

Expect the Unexpected

“Having followed Dana Donaty’s work for several years, I can attest to her very high standard of consistency in imagery and inventiveness. In fact, after carefully examining her latest series of works, I have come to expect the unexpected in terms of sheer innovation.

At a first glance by someone who may be unfamiliar with her artwork, one might assume that all these wonderful hybrid creatures come from a collection of secondhand and department store objects, which serve as inspirational still-life models and a studio guideline for accuracy. But, in fact, this marvelous gathering of disparate and strikingly humorous figurative forms seems to be spinning around in the artist’s head, ready to be borrowed for her compositions as she intuitively lays out a parade of semi-alien creatures from the cartoon network in the sky.

Donaty’s new series effortlessly connects with her past work by retaining the delightful common denominator of slapstick humor in unlikely possibilities, including a never-ending barrage of characters born of impossible imagination and circumstances. It doesn’t hurt that this gifted artist has a special knack for inventing oddball scenarios that are heightened by superior picture-making. The work titled “All Stars” (pg. 28) is a pretty good example of a painter gone wild with an unlimited imagination and an unusual talent for making things up that appear believable. A careful examination of “All Stars” first and foremost reveals an uncommon talent for generating realistic perspectives. The purple-shoed skateboarder mysteriously glides through the air while miniature UFOs jump to get out of the way. Those curious creatures that don’t react fast enough, express comic horror as they nearly become absorbed by the airborne velocity that’s jetting through the atmosphere. Also in this engaging configuration, there is an unusual viewpoint that looks upward, adding convincing depth and is secured by a complicated foreground of beings never before discovered.

While many painters limit themselves to two-dimensional formulas, Donaty takes in stride three-dimensional forms that are accented by connective characteristics that simply don’t skip a beat. “Freaky,” 2016 (pg. 50), depicts a five-eyed, big-lipped, blob of a shape, which is perhaps looking for a friendly expression from a sympathetic observer. The creature’s skin is translucent, revealing a network of colorful “veins” that could only come from another planet. Conversely, “Top Dog,” 2015 (pg. 53), has the same identifiable DNA as other delightful figures that add to the pageant of engaging suspects.

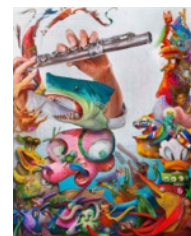
In all of Donaty’s carefully articulated works, her audience can sense a true love of articulating paint medium combined with a love and fascination for creating abstracted characters that are unique and certainly memorable. These works suggest a rare talent and an artist who truly is having a wonderful time that ends each day, no doubt, with an engaging smile of satisfaction and accomplishment.”



All Stars



Freaky



Top Dog

Bruce Helander art critic, arts writer, curator and artist. He is the former Editor-in-Chief of 'The Art Economist' magazine, White House Fellow of the National Endowment for the Arts and the former Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs of the RISD. He is a regular contributor to The New Yorker and The Huffington Post.