

RAYNES BIRKBECK



RAYNES BIRKBECK (Bronx, 1956) lives and works in Manhattan, NY. He is a self-taught artist who paints, sculpts, draws, and writes poetry. He chronicles personal and fictitious accounts with subject matter ranging from environmental issues, war, politics, and sex. Raynes has organized a personalized system consisting of four concurrent dimensions. Individual drawings stand alone, but when seen together, strong narratives appear woven throughout his body of work. He has exhibited work at SITUATIONS, New York; the Bureau of General Services--Queer Division, New York; The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, New York; and Safe Gallery, Brooklyn. Willow Glen Films is producing a documentary about Raynes set to be released in 2020.

The significance of my work is to show the people looking at a sculpture, a painting, a drawing, a collage, or a poem, the beauty, the power, the love and the need of nature or a higher power. And even in the most mundane and commonplace things that „the Force“ is always present. That the existence of nature and God are evident due to the fact that all things are made up of atoms and thus are created by, maintained, destroyed, resurrected and governed by nuclear forces, states, conditions and laws.

I show a colorful view of the creation of life. My work allows me to evolve. In all of my work I often speak of our relationship to energy.

— Raynes Birkbeck



SELECTED WORKS



Raynes Birkbeck
Dinoland Visitor's Center, 2020
Oil and acrylic on canvas
20 x 24 in
50.8 x 61 cm



Raynes Birkbeck
Bill Halsey's Stigmata, 2020
Oil and acrylic on canvas
36 x 48 in
91.4 x 121.9 cm



Raynes Birkbeck
Teddy and Detective Wally, 2020
Acrylic on ceramic
15 1/2 x 21 x 12 in
39.4 x 53.3 x 30.5 cm



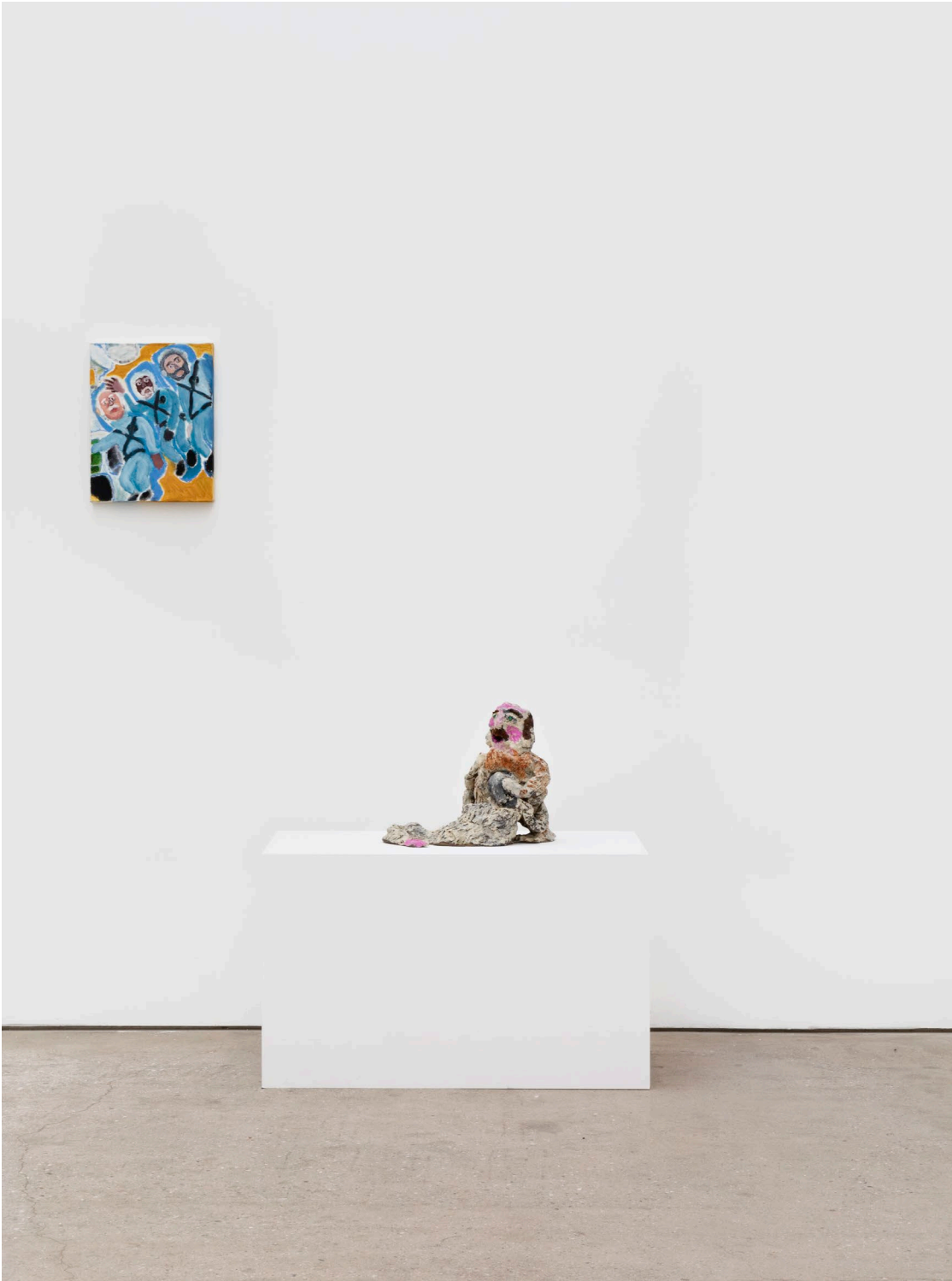
Raynes Birkbeck
Incoming Outgoing Presidents; Denny In, Jesus Out, 2019
Oil stick and acrylic on paper
18 x 24 in
45.7 x 61 cm



