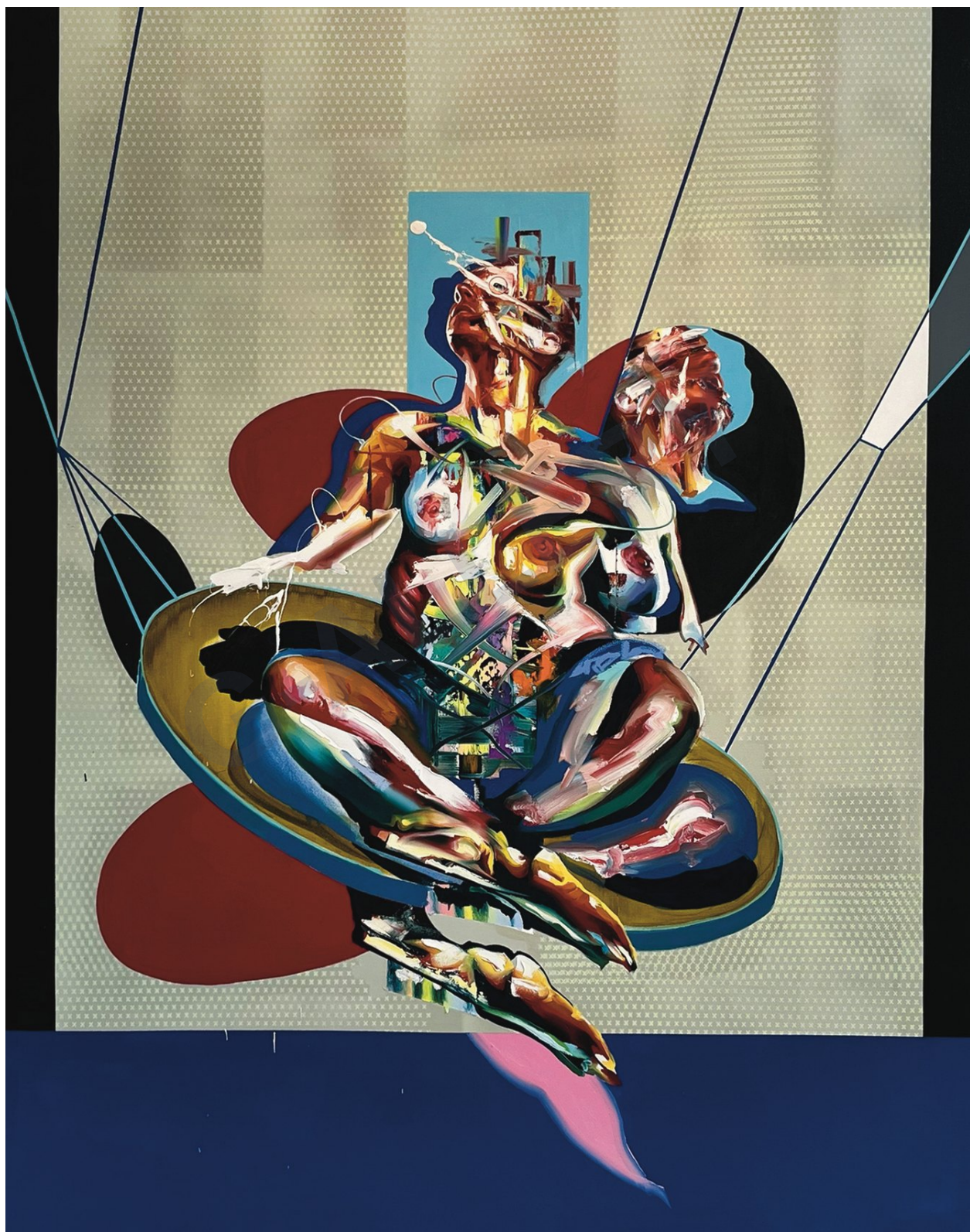
The modern history of abstraction also provides a language for considering these backgrounds. In the supplied gallery essay, Malevich's Black Square appears as a point of comparison for a pictorial field freed from descriptive space. The analogy is most useful when kept open. Bower's black-and-white structures may recall the economy of a code, yet they remain visibly embedded in a painting with a figure, a scale and a complex distribution of attention. They neither function as binary information nor announce the disappearance of representation.

Similarly, the sense of movement does not depend on a literal sequence of events. Several positions appear to coexist. A doubled eye or displaced mouth can suggest a change occurring without a clear before and after. The viewer supplies movement by attempting to reconcile the alternatives. What looks initially like the breakdown of an image becomes an unusually exact way of organising the duration of looking.

The phrase Disrupted Realism is useful here as a description of a tension. Recognisable bodies and spaces remain, but recognition is interrupted from within. Bower's paintings do not simply illustrate a world changed by technology. They give that change a sensory form while preserving the capacity of paint to exceed an explanation. Their subject is also the viewer's work: finding a person in the fragments, testing that recognition, and returning to the surface when certainty fails.

The Body and Its Enclosure

A seated figure, a measured space, a boundary that will not hold.



1970

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm



1971

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm

The Body and Its Enclosure

The works titled 1970, 1971 and 1972 establish a conversation through repeated structures. Each places a seated figure within a shallow, strongly articulated setting. Diagonals cross the field, angular frames organise the space, and a band of blue separates the lower edge from the figure above. These recurring elements allow small differences to become consequential.

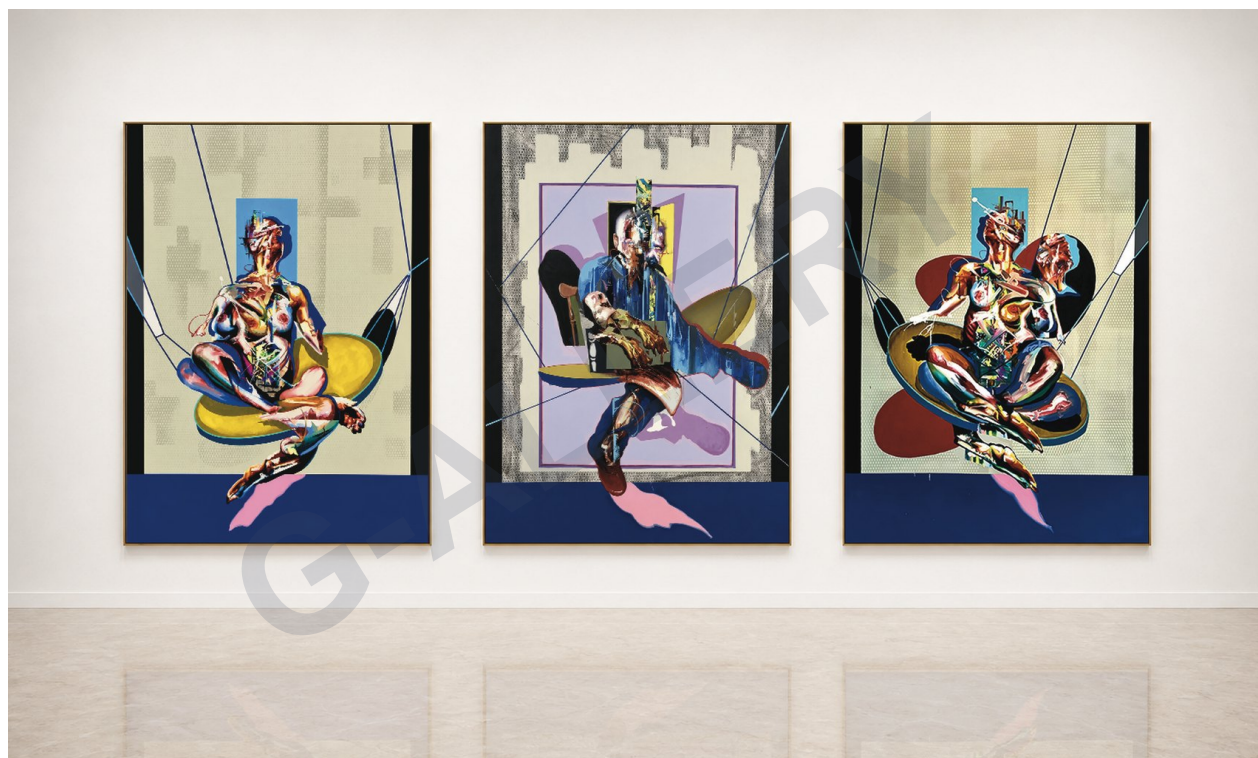
In 1970, a mass of limbs and coloured planes gathers around the seat while the head appears to divide. The chair provides an intelligible support, but it cannot make the body entirely coherent. In 1971, the lilac field and compressed upright figure shift the balance toward enclosure. The yellow seat in 1972 opens a different relationship between the figure and the surrounding pattern. Seen together, the paintings make repetition an instrument of comparison.

The numerical titles are treated here as titles, not as dates of execution. The sequence invites a visual reading rather than a biographical chronology. Its central question is spatial: how can a body inhabit a setting when its own limits remain unsettled? The straight line promises definition; the painted figure repeatedly exceeds it.



1972

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm



1970 / 1971 / 1972

Installation view supplied by G-ALLERY.



Embryonic Love

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm



Untitled

Oil on canvas · 214 × 183 cm



II

The Divided Face

Recognition persists inside the fragment.

Introduction

Andi Campognone

What makes a painting good? is a question I am often asked by both the novice enthusiast and the seasoned collector. It's a question that sometimes becomes tired amid the proliferating artists who are able to, even with expert skill, imitate the innovations of their predecessors. Moreover, depending on what a viewer values and individually takes from the painting, you can find "good" in almost anything. But the answer is different for a museum, which has a responsibility as steward, not tastemaker.

For one, the work should be groundbreaking: the artist has the insight to see where painting is either going, or should go, and his technical ability gives that vision the momentum to become a full-fledged movement. In that sense, the painting tells the story of its time. This may involve revitalizing the inert ideas and techniques of the past, but the painting should nevertheless represent its own time. This requires that the painting be a product of both craft and concept. It is neither a brilliant idea poorly communicated, nor a demonstration of skill with nothing new to say.

