

CURATOR'S NOTES

Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the over-compensations for misery. And of course, stability isn't nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune, none of the picturesqueness of a struggle with temptation, or a fatal overthrow by passion or doubt. Happiness is never grand.

—Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

Pungent Dystopia was first conceived as a group of artists responding to adaptation and survival in dysfunctional times - mainly the last four years of the Agent Orange regime. The selection of artists is largely figurative, narrative, and text-based. Many deal with fantasy and escapism in their work as a means of coping with the insanity of today's volatile political climate.

The exhibition has now become something akin to a reality TV show: the art increasingly mirrors the situation unfolding right before us - an actual matter of life and death - as COVID-19 sweeps NYC and the world at an alarming rate. The world financial markets are crashing and impacting all sectors of society - particularly the art world, including galleries, museums, auction houses, artfairs and artschools, etc. F+V may be the one of the few galleries in the city to install a new, physical show during the pandemic and ensuing quarantine. "And the band played on..." Although the space is closed as of this writing, a virtual tour of the exhibition will be available on our website, www.freightandvolume.com

Pungent Dystopia reads like a contemporary Hieronymus Bosch "Garden of Earthly Delights" landscape, populated with a multitude of monsters, deformed creatures, bizarre hybrids, and ghoulish drones, devils and saints - imagined by the artists - which might just have the ability to navigate today's troubled and treacherous waters. In many instances these characters have undergone a sci-fi kind of metamorphosis, changing their structure, skin hue and body, for the worse or for the better. In other cases the figures have become more human, compassionate and evolved.

Our current dystopia and pandemic is, in many ways, a culmination of a long history of

bad human habits: our steady abuse of the planet, factory farming, rampant pollution, lawless destruction of rainforests, habitats and biological diversity, wanton corporate greed and unchecked capitalism, and of course, exponential overpopulation.

We are learning some hard lessons about our medical and logistical unpreparedness, our current administration's incompetence, and above all our failure to predict any of this: all of which is especially embarrassing for the wealthiest and most "advanced" nation on Earth.

We are learning these things very quickly, and at great cost. We are encountering what Paul Ehrlich, in a recent essay in *Environmental Health News*, terms "the deterioration of the epidemiological environment...the decay of biological diversity," and its disastrous consequences.

Artists in *Pungent Dystopia* address the catastrophe in a variety of ways, but at the end of the day their message is hardly just one of doom, gloom and apocalypse. There is an underlying (and reassuring) optimism and faith in the planet's resiliency and - perhaps, this time - humankind may learn from its mistakes.

Big thanks to all the participating artists, collectors, friends and writers for your continued support of the gallery and its program, and my hardworking staff - Ashley Dillman, Aya Mehra, James Scarlett and Ricki Rothchild. As well as our expert book designer John Gross and photographer Adam Reich, our installers Hideki Takahashi and Michael Holden, and Artland for a superb virtual rendition of the show (so vital in this current "social distancing", shelter-at-home predicament). Please stay safe and healthy out there, everyone. Alone and together.

—Nick Lawrence, March 2020

Nick Lawrence is an artist, curator and owner/director of Freight+Volume and Arts+Leisure in NYC, and the DNA Residency in Cape Cod, MA. He also worked extensively with animal rights and environmental groups. He divides his time between NYC and Cape Cod. He has two rescue dogs and is currently perfecting his quarantini and seafood gumbo recipe.