Raynes Birkbeck
Invisible in the City, 2019
Acrylic on paper
18 x 24 in
45.7 x 61 cm



INSTALLATION VIEWS



Installation View of Raynes Birkbeck, *The World View Show* (May 20–June 30, 2020)
Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA



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PRESS

Art in America

June 26, 2020

Raynes Birkbeck on Painting an Inclusive Queer Science-Fiction Reality

By Francesca Anton



Raynes Birkbeck: *The Rising of Poseidon II*, 2019, oil and acrylic on canvas, 24 by 24 inches; at Nino Mier.

The Bronx-born, self-taught painter and sculptor Raynes Birkbeck—now in his early sixties—melds personal experience with issues of ecology, politics, war, religion, and queer representation. His current body of work, called “The Dinoland Series,” depicts a science-fiction paradise where dinosaurs live among humans and various expressions of love and sex such as polyamory, pansexuality, and gender fluidity are embraced. Set in Los Angeles, the artist’s fantasia is a colorful landscape in which love and shared experiences unite humanity, freed from its current divisions of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Birkbeck has created roughly one hundred different timelines in which he reimagines historical people and events. These timelines—he refers to the current one as 3.2—are filled with multiple iterations of the characters at various ages, altered versions of those characters, and numerous plotlines. Bringing together disparate personages and periods, his tableaux allow for reflection on the past as well as new possibilities in the future. Birkbeck’s oil paintings, drawings, and ceramic sculpture are currently on view in the solo exhibition “The World View Show” at Nino Mier in Los Angeles through June 30.

What inspired you to create this science-fiction utopia and what do you hope viewers will take away from it?

I was looking at the world from the point of an alternate reality. I imagined the West Coast, with some scenes on the water, as if dinosaurs had never gone extinct but instead stayed with us through modernity and into the future. As I painted this universe, I began to question basic preconceptions, like what if pet dinosaurs resembled our relationships with domestic animals like cats and dogs? I created this world as a mix of what we have now with things from the past that might add even more diversity.



Raynes Birkbeck: Dinoback riding on the Beach, 2020, oil and acrylic on canvas, 24 by 30 inches; at Nino Mier.

As a self-taught artist, are there any particular influences that were important to the development of your work?

