

Better Worlds

Paintings 1999 - 2024

Rudy Rucker

For my Family

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Published January 23, 2024



Transreal Books
Los Gatos, California
www.transrealbooks.com

Dreaming Better Worlds

I took up painting in 1999 while writing a novel about the Flemish master Peter Bruegel the Elder. Quickly I fell in love with the medium. I used acrylics at first. Later I came to prefer oils as they seemed richer and deeper. And then I returned to acrylics for their ease of use, and for the brightness of their hues. My studio remains the same: a plastic chair and table in our back yard, with my paints and brushes in a knapsack.

I enjoy the exploratory and non-digital nature of painting, and the luscious mixing of the colors. Sometimes I have a specific scenario in mind. Other times I don't think very much about what I'm doing I just paint and see what comes out.

After I've finished a rough first version of a painting, I'll polish and tweak it through several iterations. I'm never in a rush to finish. I like exploring my better worlds.

My pictures are often realistic in that they contain recognizable objects, but fantastic in their use of heightened colors, cartoony simplifications, and odd scenarios. The genre is sometimes called pop surrealism. Some of my pictures seem to tell a story. The stories may relate to my novels, or they may be free-floating parables, ambiguous, with their precise meanings unknown.

The paintings are arranged in the order that I painted them. Notes on the individual pictures are collected in the back of the book. And I have a website, where it's possible to buy prints and originals: www.rudyrucker.com/paintings.

Rudy Rucker, Los Gatos, California



1. My Parents



2. Arf and the Saucer



3. Saucer Wisdom



4. The Attack of the Mandelbrot Set



5. A Square





7. Saucer Dogs



8. Spaceland



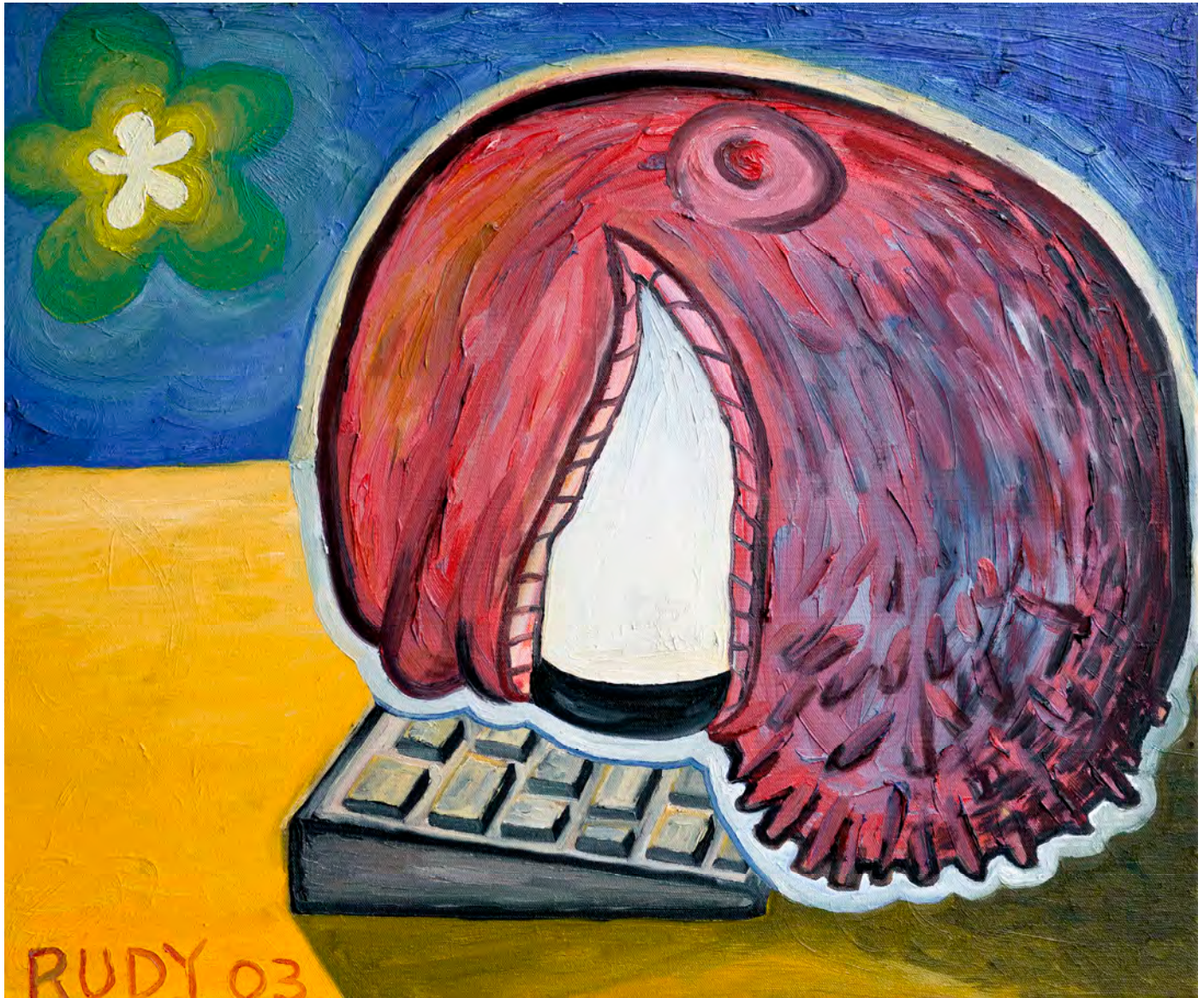
9. Under My Bed



10. Stun City



11. The Hacker and the Ants



12. My Life in a Nutshell



13. Da Nha Duc





15. Jellyfish Lake



RUDY O'CONNELL
16. Surfin' Tiki



17. Davenport Cliffs



18. Summer Day



19. The Hollow Earth



20. Yellow Couch



21. The Old Marrieds



22. Minerve Awning



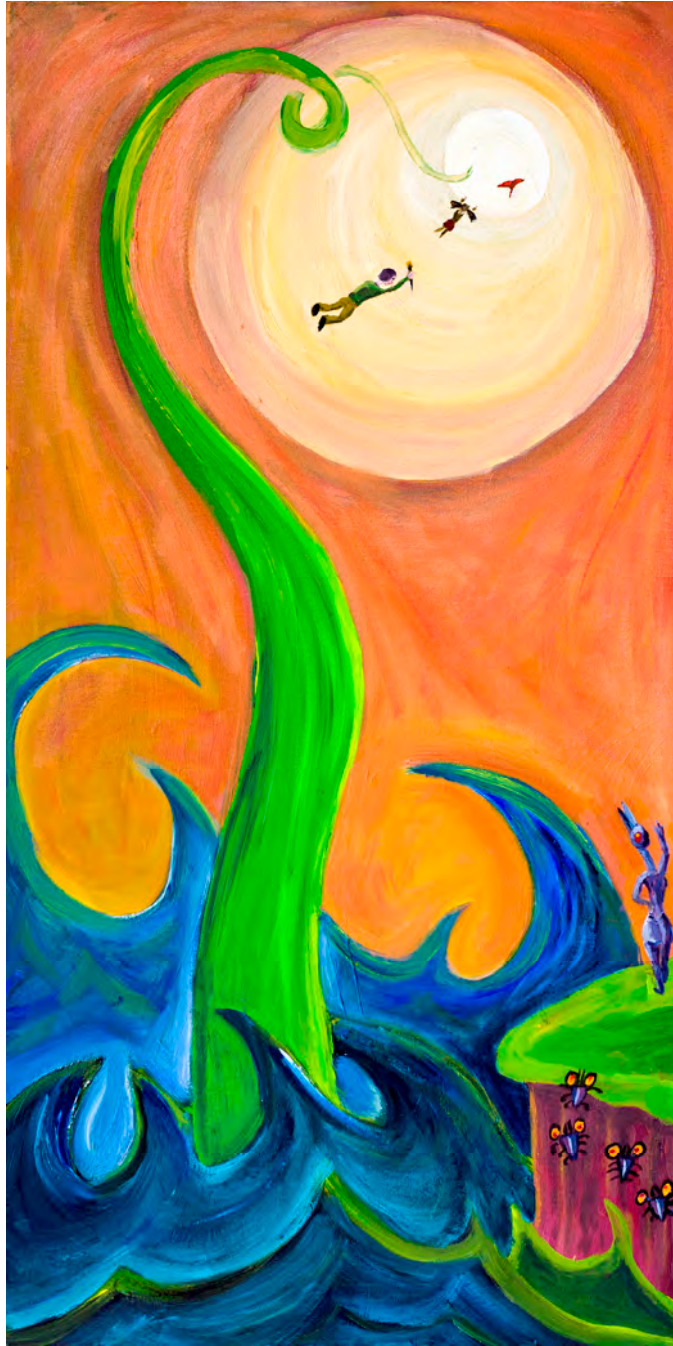
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24. Hylozoic: Jayjay and the Hrull



