

# *Medieval Times*

By Parker Ito

Written in the Year of the Tiger, 2022

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As the Italians say, *allora...*

## RB41

RB41 is this very specific microbe that for some reason scientists have been unable to grow in a lab, but that has been found in the natural world: inside dog's noses, the caves that the cave paintings were made in [Lascaux?] , among other places. Unclear if it's in all the caves early man painted, but it's definitely in some of them. Let's just say it's present in all the caves. It's also one of the bacterias found in people's showers. I have no idea why scientists are trying to grow it in a lab or what it even does, but I do know that when I take showers I often have my best ideas. I think it's something about the space of the shower and the space in which the first art was made, the caves. When I'm taking a shower, I'm tapping into some primal creative part of myself connected to some of the spaces where the earliest known examples of art and creativity took place. It's the art version of Liver King.

[Juliana Halpert, who helped with this text, mentioned here that she "learned recently that the assumption that art was only made in caves during prehistoric times is unconfirmed. It's just that the caves' alkalinity [or something] preserved the drawings/art better than other environments," which maybe undermines my RB41 idea. Grant [Edward Tyler] also learned somewhat recently that acoustic research at Lascaux revealed that the deeper areas of the caves, where the paintings are to be found, have a particular acoustic profile which make those areas ideal for drumming and singing [ritual] . People also have a habit of singing in the shower.]

It could be the negative ions generated by falling water which have a soothing effect on the nervous system and stimulate creativity. Does water fall in caves? I've often wondered what RB41 smells like and have thought about trying to make it into a scent. It would probably smell musty or musky. When I imagine it, it would probably resemble the smell of the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland. Disneyland as a whole is conducive for creativity. I think the smell would make a nice candle. A nice candle to light in my studio so I could get in the zone when I'm making art. I'd have to rely on adderall less and I wouldn't be wasting water, which is very precious in LA.

I have been planning on writing this text as a follow-up to the PPP text I wrote for my exhibition at Mother's Tankstation in 2020. I may or may not have had the idea to write this text while taking a shower. I'm sure some of the ideas in this text were generated while taking a shower. To prepare for writing this text I started a Google document where I've been taking regular notes for the past couple of years. But in returning to the document, many of the notes have become indecipherable to me, so I will do my best to try to make sense of them. This text is some of the

thoughts I've had over the last couple years, but I'll also inject descriptions of the bodies of work I've made since then.

Unlike the last text I wrote, this text was formulated from a series of sessions that I dictated to Grant. Sometimes Grant and I would have long phone conversations where I would ramble on, or sometimes Grant would come to my studio, to look at my sharp jawline while I rambled. I hate writing and so this dictating method made it much easier to develop this text. I guess it makes sense that I would have a "writing assistant," as I have utilized assistants [some people might say famously?] through the majority of my career. A recurring idea present in this text: being an artist is strange [like love]. The day-2-day reality of this career, at times, can seem bizarre, and explaining the artworld to outsiders is like explaining the taste of water.

Often people have romantic ideas about the life of an artist that I would speculate are hangovers from modernism. None of this can really be applied to me. The result of these interactions during which I explain my job often leaves me feeling embarrassed and the person on the other end confused. Especially because as an artist, I don't really do anything but come up with ideas. I mean, there have been times where I was "doing things," and that was mostly when I didn't have my assistants around. For instance, at the beginning of my career and at the current moment. Unfortunately, I never really developed any technical skills in regards to artmaking and this is the thing that is most surprising/confusing for people to hear. I don't know how to draw or paint, or whatever. I am pretty good at Photoshop, but, like, good enough to teach a class on Photoshop? Not really. For Christmas several years ago I gave my former partner [I don't like the term partner but let's just use it here because my current relationship to this person is hard to explain] a drawing of our cat. Upon seeing the drawing of the cat my mother-in-law remarked "Wow Parker, that's a pretty good drawing." I had to remind her that, technically, it is my job.

[I'm about to open a show in Australia, where my semi-mother-in-law lives. By the time this text comes out the show will have opened. The show has a couple artworks in it but the star of the exhibition is a single large painting of me sitting on a couch in my old apartment. I had planned to make this painting on my printer using this technique I had developed to make the "Asian Goddess Smoking Fetish" paintings. However, my printer ended up breaking and I had to resort to — I think for the first time in my life — making a painting from start to finish, completely by myself, paint to canvas, without the aid of assistants. I guess I had made abstract paintings before but that doesn't really count. I'm talking about actually having to carve out forms, and communicate lighting, depth, volume etc — real painting-nerd shit. Maybe one of my former assistants did help me a bit. Every couple of days I would text her photos of the painting and she would direct me on what areas I needed to change in the painting to make it

“feel” right, even though the actual logic of the painting defies optics based in reality. I had a pretty good time trying to figure out how to make this painting and, to be honest, it was a rewarding experience that has given me confidence to try and develop a real personal painting style. The show in Australia will be titled “Romeo Must Die.”]]

It has been decided that this text will be dedicated to Grant [[and my poker group, Chop City, who were quite encouraging of my last text]]. Actually, I’m trading a painting to Grant for doing this dictation service. I hope it gets him laid. [[It worked before.]]

[[ Grant: I’m from Las Vegas and every Christmas when I visited from Chicago I’d go with my family to the Bellagio to see the Conservatory decorations. One year [[2017?]], there were some flower paintings hanging outside the conservatory across from the concierge’s Rauschenberg that really fucked me up. My family went into the conservatory without me so I could stare at them for a while. A couple years went by before I found out they were Parker’s. A couple years after I learned they were Parker’s, I was living in an apartment in East Hollywood. There was an incredibly attractive woman who lived down the hall from me, just a couple doors away. I lived next to her for about a year and would see her in the halls sometimes but otherwise we never really talked. At some point while I was living there, I became friends with Parker. A couple months before I moved out of that apartment, I spent a night drinking and hanging out with the attractive neighbor and a couple other people who lived in the building. We blacked out and she spent the night at my unit. In the morning, after she left, I printed out a photo of one of Parker’s flower paintings as a token of my love and wrote a note on the back saying I wanted to see her again soon and left it at her door. I had plans to go to Parker’s studio that afternoon. When I got back from Parker’s studio, she’d left a note on my door saying to come by later that night. It seemed to me that the potency of Parker’s paintings that fucked me up one Christmas at the Bellagio played not a small part in my ability to meet up with her again. We dated for a couple months before she broke things off with me because I couldn’t give her anything more than cheap printouts of Parker’s paintings. Part of my motivation in helping Parker write this text is to get her back by getting a real Parker Ito painting.]]

Look out for the show Grant and I do in his apartment sometime in the next year.

As a young child growing up in Orange County, California, I got to spend a lot of birthdays at Medieval Times, the 11th-century reenactment dinner theater located in Buena Park. In my lifetime I’ve probably been 7 or 8 times and of all those times my knight only won one of those tournaments. There is an exhibit at Medieval Times called the “Hall of Torture” which displays torture devices from that time period. Historically, it’s completely inaccurate, but as a young child with undiagnosed purely obsessional OCD, I became fixated on the idea that someone was





## PPP

It's worth noting that in the time since my last text, there has been a new building erected that's part of Geoffrey Palmer's "Renaissance Collection" called the Ferrante. It's across the 110 from where the DaVinci was. Whatever was in the space the Ferrante now occupies [I think a bank?] had security cameras that recorded the footage used to discover who lit the DaVinci on fire.

The PPP text contained a discussion of how I abused myself by selling a rare Issey Miyake jacket on Grailed to fund the production of a bronze sculpture titled "Renaissance." You'll recall it's the same jacket that Robin Williams famously wore. Mr. Williams will make another appearance later on. I have some good news: I've located the jacket I sold to fund the previous exhibition. I did confirm with the seller on Grailed that they had purchased it from the people I sold it to [MiddleMan]. I haven't broken the news to this person that I scribbled my name on the inside of the tag [see previous text].

Unfortunately, I also have some tragic news. As mentioned in the last text I have another version of the Issey jacket in a rarer colorway [gray green color], and now, in this dark hour, I am contemplating selling that jacket to fundraise for more art. The love of art! A couple years ago I traded a painting to my tailor for a credit. Anytime I can make an art trade for a service it makes me feel like people really take my art seriously, and that feels good! Now that I have this credit, I've been making myself a bunch of custom clothes. Mostly existing garments that I'm modifying and sewing my own tags into. A Burberry "pervert" style trench coat that has a zipper in the dick area and has been relined with a silk interior featuring a photo Balthus took of his cat. My "label" is called ... *PP \*fashion Pour Moi* ... and as the name suggests, the clothes are just for me. I've been toying with a *PP \*fashion Pour Toi* line. Mostly I just enjoy making clothes because it is a "creative" outlet that isn't my job, although I wouldn't mind doing it in a professional sense. I've been seeing my tailor for about 8 or 9 years. I originally started seeing him because I bought a suit from Margiela and he does all the tailoring for Margiela. In the time I've been using his services I've spent a substantial amount of money with him, so it would have been great to have this credit years earlier, but nonetheless it's nice to have the credit now.