History is integral to my work. I paint scenes of World War I, World War II, the Korean war, and the Vietnam war, as well as projected future wars. My paintings present a world that is similar to ours, but with a better resolution to the problems we face. I also depict a variety of characters, including key historical figures, who ultimately represent larger ideological concepts. Former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover symbolizes law and order, Admiral Chester Nimitz represents security, and General Patton is a stand-in for World War II. They are all older men who I've made the same age at the same time. I paint them interacting with regular people—sailors, marines, and civilians—who all hang out on the beach together. I show daily life and what these figures do in alternate timelines—not only as we are used to seeing or hearing about them through historical records.

Why did you place these historical figures in familiar contexts?

Humanization is important in painting because when you are dealing with any event, people can latch on to a hero or a loved one or an historical figure. I hope people think about these figures—familiar or not—in a new context. If I'm painting Moses, for example, I might depict a black leader who could embody Moses in our time.

There are a lot of self-portraits in the show. Why did you choose to paint yourself?

Ah! Well, I like the idea of being included in the work because it shows my contributions as a character in the paintings, doing activities such as splits or interacting with the police. My presence in a painting means that I'm there to solve a problem. If there is a war or a disaster, and I'm one of the characters, I need to help. In my work, we're all friends and family. When I add myself, I'm coming in as a son, father, or cousin.

What does it mean for you to include different depictions of yourself alongside fictional characters, like Bad Billy, whom you've created?

Bad Billy is a character I manufactured into a superman with a nom de guerre. He and Raynes work in the current timeline, 3.2. He is actually a version of a guy I once knew named Bill. I like the idea that he was a real person. In my work Bad Billy is a father, a lover, and an artist who represents wisdom and power. There are many versions of “Bill” and “William,” who appear as different forms of this character Bad Billy, but they’re all based on one man. Bad Billy embodies the ultimate ruling historical figure with a lot of power and is very involved with his government. He is the kind of guy who sets up a dynasty and has other people serve as his proxies. He ruled for 500 years, until others gained possession of his world.

I’ve become more interested in including female figures. I’ve been developing new characters based on my mother and grandmother. I would like to add my aunts too. I imagine they would meet me at certain points in a given timeline and rise to power. Right now, I have ideas for eight different characters they can play.

Why did you decide to include dinosaurs and how do they function in your work?

I included dinosaurs as an exploration of the ultimate relationship between man and the wild kingdom. In my paintings, dinosaurs are owned by humans. The dinosaurs are, like dogs, very personable—they have a lot of character and add a touch of humor to the world. The dinosaurs know how to communicate with each other, and, if you caught them out in the wilderness, some could talk or come close to talking. Imagine having a pet open the door or helping around the house. That would be wild!

Many of your works reference Christianity and Greek mythology. How do these beliefs come into play in your work?

In the world I’ve created, man and God are friends and get along with one another. God takes a human form and, in this case, can be any number of characters in a human family. Just like people, God has personality and humor. God also occasionally takes the form of an animal, and this animal form can be humanized. For example, there might be a lizard person—any form that can end up doing humanlike work. If it’s an avian form, then a bird could have hands and feet in addition to wings. Each time, God is doing something different and has something to offer.

You’ve broached race relations and the segregation of troops in World War II in a previous painting of General George Patton’s US Third Army. How does your presence as a queer black man in Bill Halsey’s Stigmata (2020) further that exploration?

World War II was brutal as far as race relations are concerned. The troops were segregated, and the roles were not equal. In World War II, there were real nasty things going on. In my timelines, the troops tend to fight together. We’re all in the same boat. In these ultimate timelines, nobody is detained based on race or beliefs. That kind of animosity is wrong. So, in a sense, they might also show a love scene.

Many of the paintings show different kinds of love and sex. How does the legacy of queer representation inform who you paint and how you choose to depict them?

In the love scenes, I show people being close, affectionate, and loving because that’s the way I believe people are. When painting families I show a lot of options: multiple spouses are prevalent, two women are lovers, many men are lovers—everyone participates together. Homosexuality and heterosexuality meet at a happy medium. MacArthur’s on the Beach [2020], which shows three men having sex, is an example of how sexual preferences can coexist. In this world, it’s not unthinkable for a man to call another man “lovey,” “dear,” “darling,” “boo”—and it crosses racial divides, too. Everyone shares love.