Second, the work must be something that can be said only in paint. How does it keep paint relevant? As art is increasingly becoming a business of concepts executed by machine, the work should maintain a fidelity to its own chemical structure and the physical and intimate nature of its application. A painting's smell (maybe from oil or turpentine), its texture, and other sensory aspects specific to paint, are essential to appreciating the art, however far advanced the underlying concept.

Justin Bower, who has renewed painterly techniques into a dissection of philosophical questions about technology, meets these criteria. It is with great pleasure that the Museum of Art & History presents this exhibition and the accompanying monograph.

From Justin Bower: Thresholds (2015). Historical text.



Thresholds

Museum of Art & History, Lancaster. Exhibition view.

Justin Bower: A Fractured Self

G. James Daichendt

Combining the raw power of abstract expressionism with a digital toolset, the work of Justin Bower simultaneously promotes an instability that is disheartening and traumatic. The painterly surface of each image is lavish as colors and textures cross-pollinate and juxtapose one another to create a hypnotic and frenzied experience. Add an element of optical art and the layers of Bower's art radiate off the canvas and provoke a number of notions of what it means to be human and how we see ourselves in this technology-laden era.

Portraiture dates back to ancient civilizations and its purpose has ranged from representing gods and politicians to lay people. The aim of such images could be political, historical, and/or personal, yet the mode of delivery was fairly consistent for centuries. These works of art either had to be seen in person or could be reproduced via photograph in the modern era. The Internet age changes this radically as smart phones and virtual reality impact how we engage humans and their likeness. It's this delivery system that seems to filter Bower's paintings from being anything but ordinary. The seemingly regular portraits, stare into the distance but the transmission has been severally distorted. Not only is the structure of the image broken down, we appear to travel through their skin as properties of their flesh peels away and distorts reality.

The glitch of a computer screen is writ large on Bower's work as these faces fail to come across clearly. Flashes of normality fight distortion. Reminiscent of late British painter Francis Bacon, Bower's semi abstract figures are set against nondescript backgrounds yet they are full of anguish and disfiguration. While Bacon bordered on the grotesque and his subjects writhe in pain, Bower's portraits are strangely complacent despite the visual chaos.

The scientific community has also changed the way we think about being human. In the 2000s, decoding human genomes, which is a complete set of genetic information for humans, became a reality. Reducing the person to a series of formulas, the implied accuracy and organized sections of Bower's work contrasts

the violent brushstrokes and aggressive motions. Whether these patterns and background are codes or reference the current landscape of research, the portraits are oddly distant from these contexts and float toward the viewer.

In a series of images entitled Spaceboy II, IV, and VI, a young man stares out blankly from the canvas. His eyes multiply into four, and his nose shifts in a circular motion. It's as though someone was adjusting a camera and captured various positions similar to cubism before it comes under control. The boy's head is then outlined with an otherworldly blue that glows in comparison to the otherwise dark background. Whether the image is materializing or dematerializing is uncertain, regardless, aspects of what is underneath is revealed in whips and lashes of color. Like bits of information flying through cyber space they are unreadable but detectable.

Our brains are wired with a cluster of nerves that enable us to remember facial differences. It only requires a minimal amount of information, so within a few milliseconds the brain can make predictions and compare a face with prior knowledge. Bower disrupts this process through his abstraction and it requires us to slow down when engaged. The elements of the surface that are present and allow for a sense of normality before the artist carves and digs into their skin to reveal powerful edges and robust bursts of color. The transmission of the facial features is not working the way we do it everyday when viewing his work and it causes discomfort and uncertainty, as we are unable to place these individuals quickly.

The titled work Something Solid Under all That is Now points towards Bower's inclination to pull away the surface. The portrait floats in front of a grid and an ordered universe. The rules are consistent as repetitive strokes are applied on various layers. An icy blue builds the basic form like a synthesizer and the humanistic characteristics rush forward. The dualism is not neat but the cross over is apparent through color and direction.

The size and focus on Bower's work recalls Willem de Kooning's powerful female figures from the mid-century. The human sized canvases dwarf the viewer as the heads are proportionally large and carry a sense of power and importance. The consistent presence of the Op Art movement and its visually chaotic effects further Bower's spatial game that goes beyond a formula or facial recognition. The humanness is there and the artist appears to fight for the invisible that resides in tension.



Something Solid Under All That is Now

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



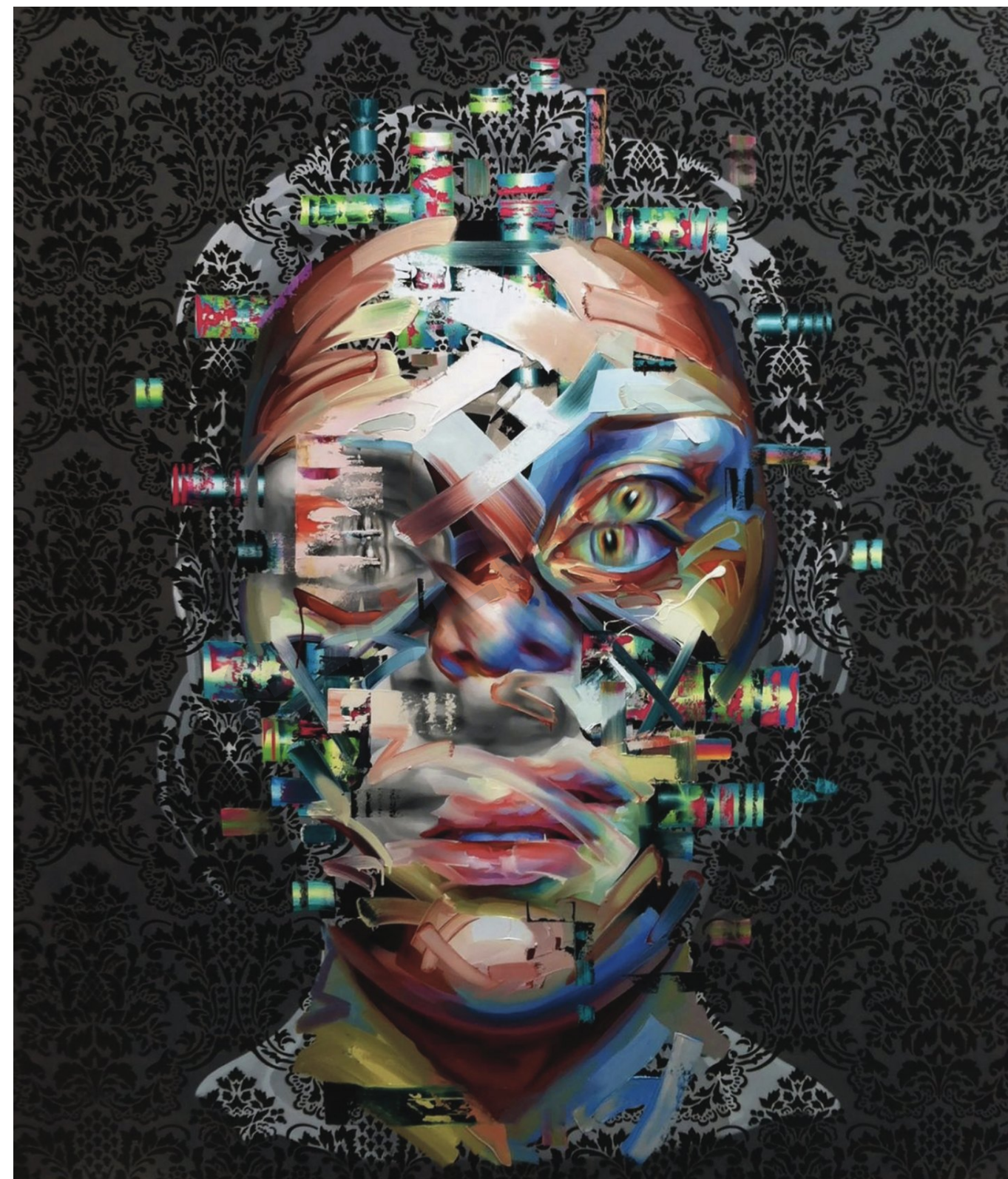
Clone II

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



Code: No Code

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



Heaven Dimmed

Oil on canvas · 214 × 183 cm

Justin Bower: Poet of the Singularity

Shana Nys Dambrot

Justin Bower has an unmistakable style of recombinant refinement and prismatic, cybernautic lyricism, centered around monumental portraits that resemble the gods worshipped by a future race of human/robot hybrids, their gestural, architectonic armatures pulled apart to reveal the form taken by consciousness. Now this significant mid-career survey examines his work of the past five years - arguably the most salient of his studio career.

This assembly of majestic works from 2010-2015 takes core samples across the terrain of those years, chronicling the reign of the colossal heads, from their early, grotesquely protean and emotionally visceral maturity, later becoming more genteel and alluring, all the while in variable contrapuntal harmonics with the energetic flow of complex, abstract grounds through periods of alternately high-tech, painterly, kaleidoscopic, auric, geometric, psychedelic, palimpsestic, planar, intensely patterned variations on abstract fever dreams. As for the faces, the gods, they seem mostly to smile now, though with the ambivalently wry challenge of a doe-eyed Mona Lisa, in an idealized pout, at the towering scale of Mount Olympus or IMAX.

The illusion of double exposures and the choreography of fractal refractions is executed in huge fat wet brushstrokes deploying pure supersaturated pigments like scaled-up crosshatching. As though the bone structure were on the outside, they pulse and stay crisp even as they riotously intermingle. In earlier works the teeth are exposed in glistening hyperrealism, with the result of zooming the viewer's focus to

the interior space of the mouth, even as the rest of the head threatens to blow apart into splinters, piercing the backgrounds of solid colors that set off the rest by dissonance -ruby and teal, lavender and pistachio, and other holographic oil slicks. In the works with patterned backgrounds, stencils, arabesques, interference stripes, bubbles, grids, neon halos, and a panoply of stripes are hyper-collaged in woven layers, as maximalist as the heads themselves, but always in a counterintuitive syntax that amplifies dissonance chords into a symphony.

