PABLO'S BIRTHDAY
GALLERY

Press release

Tony Huynh
Magical Thinking | May 8 - June 13, 2025

Pablo's Birthday is delighted to present an exhibition of new paintings by Tony Huynh. *Magical Thinking* is the artist's first solo presentation with the gallery, and his second in New York. Huynh's modestly-scaled paintings are deceptively simple but rich with poetic meaning.

Recurring, symbolic motifs — the moon reflected in a body of water, a window open to the sea — and a variety of familiar animals — a sheep, chickens, a pony, and a white rabbit in the snow — populate Huynh's modestly-scaled paintings (all works 2025). Architectural framing devices and doubled objects are often arranged around a single, central element — a ferry boat, a wine bottle, a lone woman lost in the woods. An empty door frame that cuts the painting in half opens onto a black cat walking on a brown carpet in *The Light that Goes Out*. Two almost identical trees against a mustard sky are also reflected in the still olive-colored water in *Echoes of the Delta*. The symmetrical compositions and pared-down imagery suggest a supernatural, almost religious significance to his subjects.

The artist states, "Painting is a mystery to me; it's like believing in magic."

Huynh's stubborn, staccato brushwork and ingenuous descriptions of everyday items echoes self-taught artists like Grandma Moses, Mose Tolliver, Frank Walter, and Forrest Bess. Bess in particular, whose small paintings are laden with philosophical meaning, might be a key to understanding Huynh's practice. Bess paintings evenly divide the sky from the land, or in some cases, interweave them with a gradient, as though the landscape is obscured by atmospheric perspective. Huynh also uses a mirroring relationship between the sky and his watery landscapes to create his modest-yet-monumental pictures. In *The Inner Light*, an ultramarine blue pond situated between two trees in a green field captures a red sun and a halo of gray cloud in a perfect, Cobalt blue reflection.

Other images are even more surreal, bordering on absurd. Two rabbits munch on beets in *Beetroute* beside a pink bush. It recalls Gertrude Abercrombie's *Owl with Three Eggs*, 1963, where a central figure (an owl) is surrounded by three strange orbs, each haloed by its own white cloud. The tiny scale of the paintings also recalls Abercrombie's uniquely strange, gemlike paintings.

Huynh uses a restrained, narrow color palette, reminiscent of Japanese woodblock printing. "There's beauty in its simplicity," Huynh remarked of Hasui Kawase (1883 - 1957), a printmaker whose landscapes feature beautiful light and weather conditions. In Huynh's *Downpour*, 2025, a frog sits calmly on a lilypad as the rain irradiates the surface of the surrounding pond. Marsden Hartley and Milton Avery and their quintessentially romantic view of New England's rocky coastal landscape also come to mind. Both edited down and simplified the complex relationship between the land and ocean to create the most economical compositions possible — more colored, interlocking shapes than descriptions of real life. In Huynh's *Memento*, a horseshoe-shaped beach wraps around a glittering cove,

and a black wine bottle (perhaps with a message curled inside) lays directly under a glowing moon.

Huynh's compression of multiple, interrelated methods of painting drawn from the last century of art history encapsulates a variety of strategies on how the artist might make a small painting feel *really big*, or how to compress a vast subject into only the most essential elements. The result are paintings that vibrate with ingenuity, self-effacing humor, and an internal light.

– *Stephen Truax*

Tony Huynh (b. 1986, San Francisco, CA) graduated from the California College of the Arts and currently paints out of his studio in Sacramento. He has participated in solo and group exhibitions nationally, including the San Diego Museum of Arts, San Diego, CA: The Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; the Marin Museum of Contemporary Arts, Marin, CA; Pablo's Birthday, New York, NY; and Scroll NYC, NY, among others. This is his first solo exhibition with Pablo's Birthday.