25. Hylozoic: Thuy and the Subbies



26. Hylozoic: Beanstalk to Infinity



27. The Talking Pitchfork



28. Lexington Reservoir



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31. Mossy Trees



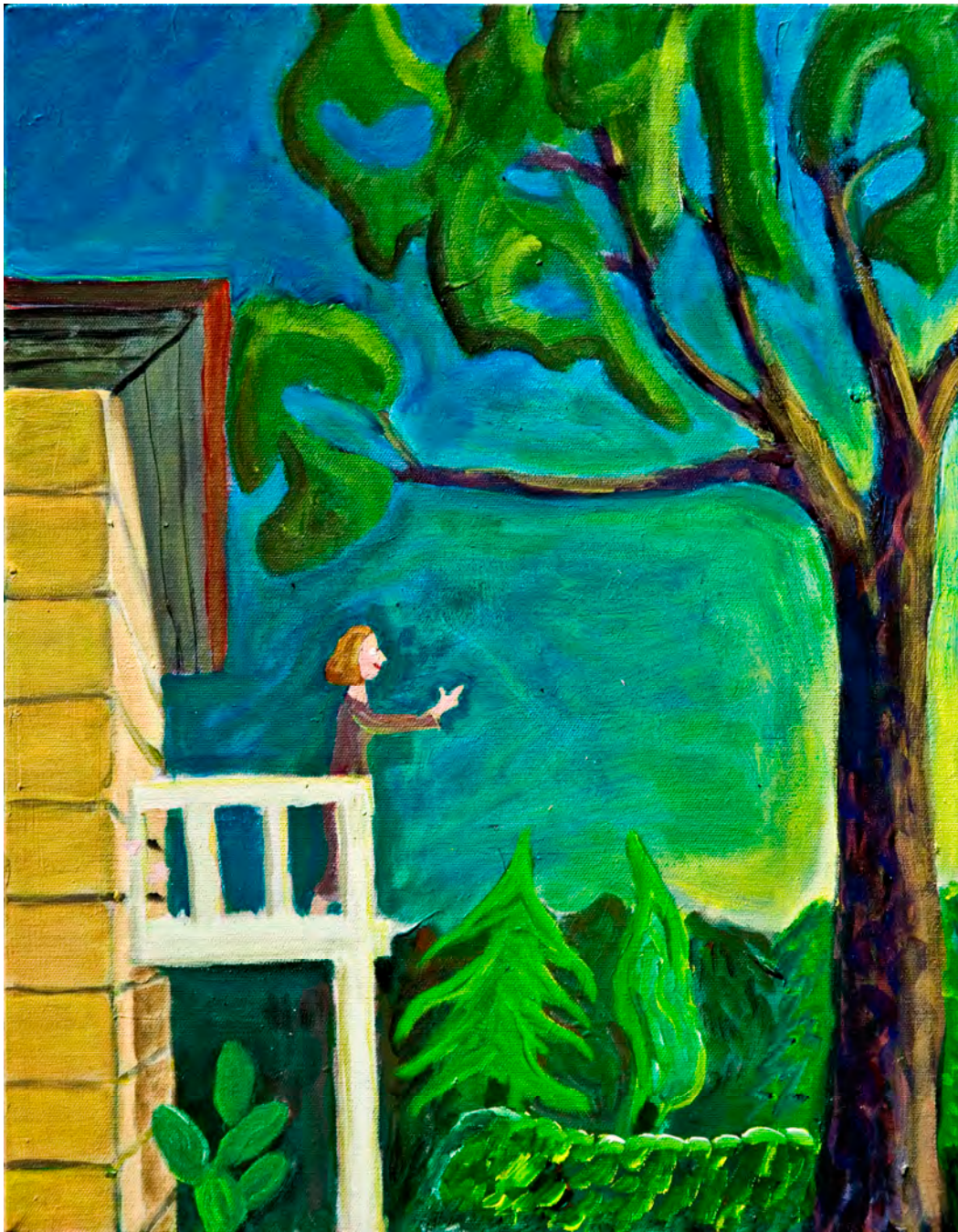
32. Giant's Head







35. The Sex Sphere





37. Montgomery Hill



38. The Collaborators



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40. Cerebral Hemorrhage

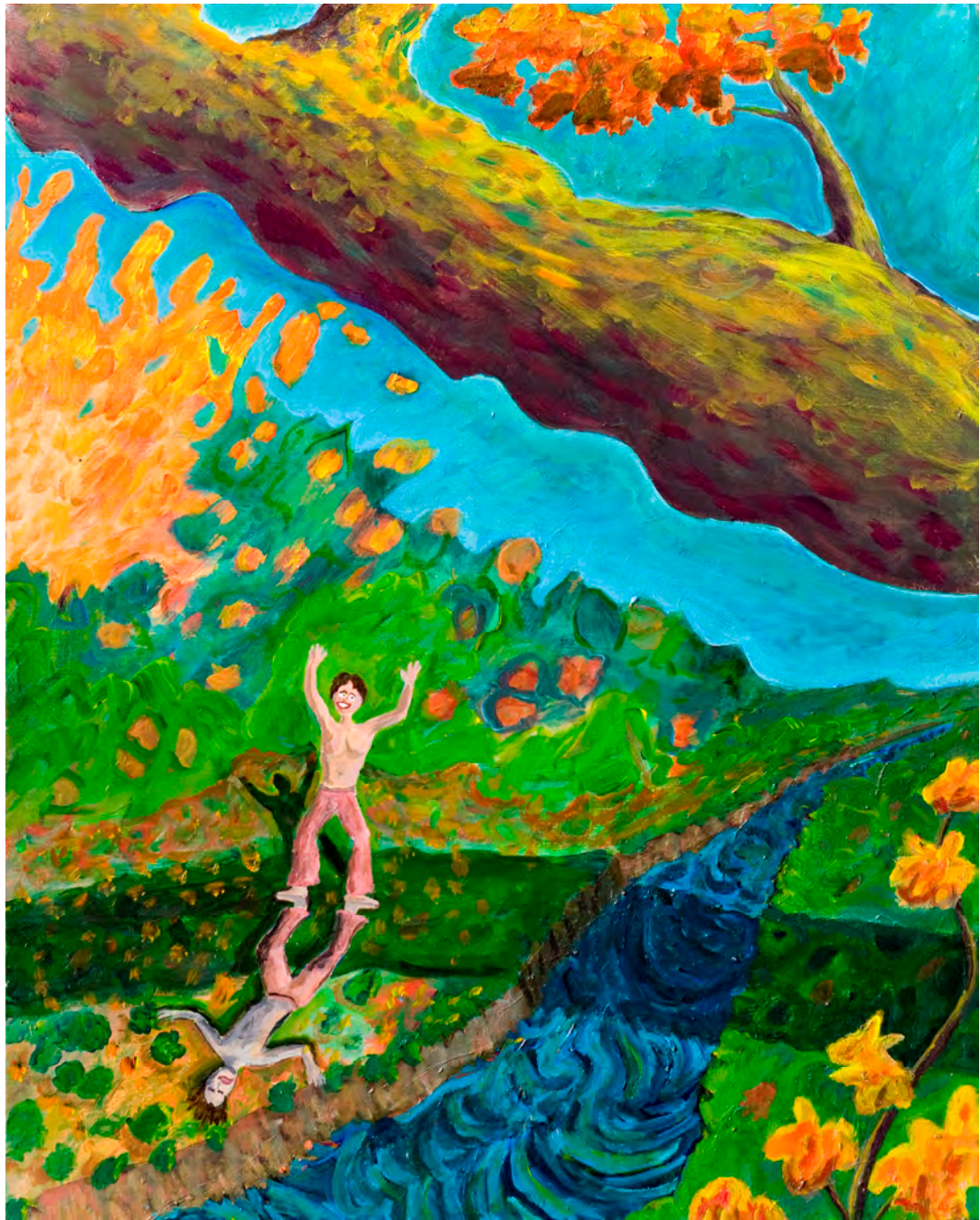


41. The Big One





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45. Romeo and Juliet







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50. Four Mile Beach



51. Yellow Vines



52. Pig Surprise



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54. The Clone Garden



55. Geranium

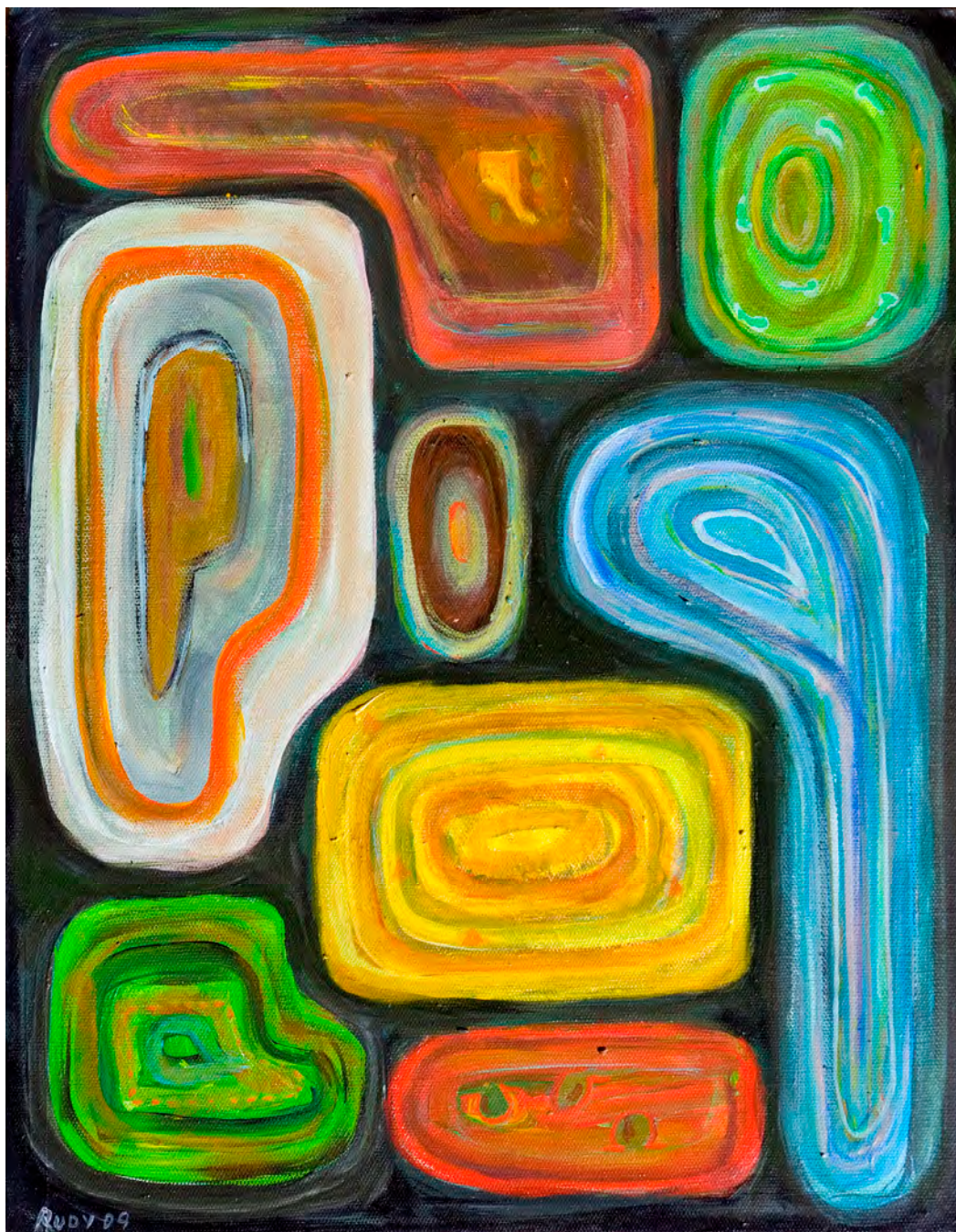


56. Man in Flame Car





58. Fjord at Balestrand



59. Magic Doors



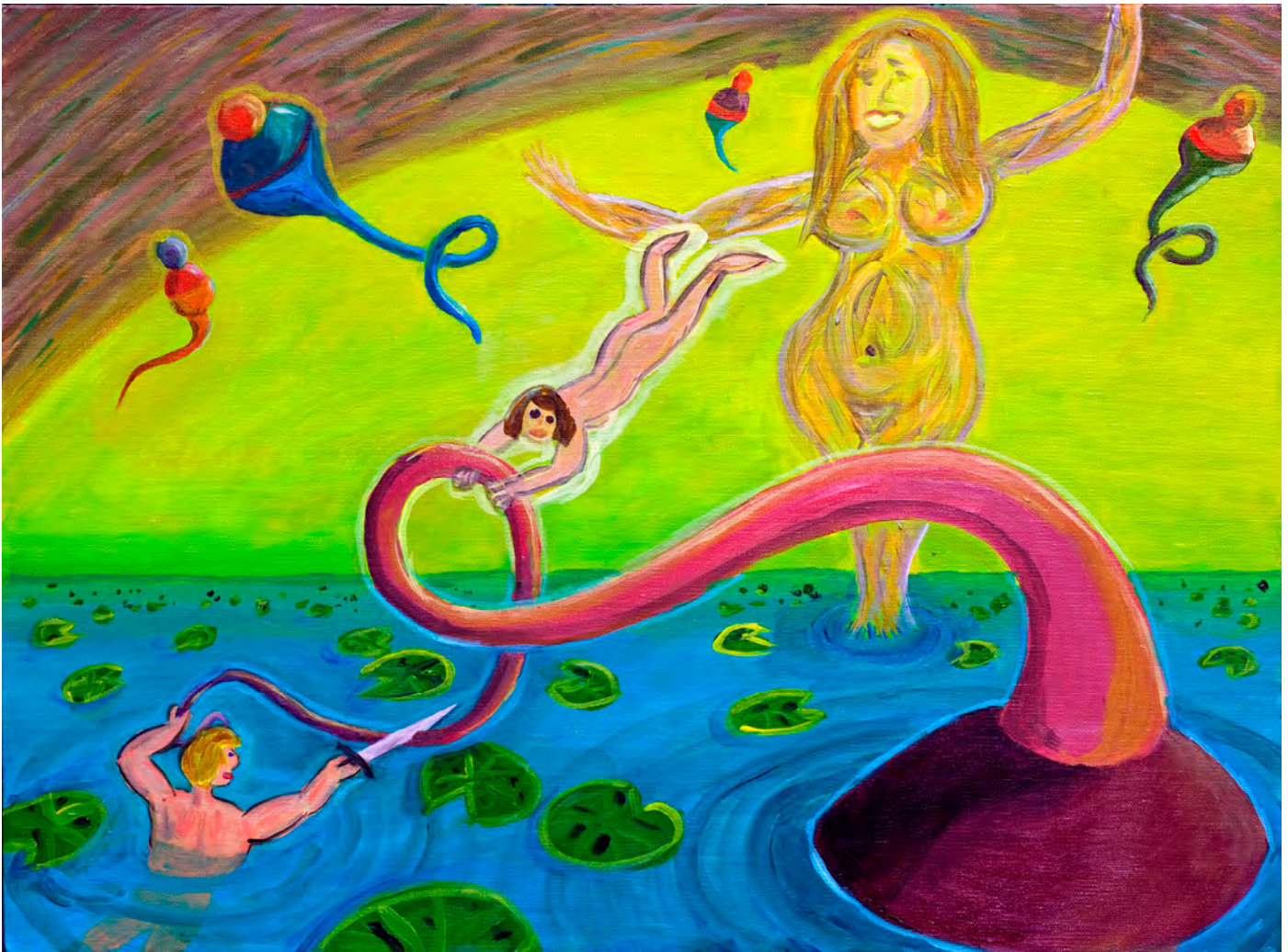
60. Topology of the Afterworld



61. Surf Pilgrim



62. Amenhotep's Ghost



63. At the Core of the World



64. Flower Dream

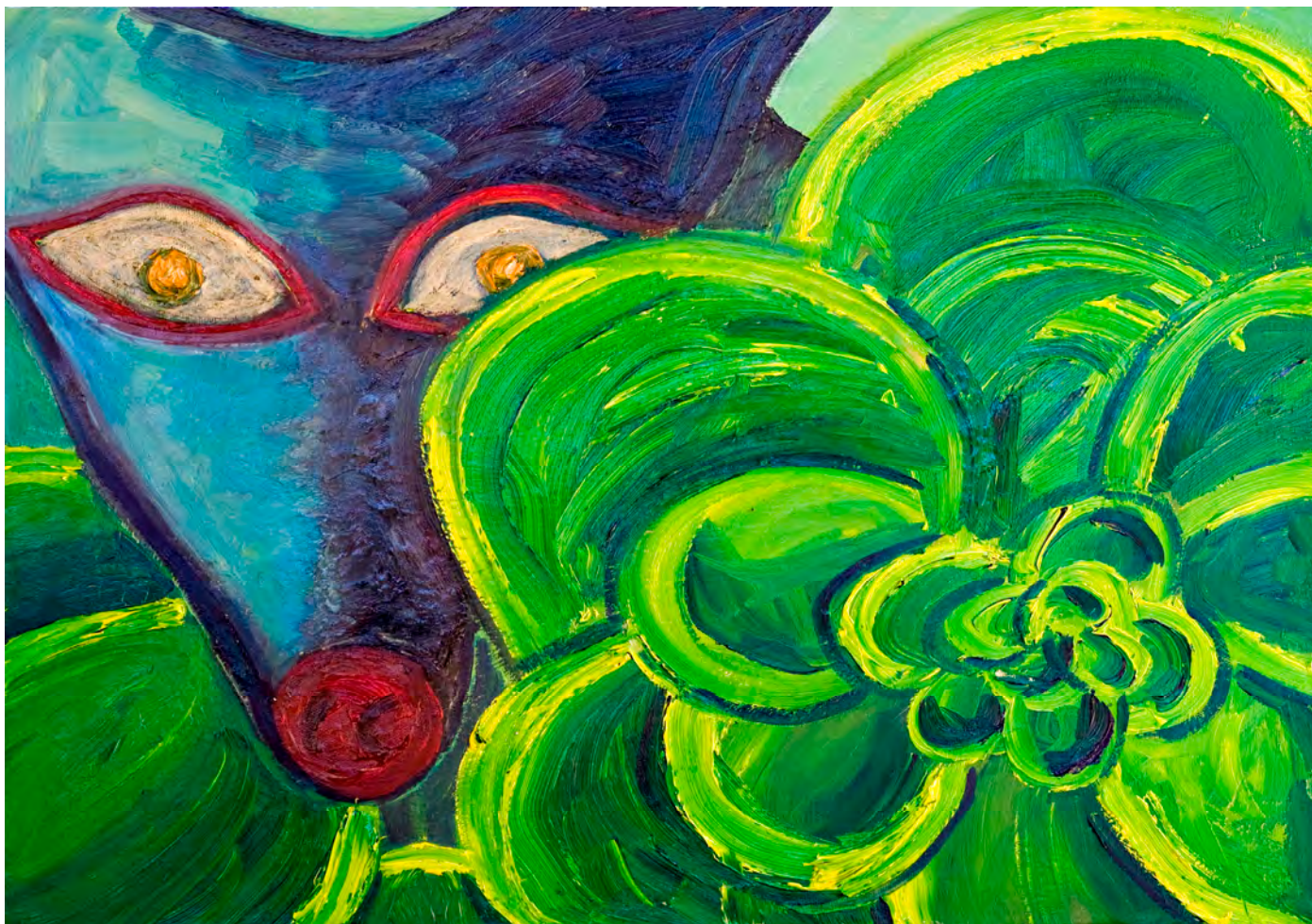


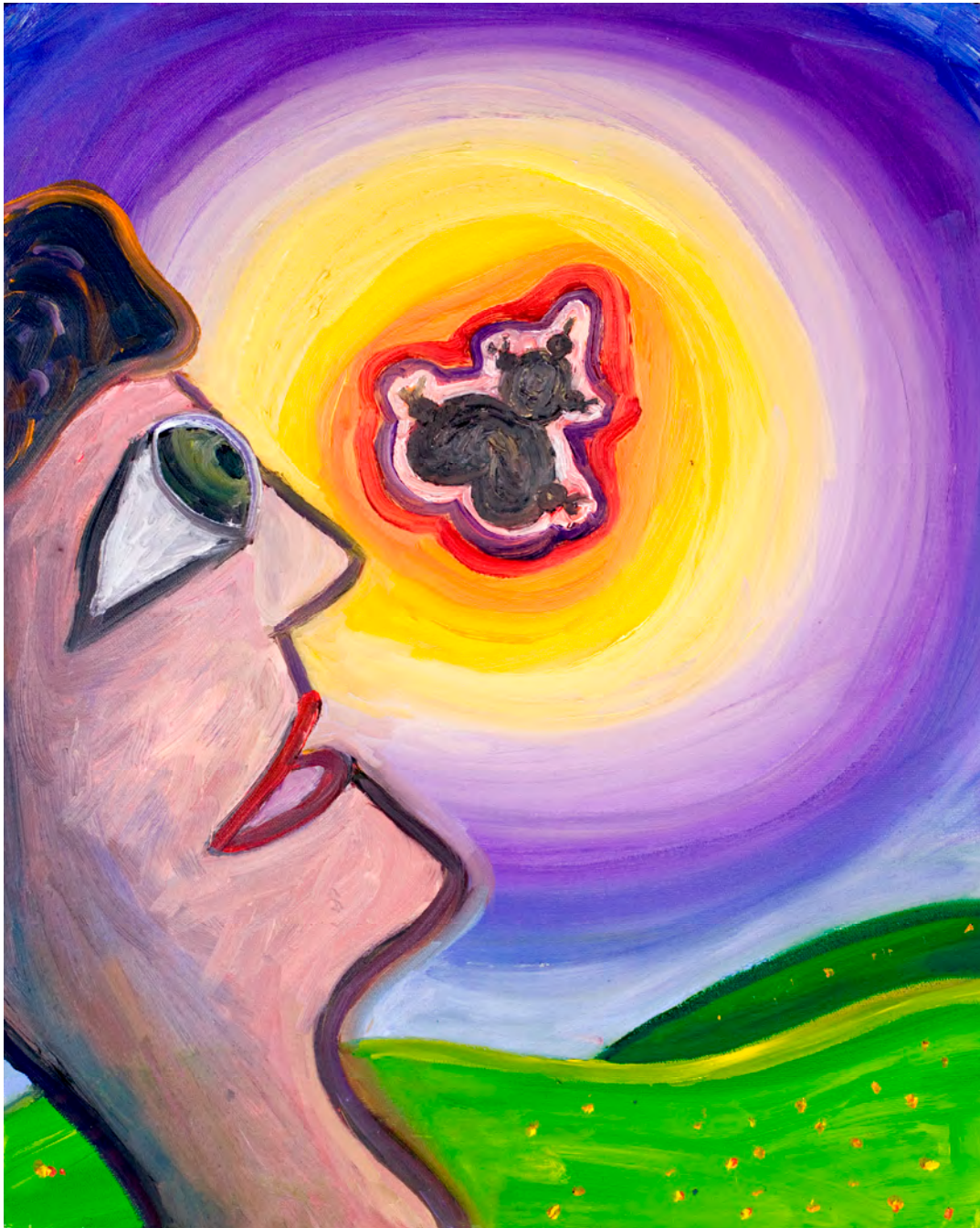


66. Giant Octopus Wearing a Silly Hat



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69. He Sees the Fnoor



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72. Buddha and the Mouse.



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75. Nude Nabs UFO







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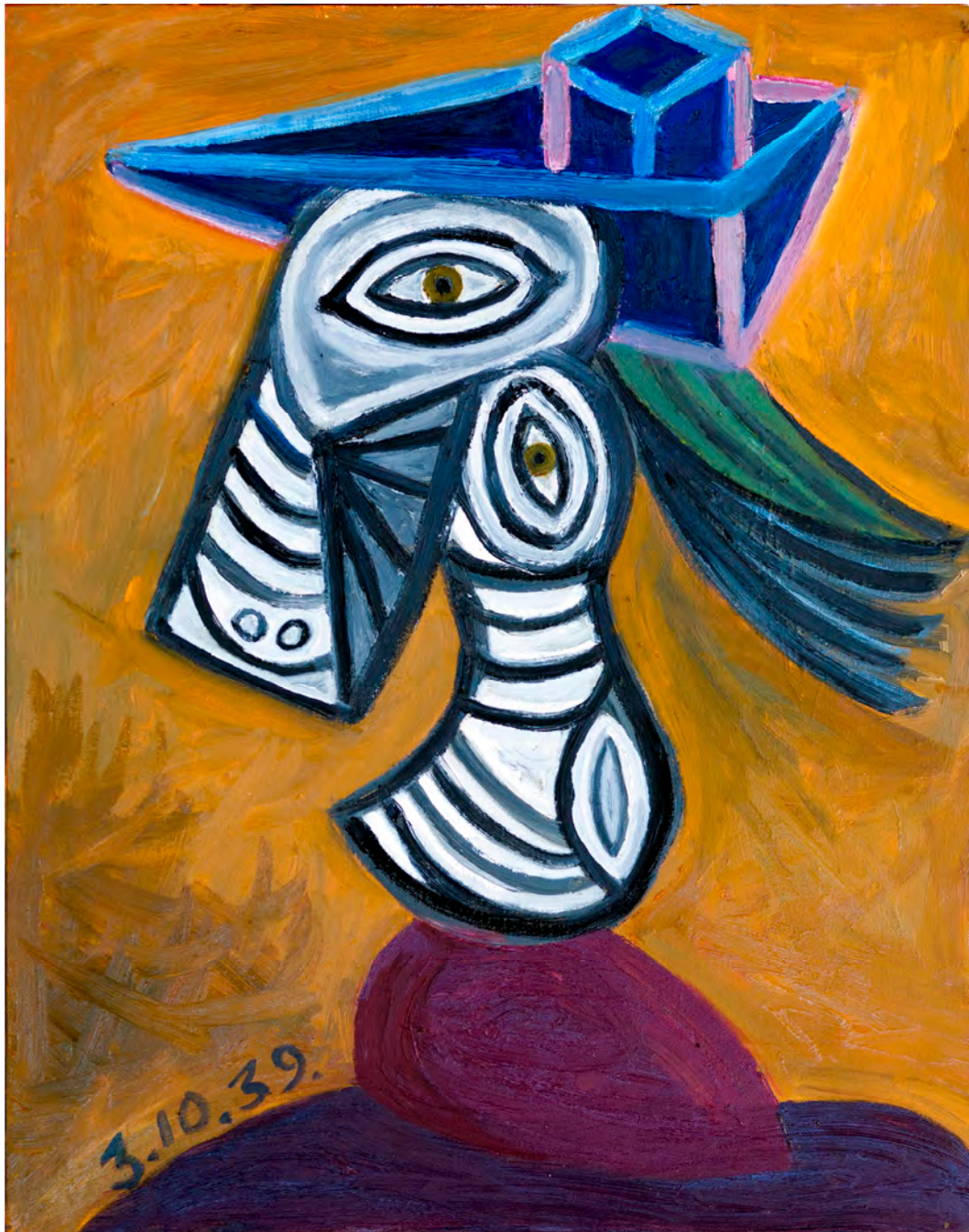