And there is a certain operatic classicism to Bower's sense of scale and style of hyperactive abstraction; but he figured out a way to press this into the service of figurative portraiture. Despite this allegorical premise, all the energy is in the technique, the facture, the hand of the artist, expressing a performative presence that is both somber and meticulous, fractal and rapturous. Like each head is a collapsing opal mine, like individual Big Bangs creating prismatic molecular universes, Bower's heroic, violently surreal physiognomies hover like a death stars shot through with rainbows.

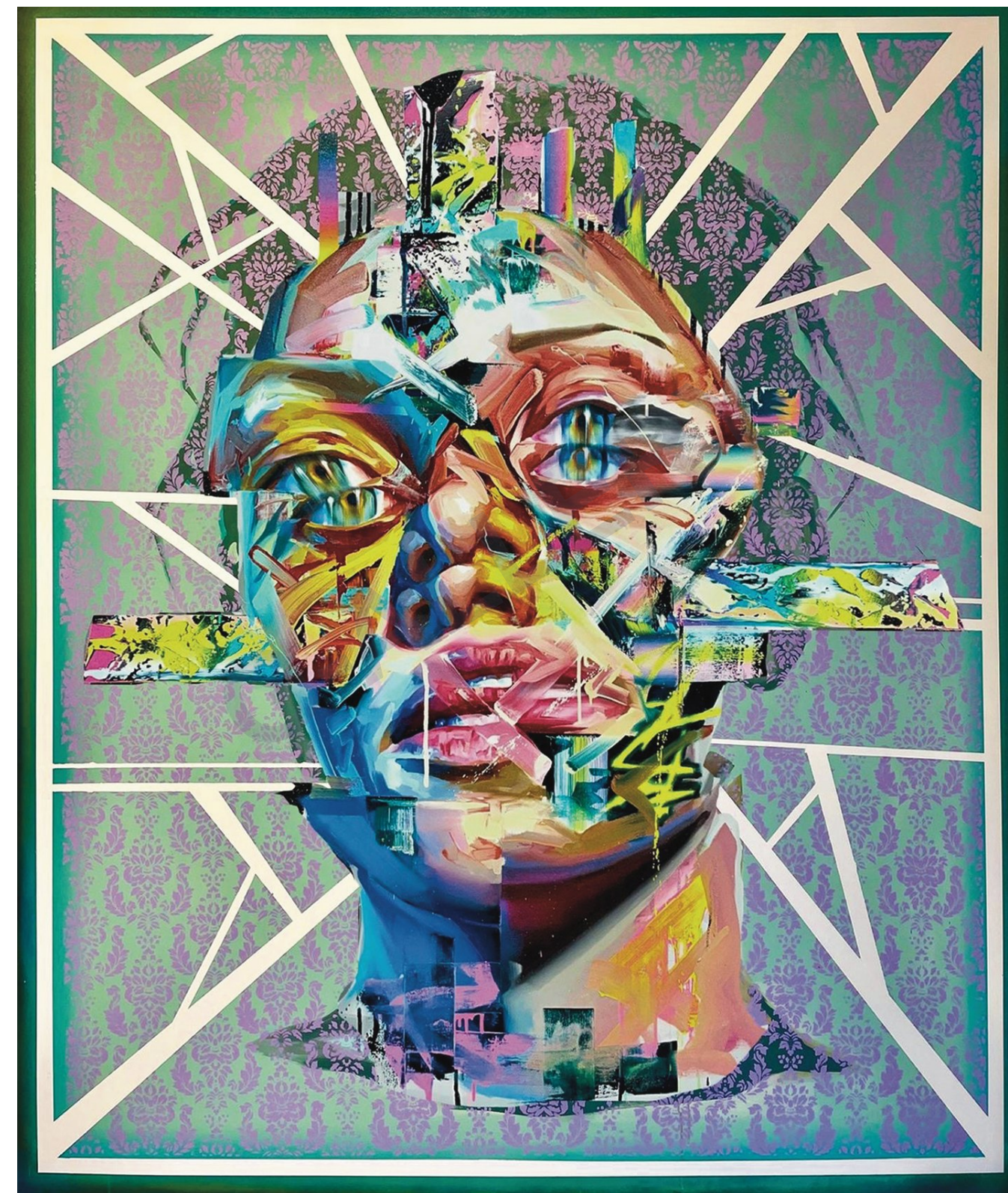
The titles do their share as well in moving the story forward by carrying germane suggestions for interpretation like: Feedback Loop, Vivisection, Decoder Debaser, Code No Code, Spaceboy, Acid Test, Illuminati, The Systemic Archaeologist, In Pursuit of New Pathologies, The Inevitable Possibility of Holding Several Positions at Once, The Dissolution (Study), A Divine Prosthesis, Replicant, Deep Belief Networks, Ontological Hygiene, Cleanliness, and Godliness. These linguistic breadcrumbs place the viewer in the overlapping realms of neurology, technology, and consciousness; the paintings both show and tell this as they vibrate like Op-Art or laser beams, one feels the anatomical eye as it physically engages in the act of seeing, sparking an internal dialectic, noticing the quality of attention -merging all platforms of perception into a single channel, and finally projecting it back onto the classical art historical touchstone that is the human face.

From Justin Bower: Thresholds (2015). Historical text.



