



Rene Capone and the Hedgehog Boy

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Rene Capone

The young man is naked. Hunched forward in a fetal-like position, his phallus dangling like an animal's, he could be rocking back and forth in contemplation, anger, misery, or contentment. A spiky animal head rests atop his skull, or is it protruding and growing out from his own head? Is this a terrifying nightmare or allegorical dreamscape? The mystery is one of many that artist Rene Capone's latest exhibition brings to ambivalent light.

The half-boy/half-hedgehog figure is the centerpiece for Capone's show, *The Legend of Hedgehog Boy*, scheduled to exhibit at the Magnet Gallery from September 3rd through the 28th. Known for his renderings of the male figure, this time around Capone goes off on a trippy tangent, conjuring a fantastical realm - mixing the primal, the animalistic, and the fatalistic in a transfixing collection of mostly-new material. The lines between fantasy and reality are beautifully blurred, and the realm of what is possible is deliciously skewed in this phantasmagoric world.

"The show is a big turning point for me as I've never made a character and focused so much on him before," Capone claims. "There will also be a few paintings that are not of Hedgehog boy, but they are similar in tone, so I think they belong. It's the story of an outsider, who goes even farther outside by slipping into insanity, a rather fun and sexy insanity, but still fucking nuts."

It's always thrilling to see an artist venture from their comfort zone and experiment with new ideas and visions. The greatest works are often those that result from risks, and sometimes accidents. Capone veers far from the tried and true with this latest collection, built around the aforementioned character, an oddly-compelling half-beast/half-man.

"I've always been fascinated by the idea that one could get lost within their own mind," he explains. "Hedgehog boy is what happens when one falls too deep within themselves."

The images Capone has created can be read in a multitude of ways - in some pieces the hedgehog headpiece looks like a harmless accessory Cher might wear; in others it's as if the animal is devouring the young man headfirst. Subtle influences of Japanese manga infuse the new works, while tribal floral patterns inch their way onto the canvas.

Held together by a striking color palette that features rich tints of blue, indigo, violet, and fuchsia, and shot through with strokes of blood red and black, the resonance of the color scheme lends this collection a transfixing, hypnotic effect. It adds to the compelling double-sided tension that runs through the exhibit, forcing an uneasy reconciliation between dreaming and waking - akin to what happens when one has been awake or asleep for too long

"All the pieces in the show deal with dual identity and conflict of one's character...and how people deal with trauma. Hedgehog boy is actually a very complicated character in what appears to be a simple story, and it's far from original, but that's the point. I want tell the story of someone

who escapes from reality, completely unaware from the context that he is gay."

There is freedom in such a notion, and a glorious abandon in that freedom, but there is danger and risk as well. Like the pratfalls involved in giving in to the whims of the Hedgehog Boy, there is some tricky maneuvering involved in successfully executing a new direction in one's artistic oeuvre. For Capone, such a bold move comes rather appropriately during the ten-year anniversary of his professional craft: a decade ago was the first time he sold one of his paintings.

"It was a big deal back then, and it still is now," he admits. "The idea that my artwork holds up enough merit to be included in other peoples lives, other than my own, is very important and special to me."

Marking the moment with this current show is an apt celebration for an artist who has continued to evolve and grow over the years - pushing himself and welcoming the challenges, while realizing the significance of his own art.

The Legend of Hedgehog Boy is currently showing through the end of September at the Magnet Gallery, located at 4122 18th St. (18th and Castro), San Francisco, CA 94114.

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