80. Painter Near Mt. Umunhum



81. V-Bomb Blast



82. Stolen Picasso

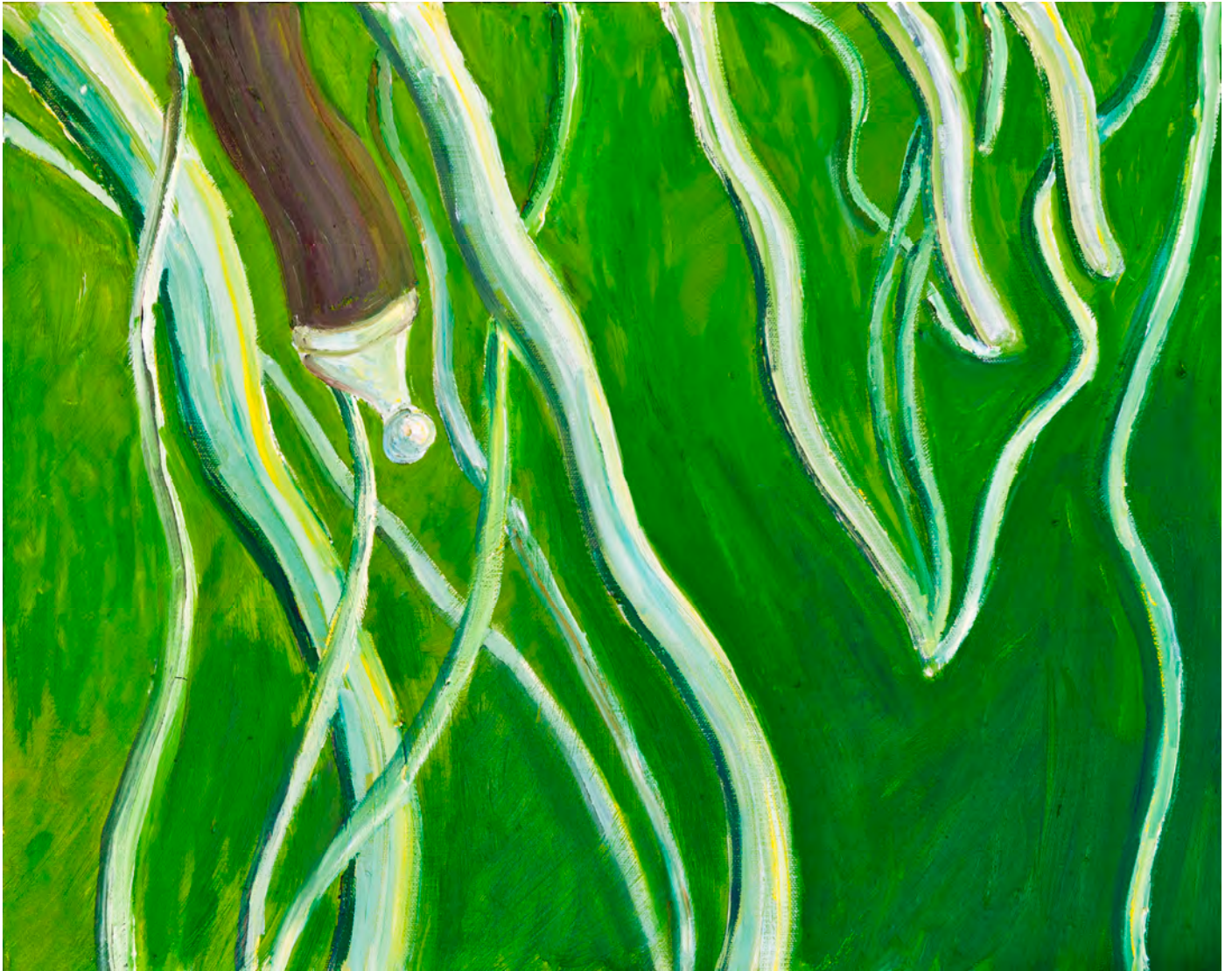




84. Cow and UFO



85. Santa Cruz Harbor





87. Four-Dimensional Ducks



88. My Home Planet



89. The Lovers



90. Loulou and Skungy



91. Garden of Eden





93. Louisville Artist





95. The Two Gods





97. Ant And UFO



98. A Gub On Her Bed



99. The Mr. Normals vs. The Myoor



100. Gubs and Wormholes



101. Study of Picasso's Girl Before A Mirror

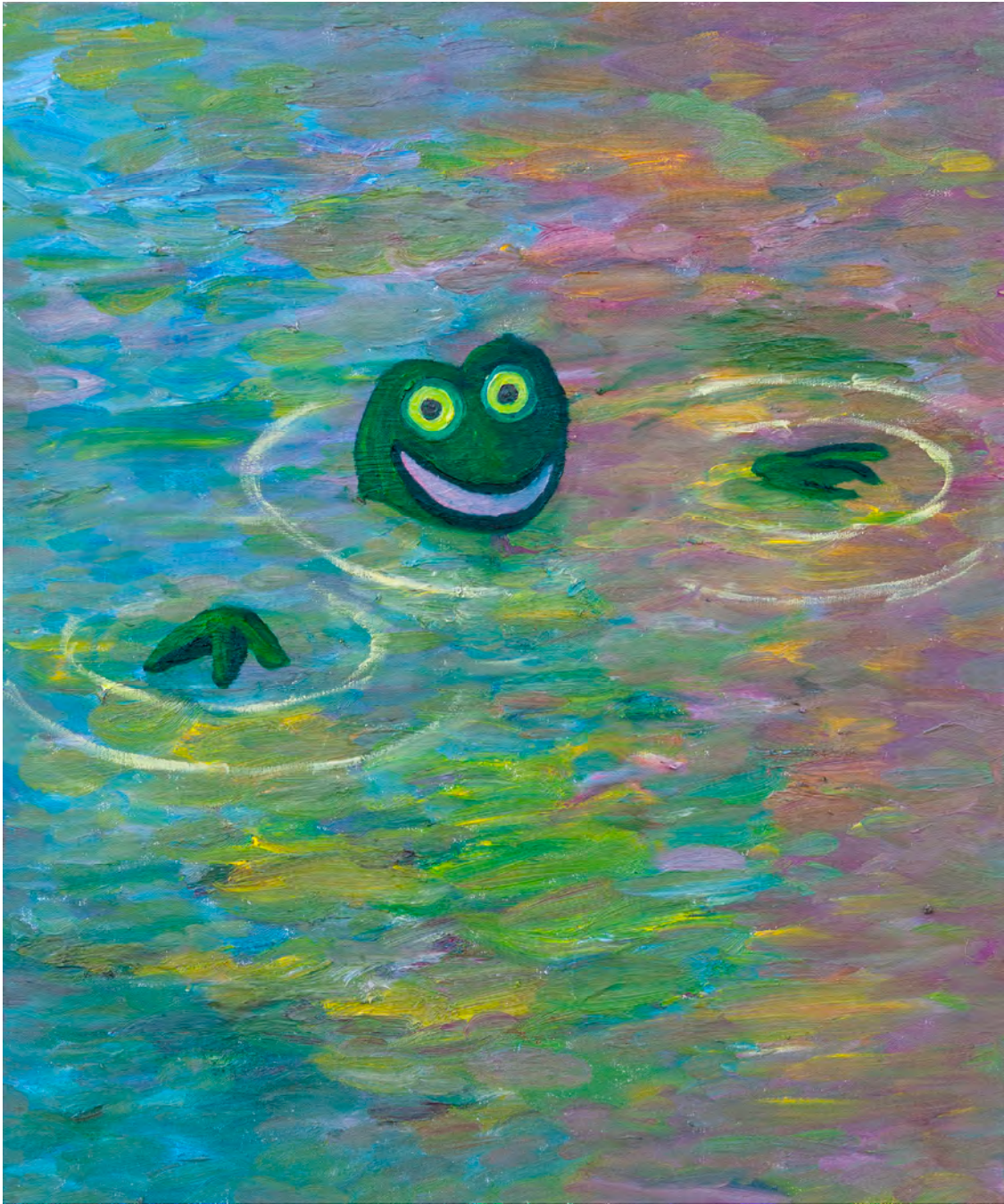


102. In Her Room





104. Woman With Jellyfish



105. Frog Man





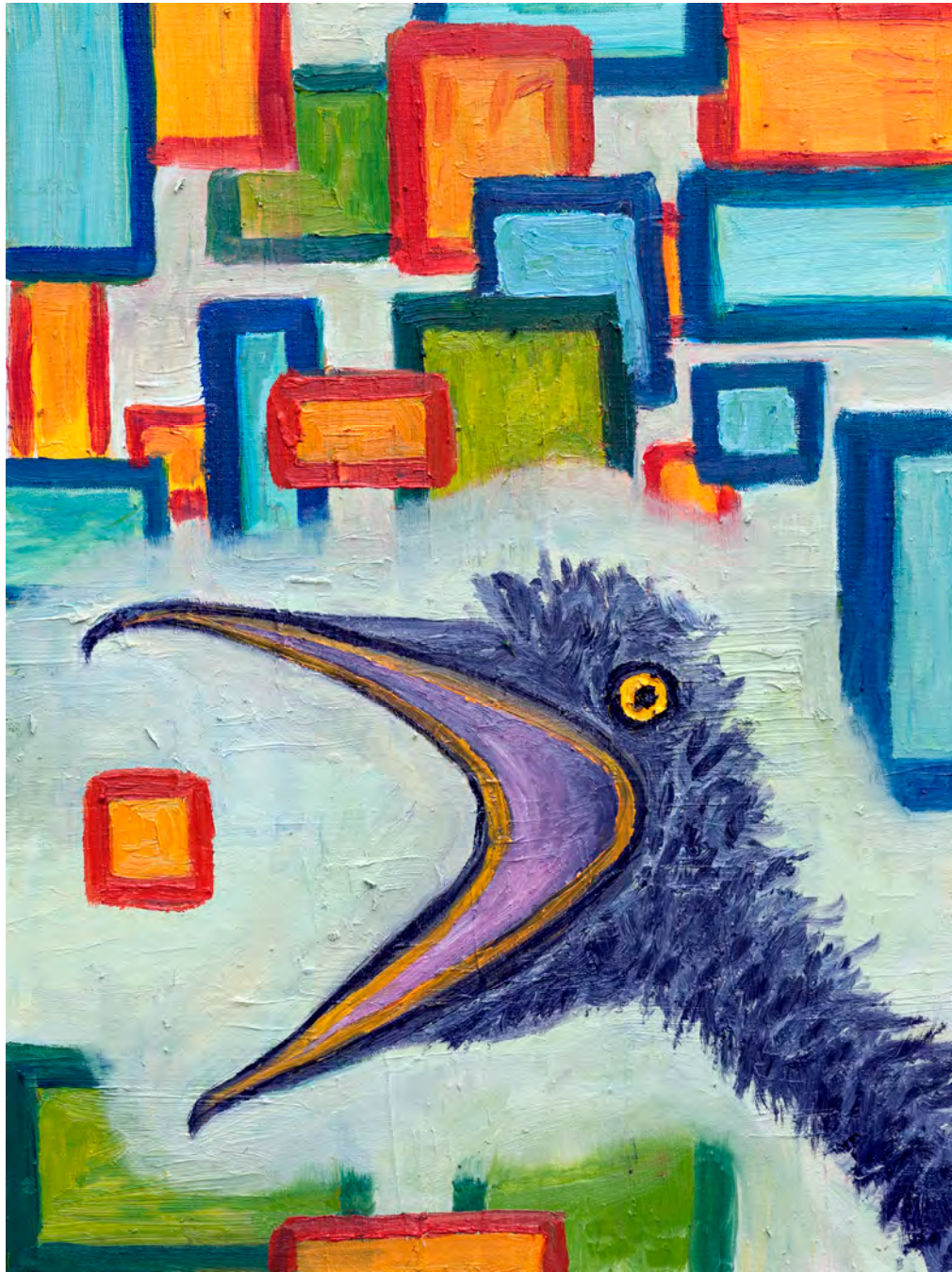
107. Laser Shades



108. Petroglyph Man



109. Two Ducks



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111. Cows on the Run





113. Dog UFO Gub



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115: Endless Road Trip



116: Flying Cone Shells



117: I Once Was Blind



118: Deep Space Saucers



119: Tree of Life





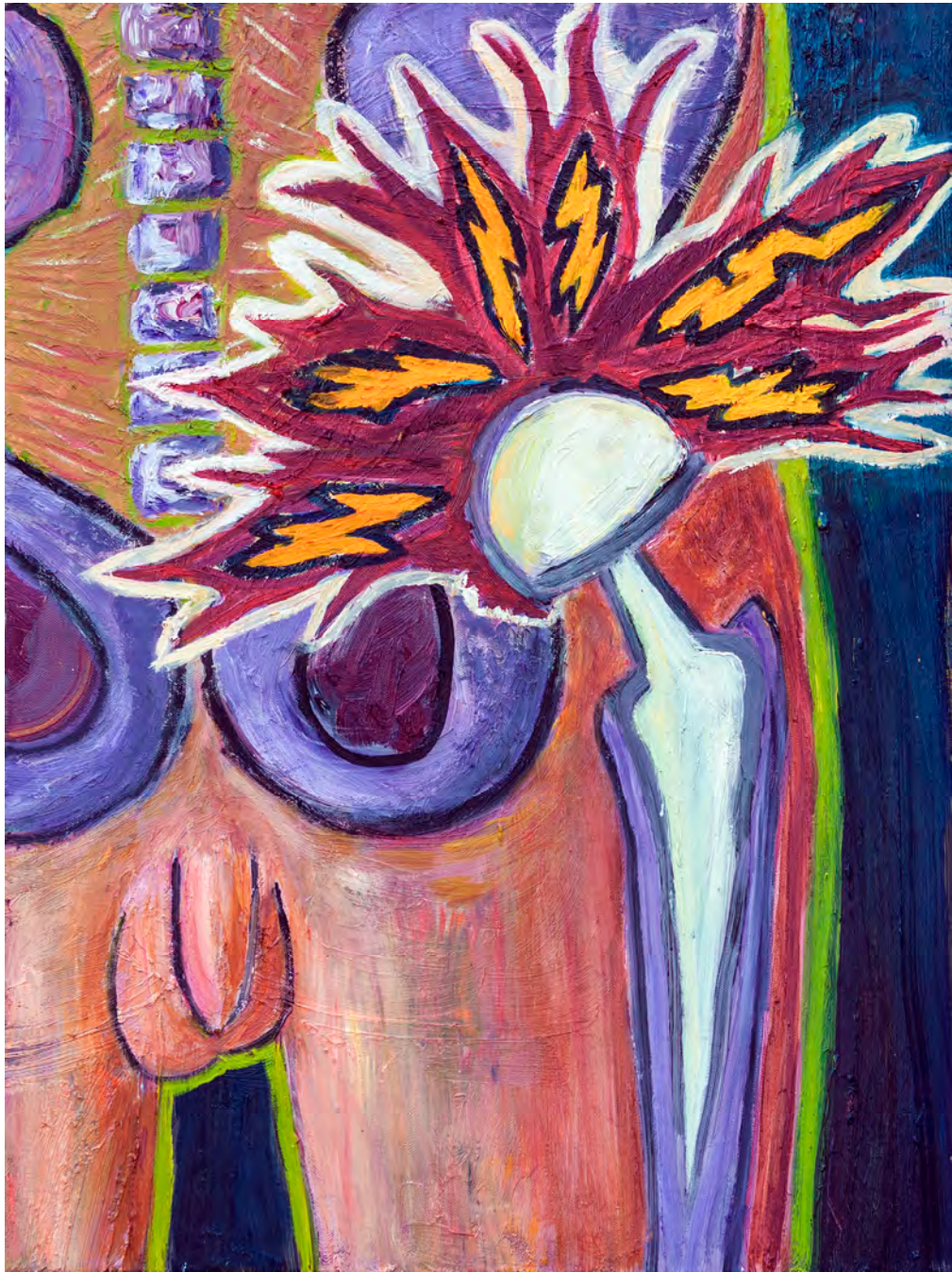
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122: The Sage and the Messenger

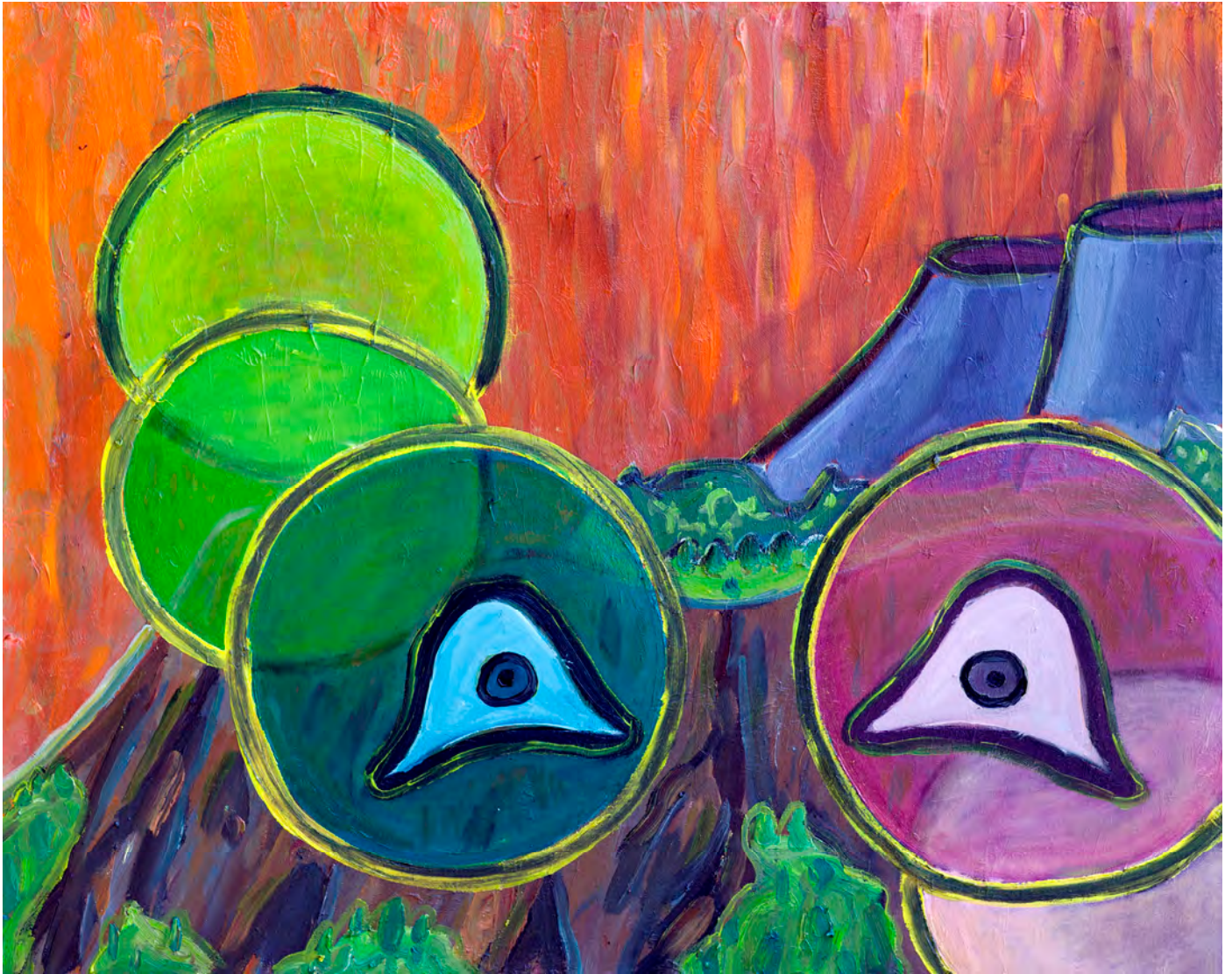


123: Cells



124: X-Ray of Failed Hip Implant







127: Diego's Hunhunahpu







130: The Flat Cow



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133: "I Like Purple"



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135: Californians Request Secession



136: Red Scribble



137: Elephant Bush





139: Antarctica





141: Soft Zhabo





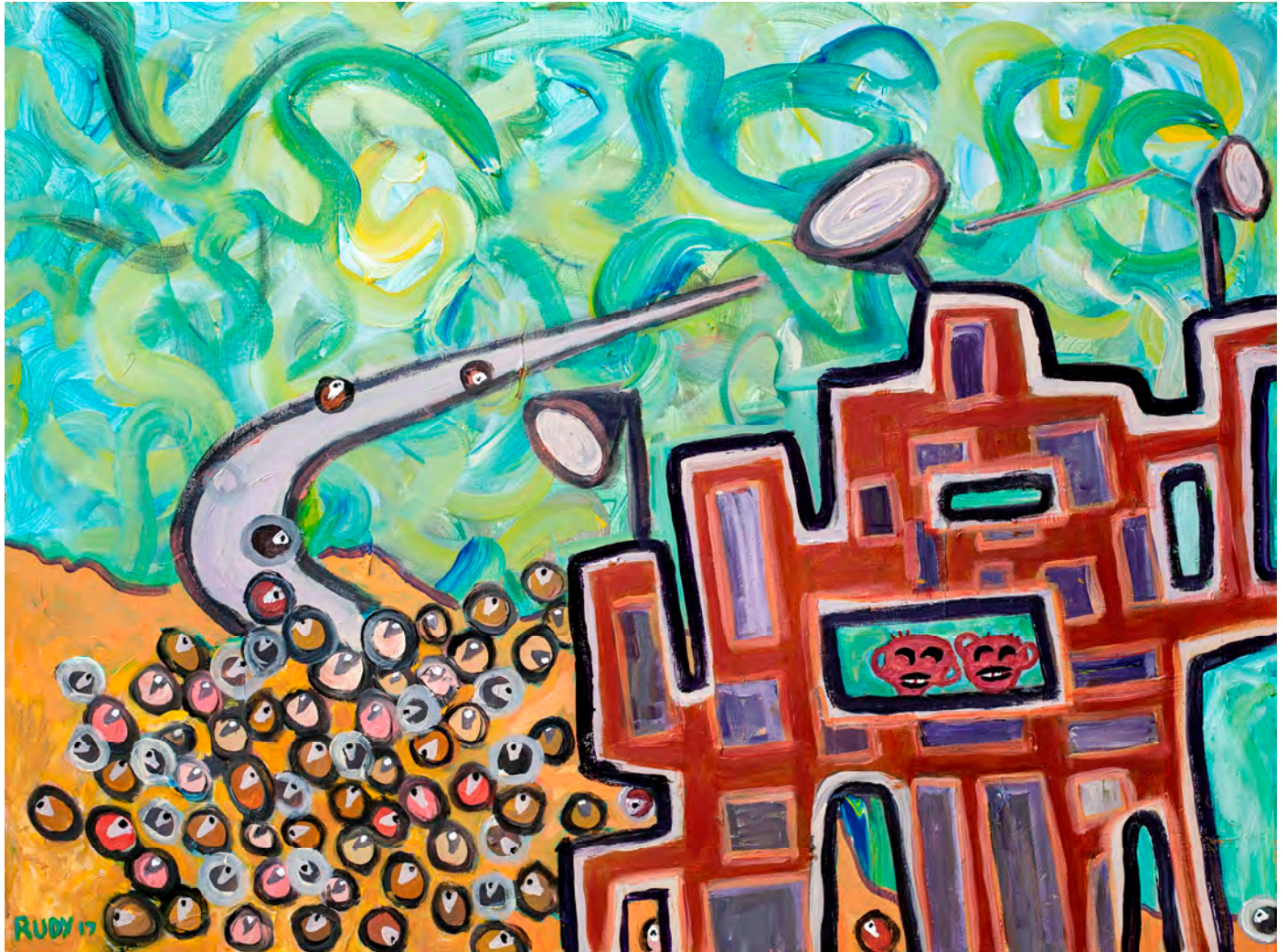


144: Piñata (Diptych)



145: Hooray!