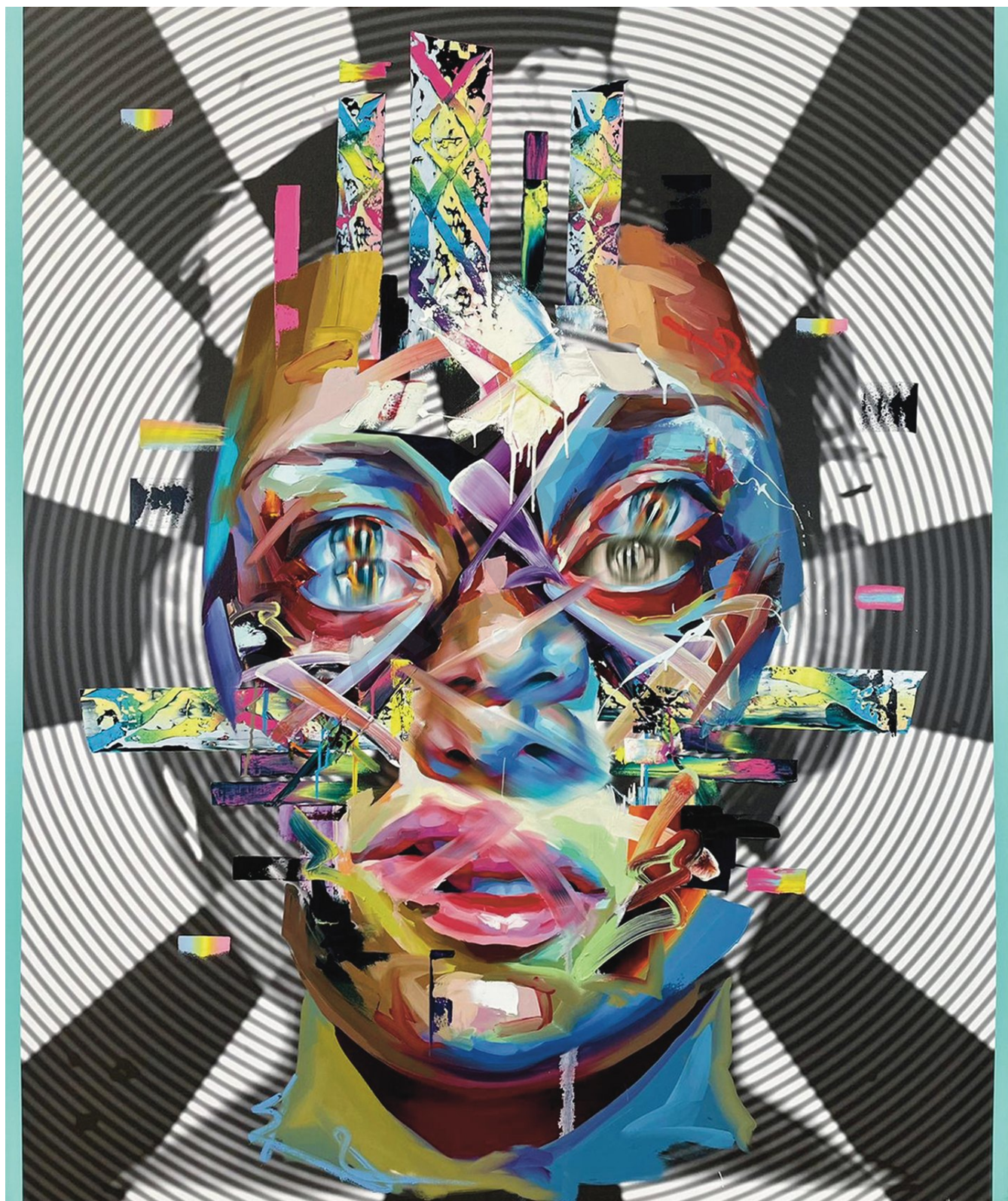
Magician

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



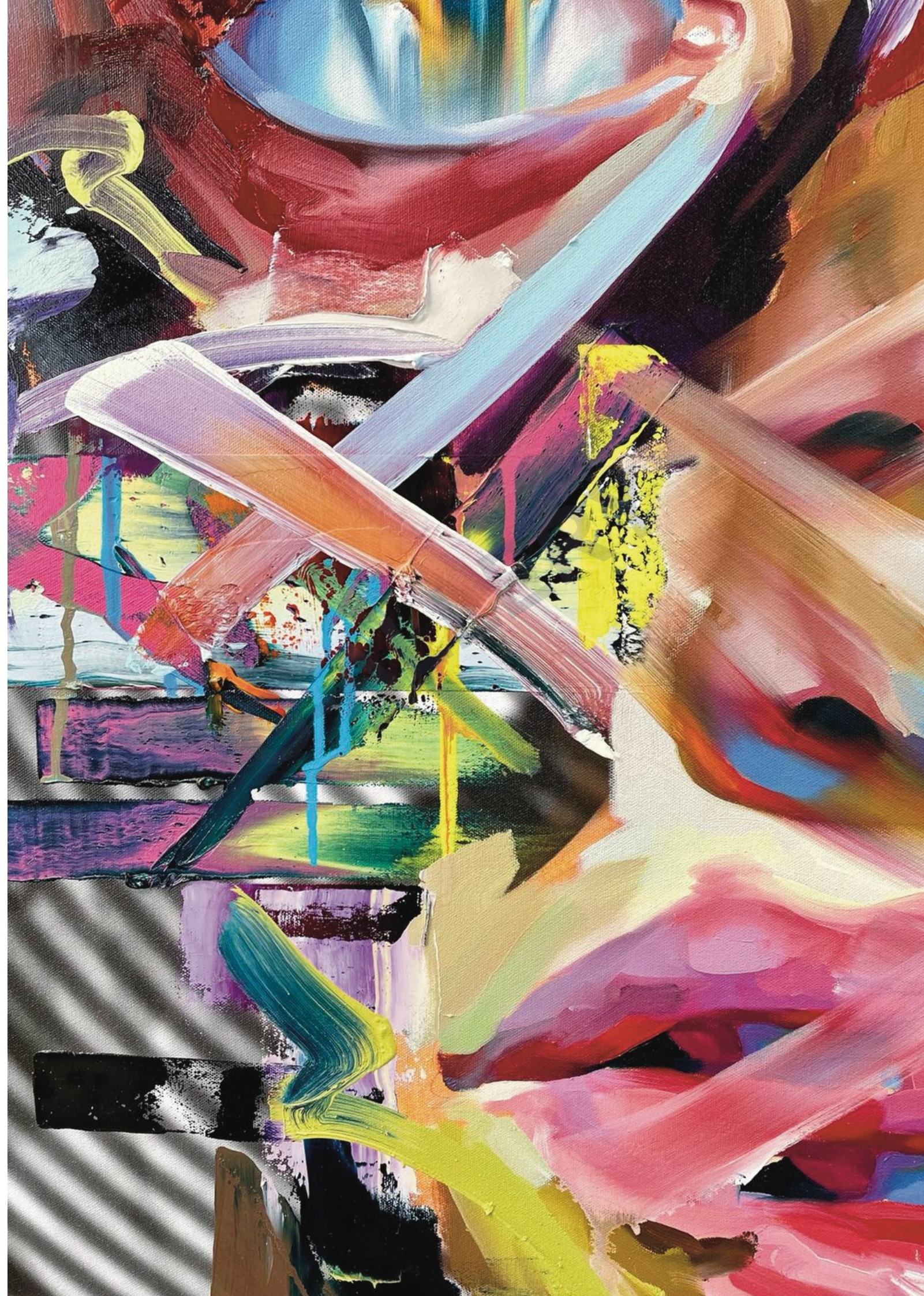
Mesmerized III

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



Induced Panic Control

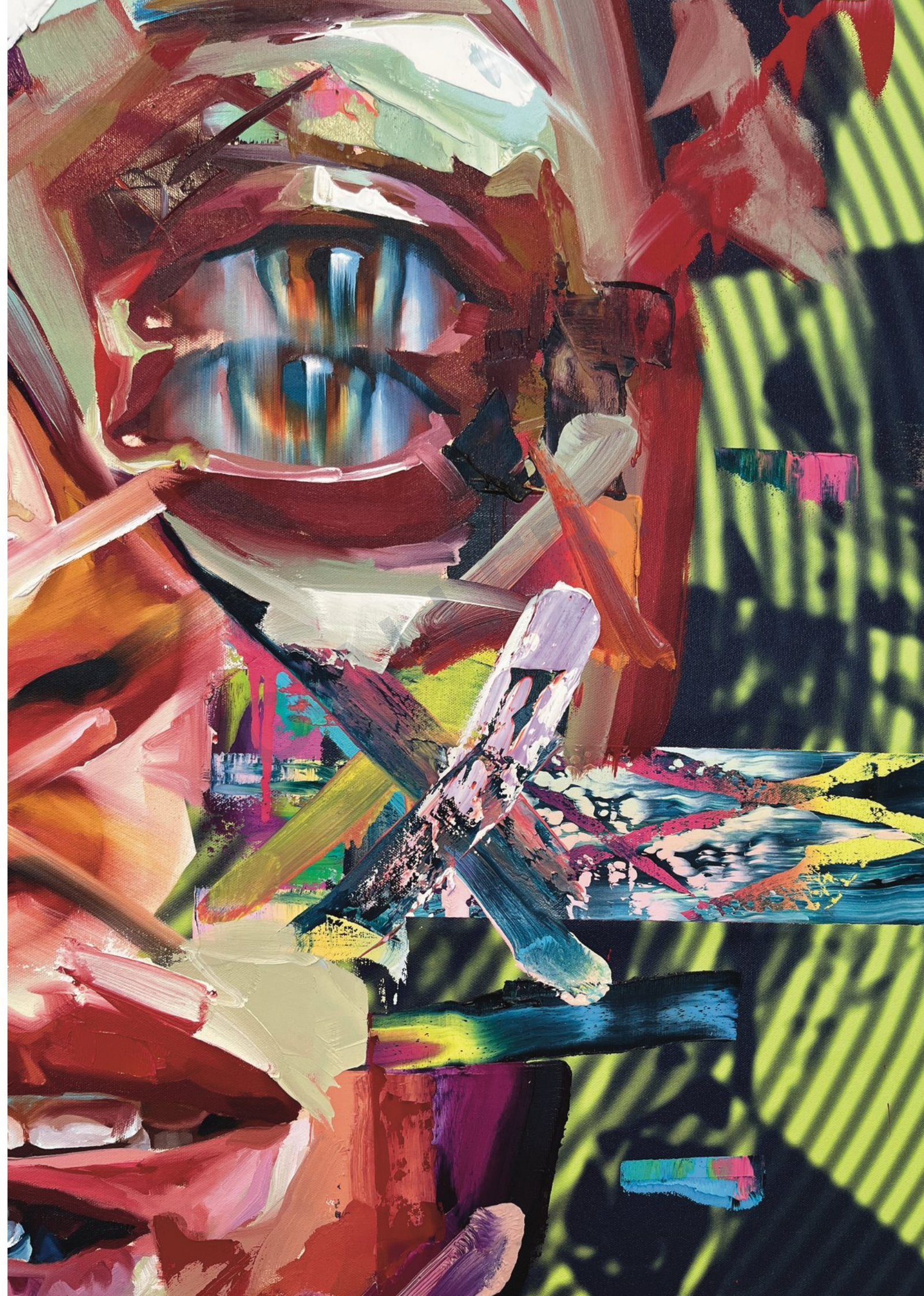
Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm





Necessary Injuries

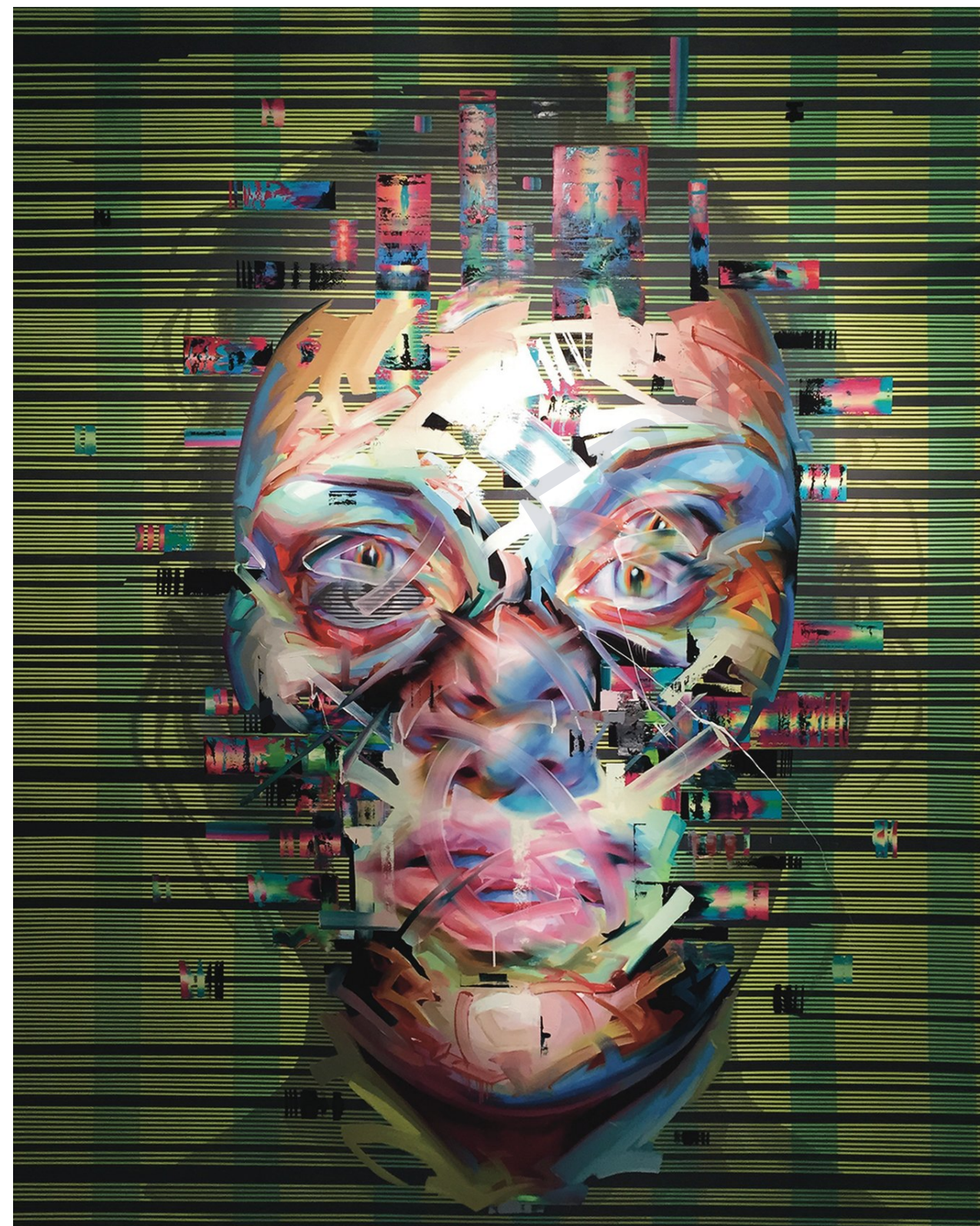
Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm





Psyche

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



Moment of Collision

Oil on canvas · 335 × 275 cm

Essay

Cooper Johnson

"Don't ever tell anyone anything. If you do, you start missing everybody." - Holden Caulfield

The frightening thing about being ripped apart, bloodshot, and discretized into a decaying mass of sinew and neon static fading into digital space is that we understand it almost too naturally. That harrowing question about fragmented identity and disintegrated consciousness can be conveyed through paint. Yet this is the effect of the polymath, Justin Bower. We're left with shrapnel wounds and seeing double.