I've been considering making a copy of my Issey jacket and stitching real Issey Miyake tags inside of it and trying to sell it as an authentic version of the jacket. I'm partially motivated by the fact that I want to see if I could dupe Grailed's authentication process [which as far as I can tell consists of anonymous Grailed staffers looking at photos of clothing items and deciding if they think the garment is real or fake?], but also I have this grand fantasy in which I produce several fake Issey jackets, thus oversaturating the market, causing the prices to plummet,

allowing me to repurchase back the original jackets I had sold [the authentic ones] at a much lower price than what I sold them for. I started to question the moral and ethical implications of selling fakes on Grailed [am I an empath?]. Immoral because I feel bad about ripping someone off [maybe a teenager?]. I guess if it's a teenager who can afford a \$5,000 jacket then they probably have rich parents and I don't feel so bad. Or, there are greater unethical considerations because as the Drip God who lives on Swag lane [moi], I would never violate the Hammurabi hypebeast code: thou shalt not stunt falsely.

I also wonder about selling the fake Issey Miyake jacket not just as a fake Issey Miyake jacket but as a fake Issey Miyake jacket that is an original artwork by Parker Ito. Would the fake [but authentic artwork] jacket then be worth more than the authentic non-artwork original jacket? Imbued with some kind of additional aura or cultural cache? Well I'd like to think so because of, duh, my ego, and of course this is the messaging of the contemporary art market — that art is rare, beautiful, special, it's unlike anything else humans make — and this is the whole reason I'm able to do this as a job in the first place. I'd just really like my jacket back.

Now that I'm thinking about the jacket again, I'm reminded why I have a whole section in my Google document about Epson printheads. [A printhead is the thing the ink squirts out of and is the most important part of a printer. Epson is like the Mercedes-Benz of printers.] These notes are taken from conversations I had with this funny man who fixes my printer, Adi Hacker. Recently Adi accidentally locked himself out of his own phone for over a week and couldn't access my contact information. This is why he took so long to invoice me, he explained. In one of our printer-repair sessions, Adi revealed to me that Epson changed their policy about stocking printheads 10 years ago because the printhead black market was fucking with Epson's business model. People were basically getting legit Epson printheads and frankensteining printers together in their garages with miscellaneous bootleg parts from China, selling the finished printers as official Epsoms. It sounds similar to stitching real Issey Miyake tags into a fake Issey Miyake jacket.

I have this little anecdote that Adi relayed to me: imagine trying to read every book of the Encyclopedia. At 26 books that would take a lifetime. But the whole entirety of those books could be compressed into just under 1mb of data. So, basically, while I'm printing something huge and oversized on my printer, it may seem large to me, but that file contains an amount of data that ain't shit for a printer. Is this a metaphor for something else? I don't know.

## 27

My favorite number is 27. I was born on the 27th of May in the year of the tiger. Like Albrecht Dürer I'm a May Gemini, but not like Kanye, Prince, and Harry Nilsson, who are all June Geminis. Two-seven unsuited is statistically the worst starting hand in poker. [There is something called the "computer hand" — queen-seven offsuit — that I thought I'd mention here just because it's funny.] There's even a variant of poker called the "2-7 game" in which, if a person wins a hand with 2-7 [through bluffing or value], everyone at the table has to pay them an additional agreed-upon amount of money. In this scenario, people are incentivized to play the worst starting hand like one would play the best starting hand: pocket aces. Thus high jinks are sure to ensue.

As a child playing competitive roller hockey, I wore the numbers 27, 86 [for the tigers], and the number 9. Nine because Paul Kariya, my favorite hockey player [a half-Japanese American who played for the Ducks], wore number 9. [2+7=9. Fascinating how numbers work.] I've never considered pocket nines to be a lucky hand or one that gives me any good vibes. However, pocket sixes [the inverse of pocket 9s] have often been a lucky hand for me. I've "cracked" aces many times with pocket 6's, usually by flopping a set [three of a kind, where you have two hole cards and one card is on the board. This is different from what is called "trips," where you have one card in your hole cards and two cards on the board. Trips is a more vulnerable hand because you can be "out-kicked," meaning someone has a second, higher hole card than you and anytime a board is paired there is risk that someone has a full house] in a three-bet pot [flopping a set is one of the best feelings in poker]. In roulette I play the numbers red 27, red 9, black 17, and red 23.

## +EV

In the 17th century, a French mathematician named Blaise Pascal invented something called expected value. It is a generalization of a weighted average. This came out of Pascal's search to solve the problem of points, which had eluded mathematicians for years and it also had something to do with God. In poker, expected value (commonly referred to as EV) is the longtime result of your decisions in a particular poker hand. It's a way to cut through poker's blend of luck and strategy so you can see how profitable your decisions are over time. I touched on this in the PPP text with game theory optimal (GTO) as a popular mathematical poker strategy. GTO is a decision-making process solely based around a +EV result.

There are circumstances all the time in poker in which one might make the right decision in the moment because they have a read on a particular opponent or have a certain read on the situation in general. In some situations though, according to GTO play, even when making the right decision in the moment this could be incorrect over a large sample size because the action will incur a -EV result.

For example, there is a famous tournament hand that was meticulously analyzed a couple of years ago in which one player "rivers" (makes his hand on the last card to come out) a set of kings (3 kings (this is a very strong hand)) against another player who rivers the nut straight (in poker having "the nuts" is having the best hand possible on a particular board. (Being nutted. [Deez nuts]))). What makes this hand especially notable is the guy who makes the straight achieves the straight à la "backdoor," or "runner runner," meaning that he has to hit two very specific consecutive cards on the turn (fourth card to come out), and on the river (fifth card to come out) to make the straight. The probability of realizing "backdoor equity" is low, but good players mix in these plays to make it harder to play against them. The climax of the hand is that, facing a big bet (for all of his chips), the guy with three kings ends up folding his very strong hand — the correct choice for the situation. This sent shockwaves through the poker community because people were like "how can you fold there?" From a GTO analysis of the hand it was shown that this genius fold is actually incorrect because in this very particular situation, based on how the hand was played out, it was unlikely that someone had a straight. Three kings would be the best hand most of the time so it would be profitable most often. I'm pretty sure the guy who made the fold went on to win the tournament and, had he called, he would have busted out.

In regards to art, I've often mused about creating an EV system that would allow me to make decisions for my career that over time would yield a +EV result. For example: Should I do a show at gallery P — a young project space with a small collector base but with good energy that

young people think is cool — or gallery PP: a blue-chip gallery guaranteed to sell everything but that only wants to show paintings and is basically a mausoleum where artists go to die? Should I sell to this collector, or that one? Should I spend all of my money making a single work knowing that it is unlikely to sell but will guide viewers to understand the broader scope of my practice? Who should I hang out with? How many portraits of myself should be viewable when someone Googles my name? Is my CV impressive? Even though they have art schools where you can supposedly learn things about being an artist, most of what is actually required to be a successful professional artist, as I have experienced it, you have to learn on your own, from just doing it. I guess art school is like sex education; you can learn about sex but that doesn't mean you know how to *fuck*.

## GALA

In 2015, I was invited to participate in an exhibition at a well-known French institution. The museum has a cool room in its entrance which features a mural depicting the discovery of electricity. I proposed a project to be installed in this room, which unfortunately didn't come to fruition, but I'm going to mention it here because the work I proposed is very on-trend for 2022. I planned to buy a bunch of old Bitcoin mining CPUs — and at that time, Bitcoin, obviously, was not what it is now. At one point, my studio assistant had been trying to get me to buy crypto, and if I'd done that I'd be a millionaire from Ethereum [not very +EV of me] .

If you didn't know, mining CPUs become cost-ineffective over time due to increased block-difficulty [something to do with network hashrate, IDK] , and since they are designed and built only to do one thing — mine Bitcoin — these incredibly powerful and otherwise cutting-edge technological devices are very quickly rendered obsolete. I thought it would be a cool art installation to have a bunch of these obsolete CPUs covered in cables, lying on the floor, with live mushrooms growing through the circuitry. The problem with my proposal was that museums are highly controlled environments, and moisture, which mushrooms need to thrive in, is bad for controlled environments. There's no way that they would let me do this. But I like the idea of it as a piece. I was thinking about how sculpture is not easy to exhibit, buy, or store. You have to have space for it. Painting less so because it's more decorative and has a utility of covering a wall. Thinking about the utilitarian value of sculpture, it's less clear. Ultimately paintings aren't utilitarian either, but they lend themselves more quickly to being mere decoration. I guess that's only the case in private. Merely decorative public sculpture is much more common than merely decorative public painting. If I had made the mushroom piece I'd have rescued these CPUs, which have lost practical utility, from total obsolescence. When something becomes obsolete technology, it functions the same way sculpture does. When it's lost its obvious use value, it becomes material for aesthetic ends. I proposed another artwork for this exhibition. Around this time, I stopped exhibiting with a CV [I think I covered this in another text, or will eventually] , so I proposed to the museum, as an editioned work for the gift shop, that they produce a reusable enema kit with my CV printed on the bag portion. They didn't go for that either.

Because they wouldn't let me do mushroom sculpture [but I did get to half-interview mycologist Paul Stamets] , I presented a suite of 25 paintings that function as a single work, which the museum ended up acquiring. The story of the museum acquiring this suite of paintings was a very memorable, fascinating experience. The opening of the exhibition coincided with the annual gala hosted by the museum to — like all museum galas — raise

money to support the museum for the coming year. I was a sort of fake guest of honor at the gala that year, on account that the museum was using the gala to fundraise the purchase of my paintings. As the pseudo guest of honor, I was of course invited to the gala and had a confirmed seat, but my gf/gallerist/wife at the time, in a clerical error, was invited at the very last minute and was not even sitting in the same room as me. So I arrived early to the museum alone because my gallery-girl-date-plus-one had to do a work thing. Baby's day out.