147: Bugs and Stars



148: Forged Matisse



149: Riding a Nautilus









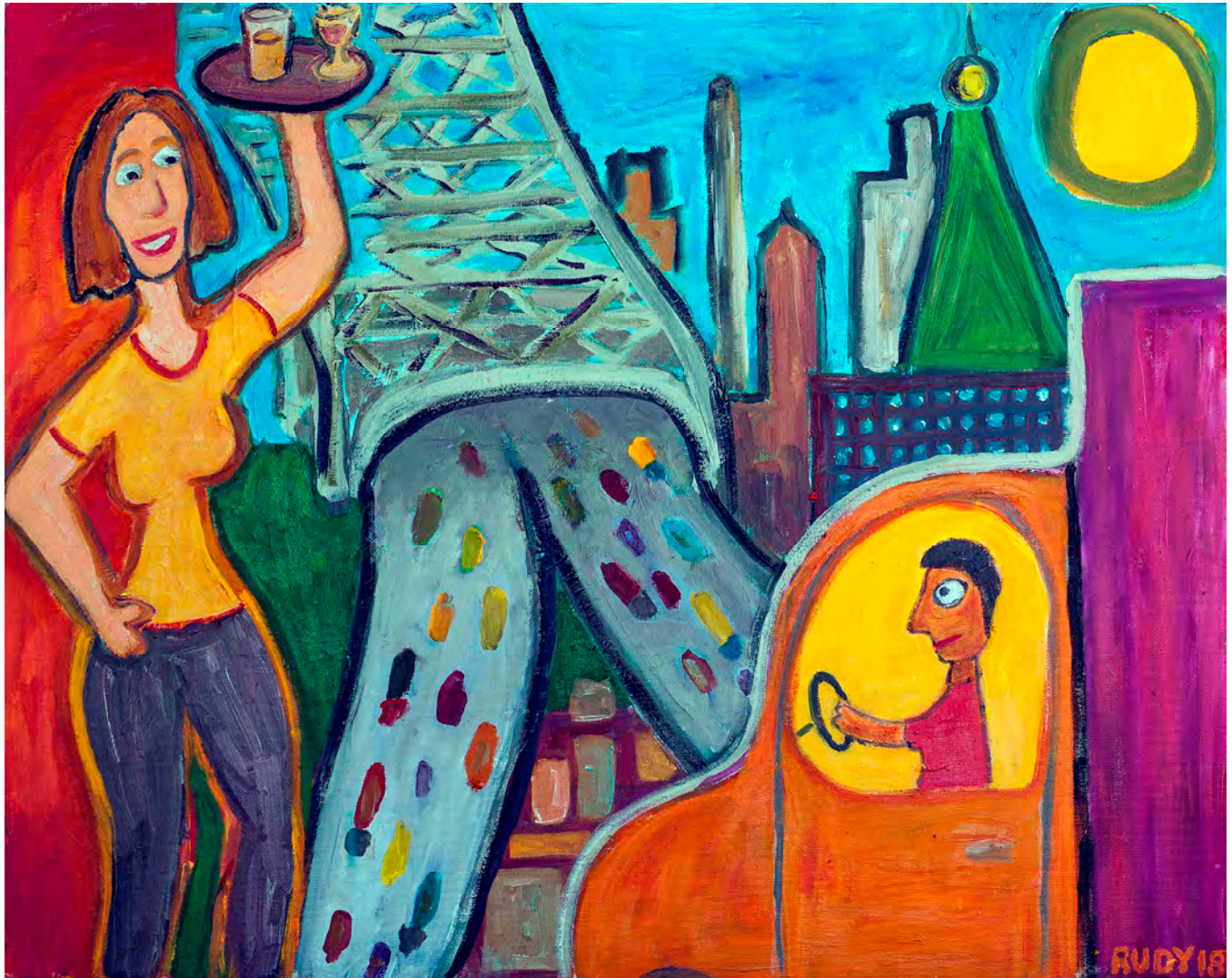




155: Seela in the Hollow Earth



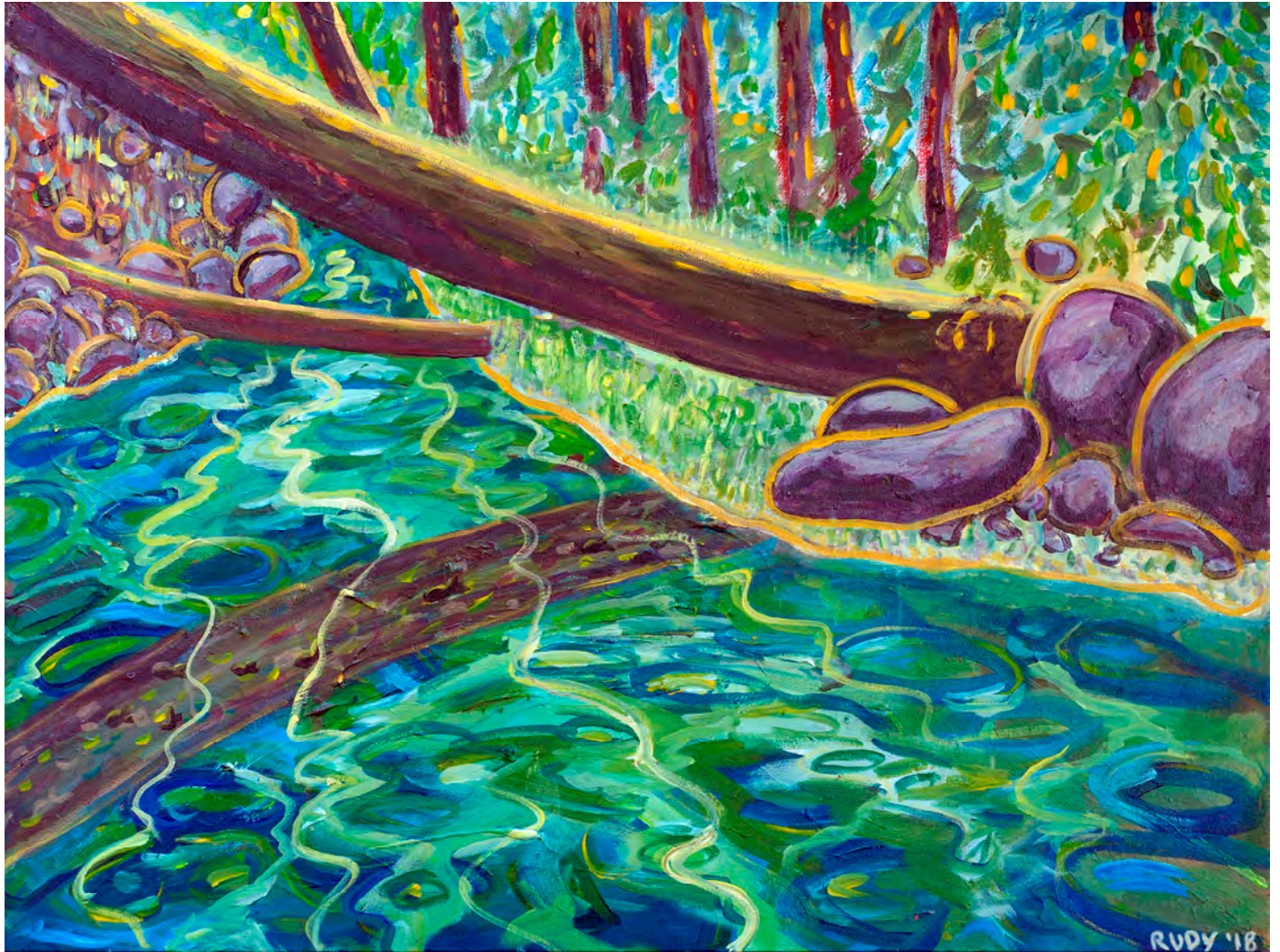
156: Woomo Hunters



157: Manhattan



158: Delta Eyes



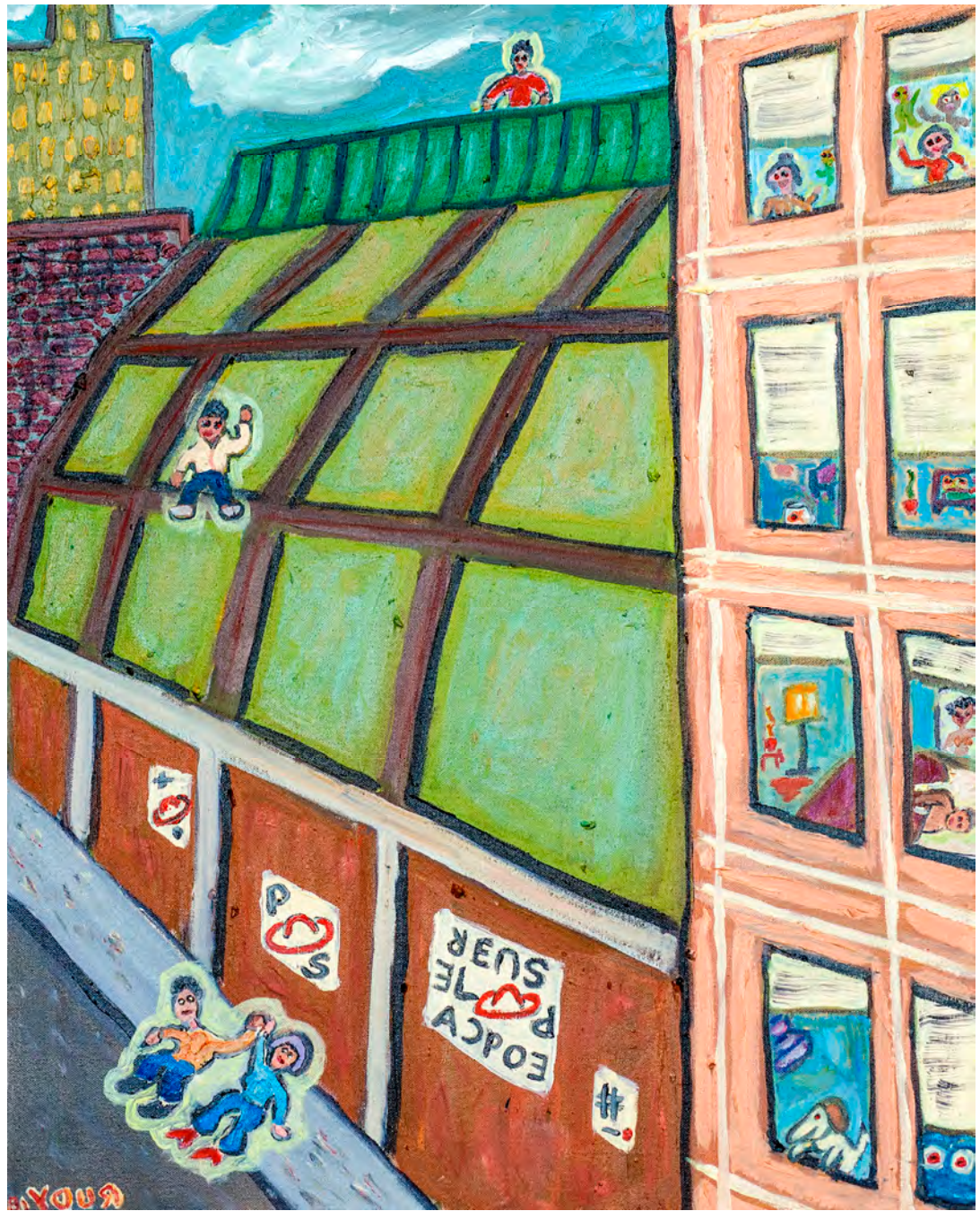
159: Up Creek



160: Standing in the Stream



161: The Red Saucer



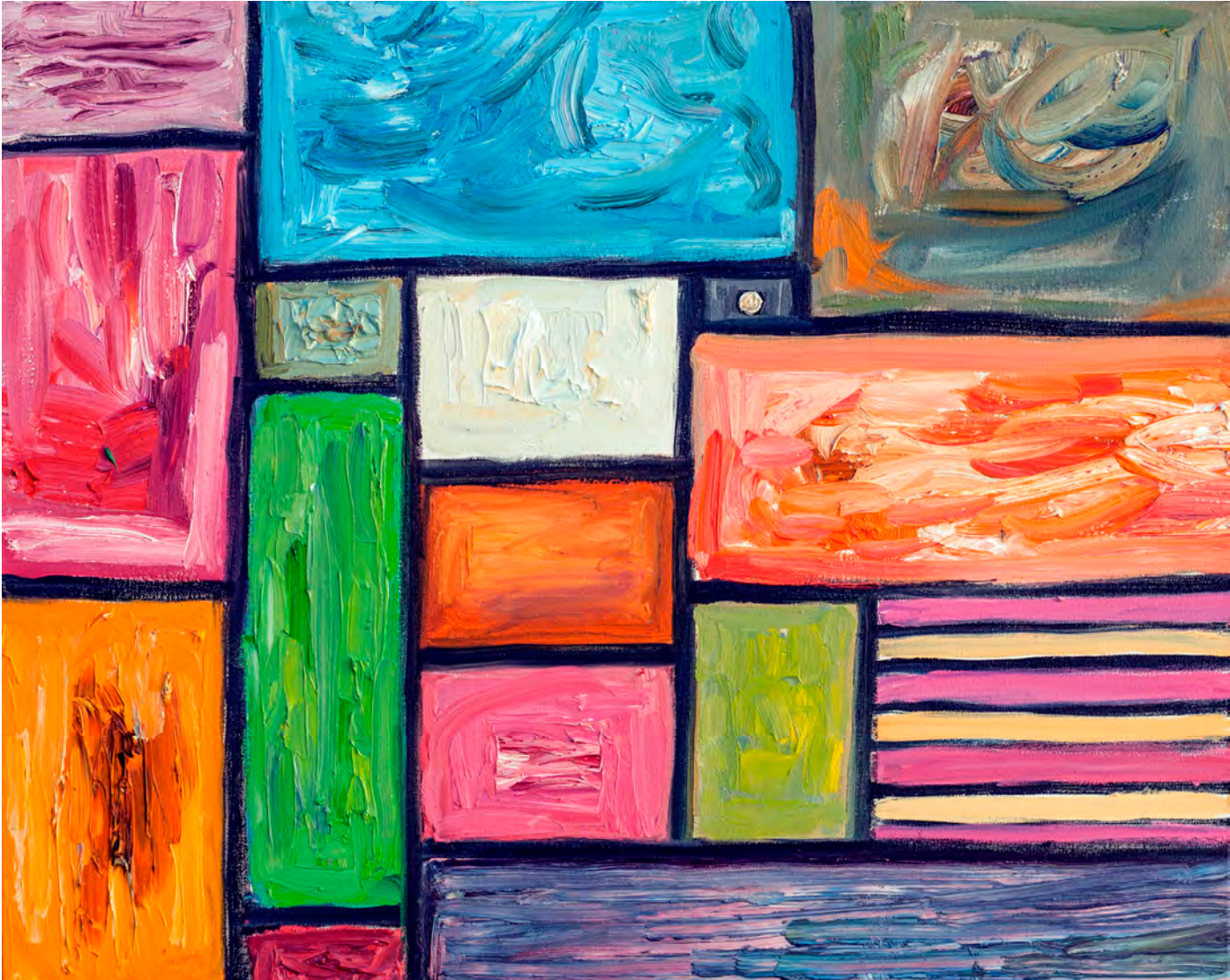
162: People of the Red Saucer



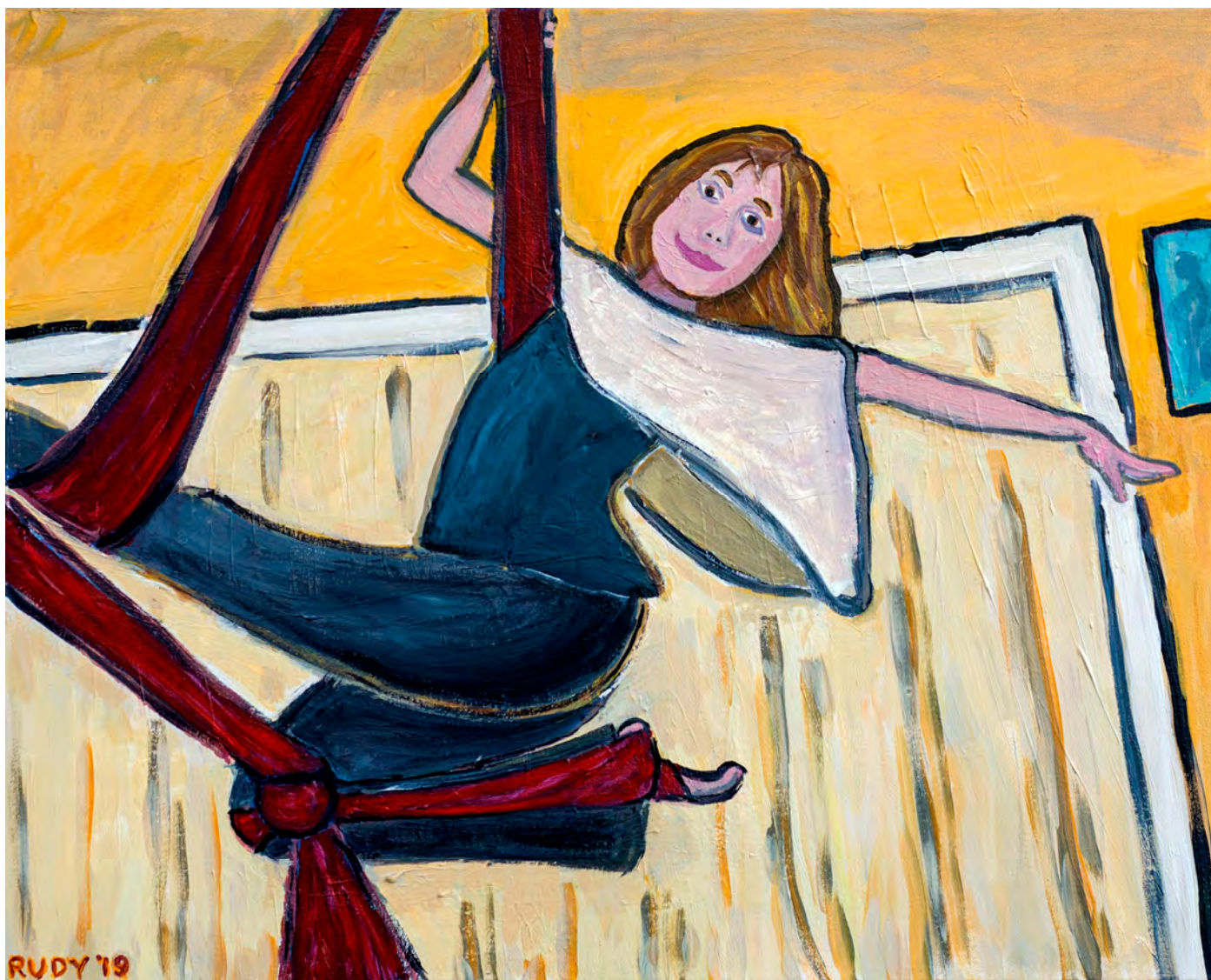
163: The Tyrant's Wife



164: Dot the Eye



165: My Flag



166. Young Acrobat With Silks





168. Moonrise





170. Cute Meet (Diptych)



171. The Two Lovers Walk Their Dog

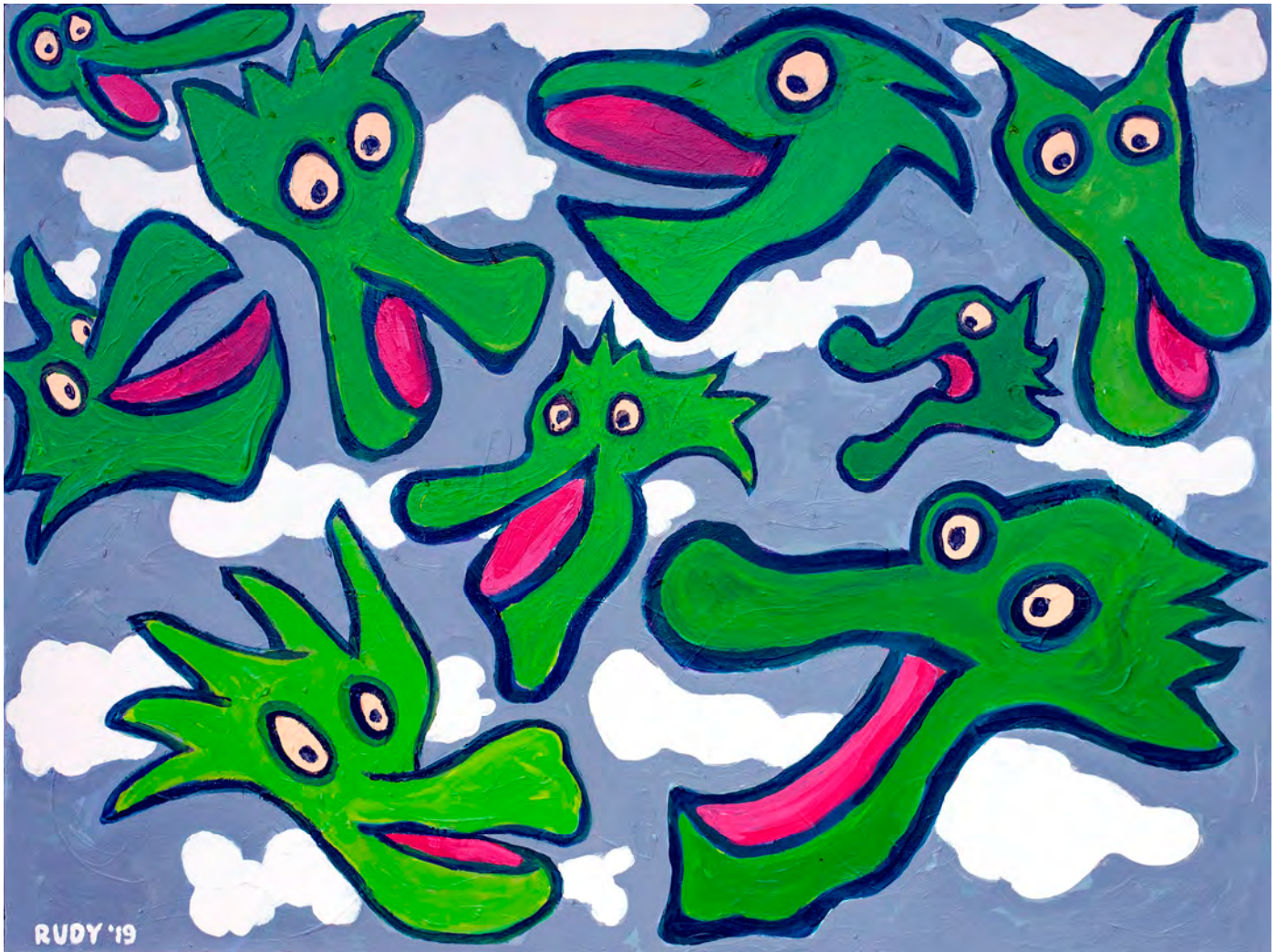




173-1 and 173-2. Gems #1 and Gems #2

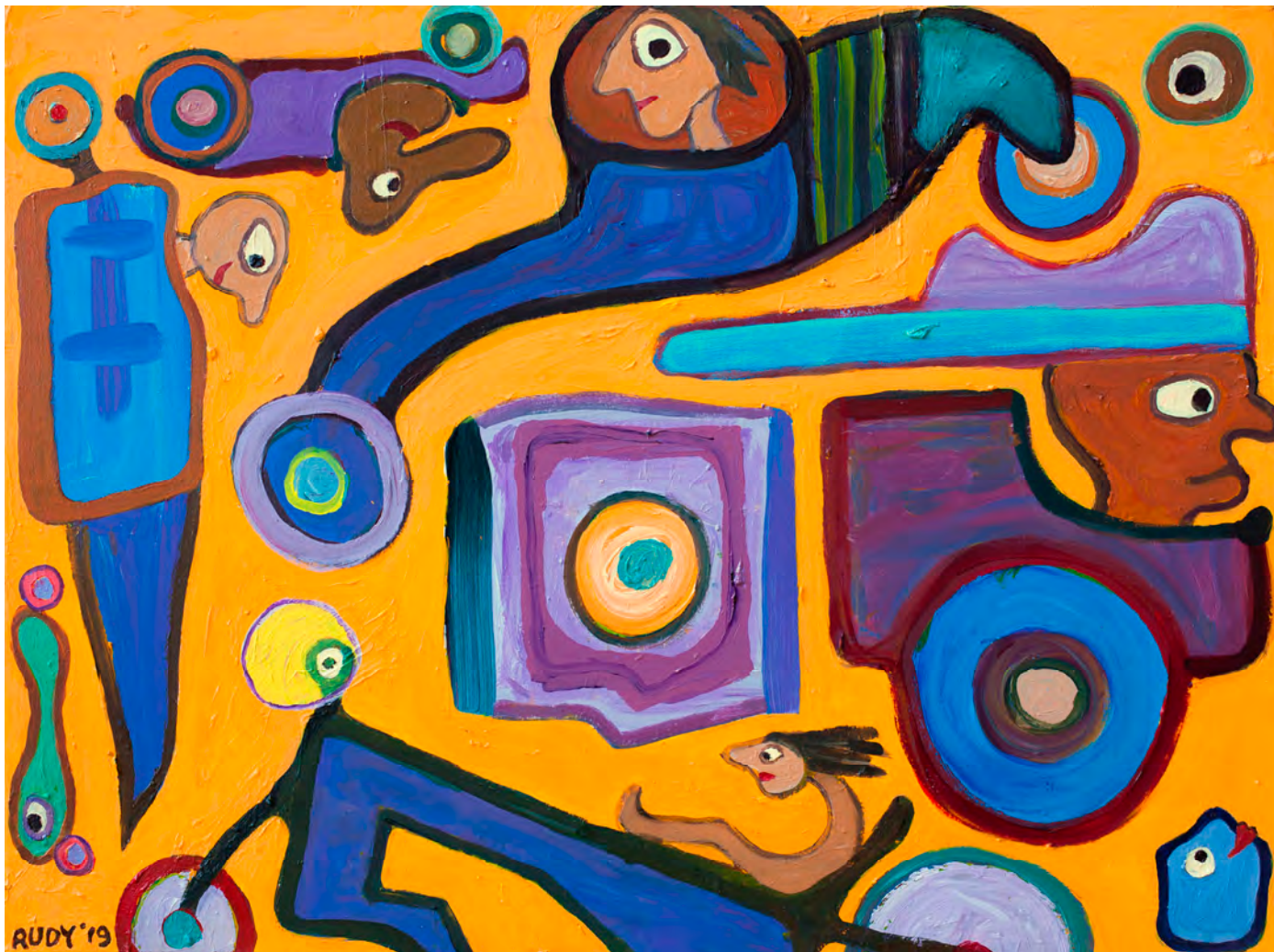