It's easy to overlook the underlying functions of consciousness because they are so automatic: when you see an image, you don't need to know, or even realize, that the brain is flipping upright the visual information it just received from the eye; when your body needs to fight off infection, you don't need to instruct where blood should rush. Your mind, too, is an electrical and chemical system of discrete parts, governed by an archaic and reiterated code -calculated to make sense of, or make useful, the infinite inputs of sensory and chemical information. Everything you have, or ever will, experience has a physical counterpart in your brain, and you are its sum-total of calculations.

Our bodies have learned, over many gradual refinements, to grunt, to use symbols and language, to mass produce them, and to instantaneously share information anywhere in the world. And that basic trend of the mind reaching out is continuing in technological development: there are prosthetics that can send tactile information to the brain, mechanical arms that can be controlled by brainwaves, and software that can roughly recreate the images in your head. Literally, the electrical components of our brain are suffusing into an external network, where the act of the mind spreading out is, by Bower's paintings, in an ambiguous state of assembly and disintegration.

There is a definite, maybe even primal, urge to avoid the solitude of consciousness, but at the same time, the constraints on our methods of communication are the very boundaries that shape our identity. What will we be losing if technology allows us to tell everyone everything?

For every looming question, Bower conjures bodily anxiety out of the intangible. The experience of our internal identities shattering and suffusing with an external electrical network is something we feel right as we look at a Bower painting - like it's hardwired - even if we are not aware of its philosophical framework. By exploiting the "code" of our own bodies, Bower can make a digital event sensorial, and the philosophical question visceral.

Many of the visual elements in Bower's portraits play off the mind's natural function to resolve chaotic visual information, and give multiple "explanations" for your brain to frantically alternate between. There is, of course, the "glitch": the disruption of the mind's process for meshing two optic sources. There's also the mental ambivalence from the inability to place the swarming decay of Bower's subjects in representational or abstract space. Mistaking brushstroke for sinew, our minds keep switching through plausible interpretations, sparking and flickering like every circuit never finds certainty.

More interesting, though, are Bower's fragments of colored static, which, in both their number and deliberate rectangular shape, resemble the myriad interfaces we have with electronic and digital networks. While they look like marks on a Gerhard Richter painting, they curiously suggest certain qualities of (the perhaps diametrically-opposed) Pop Art: bright colored backgrounds with a black, high contrast image overlaid. Even the loose repetition of these marks resembles sequenced frames in unraveled film, but at the same time, they're still static, purely abstract. Of course, these "screens" are not literal, they don't represent anything. But our minds want them to.

In the tangle of brushwork, blur and sinew, Bower's subjects are being pulled in infinite directions but don't go anywhere. This sense of writhing, hyper-directional movement - almost like drowning - seems too familiar: for every interaction with a computer or phone screen, for every extension of our minds into an external system, we give up some physical movement for the infinitesimal. Fewer and fewer of our day-to-day tasks require actual get-yourself-out-the-door movement (which makes having a body even more of a cumbersome, outdated chore). They're replaced by interfacing with a screen. Shopping, banking, entertainment, socializing, even dating, are now done by rapid twitches of the eye and flicks of the finger. We're the sum of infinitesimal movements, swaying through the hypertext of the digital earth.

As if it were some natural response to fear the unknown, there are many who automatically oppose either new technology, or how it changes us. We've all heard, or even muttered, that clichéd criticism: "everyone's too busy on their phone to look

up and experience life." That communication and technology are so instantaneous and accessible that we are losing our attention spans, we are becoming more vain, we are letting our face-to-face interpersonal skills fade. But maybe these are only important concerns to us now, based on the old models of communication. Maybe these don't mean anything in the future we're drifting into.

One of Bower's sustaining strengths as an artist is that he imbues the viewer with questions and experience, rather than offer the safety of a premature explanation. For as much as Bower's subjects are in a state of disintegration, they are just as much in a state of assembly. The human experience, according to Bower, is more about the instantaneous change, rather than beginning or end states. Perhaps the fear of technology "ruining" our present identity is something best explained by David Foster Wallace, who noticed a similar reason for students not appreciating the humor of Franz Kafka:

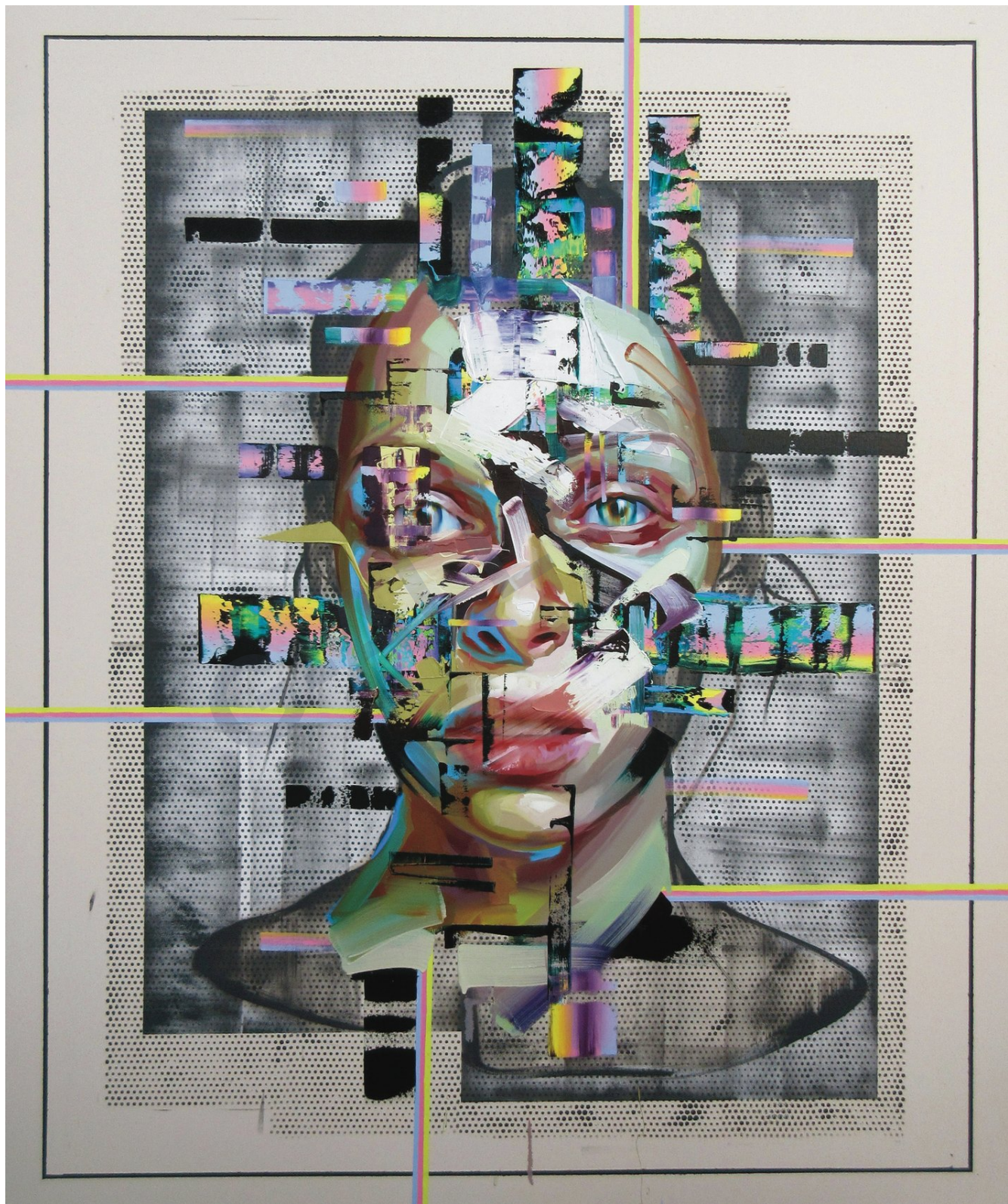
It's not that students don't "get" Kafka's humor but that we've taught them to see humor as something you get - the same way we've taught them that a self is something you just have. No wonder they cannot appreciate the really central Kafka joke: that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home.

If there is horror in Justin Bower's portraits, it's not necessarily from the external harms of technology itself, but the sequences in our own code that have been stitched in from trillions of iterations of trauma and self-preservation - traced all the way back to the first single-celled violence. Compulsory mechanisms for the preservation of genetic material might best be demonstrated at the "fight-or-flight" level, but there are more subtle and varied functions - ancient or not - lurking in that dark, labyrinthine hovel of our inner selves. And as we expand out and interface with new technology, there is something unsettling about what might be lured out, and possibly amplified - something about us that is unpredictable, out of our control. The same might be true for our motivations in creating the technology to begin with. As Jenny Holzer might put it: "Protect me from what I want."