[[Earlier that day in the museum I had been attempting to photograph my work with my iPhone. The guards notified me that I wasn't allowed to photograph the paintings with my flash on. I think this is pretty standard in European museums. However, these specific paintings, which I will explain in another text eventually, are made on a special reflective fabric that changes when photographed with flash. I guess this wasn't communicated to the museum guards and so I had to tell them that I was the artist and that photographing these paintings with a flash is part of the experience of the work.]]

At the gala, in a sea of French people — surrounded by them, with not a word of English to be heard — I assumed the speaker addressing the crowd was going on about how the museum is going to fundraise to buy a work by Parker Ito. I made this assumption because I don't speak French, not even a *petit peu*, but I keep hearing my name being repeated. I was just standing around but no one seemed to know I was the artist. Why would they? Of course, there were other artists involved in the gala, but none of those artists had *le plaisir* of the museum staff walking around wearing shirts that had their name on it.

[[If I remember correctly, the shirts didn't even say "Parker Ito," they said "Parker," and were pink, and the museum specifically requested them in the Chateau Shatto font. [[There is no Chateau Shatto font, it's just a logo. The graphic designer who designed the Chateau Shatto logo had to make an impromptu design for the word/name "Parker."]] I guess they did this for me because I was a young and cool artist, and this is how you communicate that things are young and cool?]]

The thing that was actually cool about the gala was that it was in the museum among the artworks, and it spanned multiple rooms. It became clear to me that the further into the museum your seat was, the more interesting you were [[the more you donated money to the museum]].

It's at this moment when I've made my way into the deepest room that I realize I'm not sitting with my gf [[she's in the first room]] and I don't know any of these Kermits at my table. The United States' Ambassador to France was at my table, surrounded by security. To be honest, just

this one time, in that weird moment, it was nice to hear someone with an American accent in Paris. Usually I feel embarrassed and self-conscious when I hear an American accent in Paris. I remember being introduced to a guy at the table, and the only thing I was told about him was that he had a really nice castle. The head of the Pompidou was there, as well as the wife of one of the biggest French collectors [not Salma Hayek] . There was also a journalist at my table, who was really the only person I spoke to the whole night. At the time, I'd decided to go as long as I could without shaving, so I had a lot of facial hair. My Asian genes are great for some things [like hitting a squat pose] but not for growing facial hair, so I think I probably looked a bit hectic.

Immediately as I sat down, people began to wonder who I was, and began to ask why I'm sitting at this table. I can't remember how I responded. I know that I didn't reveal I was the guest of honor. I was wearing a green Jil Sander suit with a red sweater vest. I remember this detail very well. Eventually, after several hours of sitting at this table, the people at the table realized that I'm an artist and I've made some paintings. Then they made the connection that the brochures in front of them displaying what's being fundraised for that night was my artwork.

The next bit is where it gets bizarro but I would describe it as a +EV situation. The fact that none of the people at this table knew who I was, to me, describes a way in which their presence at this event is, to them, a +EV situation for their image or whatever. It's like two ships passing in the night, where the weight of each ship propels the other forward or something. It's the exchange of capital taking place between +EV positions. Museum patrons are there for social capital or to develop mutually beneficial relationships with the museum. The people in attendance might not know what's going on but who cares, they have their own reasons to be there. They want a chance to feel like they're contributing to something larger than themselves, like their manning an oar to accelerate the boat forward. Or maybe they're there because it's hot [in the Paris Hilton sense] to be seen at this function and it's especially cool to be slurping down snails in front of historical paintings. I'm there because I need the museum to buy my work for the immediate returns [so I can buy some more jackets] and the long-term returns resulting from my work being in this museum's esteemed collection. Cultural clout? The raising of my prices? Hell yes. The people wearing the Parker shirts show up again, and go around table to table with iPads asking attendees to donate money specifically for the acquisition of my work. I forgot to mention this but it's very important: my suite of paintings was only a proposed acquisition, there was not a guarantee that the museum would make the purchase. So I had to sit at a table and watch people decide in real time if they wanted to help the museum buy my work [or not] . I sat and watched as people sent or didn't send money through an iPad. When they came around to me and asked for money I told them I couldn't help out. In the end, I guess the Parker shirts were convincing: the museum acquired the work. The



suite of paintings that the museum ended up purchasing has an image of my dick in it. So that's pretty cool. Kinda puts the whole "Parker" shirt thing in context.

## +EV2

A couple years ago there was a highly publicized grudge match between two famous poker players: Doug Polk and Daniel Negreanu. They're both annoying guys, but excellent poker players, and young Daniel Negreanu was actually pretty cool. He had good style and had this Playstation game during the poker boom that nobody remembers. Polk, who I would describe as having slight incel vibes, was heavily favored to win in the heads-up match as he is a heads-up specialist. Polk ended up winning 1.2 million off Negreanu, but in order for Polk to fund his bankroll, he sold off his bitcoin. If he would've held that bitcoin, he would've made twice the amount of money — that is, if he sold it in fall 2020. At the time of writing this, Bitcoin is worth a lot less. Similarly, in the mid-2010s, Brad Troemel produced a series of shrink-wrapped artworks that included physical bitcoins. What I mean when I say “physical” is that there were coins that had codes on them that would enable one to access the digital currency. At least one of them had a token value of 100 BTC. At the time of writing, this would be worth \$2,030,270. The whole artwork is a Semiotext (e) book called the *Violence of Financial Capitalism*, with the physical Bitcoin shrink-wrapped to it. A similar work, which had semiotext (e) books shrink-wrapped with two Bitcoins, came to auction at Sotheby's in 2016 and was estimated between \$2,400–\$3,600 but failed to sell.

Art is not objective in that you can't win at art, something I discussed in my last text. So, then, what are the core principles of this EV system I'm designing? Is money most important? Fame? Critical regard? Aesthetic value? What does it mean that you do this as a job, that you rely on the sale of art to make money? Do you make EV decisions based on what's gonna make you richer and make your life more comfortable? Do you show at a gallery because the owner has his own jet? I think that's definitely a route some people go.

## Las Vegas

There's a conversation that happened at the Guggenheim between James Turrell and a curator where James Turrell admits with a smile on his face that his mid-2000s holographic wall works were made to enable him to become a "full-service artist." [I wonder if this desire has something to do with his being a Quaker?] I saw one of these works in a collector's home one time, and, later that night, inside another Turrell artwork, I would have one of the most bizarre, thrilling experiences of art I'd ever encountered. It was on par with the first time I went to Dia Beacon on mushrooms and had an intensely spiritual experience. I have never cried looking at art but I hope one day I can experience that.

Picture this: it's 2019, I'm on residency in Las Vegas, there on behalf of MGM Resorts. I'm there as part of a program for Japanese artists. This is the first time I'd been selected for something because I'm "Japanese." POC-lite I like to call it. At the time, MGM was bidding on contracts to build a mega-casino in Osaka [I hope that worked out for them] . As a PR tool, they decided to start an artist residency program where *the east and west* can be in dialogue and Japanese artists are invited to stay and make work in Las Vegas.

Somehow, as a Japanese-American, I ended up in this residency, even though I have basically no cultural ties to Japan. So I was living in the MGM Signature in a one-bedroom, hotel-esque apartment. It was great because I didn't do my dishes, maids took care of that. I had access to Mangia, the Bellagio employee restaurant where I ate free food everyday. Each day one of the chefs made a hot dish from their native country. [I heard some great dealer stories too.] I could leave my room a mess every morning, and someone would come make my bed for me [although I don't know if I philosophically believe in making one's bed] . My meditation practice was more focused than ever at this time. I was meditating about an hour and a half per day. I felt great. It was probably one of the happiest times of my life. On top of that, I got to have a studio in the Bellagio, in the casino by the pool entrance. It was a glass cube — formerly a gift shop for the Yayoi Kusama exhibition — where people came and watched me make art. But I wasn't really making art in the studio. Firstly, because my assistant was not there yet, and secondly, because the paintings I made were based on images of the views from different MGM properties, and all the images were produced offsite. So on most days, people watched me sit on a laptop. Most likely I was online shopping. I had not become obsessed with poker at this point in my life, and that was probably for the best.

As a special treat, I got to go on a field trip to someone's house. This someone was very high-up at MGM and collected art. I arrived at the house, was greeted, and was served dinner [

take-out from one of the Bellagio restaurants, if I remember correctly) . We listened to Neil Diamond [the Jewish Elvis [I specifically requested Neil Diamond] ] . The collector showed me two Turrell works he owned, one of which was a holographic wall work [mentioned above ] and the other was a famous Skyspace work, custom-made for the collector's backyard. After dinner, as the sun was starting to set, we went into the backyard to view the James Turrell Skyspace. Not only did he have a Skyspace in his backyard, but it was specially built so that its entry lined up with a view of the Vegas strip, perfectly framing every MGM property. This house is located in a community called Summerlin, adjacent to Red Rock, which is a sprawling master-planned community designed by Howard Hughes, the eccentric millionaire/pilot/ice cream lover. James Turrell's prime source of inspiration for his Skyspace works is his experience of light while flying [he is also a pilot] . [Grant is from Summerlin.]