174. Five Eggs

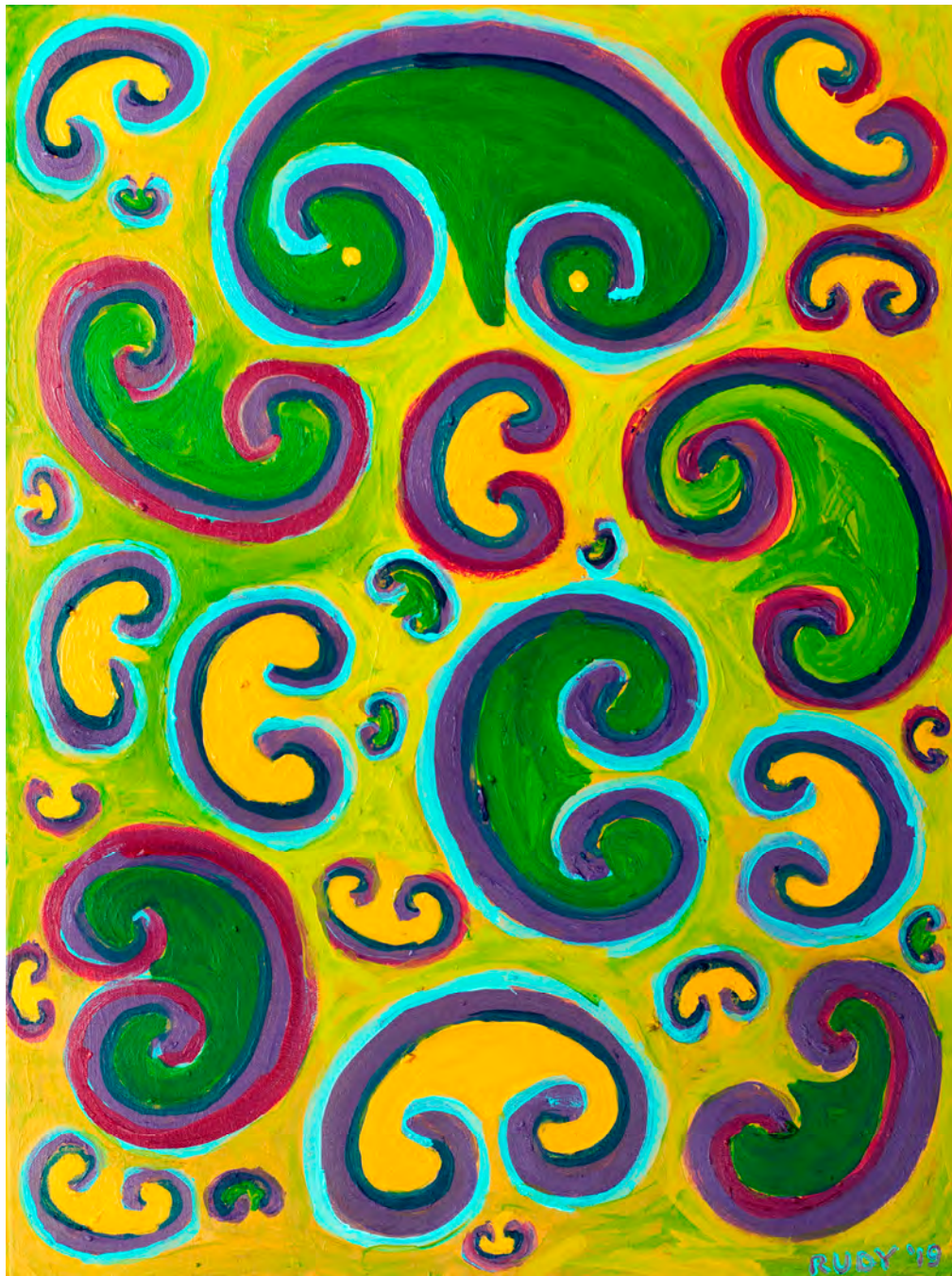


175. Nine Dragons





177. Rush Hour



178. Neptune



179. Magic Door



180. Dino Balloon



181: Pandemic #1: Infection



182: Pandemic #2: Panic



183: Pandemic #3: Peace





185: Happy Egg



186. Night Bird of Paradise



187: Astral Travel





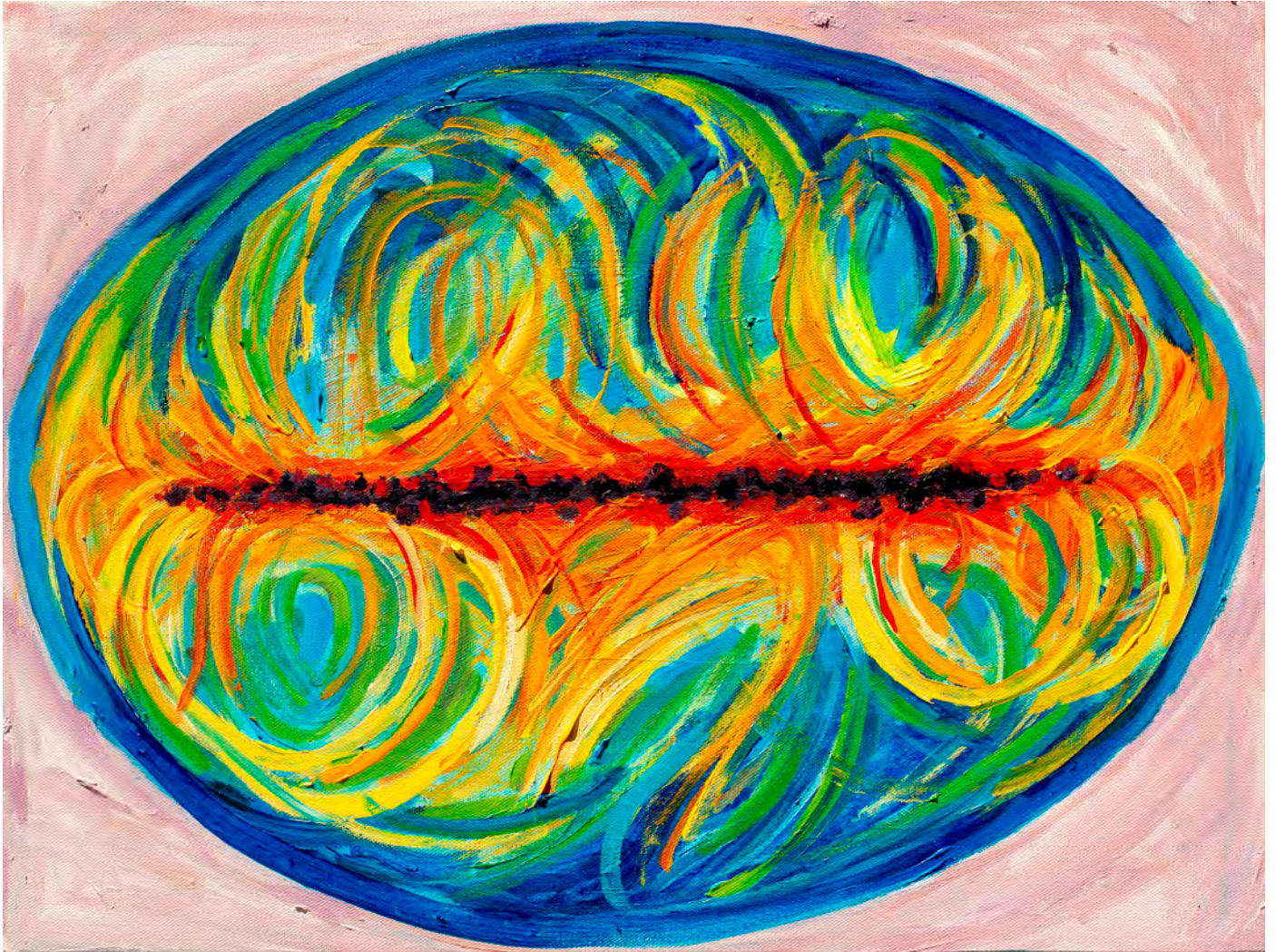
189: With My Friends



190: Bicyclist



191: Leaving Earth



192: Magnetic Fields of the Milky Wa Galaxy



193: Pop's Pipes



194: Pinchy's Big Date



195: Two Lizards



196: The Healing Angel



197: St. Georgia and the Dragon



198: The Halo Card



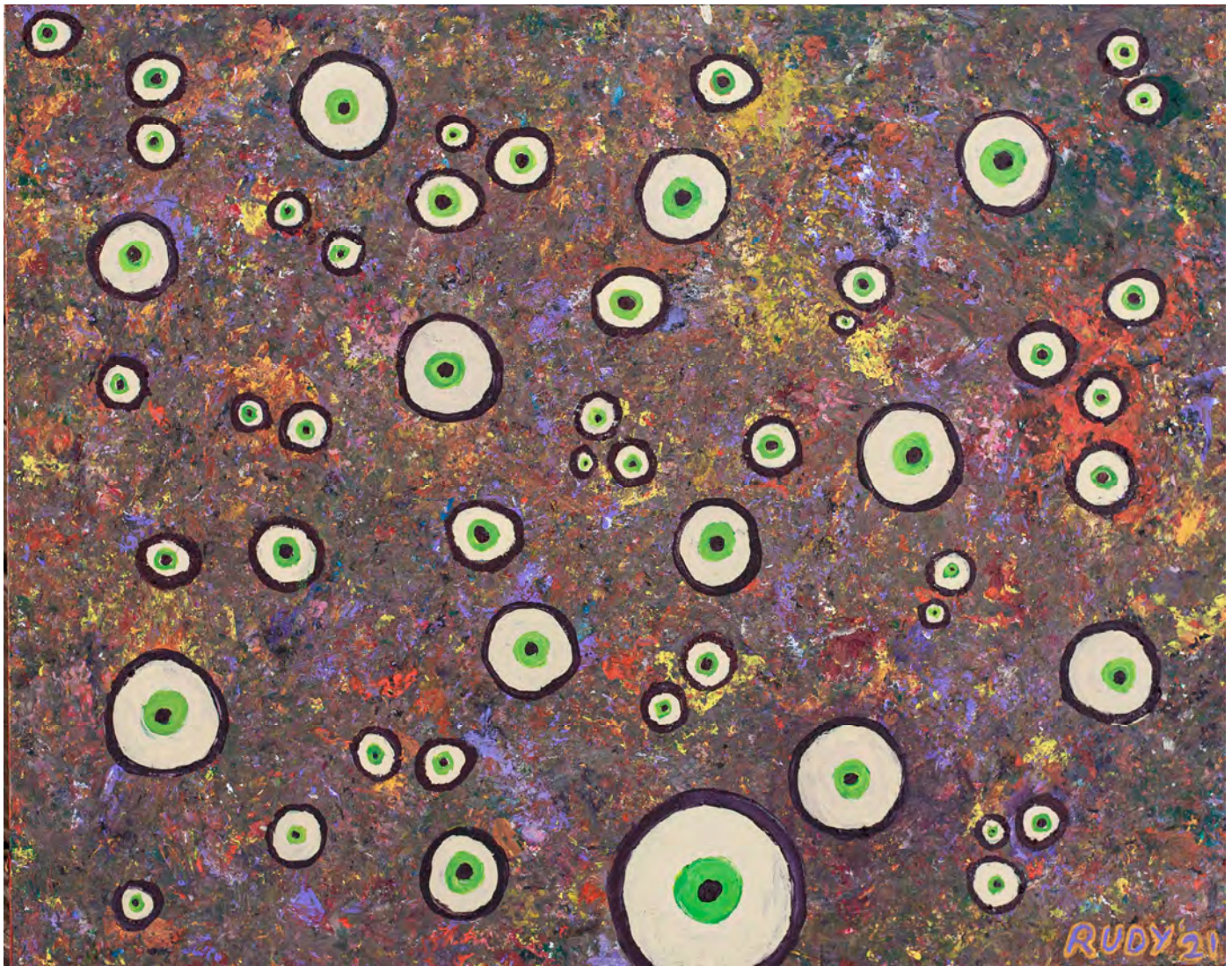
199: Zoom Meeting





201: The Day We Met

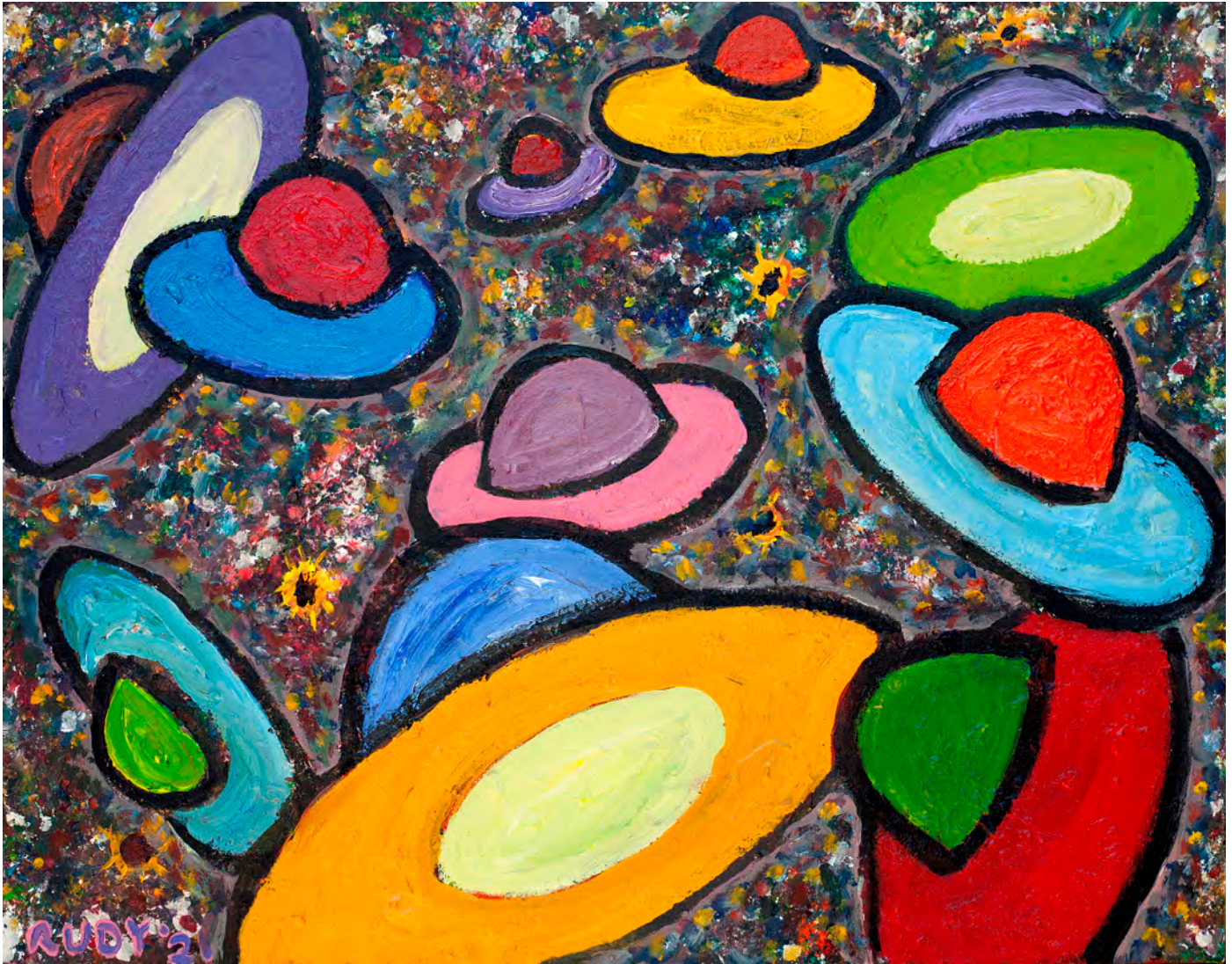




203. Invaders.