However far along we are in suffusing into an external network, into breaking down the historical barriers of communication, into being able to tell everybody anything, the day will come -whether it's tomorrow or in some distant hypothetical or dystopia - when it's yourself that you start missing.

From Justin Bower: Thresholds (2015). Historical text.





Tabula Rasa

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



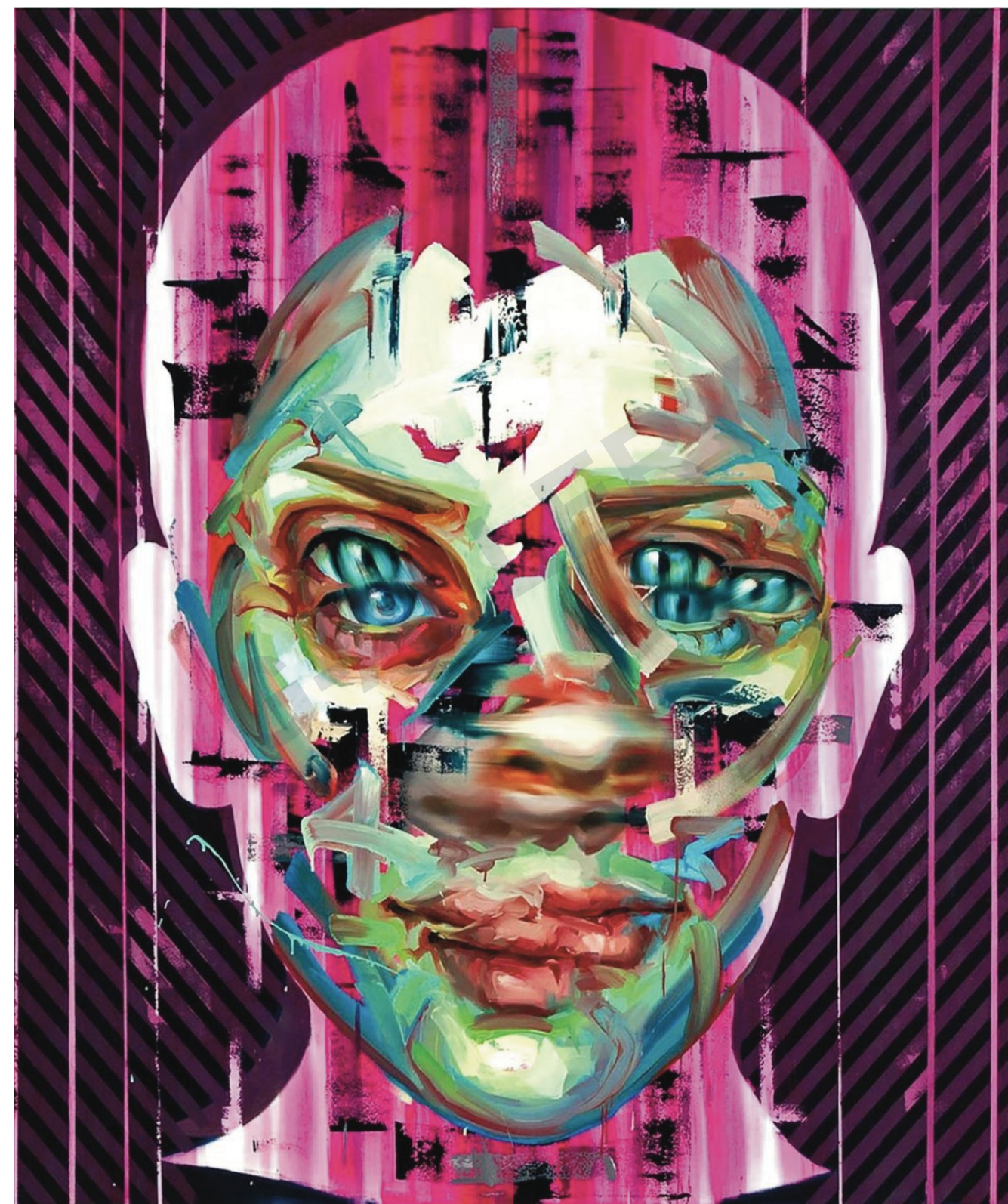
Slither Gazer

Oil on canvas · 122 × 92 cm



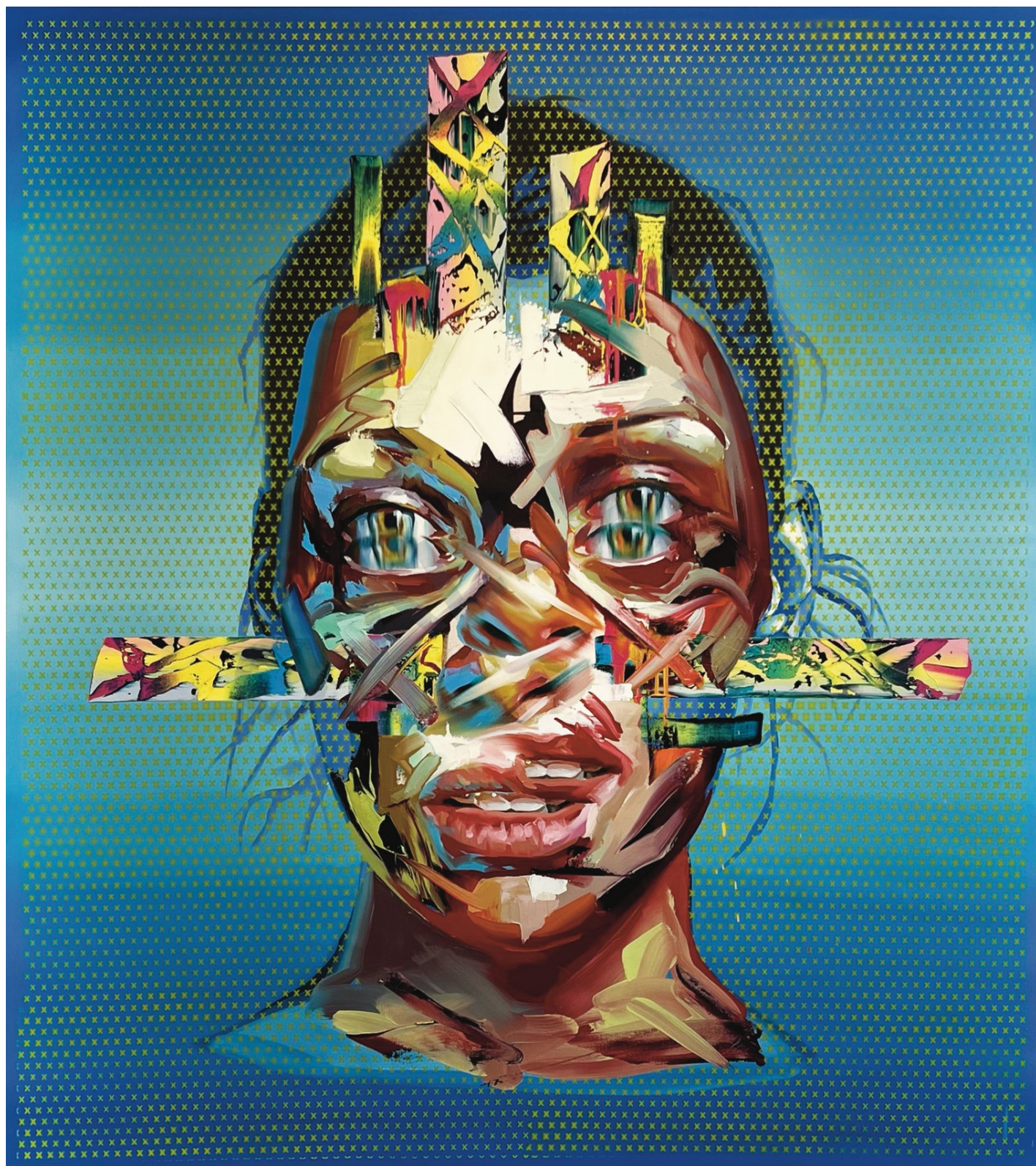
Son Stroke II

Oil on canvas · 135 × 122 cm



That Drug Machine 'aint Got no Soul

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm



Wise Bloody Study

Oil on canvas · 130 × 120 cm



Essay

David Pagel

The people in Justin Bower's portraits are monstrous. Each of the L.A. painter's mutant humans makes the nameless monster Dr. Frankenstein sutured together from limbs snatched from graves and organs stolen from undertakers look warm and cuddly— like a big, lumbering cartoon character that might scare kids on Halloween but lacks the power to terrify grownups like ourselves, who have grown so used to so many news stories filled with so many more real-world nightmares that the fictitious misadventures of a nineteenth-century scientist's experiment to extend life seem quaint and touching-not quite cute, but far from horrific, gut-wrenching and mind-bending, which they were, when the twenty-one-year-old Mary Shelley (1797-1851) penned *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*. For those without Wikipedia at their fingertips, "Prometheus" means "forethought." He is also the Greek deity who created humanity and was its greatest benefactor, until Zeus punished him for stealing fire from Olympus and giving it to mere mortals. The jealous god chained Prometheus to a rock, where an eagle bit into his flesh and devoured his liver for eternity.

Empathy and risk-and the consequences of their absence-link the stories of Prometheus and Dr. Frankenstein. These sentiments and actions also drive Bower's art, which taps into the ancient myth and the Gothic novel by bringing the psychological complexity and moral ambiguity of both out of the past and up to the minute, into a world of instantaneous digital communication, where the pyrotechnics of Hollywood special effects seem to be overrunning the imagination's capacity to have any impact on its surroundings as well as the intellect's capacity to make sense of the chaos. Both types of technology seem to have changed what it means to be human. And that is where Bower's art enters the picture: All of his works invite all of us to ponder the nature of human identity and to wonder about the imagination's place in knowing what that might be. More important, they take

DAVID PAGEL

us fairly far down that path, perhaps not quite past the point of no return but in clear view of it.

