ALMINE RECH

Javier Calleja
This Is Your Lucky Day

Jun 2 — 25, 2022 | Paris, Matignon

Between June 2 and 25, Almine Rech will exhibit *This Is Your Lucky Day*, a Parisian solo debut by Spanish artist Javier Calleja (Málaga, 1971). After introducing his renowned work at numerous art fairs, solo, and group exhibitions at Almine Rech venues worldwide, *This Is Your Lucky Day* introduces a new corner of the Malagan artist's practice at the gallery's Matignon space, in Paris.

Javier Calleja will introduce his work in the historically residential neighborhood next to the emblematic Champs d'Elysées and overlooking the famous Arc de Triomphe. Calleja has put together an intimate presentation that will provide a getaway from buzzing city life and complement the urban environment. Showcasing a series of special works on paper on the ground floor and paintings on canvas on the first floor, the installation is meant to convey the ambiance of a calm and quotidian yet playful environment, while giving subtle nods to French cultural traditions. As with most of his solo exhibitions, this particular showcase marks a number of new departures without stepping too far from his recognizable visual language and concepts. From revealing previously unexhibited aspects of his practice to introducing new compositional approaches, utilizing new colors schemes, and working with a rejuvenating mood of the post-pandemic world, the work is still firmly grounded in the framework of the "simple, but not easy".

Naughtily accentuating the title of the show, *This Is Your Lucky Day* will for the first time exhibit to the public the artist's unmediated, studio sketches, transporting the raw creative energy of his tranquil studio in the outskirts of Malaga to this trendy neighborhood of Paris. Serving as a Petri dish of Calleja's oeuvre, these paper sheets are filled with marks, notes, and elements that were possibly elaborated into one of his drawings, paintings, sculptures, collaborations, or other projects. Comprising everything from rough sketches of his infamous characters, experimentations with the face shapes, hairstyles, or eyes, color palette combinations, and compositional tryouts, over lists of words and quotes, to gestural marks and random real-life data such as phone numbers, dates, places, etc, these studio relics reveal the boisterous stream of consciousness at the base of Calleja's concise and hopeful imagery. Serving as sort of an introduction to his practice, they lead the viewer towards the first floor where a selection of large canvases visually shrinks the space.

Five new colorful paintings in custom-built antique-like frames extend Calleja's continued interest in playing with scale and proportions. Interested in altering the perception and creating an illusion for the viewer, these abnormally large frames provide a deceptive sense of Lilliputian experience. Shifting the viewers' role from mere observers into the living and moving scale reference marks, they become part of the presentation themselves and are therefore driven to relate more closely to the big-eyed protagonists. On another hand, as if they just walked into the space from the trendy street outside, the signature characters seem slightly more debonair and grown-up in their carefully designed outfits. Subtly paying tribute to Paris as a cultural capital of the world, the ornate frames reference its long-established painterly tradition, the outfits nod to its role in global fashion, and the dynamics of the new paintings shift towards *bandes dessinées* comics tradition with the textual elements now being placed alongside Calleja's iconic muses instead of on their shirts.

— Saša Bogojev, writer and curator