204: Escaping Death



205: Galactic Saucers

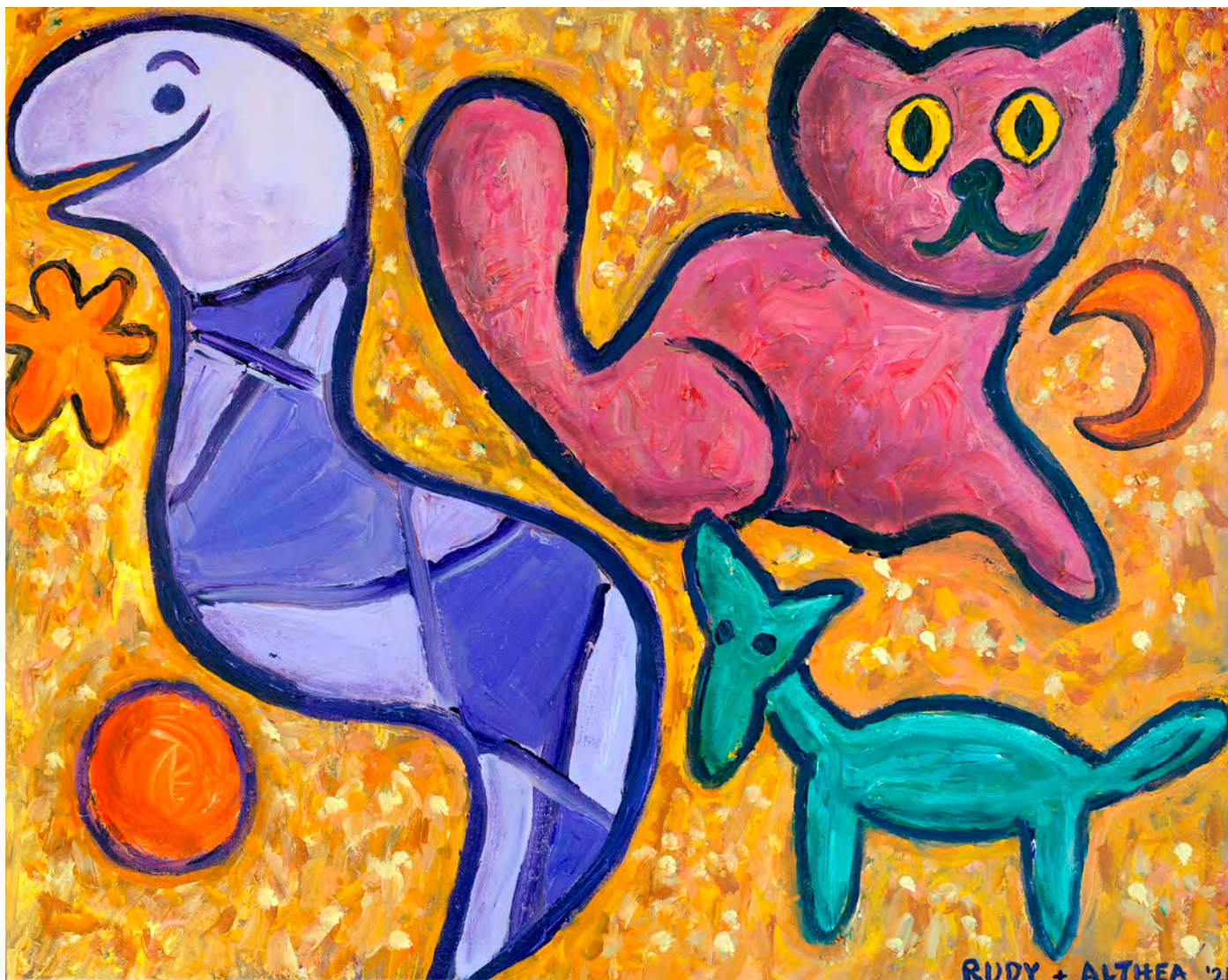




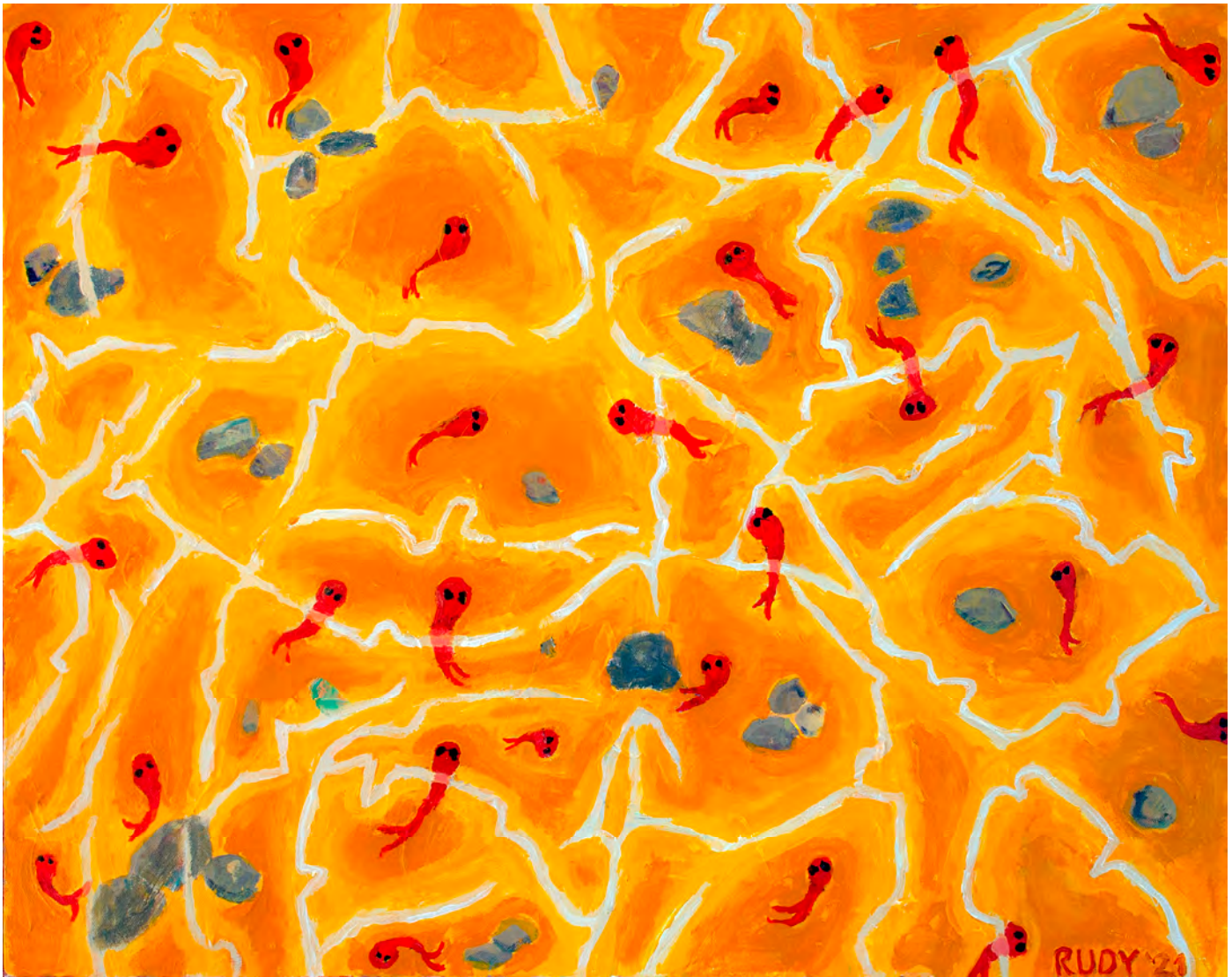
207: Beach Morning



208: Loplop



210: Althea's Friends

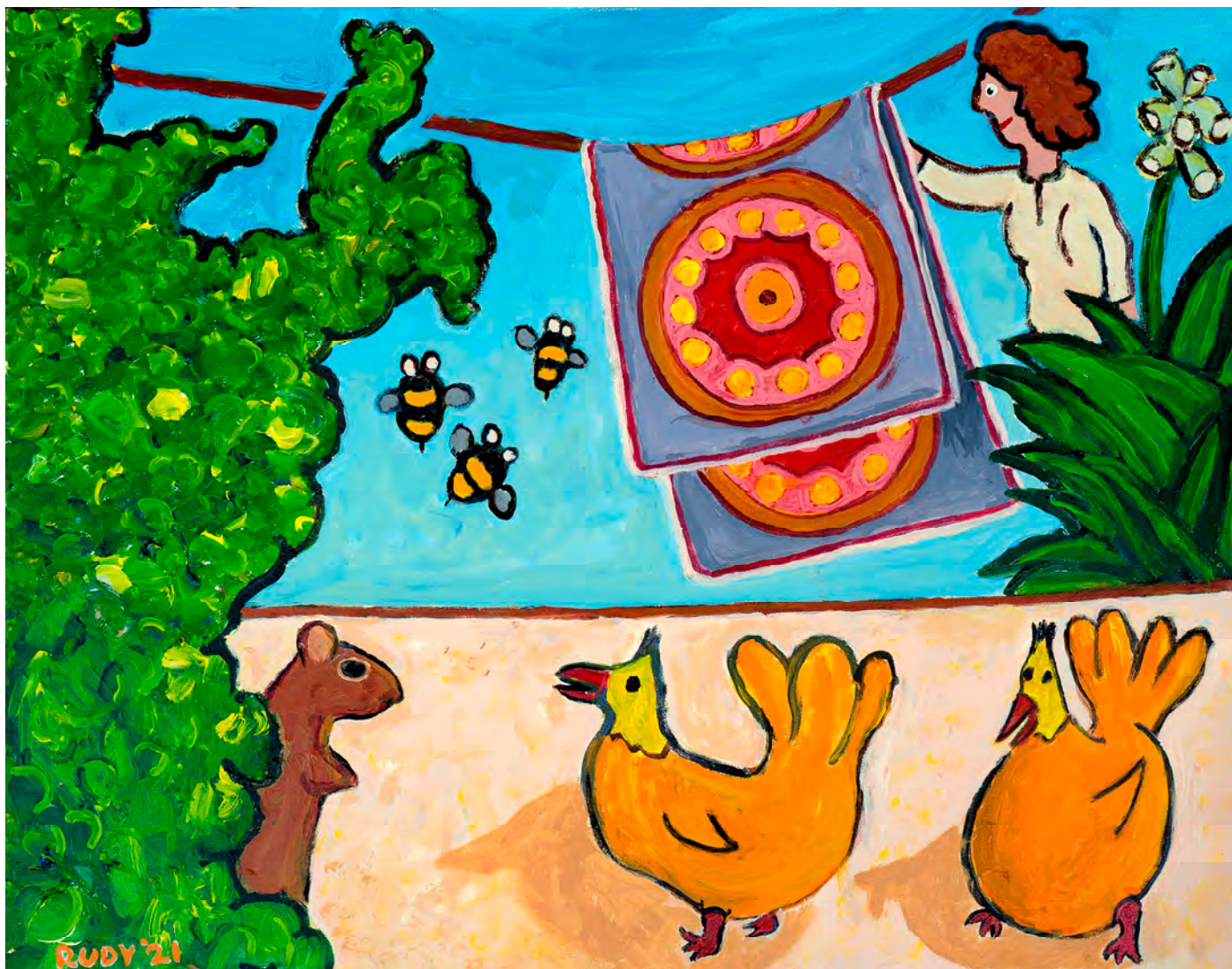


211: Minnows and Caustic Curves



212: High Five





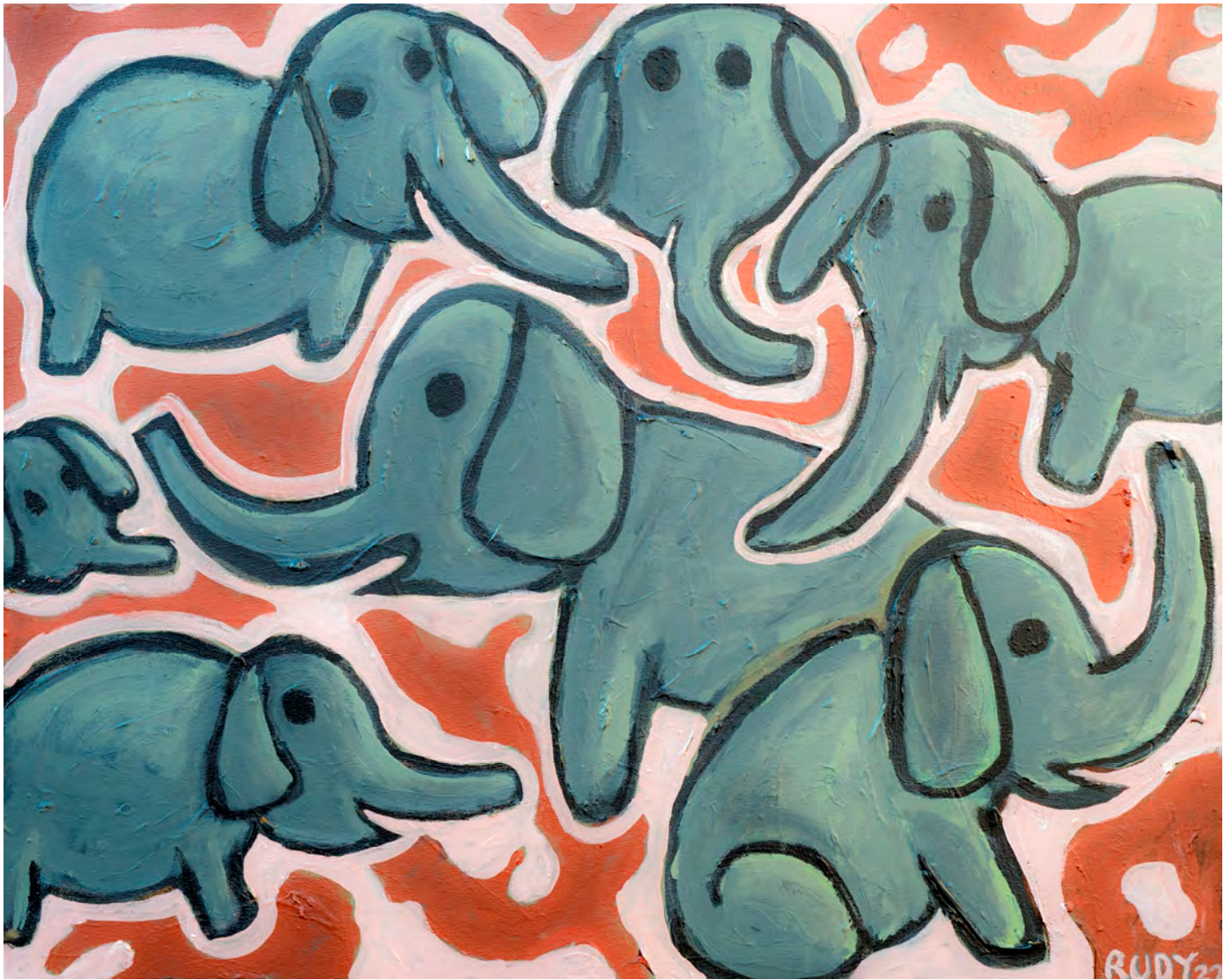
214: Our Back Yard



215: Mr. Gray



216: Calder Grabs Crab



217: Elephants



218: Covid: Third Year



219: The Teacher



220: Spring Oaks



221: Spring Roots



222: Los Gatos Hills



223: Hailing a Ride



224: Golden Eyes



225: Saucer Clam, Anchor Shrimp, Conger Eel





227: God is a Log





230: Family Tree



231: Galaxies



232. Outside the Fillmore



233. Saucer Party



234. Cosmic Cliff



235. Space Jellies



236 "Going to Heaven"

