



Synthesizing satire, fan fervor and socio-political critique, the voluptuous drawings by Puerto Rican-born, New York-based artist JONNY NEGRON are described by FRANKLIN MELENDEZ as inhabiting a melting-pot proto-paradise where tropical flora comingles with manmade detritus—home to disenfranchised half-citizens that swim harrowingly in the saturated currents of global trade.







Every time I meet you, I'll say
Yanahan, Yanahan, ooh Yanahan





*"my love and devotion
love and devotion
let it sink down in
the ocean"*

Lush, wet and stormy, Jonny Negron's voluptuous drawings inhabit a proto-paradise where tropical flora comes unbothered with manmade detritus. There, bodies swell and surge, plumped by a preternatural plenitude as well as the anxiousness of desire. Case in point: the curvaceous Venus-Doms, who stomped through his early comics and illustrations, asserting the power of their contours over nerdy, sweaty subs; or more recently, cis male dons, ripped and sinewy, brandishing the salty pathos squeezed out by all those gains. In one composition from his recent solo "Small Map of Heaven" (Château Shatto), we glimpse a morose bodybuilder through a foggy window, shedding a single tear whilst woefully injecting a perfectly swole and veiny bicep. This is no *Men's Fitness* centerfold, but rather the suffering of the eternal redeemer reimagined within the confines of the home gym.

It is in scenes such as this that one encounters the allegorical work animating the Puerto Rican-born, New York-based artist. Rather than caricatures, his expressive lines and saturated gouache tones conjure latter-day passion plays that harness the elasticity of the figure for its symbolic resonance. It is a tradition as indebted

to the extravagant flourishes of Chuck Jones, Namio Hurakawa and John Kricfalusi as to the weighty volumes of Fernando Botero, Henri Rousseau and Hieronymus Bosch. As Negron notes: "My initial figures were rooted in imagery of maternal deities and fertility goddesses. On the other hand, I find an awareness of a contradiction as much of my work also has a strong influence from the lowbrow comics and anime illustrations I was exposed to when I was a kid in the '90s."

This contradiction proves generative at the core, as it comes to straddle the pastoral and the cataclysmic, the reverential and the fetishistic, the aloofness of art and the slickness of commerce—but then again, aren't these just sides of the same enchanted coin? It is this vacillation of guises that affords Negron's highly mannered scenes their most acute insights, synthesizing satire and fan fervor into a single exuberant world that highlights moments of physical and symbolic exchange, all the while opening up onto a larger socio-political critique.

For his latest body, he turns to the consumption of the tropics in the contemporary imaginary: sexual Eden, spring break destination, disaster zone, refugee center, fulcrum in triangular

trade, unincorporated territory, mestizo melting pot, home to disenfranchised U.S. half-citizens that swim harrowingly amidst drifting consumer goods in the saturated currents of global trade. In *Bonus* (2018), a comely and well-endowed survivor poses on a sandy shore in tattered rags, equal parts seaside pin-up and hurricane victim. It all depends on how you choose to take it in.

And therein lies the crux: for in playing it up to the fetishistic gaze, Negron also exposes its appetites, predilections and unspoken fears at the site of consumption. It is this that ultimately determines how we ingest political realities and material facts: as so many morsels packaged to satiate our needs, adhere to the contours of our desires. It is a potent lesson, gleaned from the world of outsider comics and fan fiction as well as religious imagery that brandishes the debased thing as transfigured talisman. In one mystical landscape, J.Lo's iconic Versace gown hovers over jungle foliage. The figure has dissolved and only an outline remains, a memory of scintillating curves impressed on diaphanous folds. Detached from hyperbole, this serene, semi-holy apparition stands watch like some primordial guardian over a wilderness that's proximate, yet already lost. **K**











Presently, is he descending
or is he ascending???

JONNY NEGRON (PUERTORICAN, B. 1985) IS AN ARTIST WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK. IMAGES IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE: EMBER; CURRENTS; LADDER; CUP; INJECTION SITE; BONUS; TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA; BENDITO; TING; YAMALUBE, ALL 2018. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CHATEAU SHATTO, LOS ANGELES