



Capital City Arts Initiative

The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is delighted to present, *Americana with Cadmium Orange*, an exhibition by artist Gig Depio, at the CCAI Courthouse Gallery from October 5, 2018 – January 31, 2019. CCAI extends its sincere appreciations to the artist, the Carson City Courthouse, and to all those involved with the exhibition. In addition, CCAI thanks our commissioned writer, Josie Glassberg, who provided the following essay.

AMERICAN IDOLS

Most people avoid discomfort. It's uncomfortable to live in Las Vegas in the summertime, to look at cadmium orange and red for too long, and to question the economic system that writes your paycheck. But Gig Depio is used to being uncomfortable. He seems to thrive in too-hot, too-bright, and almost unattainably ethical positions - especially regarding Big Art.

"Am I supposed to chase the carrot?," Depio asks me, rhetorically. "And what happens if I chase it? That changes me."



Jumping The Fence, 24" x 36", oil on panel, 2014

We are looking at "Jumping the Fence" - one of the 25 pieces in *Americana in Cadmium Orange*. In it, a goat hops over a white picket fence as a body-less hand holds a bunch of carrots just out of reach. The goat is an avatar for the artist, saddled with a military-issued backpack full of art supplies. Though in motion, the animal appears to be stationary, suspended at the peak of its leap and paralyzed by Depio's thick brushstrokes. The goat stares at the viewer as he jumps, unnervingly.

"I have to look at you looking at me."

Depio is talking about the thing that happens when artists rely on the art market to propel their careers (and gallery-goers watch complicity). It's not exactly the same as selling out. It's slower, more creeping. It might begin when an artist starts his MFA and end when he wakes up one day to realize that all of his work is made to sell - in a gallery, at an art fair, wherever.

Living in Las Vegas for the past decade and making public-funded art has given Depio a buffer between himself and this paid-for life he might have enjoyed in a larger art center. Although his work is just as big - both physically and psychologically - as any work happening in LA or New York, Depio thinks of himself as a local artist. He is also a

distinctly American artist, despite growing up and spending most of his life in the Philippines.

From this outsider perspective, Depio is able to say something in *Americana* that feels fresh and familiar. Not mainstreaming America, but mainlining it. Not untouched by corporate arts, but somewhat unscathed.



Not So Koi, oil on canvas diptych, 144" x 144", 2016

In "Not So Koi," the general mayhem of the art world explodes into a 12-foot-by-12-foot mushroom cloud of art stars and cadmium red. In the center of the piece, a minotaur Jeff Koons lifts a giant barbell over his horned head, revealing hands that are chained together. His armpit hair is green and by the look of the little red waves coming off of it, he reeks of something. Koons is flanked by Ai Weiwei and Takashi Murakami on both sides. All around them, an angry mob closes in, held at bay - at least temporarily - by a few armed guards. The sky reflects the battle below in a volatile shade of red, shot through with Murakami's rainbow daisies and iconic Louis Vuitton symbols from his decade-long handbag collaboration with the company. Above the fray, a blindfolded Canada goose (another avatar for Depio) flounders in mid-air, having just laid an egg that has hatched into a snake. Like his title suggests, Depio is not interested in being coy. His message to the art world and its kept men is pretty clear ... keep it.

And to the art stars he smiles, "I can match your stuff."

He is referring to scale, but Depio is also interested in matching something else. Over the course of our visit, he alludes to it a half a dozen times, gesturing with his hands as if pointing to a larger brain above his own. It's a collective consciousness, or - as Depio puts it - "this thing that's floating on top of our heads....a manifestation of something much bigger, this reality thing."

The glut of images, colors, and oversized scale all give viewers a variety of entry points into the larger pictures that Depio is tapping into - pictures like the art market circus.



Velvet Kiss, 16"x 22", oil on canvas, 2016

Or, in the case of "Velvet Kiss," American pop culture. Here, Depio gives us an idea of how Van Gogh might have painted Madonna - the singer, not the Virgin - if he had inherited the same "reality thing" as us. It's all choppy oil and jarring colors, small brushstrokes that seem to march across the canvas like an army of caterpillars, sticky fur, or an unending finger labyrinth. The viewer could get lost in the paint if it didn't add up to someone as instantly recognizable as Madonna. From her TV-sized canvas, the popstar appears to be frozen in mid-song and backlit by a yellow glow that calls to mind halos from Catholic iconography.

If the viewer is following the geese from painting to painting, then the two here might be interpreted as stand-ins for the artist, the audience, or our Virgil-like guide to the subconscious mind of Depio's America. In this particular case, they look like angel wings as they frame Madonna on both sides, one grasping at a shining fish, the other laying an egg branded with a dollar sign.

In "The American Bazaar," Depio trades in geese for ducks and popular culture for conquest culture in this street scene set in Manila. Cadmium orange lettering makes Western words like "soda" and "bazaar" pop against the colorless faces of Filipino residents and their colonizers. Sepia tones give the piece a vaguely historical feel that is reinforced by a vaguely familiar face at the center of the canvas. After taking a few minutes to realize that the face belongs to President Taft, the next question becomes, "Why?"

Even without knowing that Taft was the Governor-General of the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century or that our country occupied the islands for almost 50 years, the viewer has enough clues to figure out that the U.S. left a mark on Depio's homeland.



The American Bazaar, 84"x 64", oil on canvas, 2018

Unlike the Philippines' previous colonizers - New Spain and Spain - the U.S. encouraged assimilation in language, clothing, and cultural ideals, spreading the kind of benevolent, manifest democracy that brought a certain kind of freedom while pasting over another.

It's the answer to the artist's question, "If I didn't grow up here, then why am I so American?"

Depio's identity - like so many others' from former U.S. territories - is bound up in the same American Dream that floats above our heads. His images simply grant us access, give us literal Easter eggs, and - if he's doing his job - make us a little uncomfortable.

Josie Glassberg
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Artist Gig Depio

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