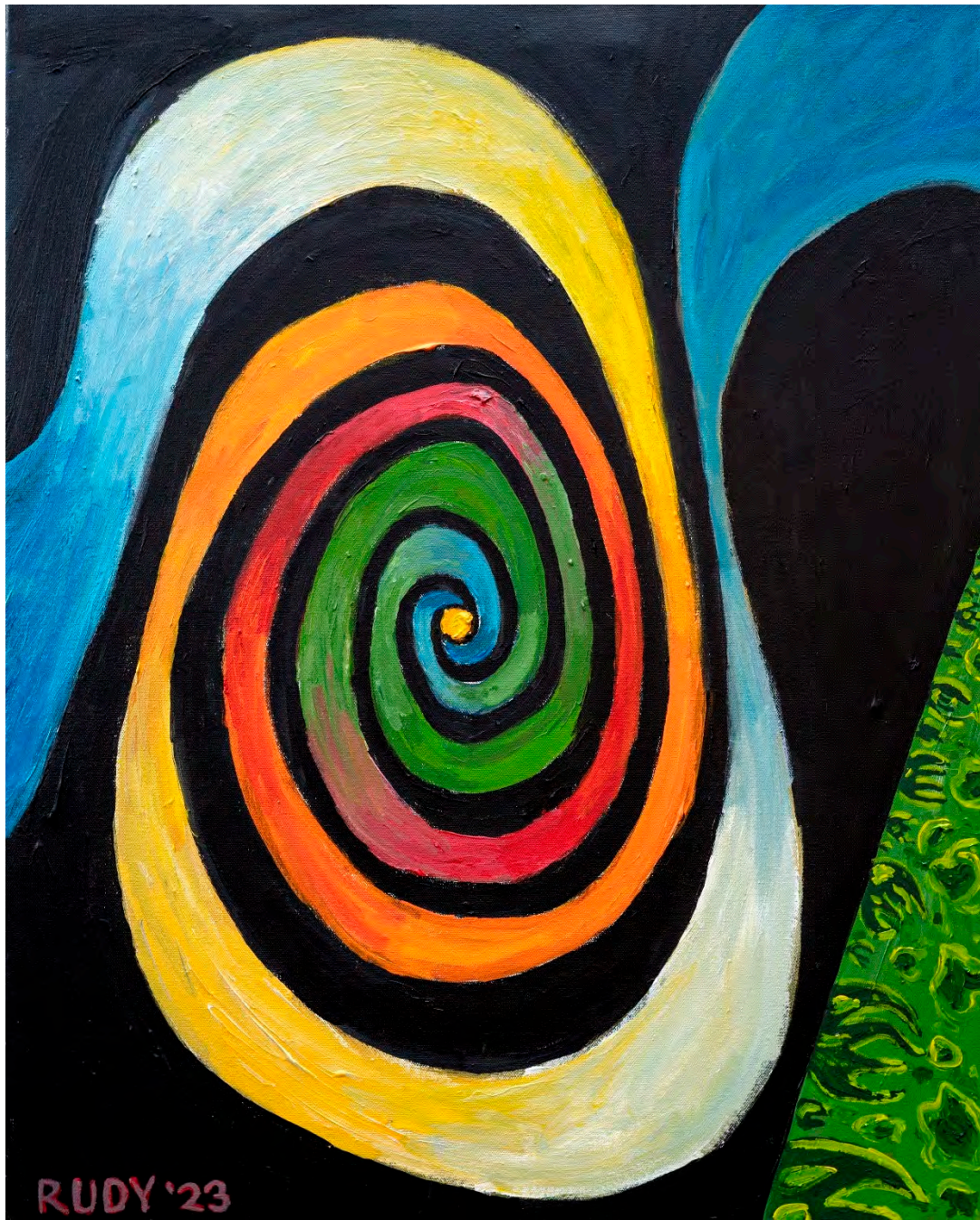




238. "Saucer Pals"



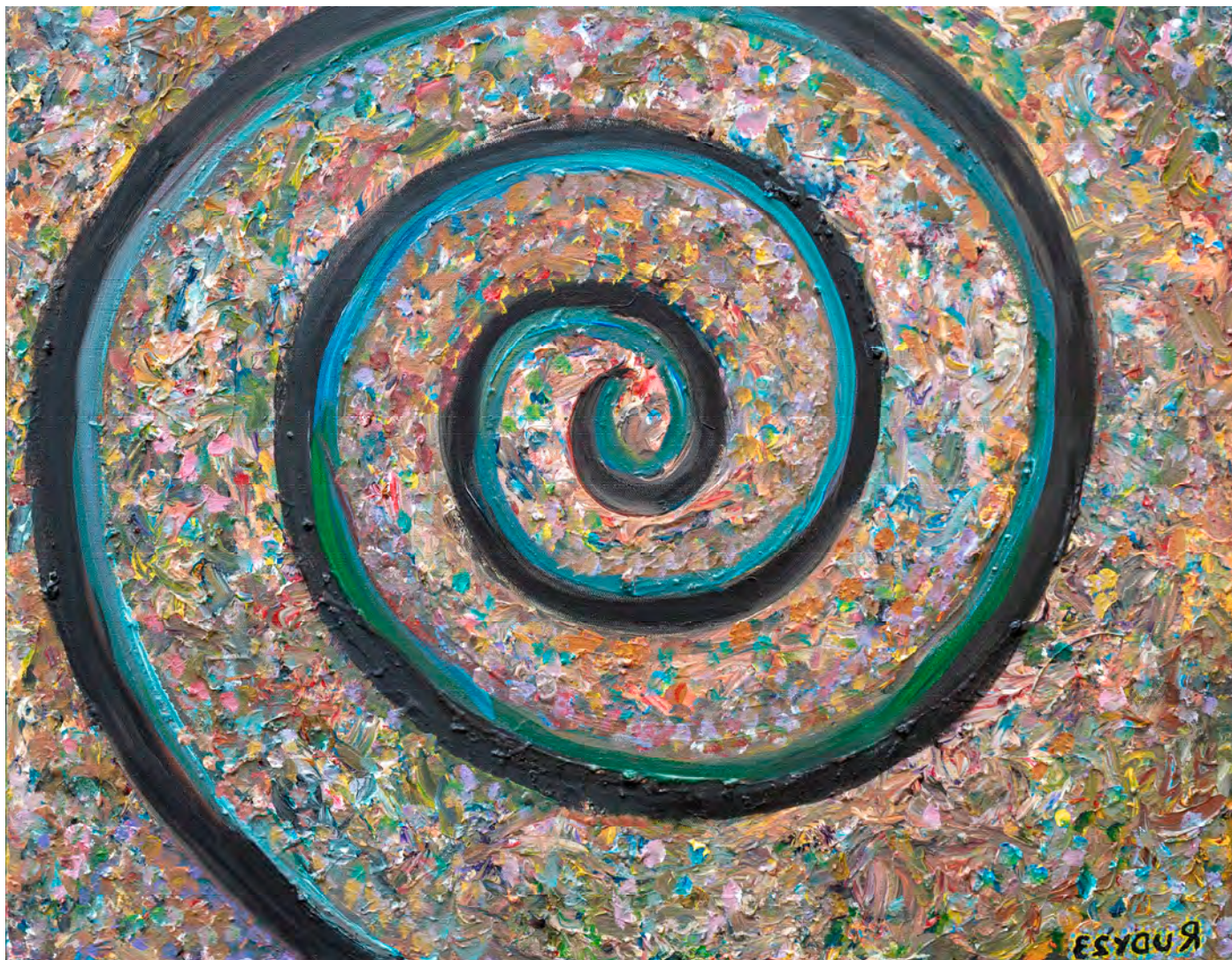
239: "Saucer Island"



242. "Whoop-Di-Doo



243. "Sylvia and the Shells"



244. "The Same Yet Changed I Rise Again



245: "Elise"



246. "Sly Saucers"



247. "Empty Mind







250. Moonbow

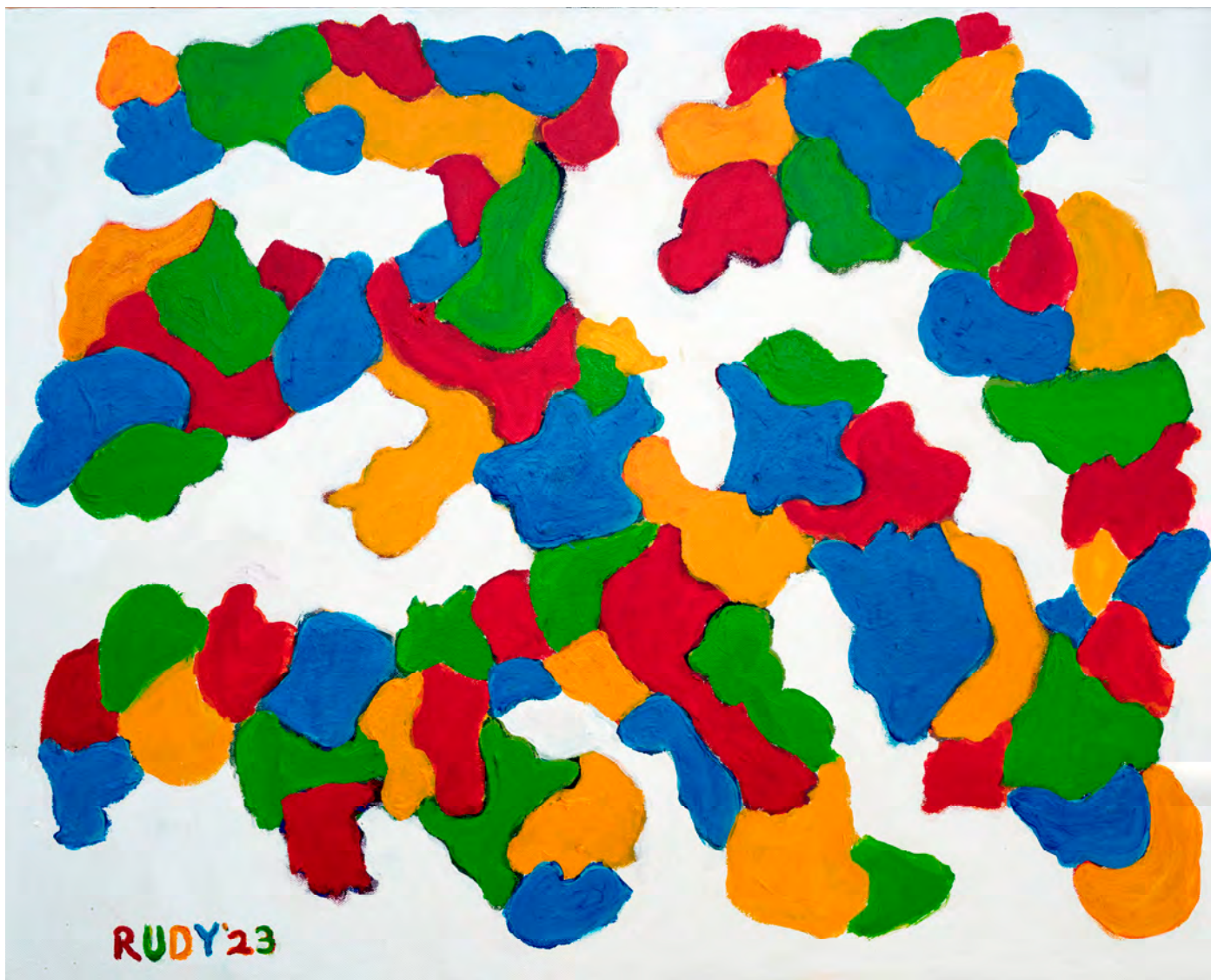


251. Veronica's Merch





253: Neuron #1







256. In the Woods



257. Bernal Hill on the Fourth



258. Neuron #2



259. Bringing Home the Tiki





261. Little People





263. Moulin Rouge





265. Riding the Flat Cows



266. Farmers Market

Notes on the Paintings

1. My Parents



Oil on canvas, 20" x 16", Oct, 1999.

I started painting in 1999 because I was working on a novel about the life of the painter Peter Bruegel. I wanted to understand from the inside how it felt to paint. And I've always thought it might be fun to find an alternate creative outlet besides writing. My wife Sylvia and I took an evening painting class with the San Jose Art Museum. We learned to use oil paints, and I stuck with them

for a few years. My first painting was based on a photo of my parents, taken on a rare trip of theirs to Florida in the early 1950s. I added a UFO—and discovered a personal style. Note that my mother's hair is pointing upwards towards the saucer. I used to call this picture *The Immaculate Conception*, and say that the saucer impregnated my mother via information-rays, as surely I'm too special a person to be born of normal man and woman! But now I don't bother saying that. I'm more like my parents all the time.

2. Arf and the Saucer



Oil on canvas, 20"x16", April, 1999.

This early painting remains one of my favorites. Beginner's luck. It shows my beloved dog Arf (who appears in four of my novels: *The Hollow Earth*, *Saucer Wisdom*, *Frek and the Elixir*, and *As Above So Below*). He used to drink out of a certain fountain in Los Gatos every day. I sketched him there and added a UFO. When I made the aliens look like starfish I was thinking of H. P.

Lovecraft's obsession with echinoderm-like aliens. But my niece Stella thought of a cuter explanation for their appearance: the aliens are the stars from the sky!

3. Saucer Wisdom



Oil on canvas, 30" x 24", June, 1999.

In 1999 I published a millennial novel *Saucer Wisdom*. It was marketed as a non-fiction work of futurology. To complicate things, one of the characters is "Rudy Rucker." This painting shows my character Frank Shook, my character Rudy Rucker, and a Mandelbrot-set-like alien near the Devil's Butte in Montana—a saucerian locale I visited for research.

4. The Attack of the Mandelbrot Set



Oil on canvas, 24" x36", October, 1999.

Sylvia served as the artist's model for the women under attack; I took two photos of her in the Mojave desert pretending to be seeing a saucer. A few years ago I wrote a short story "As Above, So Below," that's in my Complete Stories collection. The story is about a UFO that is a giant multidimensional fractal of the kind called a "Mandelbrot set." This story was also produced as a one-act play in Fort Worth, Texas.

5. A Square



Oil on canvas, 30"x24", May, 2000.

This is A Square, the hero of Edwin Abbott's novel *Flatland*. His wife is a line segment. She's beating her tail, that's why it's blurred. I got the underlying Flatland space pattern from some leaf shadows that were falling onto my canvas as I painted in the back yard.

6. Big Sur



30" x 24", August, 2000.

In 2003, I went camping alone near Kirk Flats in Big Sur. The second night I was standing there naked watching the sun go down and the moon come up. I could feel the Earth turning like a big wheel, and soon I saw the Big Dipper in the sky. I had some problems with flies biting me and I saw a lizard on a rock, so they're in the picture too.

7. Saucer Dogs



Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16", Sept 2000.

This is a simple little painting that I made for my daughter Isabel. Two dogs in a UFO! This was one of the first paintings I did in acrylic paint. The dogs are modeled on our old family pet Arf, whom I also painted into 2: Arf and the Saucer, 10: Stun City, and 19: The Hollow Earth.

8. Spaceland



Oil on canvas, 30" x 24", February 2001.

I painted this to help imagine a scene in my novel *Spaceland*, where my character goes beyond four-dimensional space and into infinite dimensional Hilbert space. I like how smooth the shapes came out. That creature with the mustache is Drabk the Sharak of Okbra, which is a name I drew from Kee Dewdney's book, *The Planiverse*—with Kee's permission.

9. Under My Bed



Oil on canvas, 30" x 20", May, 2001.

In the first chapter of my novel *Frek and the Elixir*, the young hero Frek discovers a UFO under his bed with an alien cuttlefish as passenger. (Actually that's my hand in the picture, not Frek's.) I got the glowing look of the saucer door from an oven door in Hieronymus Bosch's *The Last Judgment* in Vienna.

10. Stun City



Oil on canvas, 30" x 24", December, 2001.

This image illustrates the second chapter of my far future SF novel *Frek and the Elixir*. It's a biotech world in which the buildings are grown. Next to Frek are his faithful dog Arf and his "grullo" friend Gibby. They've just arrived at a town called Stun City. I painted in a bunch of Virgins of Guadalupe into the picture as well, even though they don't figure in the novel. I've always thought these religious icons look somehow science-fictional: a little figure floating in a spiky glowing ball. The puffball building holds the town's rulers. The Menger Sponge cube is where they grow new organisms. And the tall spiral structure is meant to be a giant beanstalk called the Toonsmithy.

11. The Hacker and the Ants



Oil on canvas, 20 x 24, March, 2002.

This is my (unused) design for the cover for my Silicon Valley SF thriller novel, *The Hacker and the Ants*. I like having the hacker be a skull, a pirate, and a light bulb—and that he's wired into the ant. In my novel an evil computer hacker creates an ant-like virus which destroys television. My character rides a virtual ant through cyberspace to an encounter with the hacker.

12. My Life in a Nutshell



Oil on canvas, 24" x 20", March, 2003.

This is an homage to Philip Guston, who sometimes painted eye-heads like this starting at empty bottles. In a way these were self-portraits. My Guston-style self-portrait shows me focused on a computer keyboard, which is how I while a way a great deal of my waking time.

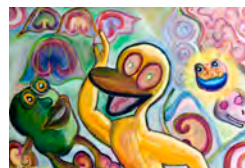
13. Da Nha Duc



Acrylic on canvas, 30" x 24", July, 2003.

This was my first painting with acrylics. I like how fast I can work with acrylic paint, and how easy it is to clean up, and you can in fact use mediums with the acrylic paint to give it more of oil's transparency and workability. This image was inspired by a frame of a Carl Barks comic book. Naturally I put in a UFO and, if you look closely, a tiny snowflake-like alien in the middle. Sylvia had the idea of giving my duck a Vietnamese name, reminiscent of all the friendly Vietnamese students that she and I have taught here in Silicon Valley. I ended up putting Da Nha Duc into my novel *Frek and the Elixir* as a cartoon character, with his nephews Huy, Lui, and Duy, "throwing back his shoulders and curving his beak in triumph."

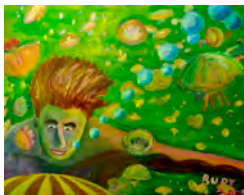
14. Disco La Hampa



Oil on canvas, 36" x 24", October, 2004.

This is a kind of alien nightclub scene. I was thinking about the other-worldly hangout La Hampa that appears in my novel *Mathematicians in Love*. Also of the classic Toulouse-Lautrec poster, Moulin Rouge. That's a star frog in the limo on the right. The jellyfish are based on Belousov-Zhabotinsky scrolls, which are one of my favorite types of cellular-automata-based computer graphics.

15. Jellyfish Lake



Acrylic on canvas, 30" x 24", June, 2005.

This is inspired by a trip to Jellyfish Lake in Micronesia near Palau; some of my fellow divers took an underwater photo of me in this very pose. I put this scene into my novel *Mathematicians in Love*, where the big jellyfish just under the diver is a kind of god. It was amazing in the lake; my visual field held only sunlit yellow-green water and jellyfish, everywhere and at every angle.

16. Surfin' Tiki



Oil on canvas, 24" x 24", June 2006.

I copied the sky for this picture from the beautiful spring sky overhead, then painted in the waves and the tiki. The surfin' tikis appear in a story I wrote with Marc Laidlaw, "The Perfect Wave." They also appear in my novel *Postsingular* where I have some giant aliens who look like Easter Island moai statues. Here's a short passage where one of them appears to the main character Thuy: "Thuy thought she saw a live moai peering at her over Jayjay's shoulder—huge, cave-browed, luminous, a tiki god with a pursed

mouth that was almost a smile."

17. Davenport Cliffs



Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 20, July 2006.

My wife and I saw a Monet show in San Francisco and I got excited about painting en plein air. I painted this on a cliff near Davenport, California. Later I added in a UFO, an alien, and a giant squid. Perhaps this was overkill, as it's a pretty strong landscape on its own.

18. Summer Day



Acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11", July 2006.

I painted this en plein air on a 105 degree August afternoon on Saint Joseph's Hill above Los Gatos, California, sitting on the ground with ants crawling into my underwear and biting me. The empty field had stakes from a former vineyard, but they looked confusing. So I made the stakes into alien snails and added—of course—a flying saucer. I think the saucer makes the picture.

-19. The Hollow Earth



Oil on canvas, 24" x 24", September 2006.

We might suppose the Earth to be hollow like a tennis ball, with the inside filled with jungles, floating lakes, and a mysterious pink light emanating from the center. Also to found are shrigs (= shrimp + pigs), flying nautiluses, and the Great Old Ones that resemble giant sea cucumbers. The painting illustrates my adventure tale *The Hollow Earth*, supposedly based on an account by Mason Algiers Reynolds, a 19th Century traveler to the Earth's interior. From the novel: "All lines of sight near the Earth's center were warped and distorted, surrounding the center's blobs of blue with weird halos and mirages. Earth's interior was illuminated by the branching pink streamers of light that stretched from the core to the inner surface of the great planetary rind we'd fallen through."

20. Yellow Couch



Acrylic on paper, 22½" x 14½", June, 2007.

In June, 2007, my wife and I went to a painting workshop in Caunes, a small village in the southwest of France. Our teacher was the artist Glen Moriwaki. It was great working with him; he brought my art to a new level. This was the first painting I did in Caunes; a yellow lawn-couch on the grass outside our group studio. So as to make it easier to bring the paintings home, I worked mostly with acrylic on paper at the workshop. I like the smoothness of the paper painting surface, but when you're done it's a drag to have to frame the thing. The nice thing about canvases is that I can paint on the edges, and then it doesn't really need a frame.

21. The Old Marrieds



Acrylic on paper, 22½" x 14", June, 2007.

In Caunes, some trees like chestnuts were blooming in long branching flowers. I wanted to paint the leaves and flowers. To simplify things, I traced the shapes of the leaves onto my paper. I set the flowers into two small pots facing each other. And then I had the idea of making the flowers be the tentacles of creatures like cephalopods or hermit crabs. As I painted them, the creatures became deeply entwined, reaching into each other's stuff, like bickering, inseparable partners.

22. Minerve Awning



Acrylic on paper, 21½" x 13½", June, 2007.

Our teacher Glen Moriwaki took our class on an outing to the ancient walled town of Minerve. As I was walking around looking for something to sketch for a painting, this awning caught my eye. This scene had the added virtue of being in front of a comfortable bench—which is a good way for an old man like me to pick his subject. I sketched it in pencil, took photos, and filled in the painting back in the studio, simplifying the scene considerably. This picture was featured in a poster for a group show we had at the Live Worms gallery in April, 2008. Someone wanted to buy it, but I gave it to my daughter instead.

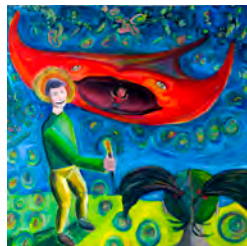
23. Caunes Vineyards

Acrylic on paper, 23" x 18", June, 2007.



Another landscape painting from the South of France, one of my favorites. I took some photos at this spot overlooking Caunes, did a pencil sketch, and painted it back in the studio. Before starting, I primed the paper with some gesso that I'd tinted pink, which gives the whole picture a nice warm quality. The style of this one is inspired by Wayne Thiebaud's late paintings of the fields and rivers in the delta region near Sacramento, California. I was also influenced by Kevin Brown, who was painting next to me in the studio every day. Glen said this painting of mine demonstrates that I could in principle let go of my science-fictional imagery and produce landscapes that are fantastic and dreamy without any additional props, and he's right. But now and then I still like to paint SF things anyway.

24. Hylozoic Triptych (Center Panel): Jayjay and the Hrull



Acrylic on canvas, 38" x 38", June, 2007.

This is the biggest picture I've done so far. I painted it with the canvas still unstretched, stapled to a wall in the studio in Caunes. I was just getting started on my novel *Hylozoic*, which features a newlywed couple called Jayjay and Thuy. "Hylozoic" is a word referring to the philosophical doctrine that everything is alive: rocks, atoms, stars. The scattered globs of light in this painting are there to represent the notion that in a hylozoic world the very air currents are alive. My character Jayjay has been getting painting lessons from no less a master than Hieronymus Bosch (so of course the picture has to be a triptych.) And that's the back of his wife Thuy's head in the front; she has long pigtails. Duxie the Hrull, a flying manta ray, is about to take

them for a ride. But never mind about that.. The main thing here is the colors. It was tough bringing this big unstretched canvas back on the airplane from France; I rolled it up inside some foam rubber and managed to talk the stewardesses into letting me park it in a little closet that they had for their coats.

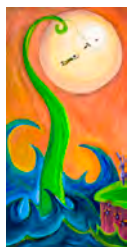
25. Hylozoic Triptych (Left Panel): Thuy and the Subbies



Acrylic on canvas, 19" x 38", August, 2007.

This painting grew out of an en plein air session on St. Joseph's Hill with my painter friend Vernon Head. There's a big oak tree growing at the edge of a drop-off; although it looks a bit unstable, I've been visiting it for twenty years. I like the tree a lot, and I like how I can see some of the roots exposed in the gully wall. I filled the sky with Zhabotinsky scrolls and got the tree done pretty quickly, but then the dirt wall was looking dull. So I covered it with little critters; I was thinking of them as nanomachines, which infest the Earth in my novel *Postsingular*, which precedes my novel *Hylozoic* (the central panel of the triptych). Those birds dancing around the fire underground are sinister subdimensional beings called subbies. In *Postsingular*, they actually try to eat my character Thuy; you can see her uneasily looking down at them.

26. Hylozoic Triptych (Right Panel): Beanstalk to Infinity



Acrylic on canvas, 19" x 38", September, 2007.

The triptych developed over four months along with my plans for my pair of novels: *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*. I've always been fascinated by the fairy tale, "Jack and the Beanstalk." It's a powerful, archetypal notion: a seed that grows a beanstalk that you can climb to heaven. Given that I planned to write about actually infinite levels of the universe, an endless beanstalk seemed like a good way to get there. I got the composition for this panel from The Ascent of the Blessed, which is a panel in a lesser-known Bosch triptych, depicting souls flying up to a circular disk of white light. You can see Jayjay, Thuy, and Duxie the Hrull way up at the top. And one of the subbies at the bottom is waving good-bye. After painting this picture, I knew I wanted a scene like this in my novel *Hylozoic*: my characters flying up an endless beanstalk that they find growing out of the subdimensions.

27. The Talking Pitchfork



Acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20", July, 2007.

After the trip to France, I was more enthused than ever about en plein air painting. I started going on outings around Los Gatos with Vernon Head. This is a field on St. Joseph's Hill; on a very hot August day, and we were sitting in the shade. The landscape seemed a little too simple to me, so I put in a character who was about to appear in my novel *Hylōzoic*: a god-like talking pitchfork named Groovy. When I painted this picture, I was thinking that the pitchfork was going to be evil, but as wrote about him more, I learned he was a pretty good guy. A Kentucky hillbilly, basically.

28. Lexington Reservoir



Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16", August, 2007.

Another blazing hot summer day painting en plein air with Vernon Head. I wanted a scene with water, and I'd found a likely inlet off Lexington Reservoir near Los Gatos. When we got there it was early afternoon, and the only shade we could find was far up in a gully, quite an awkward spot to sit. The annually dwindling water supply of the reservoir etches the steep gravelly sides with horizontal lines like bathtub rings. Some white egrets were hanging out here, and I did see one land, although I didn't actually paint him in till I was back home.

29. Prickly Pear Cactus



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 24" September, 2007.

I love the shapes of prickly pear cactus. I spotted a big stand of them up near the Sacred Heart Jesuit Center that stands on a hill over Los Gatos. Vernon and I went up there and I set to work.

30. Shells



Acrylic on canvas, 30" x 30", October, 2007.

When I was at Glen Moriawaki's workshop in Caunes, I met the artist Kevin Brown. He was a good influence on my painting; as he works very rapidly and freely, often finishing a large painting in a few hours—and just as often going back and totally changing the painting a few hours later. Kevin owns and runs the Live Worms gallery in the North Beach area of San Francisco, which he rents out to emerging artists who want to stage a show of their own. As I'd accumulated quite a few paintings, and I wanted to do something special for the launch of my new novel *Postsingular*, I got my publisher to help me rent Live Worms for a combined art show and book release party. To round out my set of pictures, I painted a still-life of a bunch of seashells that I had around the house.

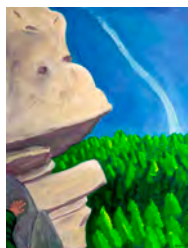
31. Mossy Trees



Acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24", November, 2007.

I got into an en plein air thing again in the sunny winter of 2007. I wore a paint stained overcoat and wedged my paints into a knapsack and strapped a canvas to that. It was great to be all covered in paint clothes with a knapsack. I looked like a bum. People looked askance. On a ridge in the Castle Rock park above Los Gatos and Saratoga I found some trees that were completely covered with fronds of moss. The sun was going down in the west over the Pacific Ocean, edging the mossy trees with brilliant yellow-green. The tree's a little like a woman's legs, too, very fertile. To pep up the picture, I added an eye. I like to wrap my paintings around, painting on the edges so I don't have to frame them. I put another eye on the left edge, though you can't see it in this image. It was beautiful here. I was thinking of a drawing by Hieronymus Bosch where he sketches an eye on the ground and an ear on a tree.

32. Giant's Head

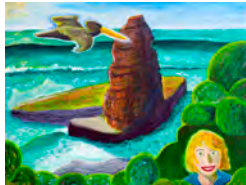


Acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24", December, 2007.

Like 31: Mossy Trees, Giant's Head is a painting I started outdoors in Castle Rock Park near Saratoga, California. This particular rock is called California Ridge. I circled around on a narrow ledge to get to this vantage point. I was somewhat worried about falling off; there was a hundred foot drop to the ground. I painted my hand in there, like clutching at the rock to show that I was scared. The rock itself reminded me of the profile of Homer Simpson. There were a lot of little

lichen patches on it; I just tried to suggest those with some spots of color. That white line in the sky is a jet contrail. The green of the trees was really lovely, it felt good being alone up here on the ledge. I didn't have room to stay very clean and I got a lot of paint on myself.

33. The Muse



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", January, 2008.

My wife Sylvia was out of town for a week visiting our daughter in New York, and I took a knapsack of paints and a canvas out to a cliff overlooking Four Mile Beach north of Santa Cruz. This spire of rock was part of a natural bridge many years ago. I often walk along the beach to this spot; it's usually deserted and very beautiful. This was the first time I'd gotten onto the cliff above the rock. It was a very windy day. I found a depression in the cliff, a little grassy dell, and I settled in. I wanted to get the shape of the long, breaking dark waves near the horizon. A pelican flew past and I got a photo of him. I missed Sylvia. At home, I printed out a large image of the pelican I'd seen, also an image of Sylvia, and I slid those images around on the canvas until the composition looked right. And then I outlined those spots and painted copies of the images. I think of the woman as the muse. When I go out alone in nature, that's who I'm hoping to hear from.

34. Spacetime Donuts



Acrylic on paper, 17" x 13", April, 2008.

In April of 2008, I arranged for a small press to reprint two of my early science fiction novels, *Spacetime Donuts* and *The Sex Sphere*. As part of the deal, I did the cover art. *Spacetime Donuts* is about punk young mathematician who finds a way to shrink down so small that he wraps around the scale axis and gets big. Scale turns out to be circular, and spacetime is in some sense like a donut. I wrote this novel in 1979, and it can be argued that this was one of the very first cyberpunk science-fiction novels. The characters in the book plug their brains into computers, which is why I have that wire coming out of his neck. He's wearing an earring that's a variation on the W.A.S.T.E. symbol in Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*. As it turns out, the book's plot resembles this symbol. I had fun making this image pop with cadmium red and cadmium yellow.

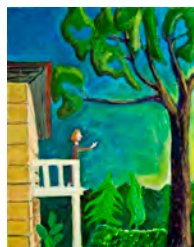
35. The Sex Sphere



Acrylic on canvas, 14" x 18", April, 2008.

My novel, *The Sex Sphere*, is about a being from the fourth dimension named Babs. Her intersection with our 3D space looks like parts of a woman, squeezed together and rounded off. She manipulates some of the characters into setting off a terrorist A-bomb in Florence, Italy. You can see the mushroom cloud in the background. I liked painting this, as it's so intense and cartoony and surreal. I think the sex sphere looks a little scary. Originally this painting was going to be a landscape looking out over Silicon Valley. I went up on St. Joseph's Hill with a canvas and paints and started the picture there with Vernon Head. Vernon knows my working habits by now, and he knew something weird was going to show up in the foreground. For a while I wasn't sure what it should be, but when I realized I needed a cover image for the new edition of *The Sex Sphere*, I was ready to go.

36. Dawn



Acrylic on canvas, 14" x 18", May, 2008.

In the morning, the sun comes up behind our house and slants across the yard, coating the trees with warm light. Sylvia calls it "the lamp," as in "Is the lamp on yet?" This is a painting of her standing on the back porch greeting the dawn. I redid the face about twenty times to get the right look, although it still doesn't look like my wife. We're so highly tuned to recognizing faces that the tiniest smidgen of paint changes everything

37. Montgomery Hill



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 20", May, 2008.

I painted this in Montgomery Hill park in east San Jose, next to Evergreen Valley Community College. The park is named after aviation pioneer John Montgomery who died when his glider, *The Evergreen*, crashed here in 1911. I added a UFO to liven up the picture, with some star-shaped aliens like in my early painting, 2: Arf and the Saucer.

38. Collaborators

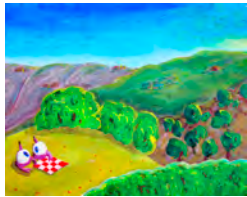


Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16", July, 2008.

This is an image inspired by collaborating on a science-fiction story with my friend and fellow author, Bruce Sterling. We quarreled a lot about this particular story, called “Colliding Branes,” but it turned out well and we sold it to Isaac Asimov’s SF Magazine. Thinking back on the experience, I thought it would be funny to paint two long-armed men choking each other. Actually

this painting started out as an en plein air portrait of a different friend painting with me on St. Joseph’s Hill near Los Gatos, California. But then it diverged into the cartoony mode. I was feeling negative when I painted this picture, as was recovering from a blood vessel bursting in my brain at the start of July, 2008—see picture 40: Cerebral Hemorrhage.

39. Alien Picnic



Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16", August, 2008.

Another en plein air painting on St. Joseph’s Hill in Los Gatos, California. My earlier work, 18: Summer Day, was painted at almost the same spot. Here again, once I had the landscape, I wanted to liven it up, so I thought of two cute little eyeball-shaped aliens having a nice picnic together. I sketched in some towns on the hillsides, and used gloss medium to layer on some different

colors.

40. Cerebral Hemorrhage



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 20", August, 2008.

This is a picture of me in the hospital at the start of July, 2008. It’s supposed to show how I felt when I nearly died. I like the 3D blob of blood and its shadow on the sheet, also the way the guy’s soul is flowing out through the soles of his feet...with the lobes of his brain piled up on the right like a compost heap, with a terrified, watchful eye on top, this eye twinned with the eye of the soul in that starfish shape. Spooky, but somewhat uplifting.

41. The Big One



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", September, 2008.

I used to edit a science fiction webzine called Flurb, and my friend Michael Blumlein sent me a kind of magic fish story called “The Big One,” and the magic fish got into my head to the point where I painted him. A technical painting issue that interested me here was to get transparency effects, that is, glazes and veils, when you’re using the somewhat dead and opaque medium of acrylic paint.

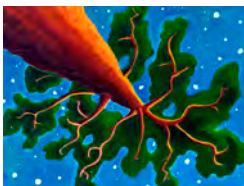
42. The Wanderer



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", September, 2008.

This painting is loosely inspired by Hieronymus Bosch’s The Pedlar. I made the background in an abstract-expressionist fashion by simply painting shapes to match the shadows of leaves that happened to lie on my canvas, and then fashioned it into a mountain scene and added the Wanderer. To fill it out, I put some creepy critters into those rocks on the left, perhaps they’re memories from the Wanderer’s past. For me, The Wanderer represents my own life’s journey, with me at a somewhat confusing bend in the road, and the future entirely uncertain. I was still recovering from having a vein burst in my brain at the start of July. I was wondering whether I was near my life’s end, or whether I was starting a new phase.

43. Georgia’s Tree



Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", September, 2008.

Georgia is my first daughter’s name, but this painting is inspired by Georgia O’Keeffe’s The Lawrence Tree. She painted her picture around 1929, while visiting the former ranch of author D. H. Lawrence near Taos, New Mexico. Describing that time, O’Keeffe wrote, “There was a long weathered carpenter’s bench under the tall tree in front of the little old house that Lawrence had lived in there. I often lay on that bench looking up into the tree...past the trunk and up into the branches. It was particularly fine at night with the stars above the tree.” In some books and prints, “The Lawrence Tree” is shown with the trunk at the lower right, but a number of scholars feel that O’Keeffe wanted the trunk to be at the upper left, with the tree disconcertingly growing down, as I’ve arranged it in my version.

44. A Fork in Time



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 30". October, 2008.

This picture was inspired by Ambrose Bierce's, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," a tale about a guy who thinks that he's survived being hung...until auugh, he realizes different. For me, the significance of this relates to my trip to the hospital at the start of July, 2008.. By the time I painted this picture, I'd learned that I'd completely recovered, and that I wasn't going to have another brain-vein pop. But I was thinking that in a different branch of the universe, I died. The picture shows a fork in time, with me, happily, entering the live fork. