

Impossible Realms: Co-existing with the Intermundane in James Jean's *Meadowlark*

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James Jean's *Meadowlark* exhibit transforms the CICA gallery in historic Gastown into a kaleidoscope of colour and otherworldly figures. Entering the gallery, visitors encounter Jean's gleaming sculpture, 'Slingshot.' The mirror-polished steel finish captivates as it reflects and bounces light from its flawless curves and piercing details. But as one views it in the round, the eye is drawn by multiple swirling images spanning this warm and alluring space.

The monumental 'Bear' diptych beckons the viewer toward it, kicking off a spiralling view of vibrant and fantastical images around the gallery. Around every corner is a surprise, another step into Jean's mythos, and both long-standing fans and those who are new to his work will be mesmerized. Followers of Jean's early work with DC Comics, as well as old-school anime and video game enthusiasts will appreciate the strong characters and rich history in these pieces, such as 'Student,' inspired by Capcom's character Mega Man, which was heavily inspired by manga-master Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy.

But there is also a gravity in these works. A child's anguish as they work at their desk is almost palpable in Jean's painting, 'Student.' A woman's perspective is ever-elusive in the luscious wood carving, 'Sun Tarot.' And a young man continually flourishes and disintegrates in the hypnotic video loop, 'Sunflower.' Many of the figures in this exhibit exist in a sort of in-between world, poised between here and there, then and now. These works share a sense of grief and longing for connection to something familiar and safe, a feeling of always carrying the awareness of being alien or other. They also share a sense of the extraordinary.

While the themes of inhabiting multiple worlds and being caught between past, present, and future are evident throughout the exhibit and much of the Taiwanese-American artist's work, one of the most striking visual depictions of this notion or state of being intermundane is visible in his multiplane print, 'Yonen,' a three-dimensional tableau that literally and figuratively reveals this sense of dislocation through its employment of parallax, so what one sees depends on one's position while viewing. The 10 images within this piece are held by the layers of clear acrylic they are printed on, but there is an illusion of displacement or shifting depending on the angle of view.

Jean inhabits and navigates multiple worlds in his art, as well. Never satisfied to relegate himself to one form, his versatility is undeniable as he continually pushes himself to grow and expand as an artist, shifting with ease between drawing, painting, sculpture, video, and now multiplane printmaking. And with masterful lines and details that look so pristine and perfect, it's sometimes hard to believe these pieces were created by a human hand, but Jean's process is also on display here with numerous preliminary drawings and colour studies that reveal the progression from idea to completed work. Viewers can gauge first-hand the leaps from sketch to finished piece for most of the exhibit. Similarly, moving closer to Jean's towering images exposes a deeper complexity than is visible upon first glance—layer upon layer of colour washes seem to surface as painstaking and almost hidden details unveil themselves, and discerning viewers are rewarded with an experience akin to an Easter egg hunt.

With nine new paintings created specifically for this exhibit, CICA's welcoming and inviting gallery space provides an opportunity to see work that has not previously been shown, as well as a reprieve from the hustle and bustle, punctuating this busy city with a glimpse into another world.

Step inside and be transported.

Natasha Gauthier is a mixed-heritage interdisciplinary artist who lives on Qayqayt First Nation and Coast Salish territory.