It's explained to me that the piece we're about to look at is viewed at sunrise and sunset. It's a 45-minute cycle of watching the colors change. These works are notoriously difficult to upkeep. They are outside. They have to be repainted every year. Weather conditions have an impact on their viewability. Animals can move in. Grant used to live in an area of Chicago near a school that had commissioned a Skyspace for their campus. In the urban Chicago environment, in contrast to suburban Las Vegas, the deteriorated Skyspace was often rusted, busted, covered in graffiti, or repurposed into a shelter for the homeless. In this instance, since we're in the Las Vegas desert, rodents made this James Turrell piece their home. As I was sitting there, experiencing this Turrell — which has an aura of sublimity for many [not for me] — two field mice chased each other around the floor. Every couple of minutes they ran out, chased each other around, then ran back into the shadows. That went on and on and, pretty soon, a bat arrived and flew in and out of the Turrell. Now I had tiny mice running at my feet while a bat fluttered in the hole of the Skyspace, which is the main focal point of the piece. But the greatest part of the experience [and it's unknown to me why this happened] was that the collector decided to leave Neil Diamond playing while we viewed the piece. It was being projected through his backyard by outdoor speakers the whole time.

Turrell Skyspace... sublime? Turrell Skyspace with rodents, bat, view of the Las Vegas Strip, and the soothing melodies of Neil Diamond's *Girl You'll Be a Woman Soon*... truly a sublime experience of art. Actually, there might be some kind of poetic allegory here to art's own perceived role in society vs. its actual function. Art's independent self-evidence [vacuum] versus its realization/liquidation as just another thing among things [world] . Anyways...

Sideways thought about being in Vegas: I was fortunate enough to spend three months there for this residency. I had had some relationship to the city in the past as a youth playing competitive roller hockey. Several of the tournaments I'd participated in were in Vegas, so I've

been going there since I was a very young boy. But after I quit playing hockey, I didn't go for several years. The first time I went as an adult was for a work Christmas party with an oil company I worked for. Coming back for my residency was exciting for me because I always liked Las Vegas, and whenever you get to spend extended time somewhere, you get to experience the place in a particular way. I had a profound epiphany about the nature of Vegas when I was there. In sum, *Las Vegas is the ultimate American city*. [Apparently Dave Hickey also said this but I didn't know that at the time, and I'm not a fan of his.] When you walk around the strip you see all kinds of people who are very different from each other. You see people from red states and blue states; you see really disgusting people, really trashy people and you see elegant people; you see people walking around with no clothes on and you see people on vacation with their children. It's hard to think of another place in America where you see these kinds of people interacting. Vegas is extremely explicit and indiscreet about the extraction of capital from individuals, but everyone is there to play into that fantasy. It's truly the American Dream. All these people are united in a common vision relating to the extraction of capital. And the potential for hitting the jackpot. It's a utopian hell, but it's so upfront about the hellish part that it feels jarringly honest or real. The core of it is degradation and degeneracy. It's the negative image of people's miserable lives. We need these release valves for society to function. In Vegas' alternate reality, one can be whomever they want, kind of like the Internet. [I'm plucking out my gray hairs while I dictate this.] Vegas also is like an art installation. It psychologically and physically feels much larger than it actually is. After spending time there, I started to understand it very differently. It's a place designed to overwhelm you. But once you see the limits of it, it's not big at all. At times it can seem like you never know where you are, there are so many things to see and do... and you're lost and disoriented. There's a funny No Reservations episode where Anthony Bourdain goes to Vegas. He has a boomer meltdown in the New York New York hotel.

Something else I remember about this MGM guy's house is that he had an indoor basketball court. There was a mark from the basketball high up on the wall, which reminded me of David Hammons' basketball drawings. He also showed me his crazy computer server room, which was built to secure MGM business secrets. But, in that case, why would've he shown it to me? I don't know.

## Fame and Money [+EV3]

Fame and money are easily quantifiable. Most artists are not famous, and even the famous ones are not truly famous unless they're dead. But the times of unrecognized geniuses who are not celebrated in their lifetime are over. That shit's cheugy. The best we have now is Jeff Koons. Jeff Koons is one of the most famous artists. He was even cast in the movie about Harvey Milk by Gus Van Sant as Art Agnos, the former mayor of San Francisco. It's ironic that he plays someone named Art, no? But even if Jeff Koons is the most famous artist, is he really that famous? Do most people know who he is? When was the last time Koons made good art? I expect it was in the early 2000s, but I'm hoping to be proven wrong. [At the time of writing this, Koons has just opened a new show at the Deste foundation, and from what I've seen, it looks really good.]

Koons' initial artistic premise: one should reject the notion that kitsch is necessarily indicative of poor quality or bad taste. That's what was radical in the 1980s: elevating shitty, everyday objects via craft. What makes Koons' objects compelling is not only the content but the ways in which they were made. Koons is notoriously obsessive about the labor required to make his art. His abilities as a maker, or someone who directs the makers, is a testament to the power of objects. But as the culture shifts and art becomes closer to entertainment, you have a new value system that emerges. Koons achieves his goal as an artist by revealing there is no hierarchy in taste outside of craft. In succeeding in this goal, he rendered his own modus operandi irrelevant. The new value system, which he helped to bring about, no longer needs to make a distinction between high and low. Going to see the new Avatar movie is just as compelling as Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Rooms. The Broad, an art museum [which ① I have many problems with and ② I've never actually even been to and don't have plans to visit anytime soon] epitomizes the art-as-entertainment experience. Despite the problems I have with the Broad, I do think the "museum" has done a good job at capturing the attention of influencers, non-influencers, the general public, etc. Grant went once and says it has more in common architecturally with Disneyland than MoMA. The Broad compels visitors to pose in front of contemporary art [emphasis on contemporary] and post it on your social media. I think it's really important to bring as many people into art as possible, so congrats to *you*, Broad.

The artist Robert Longo directed the 1995 sci-fi film *Johnny Mnemonic* which is set in the year 2021 [everyone on twitter was freaking out about this last year] . It blows my mind that the studios picked Longo as the guy to direct this film. People who've seen the film and know Longo's work are always shocked when I reveal this to them. It's basically a party trick I do now. These days it seems like every artist wants to be a director. It seems to be the cool trendy thing right now. I guess that's because artists want their work to reach as many people as possible. So

to take it back to Koons, the problem with Jeffrey [I met him once and this is how he introduced himself to me] is that the old value systems in which his work was subversive no longer exist, and painstakingly creating a rococo sculpture of Michael Jackson and his pet monkey, Bubbles, as a homage to the Pieta, is just a nice thing you can see at the Broad, photograph, and post on your Instagram stories. I suspect Jeff Koons will probably be the first contemporary artist to have one of those “immersive experience” exhibits. Or did Pierre Huyghe already do that? I wouldn’t mind seeing room-sized projected animations of Koons and Ciccolina fucking.

We can think about Koons in regards to bodybuilding as a sport/activity. People associate muscles and fitness with strength and abilities in a functional aspect. But in reality, bodybuilding is purely aesthetic. There’s very few practical aspects to it. Often in competitions, bodybuilders are at their physical weakest, because in order to get their bodies aesthetically perfect [perfect in their terms] , they dehydrate, take diuretics, fast, and do various other things to make them super lean. This is the sport part. People involved in bodybuilding are also often taking steroids, which have severe consequences on one’s long-term health, and can cause impotence. One can think of an initial foray into bodybuilding as making oneself more attractive to others, more sexually ripe. But the further one takes the aesthetic aspect, the functional aspect is undermined entirely. Vanity. This applies to Koons but also art generally. I’ve also heard Koons described as a “fallen angel.” I love that.

Critical regard... What does that mean? I don’t even know what that means. Here’s a thought exercise: what is conceptual art? It’s supposed to be art where the idea takes precedence over the object. Googling “John Baldessari conceptual art” leads me to an image of a painting that says “pure beauty” on it. What is the idea here? Is painting “pure beauty” on a canvas deep? Is this conceptual art? Like conceptual art, it’s hard to define what critical art actually looks like. I mean there are things that we’ve come to hold in high esteem because they’ve been deemed important by institutions. But what we learn more and more everyday is that institutions are beholden to many factors that do not represent the interests of society as a whole. For instance the whole Guston debacle. Museums deciding what should be shown based on anonymous Instagram accounts is pedestrian and should not be encouraged, followed, or imitated.

I was once at a dinner with a prominent American curator from [Major American Institution] and they bemoaned that Lisa Yukasavage was not more collected by museums because her galleries had made her too commercial. But I’m sure that the curator’s salary was 1/20th [probably less] of what Yukasavage makes a year. And the curator did mention Lisa has a really nice vacation home.

Art is fundamentally pathological, not logical or ethical. Artists who treat art rationally or morally lose the trees for the forest. That's why those artworks are consistently underwhelming. The pathological, aesthetic element in artworks is the one aspect that is not quantifiable. It's the one element that there can be no EV metric for.

As a pastime I would often read online newspaper articles about Banksy and check out the comments. The articles are often disparaging of Banksy, but a lot of people in the comments really like Banksy. It goes to show "experts" cannot convince people to go against their own impulse.