The people in his portraits may be monstrous, but they are also just like us: More or less ordinary individuals who have access to technology that makes us more powerful than we may have ever imagined yet more vulnerable to its pitfalls and consequences than we might like. Age, race and gender do not distinguish Bower's sitters, nor does fame, ignominy or newsworthiness. Anonymity sweeps such features away, leaving each of us to deal with the people in his paintings howsoever we can: with all of our wits, with whatever we may have gleaned from our previous experiences and, most significantly, with no easy answers served up by the artist.

That's a challenge. Not one of the supersized faces in any of Bower's paintings is easy to look at. Torn flesh, sliced musculature and peeled skin are just the beginning. Nerves are exposed. Tear ducts laid bare. Eyelids removed. Pupils dilated. Ears reconfigured. Nostrils turned inside out. Lips stretched beyond bounds. Tongues doubled. And more. Lots more. The pain that throbs, pounds and pulsates throughout the deliciously sensual surfaces of Bower's vivid pictures is palpable. Attacking the senses-and the body's most sensitive organs for sensing it-agony screams from his paintings, which, truth be told, remain, like all paintings, utterly, resoundingly silent. That silence echoes the aural dynamics of *The Scream*, which Edvard Munch (1863-1944) painted in 1893 (and again in 1910). The misshapen figure in that iconic picture presses its palms to cover its ears and runs right at viewers, its distorted body and contorted facial features efficiently conveying the silent misery of modern life-and the impossibility of blocking out the voices within. Leaving details ambiguous, specifics mysterious and context indeterminate, Munch opens his little painting to big ideas. Existent existential dread, and the crippling despair that often accompanies it, come to the forefront-and don't go away.

Something similar happens with Bower's paintings. To get a feel for their atmosphere, and the psychological wallop they deliver, imagine a plastic surgeon halfway through a nose job, facelift and chin enhancement when the patient has a change of heart, gets up, walks out of the operating room and then steps into an

artist's studio and commissions the artist to paint his or her portrait. That captures some of the horrific, even torturous mutations to which Bower's sitters have been subjected while it bears witness to the calm dignity of their demeanors, which are riveting-and disturbing-precisely because they reveal none of the pain their subjects must be feeling.

Initially, it seems as if each is still under the influence of a hefty dose of industrial-strength anesthetics or large-animal tranquilizers. The diabolical cocktails of ill-gotten pharmaceuticals Dr. Hannibal Lecter used for his own nefariously masochistic purposes come to mind. But Bower's sitters look lucid, neither numbed by sensation-blocking drugs nor clueless to their states of extreme dissection. The preposterousness of the situation fuels the weirdness of these paintings, whose vicious Realism is neither limited to the way the world looks nor bounded by the strictures of rationality. Instead, Bower's gargantuan portraits probe the charged territory where dreams and nightmares do their often dirty work, bringing unconscious and subconscious realities to the light of day by giving shape to what lurks beneath the surface of everyday life. The collision-and collusion-between agony and calm, horror and ordinariness, terror and blandness gives Bower's images their kick and consequence. It sets the stage for a tug-of-war showdown between inhumanity and compassion. It is particularly insidious because Bower's artistry insures that it plays out within the consciousness of each viewer-or at least those of us who are up to the challenge of confronting his paintings for what they are: mirrors that reveal realities many of us would rather not see.

It's not a pretty picture. The plastic-surgery scenario is the tip of an iceberg made up of gut-wrenching transformations that include but are not limited to genetic mutations, hallucinations (psychotic, pharmaceutical and otherwise), deformities (of a particularly advanced nature), and speech-slurring, world-spinning, falling-down drunkenness. Bower's portraits are potent because they do not settle for letting us stand back and observe the freak show from a safe distance. That's what the news does, ever since it has become a cycle of 24/7 info-tainment. The same is true of big-budget politics, its major players more entertaining, if less compelling, than the comedy shows that spoof them. Instead, Bowers makes

paintings that make you feel—in the pit of your stomach, as well as in the deepest recesses of your lizard brain that what is happening to the people in them is also happening to you. His anonymous portraits give chilling form to the queasy feeling of struggling desperately and daily-to hold it all together, particularly when the external and internal forces that tear everything asunder push us to the breaking point.

That connection is the point of Bower's art. In a world where it may no longer make sense to speak of hearts and souls, that point is the fulcrum on which his work pivots: the tipping point where empathy and risk come screaming into focus and nothing is what it once was.

That same sort of compassionate connection caused Prometheus to behave in ways that did not end well for him. Its absence led to tragedy, sadness and death for Dr. Frankenstein and his monster and just about everyone who crossed paths with them. Bower's paintings overlay the outcomes of the Greek myth and the Gothic novel, leaving viewers alone to figure out how things fit together—or fall apart—for ourselves.

A large part of the power of Bower's portraits resides in the fact that they begin with the conviction that art does not represent us by showing us what we look like. Fidelity to appearances is not a goal. That is cliché that contributed to the so-called crisis of representation in the 1990s and still plagues many works that deal with identity. In contrast, Bowers insists that art represents us in the same way that attorneys do: by serving our interests and defending us, tooth and nail, from our enemies. Working purposefully, sometimes ruthlessly, to make the world safe for us, art goes to great lengths to get the job done. Realistic depiction sometimes falls by the wayside. In Bower's hands, the selves that take shape are more expansive and fluid and linked, more than usual, to everything else out there: machines and beasts, technologies and sentiments, fantasies and realities. Uncertainty, conflict and confusion figure prominently. But without them, the possibilities would not be real. Bowers paints the future and the growing pains of getting there.



Impossible Escape Clause

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm





Paint at Close Range

A close view changes the terms of the encounter. The face that dominated the complete painting recedes, and a few centimetres of its construction become a terrain in their own right. Fine parallel lines meet a dragged stroke. A hard edge runs into a ragged deposit of colour. The woven support becomes visible through a thinner passage. None of these events needs to resolve into a recognisable feature to command attention.

The distinction between a painted interruption and an interrupted digital image is especially clear at this distance. What resembles a broken signal in reproduction has a boundary, a thickness and a relation to the material beneath it. Its position is particular. A mark may look provisional, yet its contact with neighbouring forms establishes an exact pictorial decision.

The detail photographs in this book are therefore more than enlargements of interesting motifs. They offer another mode of reading, in which the apparent speed of the image gives way to the duration of its making. The eye moves between the evidence of a hand and the suggestion of a system. This movement is central to the work's refusal to let either account become complete.

Returning from the detail to the entire painting, the figure appears differently. It has become a provisional agreement among marks that retain their independence. The image holds because those marks cooperate, but their differences remain visible. Bower's surfaces make that fragile agreement available to scrutiny.



Justin Bower in the studio

Portrait supplied by G-ALLERY.

A mark can describe a body
and remain evidence
of the hand that made it.

A Place for Decisions

The studio photographs place the paintings beside the ordinary conditions of their making: tables crowded with containers, unfinished supports, reference images and works leaning against walls. Scale becomes tangible. A face that fits comfortably on a page can occupy much of a room; an apparently self-contained composition joins a field of other images and materials.

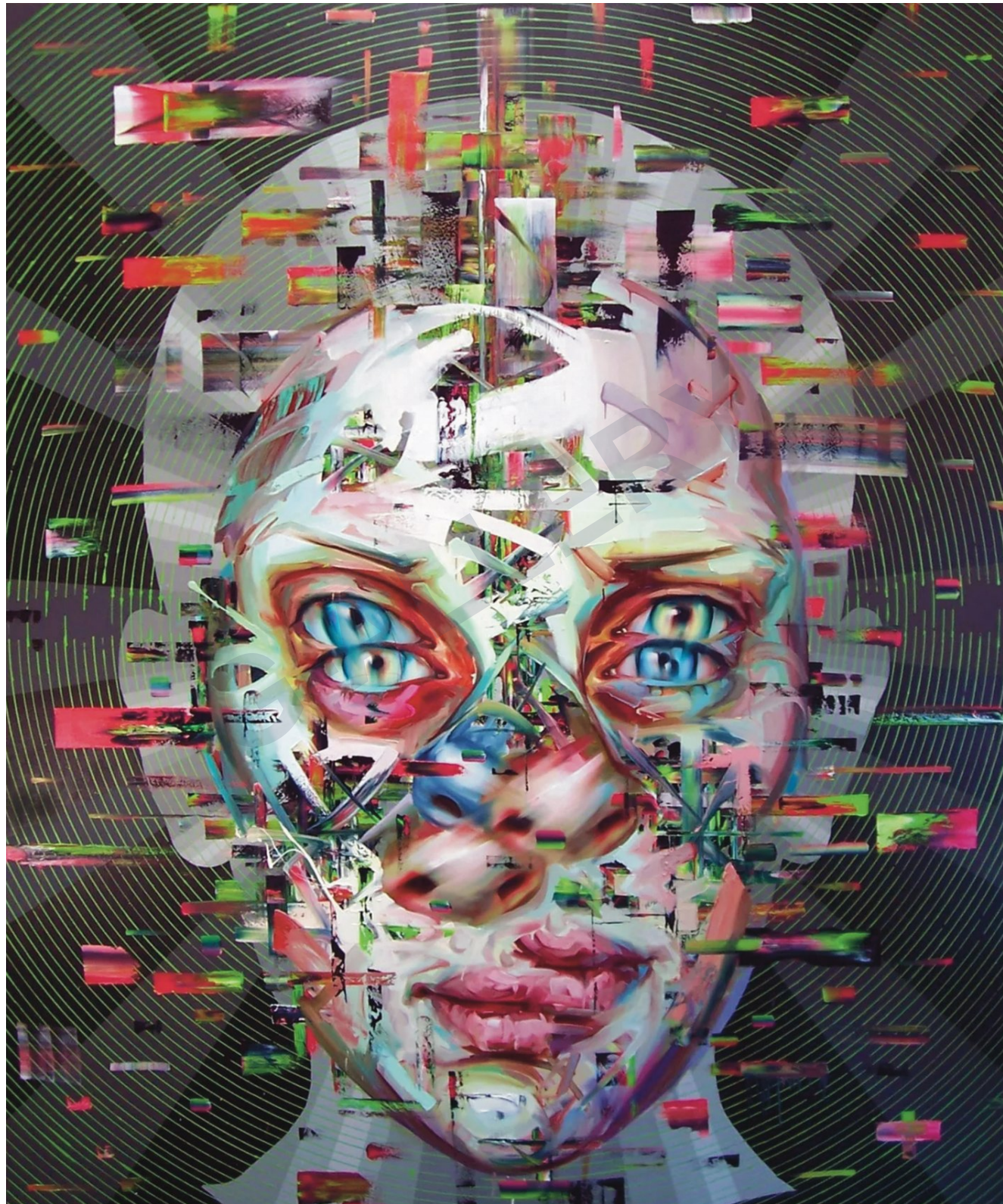
In a 2015 interview with Artnet News, Bower described a working rhythm that begins with reading and looking at painting, then changes as a work develops. He also spoke of wanting to move his subjects into more extensive environments with chairs, rooms and doubles. The account helps connect his preoccupation with the face to the spatial situations visible in the seated figures. [3]

A photograph of an unfinished painting records only a moment. It cannot establish the full order of operations, or tell us which decisions will survive. What it can show is that the image remains negotiable. A drawn head, a prepared field and a completed canvas may occupy the same space. Their proximity exposes differences that a finished exhibition tends to conceal.