I’ve noticed that people have become distant. I show the level of closeness people can still have—people in love with each other. I love men, but in my paintings I like to include everyone. Even in timelines where there are enemies, I want to show love and affection. Those arch nemeses might have a shared history of, say, a nuclear holocaust, and they can find commonalities that bring them closer. Love eventually conquers all. Men of different worlds need to work together because we need love to survive. I want people to feel and know that you can come out. You can be open. You can say what you want and express who you are, and someone else can reciprocate. It’s taken us this long, but people are starting to realize that we don’t need to hide. What’s done in the dark will come out in the light.

ARTFORUM

November, 2019

Raynes Birkbeck - Situations

By Alex Jovanovich



Raynes E. Birkbeck. *Love on the Beach*, 2019, oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48".

General George S. Patton was famous for many things, including his vicious, ugly temper and a taste for bespoke pistols with ivory handles, made by Smith & Wesson. In a painting by the self-taught artist Raynes E. Birkbeck—which appeared in “Scenes on the Move,” his solo show at the tiny Chinatown gallery Situations—the military hothead admittedly looks kinda hot, portrayed as a beefy, hirsute daddy who sports kneepads, tight shorts, wrist cuffs, and a Technicolor harness with a golden breastplate. Birkbeck, similarly attired, stands next to Patton. The artist’s engorged pink nipples contrast marvelously with his cocoa skin. Both men, ready to party, pose on the russet sands of a beach on a clear day—a picture of the good life.

Birkbeck, a lifelong New Yorker who was born in the Bronx in 1956, is a poet, painter, sculptor, and draftsman. This multihyphenate maker’s work illustrates a sci-fi paradise where humankind is polyamorous, omnisexual, multigendered, magical. Sadly, however, his sensuous realms are often plagued by war. As in the art of Henry Darger or Malcolm Morley—both of whom are well known for their depictions of violent conflicts that were either based on the historical, the deeply personal, or a combination thereof—the brutality of real life and inner turmoil inevitably creep into Birkbeck’s fantastical narratives. Yet his objects are always suffused by an unrepentant, hedonistic eroticism, a cockeyed humor, and a generous heart. He



often inserts himself into his dynamic and frenetically wrought images, too: our queer, black Virgil—handsome, kinky—guiding us through all manner of wild adventure.

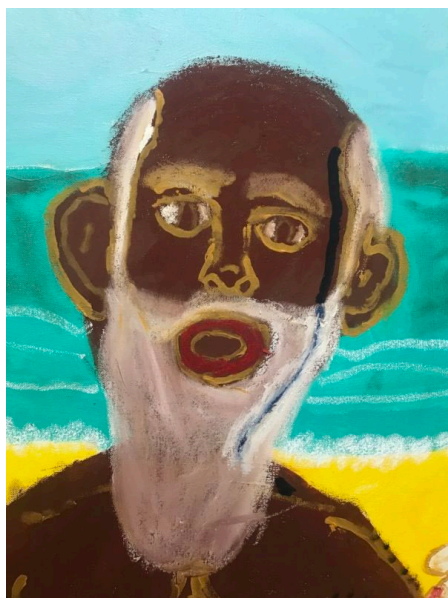
The exhibition was made up of several oil and oil-and-acrylic paintings, a number of ceramic sculptures, and a mural adjacent to the gallery's big storefront window. Across from the entrance, a trio of canvases hung in a vertical row. Like a star on a Christmas tree sat the dainty Love Boat R.E.B. the Bearded Man (all works 2019), a self-portrait of the artist (Birkbeck's initials make up the R.E.B. of the title) with two other burly guys on a cruise ship, surrounded by verdant hills and what might be half of a teal sun in a milky sky. All of the men are nude and proudly display their bellies, tits, and dicks (the last of which called to mind pieces of fresh marzipan). The scene in the painting below this one took place on a battlefield and again starred Patton, shooting off some kind of phallic-ooze cannon. Soldiers in Batman costumes surround him as a fleet of sauropods comes racing in from behind. Planes and zeppelins dot the air, while the turquoise silhouettes of ships quiver in the background. Near these works were four modestly sized ceramic pieces arranged on a shelf, including B.A.T. (the acronym stands for Battle Action Teams), another rendition of the Caped Crusader (who comes with a removable beanie); and R.E.B. in Training, Doing the Splits, another Birkbeck self-portrait, positioned as the title describes, with arms outstretched and head aimed high, like a sassy Broadway baby.