My proposed hypothetical +EV system of artmaking keeps collapsing. It seems like a Sisyphean task because of art's evasion of the concept of winning and of definitive qualitative judgments like "good" or "bad." That's the cool thing about art: no one knows what the fuck is going on. Richard Serra said "there's no winning in art" in an interview with Charlie Rose in the early 2000s, right after Rose called him the greatest living American sculptor [to which Serra assented]. Can you try too hard at art? What does that look like? Trying too hard is maybe trying to not try hard. Art is embarrassing. Art is so cringe. Especially doing it as a job. Imagine pouring your heart out on canvases and expecting people to come look at them at your opening, where you put on your cute little outfit and everyone comes by and says "congratulations," regardless of the quality of the show.



## PPPPPP

Many years ago I gave a lecture in Japan. Currently I always sign my emails "PP." At a certain point, I signed them with many Ps. It could've been two, it could've been twenty. When I gave my lecture in Tokyo, I met one of the techs, and when he greeted me, he greeted me as PPPPPP, memorizing the exact number of Ps I'd signed with in my email, so as to not offend me. I could see him counting them in his head and he said it out loud.

## Dürer

Last year I was given the opportunity to speak publicly on a panel with a Dürer expert [something I felt intimidated by] but mid-conversation I had an epiphany about the work of Dürer, and I couldn't think of anywhere to present it so I'll say it here: Dürer was the first Post-Internet artist. I am by no means a Dürer expert like my buddy Armin. I actually know very little about him. Researching him, I learned he was a radically forward-thinking artist. He was the first Post-Internet artist. What I mean by that is that Dürer was the first artist to become a network. What Dürer did that was unique was to utilize printmaking as his main medium.

Traditionally in the Western canon, printmaking is seen as a secondary medium. Although Dürer worked in painting and drawing, his most famous and celebrated works are his prints. There is no agreed upon number of Dürer prints in existence, which is unlike our neurotically indexical understanding of great artworks in the Western canon. Today, more often than not, we engage these "great artworks" through their reproductions. Dürer bypassed that by his decision to use a reproducible form as his primary medium. Goya and Rembrandt have also made significant print contributions, but most of those were printed after they died because the plates were still accessible. Most Dürer plates have been destroyed, and most of what qualifies as an authentic Dürer print was made in his lifetime. Basically, Warhol's contributions were made by Dürer in the 15th and 16th centuries.

## STOP ASIAN HATE

As an Asian-American, I remember a time in 2021 when #StopAsianHate became a call to action to bring attention to a growing number of Asian-American-related hate crimes that were prevalent at the time. I remember seeing it all over Instagram and it was fucking annoying and one of the stupidest things I've ever seen. While I don't pretend for a moment to understand how one as an African-American would feel, I imagine the #BLM stuff incited a similar response in a lot of black people. The thing that's annoying is not the substance of the statement but the co-opting of the movement. I heard from an artist friend of mine that around the time BLM was very prominent, non-black people began to put #BLM or #ACAB in their Tinder profiles with a black skin tone emoji fist. By the time we got to #StopAsianHate, there had been so many movements made by reposting infographics on Instagram, I had little tolerance for something I was directly implicated in. One of the larger problems with the whole thing is: what is an Asian-American? What does it mean to be Asian-American? I think when most people hear that term, they think of East Asians: Chinese, Korean, Japanese — which I'm part of. They don't think about south and southeast Asians. My poker group is full of Asian-Americans and Jews and two WASPs. Most of the Asian-Americans within the group are of east-Asian descent, and my Vietnamese friend always jokingly refers to himself as a jungle Asian. I bring this up because unlike African Americans, it's hard to find a single cause within #StopAsianHate that unifies these diverse groups. Most African-Americans are the descendants of slaves who were ripped from their ancestral homelands, and so maybe have connections to Africa, but don't know the specific place they came from. The unified front that all African-Americans can unite under is the history of racism as it relates to slavery in America. What is a unified front for Asian-Americans? That they're stereotyped as having small penises? They're stereotyped for being hard working or good at math? This second stereotype doesn't even apply to all Asian-Americans... Does the first?

Even Asian-Americans have their own hierarchy, or inter-Asian racism. Not just within Asian communities, but specifically outside of those. The idea of the model minority is not applicable to all Asian-Americans. Japan, the country my family immigrated from — the Japanese are shitheads. They were a part of the Axis powers. They committed war crimes in China that their own government won't acknowledge. Apparently Yayoi Kusama's biography was so racist against black people that they had to cut out sections of it for the English translation. Look at the current political climate: China and North Korea are our biggest geopolitical enemies. [And we mourn Shinzo Abe.] There are also so many thoughts I have about what it means to be Japanese-American in 2022, mostly it's feeling completely disconnected from any kind of cultural ties. I'd like to discuss them here as they relate to some of the works I explain below but

maybe I'll save it for another text as we're already 26 pages in and I haven't explained a single artwork.

One time I was at dinner with an Italian collector and prominent/important curator, and the woman hosting the dinner looked at me and asked "where are you from?" and I replied "I'm from LA," and she asked "No, where are you from" and used her fingers to pull her eyelids into a squint. So I got that goin' for me.

## Elevator Time

My studio is in the same building as Chateau Shatto, so I probably spend more time in the gallery than anyone else in the program. One day, I was somehow leaving at the same time as a collector who just had a meeting at the gallery. We got in the same elevator. The collector was not introduced to me at the gallery, and I did not sit in at the meeting. This collector had no idea what I looked like, since, for the past several years, I avoided having my photograph taken in professional settings, or even posted on social media [this is because of Vanity [lately I have been posting photos of myself again out of necessity [I'm single again]]]. I get into the elevator on the 10th floor with the collector, and head to my studio on the 6th floor. The collector's with his wife or girlfriend. As soon as we get in the elevator, he starts explaining the trajectory of my career to the woman he's with, having no idea that I'm me. I know the gallery is planning for the two of us to have a studio visit, so I'm debating whether or not I should let him know I'm me, in case he recognizes me in the visit and feels humiliated. He wasn't saying anything terrible, but they weren't things one would want to say about someone in their presence without knowing. In each elevator lobby, there are directories for suite assignment, and my name was very visible in vinyl letters on the wall as I got off the elevator on the 6th floor.

We ended up having a studio visit and it didn't come up. I didn't have the heart to tell him and he didn't seem to recognize me from the elevator. A couple years later, I was having dinner in Arles with my poker friend [the jungle Asian] while I was on residency there. I started to explain the residency to him. It's a project connected to the Luma Foundation. For those of you who don't know what the Luma Foundation is, you can't explain it unless you explain who Maja Hoffman is. As I'm explaining who Maja Hoffman is to my friend, a table of four Germans behind him become noticeably uncomfortable and start whispering amongst themselves. They end up approaching my friend's cousin and whispering something in her ear. They're whispering that Maja Hoffman is sitting directly behind us. I don't know if Maja Hoffman heard us. I actually don't think Maja Hoffman even knows who I am, so it's probably ok. I tell my friend and my friend's cousin about the time in the elevator with the collector talking about me, not knowing it's me beside him in the elevator. We finish dinner, I go home, wake up the next day, my friend is in Arles, and she invites me to dinner with some collectors at the same restaurant that I went to with my poker friend and his cousin the night before. And guess who's at the dinner? The guy from the elevator.

## “C’est la vie!”

Did you know that Vincent Van Gogh was obsessed with Japan and Japanese culture [protoweeb]? As far as I know, he never actually went to Japan. But for some reason he believed that Arles was the Japan of Europe. He thought the light of Arles was like the light of Japan. He started a residency project there called the Yellow House. The Yellow House was the ancestor of the residency I participated in called Studio of the South. The Yellow House residency project was meant to encapsulate Van Gogh’s perception of the cultural spirit of Japanese art. I don’t really like Van Gogh’s art very much, but I do like a painting he made as a student of a skeleton smoking a cigarette. I tried to make several copies of this painting while in residency at Arles. I ended up only making one while I was in residency, and I didn’t even finish that one. But this would become a major theme in my next solo show.

But here’s what I did for that residency: as you enter the Studio of the South residency building, and walk up the staircase to the second floor, you’ll walk by a painting I made that is based on an etching portrait of Dr. Gachet smoking a pipe that Van Gogh made. This is the first painting that I ever used Flashe paint on. That was because there was a bunch of leftover Flashe paint for me to use in Arles. But I like using Flashe paint now. [Grant thinks this is funny because of the 3M reflective abstract paintings from the beginning of my career.] I learned on this trip that there’s a Flashe paint color called Jaune Japonais Clair [in English: light Japanese yellow [kinda like me]]. On the next window up, on the window sill, I left one of my orchid clip installations [as described in the previous text]. In the kitchen, I painted a wall painting of myself accidentally peeing in my own mouth [because a cloud is blowing the piss into my mouth] in the style of the classic Calvin and Hobbes pissing bumper sticker. This is a drawing I made in 2014 that I wanted to paint at Arles because of the presence of the mistral, a famous regional wind in the south of France that is depicted as swirls in the sky in Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*.

Next to the wall painting is a series of objects, some that I collected while I was in Arles, others I brought with me, and a couple I had shipped to me. The first is a knitted sweater depicting Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* that I bought when I was in college. The second is a custom scent from my *Longevity Buns* show at Chateau Shatto, which is meant to be regularly sprayed on the sweater. The third is a set of poker chips I bought in Arles. Last is a giant custom Toblerone bar that says PPPPP on it.