The studio also offers a useful counterpoint to the language of disintegration. Whatever instability the image presents, making it requires sustained attention to concrete relations: an edge beside another edge, a change in temperature, a passage brought forward or held back. The body may appear to lose its coherence, but the painting is built through decisions that give that loss a visible structure.



A painting in progress



Echo

Oil on canvas · 330 × 275 cm



Echo in the studio

A Room for the Figure

The expanded settings of *Suspended Rapture* and *Three Visitations* make architecture an active part of the image. Furniture, thresholds and ornamental surfaces organise the figures into situations that suggest a stage. The visual order is explicit, yet it does not guarantee a stable world. The figures introduce another logic, one of division, doubling and uncertain boundaries.

In *Suspended Rapture*, the repetition of the seated body meets the symmetry of a richly articulated interior. The patterned floor pulls the eye inward while the bodily fragments interrupt that movement. *Three Visitations* distributes its figures across three adjoining fields. The intervals create a rhythm of separation and return, encouraging comparison without collapsing the figures into a single identity.

These spaces are most compelling when understood as pictorial constructions. Their function is to organise an encounter: to hold a figure before us, establish a distance, and make that distance unstable. Architecture supplies the measure against which the body becomes difficult to measure.



Suspended Rapture

Oil on canvas · 274 × 366 cm



Three Visitations in the studio



Three Visitations

Oil on canvas · 198 × 366 cm



Three Visitations in an interior

Installation photograph supplied by G-ALLERY.



Suspended Rapture in an interior

Installation photograph supplied by G-ALLERY.



Studio view



1970 and Wise Bloody Study in Berlin

Installation photograph supplied by G-ALLERY.

Scale and Encounter

A painting changes the room in which it is seen. Its dimensions enter into a relationship with a doorway, a chair, the height of a wall and the position of a viewer. In the installation photographs reproduced here, Bower's figures acquire a bodily scale that the isolated plate cannot convey. They become presences encountered across a space.

The white margin of a book offers another condition. It separates the image from its surroundings and makes comparison possible: one painting can be considered beside another without the competing demands of an installation. Yet this clarity has a cost. Physical size becomes a caption, and the distance between viewer and canvas becomes the distance between reader and page.

This publication moves between those conditions deliberately. Complete works establish the compositions; details disclose aspects of their surfaces; room views restore something of their spatial force. No single photograph supplies the whole encounter. Taken together, they invite a way of looking that remains aware of what each view reveals and what it leaves outside its frame.



Private Collection

Installation photograph supplied by G-ALLERY.

Justin Bower

Born in San Francisco in 1975, Justin Bower earned a degree in Studio Art and Philosophy from the University of Arizona in 1998 and an MFA from Claremont Graduate University in 2010. He lives and works in Southern California.

Bower's paintings bring large-scale figuration into contact with geometric pattern, optical disturbance and questions of technological subjectivity. Faces and bodies remain recognisable while their structures divide, repeat and reassemble. Oil paint gives this instability a physical presence: precise contours, patterned fields and passages of exposed gesture coexist on the same surface.

His work has been presented in solo exhibitions, museum projects and international art fairs in the United States and Europe. Major museum presentations include Thresholds at the Museum of Art & History in Lancaster and Justin Bower: Painting the Body Electric at Riverside Art Museum in 2023. His practice has received the Feitelson Fellowship Grant and a Joan Mitchell Award nomination.

G-ALLERY has worked with Bower since 2020, presenting his paintings in Berlin and Paris and placing works in private collections internationally. This continuing collaboration centres on the sustained relevance of his approach to the body, identity and the conditions of perception in a digitally saturated present.

Selected Solo and Group Shows

since 2015

2015	The Humiliations · UNIX Gallery, New York
2015	Efflorescence · UNIX Gallery, New York
2015–16	Thresholds · Museum of Art & History, Lancaster
2017	About Face · Kellogg University Art Gallery, Cal Poly Pomona
2018	The Singularity · Fine Art Complex, Phoenix
2019	The Future · Patrick Painter Inc., Los Angeles
2020	Colossus Id · Patrick Painter Inc., Los Angeles
2020	Justin Bower: Reclaiming the Intellectual Gaze · G-ALLERY, Berlin
2022	Justin Bower · G-ALLERY, Berlin
2023	Justin Bower: Painting the Body Electric · Riverside Art Museum
2023	Do Androids Dream? · Maddox Gallery, London
2025	Capturing the Digital Identity · G-ALLERY, Paris

Works

1970

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm
Pages 10, 16

1971

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm
Page 11

1972

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm
Page 12

Ascension Incarnate

Oil on canvas · 214 × 183 cm
Page 54; detail only

Clone II

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 25

Code: No Code

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 26

Echo

Oil on canvas · 330 × 275 cm
Page 60

Embryonic Love

Oil on canvas · 198 × 152 cm
Page 15

Heaven Dimmed

Oil on canvas · 214 × 183 cm
Page 27

Works

Impossible Escape Clause

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Pages 52, 53

Induced Panic Control

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Pages 32, 33

Magician

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 30

Mesmerized III

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 31

Moment of Collision

Oil on canvas · 335 × 275 cm
Page 37

Necessary Injuries

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Pages 34, 35

Psyche

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 36

Slither Gazer

Oil on canvas · 122 × 92 cm
Page 43

Something Solid Under All That is Now

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 24

Works

Son Stroke II

Oil on canvas · 135 × 122 cm
Page 44

Space Boy

Oil on canvas
Page 41; detail only

Suspended Rapture

Oil on canvas · 274 × 366 cm
Page 63

Tabula Rasa

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 42

That Drug Machine 'aint Got no Soul

Oil on canvas · 180 × 150 cm
Page 45

Three Visitations

Oil on canvas · 198 × 366 cm
Page 65

Untitled

Oil on canvas · 214 × 183 cm
Pages 17, 18

Wise Bloody Study

Oil on canvas · 130 × 120 cm
Pages 46, 47

Sources

1. Jorge Perezchica, 'Justin Bower: Post-Humans'

Coachella Magazine, 25 July 2015

Artist's account of technological change, autonomy and influences. Main essay.

2. Frank Stella retrospective: press release

The Museum of Modern Art, 1970

Black Paintings and the 1960 Aluminum series. The comparison with Bower is editorial interpretation.

3. 'artnet Asks: Artist Justin Bower Got Stabbed, Went to Grad School'

Artnet News, 14 October 2015

Artist interview: working rhythm, projected figure environments and Thresholds opening date.

4. Justin Bower: curriculum vitae

UNIX Gallery, document headed 'Justin Bower cv 6/24'

Education and selected exhibition history.

Sources

5. Justin Bower: Thresholds

Museum of Art & History, Lancaster / AC Projects, 2015

Photographs supplied by G-ALLERY. Introduction and four essays; exhibition dates from the original colophon. Original design: Tony Pinto / Vim & Vigor.

6. Justin Bower: CV

Justin Bower

Selected exhibitions, including The Future and Colossus Id. Entries are selected, not a complete chronology.

7. ‘Justin Bower – Do Androids Dream?’

Maddox Gallery, 6 April–15 June 2023

Exhibition title and dates.

8. Justin Bower: artist page and selected CV

G-ALLERY

Biography and selected exhibition information.

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www.g-allery.com



Justin Bower and G-ALLERY have worked together since 2020. Through exhibitions in Berlin and Paris, private presentations and an ongoing dialogue with collectors, the gallery has developed a sustained European context for Bower’s painting.

This catalogue is published by G-ALLERY in collaboration with Justin Bower and is intended exclusively for G-ALLERY collectors. It is not intended for commercial distribution.

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JUSTIN BOWER

Justin Bower

Justin Bower gives compelling pictorial form to one of the defining questions of contemporary life: what becomes of the human subject when perception and identity are increasingly shaped by digital images? His figures remain insistently present, yet resist a single, stable reading. Eyes multiply, faces fracture, and bodies emerge through competing systems of colour, gesture and geometric order. Recognition becomes an encounter with uncertainty.

Bower's distinctive contribution to contemporary painting lies in the tension between this unstable image and the material conviction of its making. The interruptions that recall screens, glitches and fractured data are articulated through oil paint: a medium whose density, rhythm and accumulated gestures return attention to the body. Across these surfaces, technological experience acquires a physical and psychological charge. Looking is active, unsettled and difficult to resolve.

Within the contemporary discourse on representation, Bower's work makes portraiture a site for examining how a self is constructed, multiplied and exposed. The gaze survives its fragmentation. It confronts the viewer with a presence that cannot be reduced to a coherent likeness or a readable code. This gives his painting its particular force: it sustains the complexity of human experience at a moment when images are increasingly expected to classify, predict and explain us. Bower renews the expressive possibilities of the painted figure, making its vulnerability, resistance and capacity for transformation central to the art of the present.