But the exhibition's golden sweetheart was the four-foot-square, oil-and-acrylic Love on the Beach, in which a radiant Birkbeck, towering like a splendid sex god, is breastfeeding other American war heroes—including Admirals William Halsey Jr. and Chester W. Nimitz—at a ritualistic-looking orgy under a sliver of palm tree. J. Edgar Hoover and a male friend, both naked and hard, take in the juicy action from the sidelines. Birkbeck stares right at the viewer as his group of sucklings greedily eat, grope, and fuck. He looks surprised—not because of what's happening, of course, but because you're just standing there and not joining in.

Visual AIDS

September, 2019

Raynes Birkbeck: Scenes on the Move



Visual AIDS Artist Member Raynes Birkbeck will have a solo exhibition, “Scenes on the Move” at SITUATIONS. The show features new paintings and ceramic sculptures held within an installation-style setting. During the month of August, Birkbeck used the gallery as a studio, painting wall murals that commingle with figurative works on paper, canvas and in clay.

Although Birkbeck works from his imagination, printouts of scientists, doctors, lawyers and politicians litter the studio walls. Subjects range from Admiral Chester Nimitz, Microbiologist Dorothy McClendon, George S. Patton, J. Edgar Hoover, the WWII Black Panthers and Neil deGrasse Tyson. Birkbeck reveals a diverse cast of historical and contemporary personas that co-exist on multiple, simultaneous timelines. War scenes with batmen meld with erotic scenarios, often played out on ships in choppy seas. He dismantles power structures and highlights pure energy fields.

Birkbeck’s interest in African American history, specifically the segregation of troops until after WWII deeply informs this particular body of work. While 676 black American men were enlisted and assigned to General George Patton’s US Third Army, Birkbeck takes note of Patton’s direct descendance from confederate soldier relatives. The Black Panther soldiers who came out fighting against the Nazis and the race prejudice of white America are heroes honored in this exhibition. In 2016, Heinzfeller Nileisist and Situations published an interview with Birkbeck which is being republished for this occasion. Additionally, Birkbeck is offering a special series of portraits available for commission for the duration of his show

NY ART BEAT

September, 2019

Raynes Birkbeck “Scenes on the Move” SITUATIONS



SITUATIONS presents a solo exhibition of Raynes Birkbeck titled “Scenes on the Move.” The show features new paintings and ceramic sculptures held within an installation-style setting. During the final weeks of August, Birkbeck used the gallery as a studio, painting wall murals that commingle with figurative works on paper, canvas and in clay.

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CV



RAYNES BIRKBECK

Born 1956, The Bronx, NY
Lives and works in New York, NY

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *The Worldview Show*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Souls Grown Diaspora, Apexart, New York, NY
- 2019 *Scenes on the Move*, SITUATIONS, New York, NY
Circus of Books, FIERMAN, New York, NY
- 2018 *Meisenfloo*, Norma Mangione Gallery, Torino, Italy
- 2017 *Day With(out) Art: ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS*, Leslie Lohman
Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, New York, NY
GUMBO, MAW Gallery, New York, NY
Raynes, Jerry & Joyce, Outsider Art Fair, New York, NY
- 2016 *Jerry the Marble Faun & Raynes Birkbeck*, SITUATIONS, New York, NY
Jerry the Marble Faun & Raynes Birkbeck, Deauville Resort, NADA Miami Beach, FL
SAFE & SITUATIONS: The Last Rose of Summer, Safe Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
Persons of Interest, The Bureau of General Services - Queer Division, New York, NY
- 2015 *Postcards from the Edge*, Luhring Augustine, New York, NY
#EndAIDS NY 2020, Housing Works, New York, NY

PUBLICATIONS

- 2016 *Raynes Birkbeck*, Heinzfeller Nileisist Publishing and SITUATIONS;
Debuted at Printed Matter's Art Book Fair at MoMA PS1, New York and the Geffen Con-
temporary at MoCA, LA