As you walk up to the next level upstairs, there’s an unfinished *Skeleton Smoking a Cigarette* painting hung in the stairwell. In the living quarters above the bed, there’s a painting that says *Asian Provocateur* in the style of the Agent Provocateur lingerie logo. On one of the bedroom

walls is another wall painting that I made that is a Google photo-translation of a Jenny Holzer marble bench at Chateau Lacoste. When I visited the Chateau with some people who spoke French, they told me that the text, which was originally in English, was a poor French translation. So I pulled out my phone to use the Google Translate app to translate it back into English. What I got is a jumble of words in both French and English that doesn't really make sense:

POUEEACOKIVOUSE AMUSTZ-SEE CAN NGT  
CLASSER LESPEURS BARA ASORLAPAISE  
DOESEROEAS P AVENIR ESTUNE AVANE LEAK  
FAULTSOPPOSE TO DETATORITE ENTANTS &:  
MAY BE USED TO COMBINE ANYTHING 01 EL "P R4X  
ANIMALITY IS PERFECTLY SA! BORN  
〔something that isnt legible as letters〕  
THE DEPENDENCY OTHER BE 1RICE OF COMFORT  
DERATION KILLS THE TRAIN  
SEXUAL MEURTRKEASON  
ARTIFICIAL DESIRES PUNISH THE EARTH  
LS MEN ARE NOT NATURALLY MONOGAMES  
S RESOLUTE ARE USED TO SOOTHE YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS  
TAKE SOMETHING ABOUT EMERGENCY CASES  
ERRIBLE CHATIMENT WAITING FOR PEOPLE EARLY BAD

The title of this piece is *The Ineffable Ecstasy of Art* 〔I just did a Google search for the word "ineffable to make sure I was spelling it correctly and an image of Van Gogh's "Starry Night" came up〕 . For me it's an artwork that serves as a metaphor for art's reliance on language to give it meaning, which 〔as mentioned in the previous text〕 is something that I've always been highly suspicious of, especially in regards to my work 〔ironic that I write these texts now〕 .

My time in Arles was the... omakase... of my Japanese-American heritage. Being in southern France, where Van Gogh had spent time vibing on orientalism, and I found myself somehow haunted by his spirit 〔vibed on Van Gogh, you might say 〔it even followed me to Las Vegas, where I traveled immediately after leaving the residency〕 〕 . Like I've said before, my art is the thing 〔s〕 around me. Maybe I haven't said that before but that's basically the thesis of my art.

The next floor up in the residency contains a piece that I think illustrates all these forces colliding 〔blown together in a great big wind〕 . It's a wall painting spread across three

separate walls. Depicted on the first wall there's a French maid ripped from the American skateboard company Hookups. It's a wall painting of an illustration by a western artist that's obsessed with Japanese culture [like our boy Vincent] depicting an American fantasy about French women. Below the French maid image is a text that reads "mistral." The word mistral comes from the Latin *magistralis*, and is literally translated as "*master wind*." On the next wall is a painting from a drawing I made that reads "yellow fever." You could think of Vincent Van Gogh as having yellow fever in two ways. Firstly, is his obsession with Japan. The other is the prominent use of yellow in his paintings, which I once read was a result of him being on depression medication. On the third wall is a text which reads "c'est moi" which I got the idea for from a letter Nam June Paik sent to George Maciunas. Paik's original letter reads "Yellow peril! c'est moi."

For the final piece at this residency, I climbed onto the roof of the building and hung the regional grocery bag I used while I was there from a vent protruding from the roof. When the mistral blew, the bag would capture it like a sail, and dance around. Getting up there was hectic because the ladder fell once I got on the roof. The mistral wind was on the loose. I was worried the roof tiles would break and if I'd fallen, I would've shattered on the ground below into a million pieces.



## Asian Goddess Smoking Fetish

Below is an interview Allan Gardner conducted with me for my exhibition *Asian Goddess Smoking Fetish* at Screw Gallery in Leeds earlier this year. Instead of writing something about these paintings, I thought I'd just copy/paste the interview here. Some of what's discussed was just discussed above. The 13 paintings I exhibited in Leeds were shipped back to my studio and I worked on them more, and made an additional 11 paintings, so 24 total, that are going to be shown in Los Angeles next week [from the time of writing this]. The exhibition will be in collaboration with my friend Pandasex, a famous/cutty Bay Area, Graffiti entity [shout-outs to Drugs Crew]. We haven't settled on a title for the show yet, but right now a leading contender is "Kimono Wednesdays," which is taken from an event held at the Boston Museum of Fine Art called Kimono Wednesdays in which visitors could put on a kimono and get their photo taken in front of a Monet painting of his wife in a kimono. [The show has since opened. There's a reproduction of this Monet in it. Grant wore a cute little kimono to the opening.]

**Allan Gardner:** When we began talking about this show, it was initially based on the Van Gogh painting *Skull of a Skeleton Smoking a Cigarette*. It's an interesting painting, in that it was apparently made as a sort of rebellion against his conservative education environment, right?

**Parker Ito:** Yeah, it was made when he was in school, maybe as an act of protest.

**AG:** Skeletons weren't supposed to be for painting, they were for getting your chops up with life drawing. That's why it was an act of rebellion. To paint a skeleton is in direct contradiction to the education he received. I know that you haven't been the most complimentary about art education, or the kind of systems at play in art in general. Was that part of the inspiration for using this work as a starting point?

**PI:** It's much more personal than that. I did have some problems with art school, but really it's about Van Gogh. I dislike his work, but regardless of what I think, he has contributed to the public consciousness of what it means to be an artist [psycho simp that will cut his ear off for love and make misunderstood beautiful paintings that change the course of history, only once it's too late... and all that shit, which I don't really like].

I learned more about him while I was doing a residency in Arles, where he went, where the Van Gogh foundation is based. But the skeleton painting is just a painting that I really like. The first time I saw it, it was being used in a Gaultier t-shirt graphic where Jean Paul had decided to put a

motorcycle helmet on the skeleton. I also have a personal relationship with smoking which I thought would be funny to do a show about.

This show is a collection of different themes and things that came together in my head [which is what my work is like in general] with the relation between themes on this occasion being a bit more abstract than usual. It's a combination of my being in Arles, Van Gogh being in Arles, my personal relationship to smoking as it relates to playing poker [my poker group is full of AA people who chain smoke when we play] and that all mixed in with reflections on being a 4th / 5th generation Japanese-American.

I'm really anti-smoking, I've never really understood it. Are you a smoker? I feel like you're probably a smoker.

**AG:** I started smoking cigarettes when I was about 13 but I'm not now, nor have I ever been, addicted to cigarettes. I guess I have socially smoked since I was basically a child but I've never been the kind of person to need a cigarette. For me it's like eating candy.

Also, on perhaps an unrelated note, I thought it was worth mentioning that most of the other businesses on our street are Asian restaurants, massage parlors, and supermarkets, so it's kind of interesting that you went with the title that you did.

**PI:** Well, that's sort of what the show is all about. I'm into it being in that situation for sure, but before I tell you about that I have some more thoughts on smoking.

Consider 3 groups of people: smokers, dog people and motorcycle riders. The thing that unifies these groups is the assumption that you will be as excited to partake in the thing that they like as they are. People rarely ask if I mind if they smoke, and even if I did, what would I say? "No, you can't fucking smoke in front of me!" No, that would be weird. I'm really into skincare. If people smoke around me, it's aging me. So I've ended up trying to convince a lot of people in my poker group to quit smoking for this very reason — because I'm vain.

[Writing this text with Parker led Grant to quit smoking after a decade of a pack per day. Also because that beautiful woman Grant mentioned earlier hated the smell/taste of cigarettes and, vain like Parker, probably worried about her skin when Grant smoked around her. Grant's quitting was also significantly assisted by a Robin Williams video Parker showed Grant where Mr. Williams says "you're either a smoker or a nonsmoker, people who say they are trying to quit are just pussies who can't commit. Know what you are, and be it."]

It's the same thing with dog people. I used to live in a big apartment complex and people would get in the elevator and just let their dog jump on you. I like dogs but I don't want a random dog jumping on me. Maybe I'm afraid of dogs or maybe I'm wearing nice clothes and I don't want hair all over me. Motorcycles. Why the fuck are they so loud? Do the people who ride them care that they're so loud? Are they into that aspect? I don't understand it. Smoking just doesn't seem productive. Cocaine, ecstasy, alcohol etc. are all terrible for your body but they DO SOMETHING. If I smoked a cigarette today, I wouldn't be drawn to it. My body would need to adapt and develop a dependence on nicotine. But if I took some cocaine I would know exactly what was appealing or not appealing about its effects. Smoking is an acquired taste essentially. You have to do it a lot to like it. Here's this thing that you can partake in that you won't really feel the negative effects of at first, nor really the positives, but will eventually be totally addicted to.

I'd like to add parents to this list too. I used to think I hated children but then I realized that it's parents that are annoying. Most people aren't exceptional. Your child isn't that special. Shit, I hope I'm never that person. My child isn't allowed to be a graphic designer.

The other thing about smoking is that it's sexy: the fetish aspect. I fucking hate smoking but I would never ask a romantic partner not to smoke. Part of that relates to *Sex and the City*. Carrie dates this guy Aidan [whom I hate so much] and one of his big things was getting her to quit smoking. That was always a big problem for me.

