

It came from outer space: Jason Fox's impish new paintings

JASON FOX
Feature Inc.
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The creatures and beings in Jason Fox's paintings are so out-there and paleo-futuristic that they look as if they were envisioned by someone from another planet. Fox gives us golems with Hitler mustaches, moonfaced orangutan men with clown Afros, an intergalactic shoe-gazing guitarist, and demented souls in jumpsuits flinging themselves against chain-link fences or others gazing at us from behind prison bars and sewer gratings. In all of them I kept seeing *Star Trek* characters from the dark side. Fox's strengths are his feathery line and refined touch, his subtle iridescent color, an impish graphic flair, and his pictorial intensity. His weakness may be that he doesn't do quite enough with these tools. (This show, his fifth since 1990,

isn't that different from his last, in 1999.) Paintings can feel sketchy or abridged. Nevertheless, in everything he does there's an underlying and slightly mad sense of malice.

Fox's work is personal and political. The chain-link fence and the jumpsuits evoke Guantánamo Bay detainees; the stares of his ape-men recall a certain chimp-faced American leader. Yet these paintings transcend timely reads and strike an almost traditional presence. Fox, who once described his style as "Cubism meets Piranesi," is Hogarth from hell by way of Reynolds, Goya, and Picasso.

These new paintings don't resemble but do have some of the wildness of Guston's one-eyed beasts, and also share territory with Dana Schutz and Chris Ofili—both of whom count Fox, 41, as an inspiration. He may be too cartoony, sci-fi, and "male" for some, but I still think he's among the weirder, more visionary artists working right now. If he begins treating materials the way he treats vision, his paintings could get even more interesting. J.S.