ALMINE RECH

Roby Dwi Antono
That Peculiar

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Almine Rech is pleased to announce *That Picular* a solo exhibition by Indonesian artist Roby Dwi Antono on view from 8 March 2023 - 8 April 2023.

That Peculiar comprises twenty-seven new works on canvas and paper, debuting a new series featuring strange creatures that appear both humanoid and alien (all works 2023). Roby began the series by looking at images of *kaiju*—monsters that appear in Japanese science fiction movies—from blockbuster Japanese films such as *Godzilla* and *Ultraman*. But while these science fiction films depicted monsters attacking large metropolises, Roby used them as a departure point to instead dream up creatures, from memory and imagination, that don't threaten the viewer. They evoke balance and healing in a peaceful setting—non-threatening, almost Zen. In soft, aquatic colors with flashes of jewel tones, Roby's creatures appear to have heads with arms akimbo, and two feet planted on the ground. Each of the creatures, composed as vertically symmetrical, appear standing at the central foreground of the composition, with a strict horizon line in the background.

In a departure from Roby's signature imagery of children with giant eyes (a trio—*Asa, Binar,* and *Elea*—makes an appearance in the show), the artist's new creatures have no eyes at all. They present themselves with an aura of blind knowingness. They embody more than they perceive, vessels of arcane wisdom.

The *kaiju* paintings comprise both organic and mystical imagery, a coexistence of idealism and materialism. Multiple paintings—*Piteron, Chimetra, Luto,* and *Gargantuma*—depict two floating orbs, one light and one dark, to symbolize the light and dark sides of the moon, or the balance of yin and yang. Alternatively, Roby's *kaiju* also take forms from plant life. *Rijoron* takes after a jasmine flower, *Orchibara* is based on an orchid, and *Nephentus* is inspired by the Kantong Semar, a tropical insect-eating plant.

Each creature is part plant, part *kaiju,* part human. Several of the figures might appear sliced, with their curiously human-like insides fully on display. *Ortigan* is sliced horizontally, as if for an autopsy, with an orb-like egg rising from its groin, symbolizing birth. For Roby, plant forms share visual puns and rhymes with humanoid vulvas, which the artist uses as a symbol of birth. At the center of the creature in *Kotekaro* is a child's nose and mouth—the only explicitly human figure in the series—but whose eyes are covered by what can appear simultaneously as flower petals or a vulva.

Regarding these humanoids, the viewer may feel identification and alienation, familiarity and estrangement, holding two opposing sentiments at once but without conflict. Rather than recoiling, the viewer is invited to identify and disidentify with the figures in a space of open curiosity, the way a child might be fascinated and charmed by dinosaurs. In *We Are There Together*, Roby arranges several characters from other paintings in an ensemble that figures a model of collectivity in harmony.

The paintings are intended to have a healing, restorative effect: balance. This induced act of empathy—an imaginary projection of a subjective state onto an object—is central to the engagement these paintings provoke, invoking a therapeutic process. Instead of repressing the strangeness within ourselves, the paintings ask the viewer to resist the instinct to shun the foreign and the alien, and confront the inherent incommensurability within the human subject by making peace with the strangeness in an encounter with an other.

- Geoffrey Mak, author and freelance journalist