I also have this Proustian connection to tasting a cigarette on someone's lips that reminds me of going home with someone after a night out. It's a disgusting taste but it's kind of sexy. My brain associates it with that. Kissing a smoker, biting into a madeleine, it really does something to your brain.

I started to notice that the girls are smoking in several of these Hook-ups graphics. I know Jeremy Klein, the creator of Hook-ups, is very anti-drug, but I guess he's ok with smoking. Jeremy Klein could be described by the popular hashtag #WMAF, which is an acronym for white male, asian female. He's got yellow fever basically.

**AG:** Some of the work uses a Yoshu Chikanobu print of an orchestra as a source image. It's supposedly an example of Japan preparing for Western visitation, or tourism, playing Western music etc. When I saw it, I didn't even clock that it was unusual for that to be happening: Japanese people in tuxedos playing violins in the 1900s.

**PI:** The reason I chose that image is that it depicts the Rokumeikan, the first cultural space in Japan built to host westerners. It was seen as an attempt at modernisation for Japan, or westernization, which was controversial. The moment of the building's construction, 1883, is the same time of Van Gogh's initial access to Japanese woodcut prints. The demolition of the building in 1941 aligns with Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor, creating the conditions for America to enter WWII.

Van Gogh was a Japan fetishist. Maybe not necessarily in the sense that he fetishised Japanese women, but in the sense that he believed Japanese art and culture was spiritually superior. He even made painting copies of Japanese woodcut prints. He was a weebo before that was a thing. [I know Japonisme is a whole thing and there are several other western artists who partook in this kind of thing, but none of these other artists are haunting me.]

Obviously there's an interesting dissonance between my generation's view on animé and the Gen-Z perspective. It used to be part of a subculture that was characterized as gross and nerdy. It was hardcore. You could be a poser. If you watched Dragon Ball Z they'd call you out. It isn't like that anymore. The content is much more mainstream.

Being white and Japanese at the same time, I benefit from both of those spaces. All the stereotypes about Japanese people are pretty positive. Those positive stereotypes are where the idea of a model minority comes from. I guess it's just about realizing I'm Asian. I didn't even try sushi until I was 25. My mom is white and a lot of the Japanese side of my family married white Americans.

I recently inherited a sword which was passed down through generations of my family. They don't know anything about it. They never asked questions because there was no desire to have cultural ties, nobody even knows what its function was. I know it was passed to my great-grandfather who had it for almost a hundred years, now I have to do the research and figure out where it came from.

**AG:** There aren't many artists who would pull that influence through the aesthetic and cultural dialogues present in the work of disparate people like Van Gogh and Jeremy Kline, it's quite specific to your own experience. Your work seems to approach the use of popular culture as fairly undefined, you're pulling together things that grab your interest but some have been present for significantly longer than others, for example, the hookups girls. Has their role in your work changed with these new considerations?

**PI:** It has changed a lot, not just because of the connection between the Rokumeikan and Van Gogh, but also because of the access to Anime and Manga in general. I had a conversation with a Gen Z-er and she said that her brain was incapable of perceiving these images in the same way that I can because of the way cultural dialogue around anime has changed so much. Anime is cool now, it's not for nerds.

**AG:** But so much of what made other pop-culture associated with anime so huge, Drain Gang for example, is the relationship to being a bedroom dweller and a celebrity at the same time. Whether it's Anime or Goth or whatever, the indicator that you were not able to assimilate into the mainstream and the resultant ostracisation has disappeared.

The importance of the content isn't your enjoyment of it, it's how it contributes to your identity: it's about seeing yourself as the kind of person who enjoys something obscure which at the same time makes you cool. The semiotic language of the images has changed significantly. A random person walking into this show will recognise the Anime as being Anime before they recognise a specific Van Gogh painting. That's the lens they're going to see the show through.

**PI:** There's a Balthus painting called *Turkish Room* in some of these works depicting his second wife who was Japanese. Balthus is an artist who I really love, probably my favorite painter of all time, but also someone who is maybe now persona non grata. There's an obvious bit of fetishisation happening in that work and it's representative of the #WMAF dynamic I explain above (is that ever not sus?). White women with Asian men is less common (#AMWF), but I've always ended up dating white women, so I'm a trailblazer. There's a history in Hollywood of feminizing Asian men, they were emasculated, seen as not sexy, that happened as result of the sentiments of the Yellow Peril phenomenon. In the test screenings of the action film "Romeo Must Die" starring Jet Li and Aaliyah, the two main characters — Li and Aaliyah, an asian man and black woman — kissing made audiences so uncomfortable that the scene was completely removed from the film. Stereotypically, Asian men are not seen as desirable — I've never really related to that and maybe this is because I'm mixed, so I got the whole racially ambiguous thing going on and also mixed babies are highly fetishized. I do think because of things like Tik Tok the attitudes in the younger generations around these ideas about Asian men's desirability are shifting. Interestingly, even though my last name is Ito, a super common Japanese last name, people tend to make the assumption that it is my mother who is the Japanese one. This is a great crossbreeding of generations of sexism and racism and the co-mingling of stereotypes about the undesirability of asian men and asian women and submissive and docile.

## Hummingbird Paintings

In 2021, I was possibly going to do an exhibition in a fake gallery owned by one of the members of the Antwerp 6. [Hint: it wasn't Walter Van Bierendonck, I'd much rather have done a show with him.] This interaction led to my first-ever professional burnout, which is expected after doing something for a decade. But I was completely unprepared to experience burnout because art has always been the one thing I've been able to do no matter what my life circumstances were. Even in my darkest moments, I was still able to retreat into the studio. Art had really been something that kept me going throughout all those years. All of a sudden, the pleasure of art was no longer present in my life. It became unfun to make art, like doing chores. It became really hard to do anything. The burnout of COVID also played a big factor in this. Making this next body of work I'm going to describe, even though it wasn't extremely sophisticated technically, was spiritually very hard to make.

In May of 2021, I started a three-month residency on Lake Como. During my residency, but not as part of my residency, I had an exhibition on Como called *medieval Times* at the site of a former fish restaurant in Colonna. The show consisted of a group of paintings I'd made of hummingbirds. Leading up to 2020, I'd been taking images of hummingbirds on the balcony of my home in Hollywood for a couple years. [The same apartment that had been the site of many of my other works.] But during COVID, because I was physically stuck in the apartment for many months, I learned the daily rituals and schedules of the hummingbirds that visited the balcony and was able to anticipate when they'd visit. Like other image-based bodies of work that I'd made, the hummingbirds were captured on an old digital point-and-shoot from the early 2000s. I've often made works with a regard for classical tropes, for instance still lifes and landscapes. These are my studies of animals — hummingbirds — which are specific to the Americas.

It's really hard to shoot something which moves as fast as a hummingbird with an out-of-date point and shoot. I'd always fantasized about doing bird photography as a hobby. Birds are beautiful and cool, so that is definitely a motivating factor, but I think there is something significant about the kind of devotion required to capture these images. So during COVID I was able to indulge my fantasy.

When I considered transposing the photographs into works of art, I thought about the images' relationship to abstract painting. As the camera technology was not sophisticated, it was difficult to photograph the hummingbirds unless they decided to land on something on the balcony. This led to photographs that were very abstracted. Abstract painting came back en

vogue and I had an impulse to start making it again, because it was something I hadn't done in a couple years. I cut the hummingbird images up into discrete panels, and made paintings using different experimental methods with my printer. Each of those cut-up panels was a chance to try a different technique either with my printer or the light-reactive dyes I was using. These panels are all composed of different substrates [various linens, canvas and jute] , most of which are not meant to be run through a printer. Through the preparation of the surfaces, the textures of the substrates themselves, and the different modes of image making [print or light-dye] different image qualities would be produced on each panel. In those panels, the images would become more abstract than their initial existence, so by the end you're looking at an abstraction [squared] of abstractions in abstractions. The paintings were made panel by panel, then arranged into a grid and stitched together by a tailor across the alley from my studio [not the Margiela tailor] .

I had originally planned the whole series as a skeletal project, with some paintings being individual panels, some that are four, and some that are 16 panels. The smallest paintings I produced at the Como residency are single panel works with unique cast bronze branches. The bronze cast on the smaller panels is a branch of a tomato plant from my balcony in LA that the hummingbirds had an affinity for and would frequently land on. The plant was dead, but I left it on the balcony because the hummingbirds liked it so much. The plant is depicted in many of the paintings.

I produced one large painting at the Como residency with the solar dyes. When making these, the substrate has to be rinsed between applications of the dyes. This large painting was rinsed in Lake Como and then cut up to make smaller works. It's the opposite of what was done with the works in the LA studio. With the works in the studio, I cut up images into small paintings in order to reassemble them to produce large paintings. At the residency, I made one large painting, and cut it up to produce a series of smaller paintings. It's an echo of a similar ying/yang at play in the formal process between the dyes and printed surfaces. Bear with me...

In these works, a one-to-one photographic chemical process [solar-dye, a subtractive process, by nature akin to shadow-casting, or otherwise to be considered as a technique for achieving high-fidelity reproductions of line and form by means of the manipulation of light] become totally abstract color fields, while a process involving the application of a pigment to a surface [inkjet printing, more akin to painting in that it's an additive process meant to approximate the appearance of forms] becomes photographically precise. In some sense the dye process is much older [cyanotypes came long before CMYK dot-matrix printing] , but in another sense the pigment application technique is much older [cave painting] .

At each level of this process there's an inversion. The first is that I'm using a camera to take images. Those images are becoming abstracted because of the camera's coarse ability to capture the hummingbirds. Next the images are split into sections to make them more abstract. Finally, through different processes of reproduction, there's the final level of abstraction taking place. The multiple maneuvers take each quadrant of the image in wholly different and contrary directions.

The show in Italy ended up containing only the 4x4 quadrant paintings. It also featured two wall drawings. Entering the space, the viewer was greeted by a wall drawing of a jester covering his face, which was accompanied by a painting of the same image. This is a drawing that I'd used many times in my previous work, dating back to 2014. I came across it as a Tarot card: the Fool card. I had my former studio assistant make a drawing of it. The drawing in the show is a modified version of the drawing my assistant made, made by me. Not until recently did I realize the original image I saw was based on a painting called the *Laughing Fool* by Jacob Cornelisz Van Oostanen made in 1500. The only reason I found out about the original painting is that my former studio assistant happened to stumble upon it in a museum and sent me a photo of it. The image of the Fool resonated with me, maybe because of my burnout, or because of COVID, or maybe we were all fools at that moment because of COVID delirium. But the painting was both a flier for the show and a work in the show itself. It was the first exhibition of mine I got to attend and the first time I traveled internationally since COVID began, so the fool character was a sort of self portrait for the show.

The other wall drawing is a version of something I referenced in the last text, the amabie character. The amabie being a yokai that became popular during COVID. [See PPP text.] The Yokai featured in this exhibition in the wall drawing is a similar type of figure that appeared in the water and was said to predict the plague. It appeared a month before the Amabie in a different prefecture, but wasn't rediscovered until after the Amabie. I had made a series of drawings with charcoal from the burnt tree stump I used to make my sculpture *Renaissance* that was shown at my Mother's Tankstation show. I shipped bits of the charred stump that I had left over to Como, and blended and incorporated it into an ink, which is what I made the drawings with. Other than the wall drawings, everything in the show was made in LA. The cast branches, which is what I made in Como, weren't included in the show because they weren't ready in time.

A potentially useful metaphor for my work is the Rube Goldberg machine. A Rube Goldberg machine is this thing designed to complete a simple task, but has an elaborate way of enacting it. Each part of the system cannot be understood without the whole. It's a good analogy for thinking about individual works of mine. If you think about it, Rube Goldberg machines aren't



even really designed to complete simple tasks. Really, they have no purpose except for the process.

## New Abstract Paintings

By the time you read this text, these works [which are in production at the time of writing] will be finished, but will have not yet been shown.

[Update: the show got canceled.]

[Update: the show is back on [thanks to Grant] but not for a year.]

[Update: since I started writing this text, Issey Miyake died, so I guess the jacket is worth more now???)

For a while now I've been thinking about the exhibitions I've produced in the context of theater. When I'm staging an exhibition it's like I'm putting on a play. I don't know why this feels like a more apt metaphor than a film.

Grant says it's because my work characteristically strives to liquidate art with life, thereby intensifying both. Films maintain a degree of separation through technological mediation. Temporal discontinuity is their essential attribute. Plays are forced to engage the here/now more directly, though it would be a mistake to call them continuous. Plato's idealistic suspicion of art. *"All the world's a stage!"*

Anyways, every time I do one of these plays, I bring out a returning cast of characters. Sometimes the characters morph and sometimes the characters become so digested that they're only recognizable by me. I had the idea to do a show of backdrop paintings where one of my scanner sculptures is surrounded by paintings hung off the wall. The scanner sculpture is center stage, but really it's just an excuse to make abstract paintings. The way I thought about approaching this was the answer to a question people ask me often: "Do the scanner sculptures capture data?" As I've explained in my previous text, they do but the data is inaccessible.

With these backdrop paintings, I'm trying to imagine what that scan would look like. I'm scanning the hacked scanner with the functional scanner in my studio, which is the same model as the hacked scanners. These images are then printed with my inkjet printer onto canvas that was made unsuitable for inkjet printing, which creates a particular effect and texture in the final output. The paintings were produced at the largest scale I could make them with the printer, to the same proportions as the original scans. The size and proportions of the paintings are determined by the tools. Each painting can be hung either landscape or portrait. I've almost

exclusively worked in portrait format my whole career. These are my landscape paintings. Printed on the canvases are photos of the downtown LA skyline taken from my studio window under different atmospheric conditions. The sunsets at my studio are really beautiful. *[[This is something I filmed over and over again for my video work *Apartment Clippings*.]]*

The content of these images is the backdrop to my studio: skyline view. The content of the abstraction, the scans, are scans of another scanner, set up in such a way that the walls and space of the studio are folded in and captured in the final scan output. Installed, the paintings will be the backdrops to another work, one of the scanner sculptures. In a sense I'm installing my studio as a stage into the gallery, and my sculpture is the performer. Or maybe I'm the performer, as the paint markings on the various abstractions are records of me in the studio, or records of different atmospheric conditions in the studio. The markings on the paintings themselves are the detritus of the production of other paintings: brush cleanings, palettes, color testing, et cetera.

But maybe process-based art about the studio is tired and boring and we don't need more of it. Like even if I was adhering to this supposed strict set of rules about how I'm arriving at the gestural marks on the canvas, it doesn't really matter in the end. I could just lie. Was Vito really under the floorboards masturbating? Maybe it's more interesting to try and just make a good painting. The scanner sculpture to be used in the exhibition is a very specific one. It is a self-portrait of me as a knight, which has taken many forms in my work over the years. It is here rendered in glass. This particular sculpture is part of a project I worked on in Italy last year. There was a fuck-up on this sculpture so the atelier sent it back to my studio as a non-artwork. I thought for a long time about what I wanted to do with this unfinished non-artwork. I ended up throwing it out of my studio window.

The artist, in an attempt to photograph a breathtaking sunset, falls out of the 6-story window and shatters on the sidewalk below, besides a churro stand, dealer of mass-produced effigies, and a retailer of fake designer shoes.

This reminds me of the time I spent several years of my life and all my money to make an exhibition which was completely destroyed by an earthquake. Being inside of the exhibition I became temporarily disabled. I made an artwork about it. My fantasy is that — after all this time and energy I put into my exhibition — there's no trace of it. I'll get paid out by the insurance, and won't have to take a loss. The sculpture is to be presented reassembled. You'll have to see the show or see documentation on my website.

*Update — August 2022:*

I'm running the new abstract paintings through the printer again, printing over the painted areas with the original image, spraying with water, and padding them with a paper towel to remove some ink and reveal the paintings underneath. I saw a Rothko defaced with a tagging pen. That's what I've been thinking about. I want to put my email address on the paintings in a graffiti font. The moodboard is Rothko with graffiti.

## Istanbul

At the time of writing, I'm in my studio working out, dictating to Grant, imagining a time when I'm in Istanbul, imagining the show this text was written for. Bad news in regards to the Issey Miyake jacket: I sold it to fund the production of new works. In memoriam of the jacket, I've decided to make a reproduction of it, as faithful to the original as possible, and exhibit it as a work of art for my show in Istanbul. Remember that credit with my tailor I mentioned before? Well my tailor also happens to be Turkish. Funny how that works [it feels very 2+7 = 9]. The jacket will be produced by him in LA. I'm going to try and get the jacket as close to the original as possible, but, you know how people like drinking old wine cause it tastes better or something? Faking a vintage jacket might be harder than it sounds. I may also add some small details to identify the jacket as a *Parker Ito artwork*.

When you start exhibiting art professionally, there is a lot of novelty in the logistics of the whole process that are not explained in art school. You have to improvise as you go. Having your flights covered when exhibiting internationally for the first time is extremely exciting. Not as exciting, but also an important detail, is the shipment of artworks. Shipping artworks is an invisible industry to the general art-loving public. Having fancy international shipping, or any kind of shipping, is a luxury of being an established artist. In the years leading up to becoming a professional artist, projects often don't have those kinds of budgets. So you have to cut corners in shipping. One route is a suitcase show: a show where all of the artwork can fit in your suitcase. This show I'm doing in Istanbul is a return to a suitcase show. It's a suitcase show in that the artwork is put in the suitcase and the artwork is just a jacket, which you'd put in a suitcase anyways.

My plan is to arrive in Istanbul for my three-week stay and spend time traveling around the city, documenting my experience there, taking images of myself wearing the jacket, which will be used for a zine available at the show [Update: it's too hot to wear the jacket. Instead the zine will be photos relating to this text. Basically the illustrated version without text.] There will be an audiobook version of the present text in the exhibition along with a printed version with a custom-designed letterhead.

What if I didn't sell my jacket? What if the jacket present in Istanbul is actually a reproduction I found on an online Chinese marketplace that I modified and sewed real Issey Miyake tags into? What if instead of selling one of my prized possessions, I actually funded this show through my poker winnings?

In the end it's about making the best +EV decisions. Big losses always feel worse than big wins feel good. Hooking up with 9 people is fine, the 10th rejection feels worse. Same with selling out a show vs selling nothing. Art like poker is about the swings, the ups and downs. No artist's career is a straight path. Finding how you navigate what +EV is what makes you you. I may have sold the jacket or I may have made the money playing poker. Or I may have had to sell the jacket because of poker losses. Either way, I hope it's +EV.

The Nuts.

As the French say, *c'est la vie...*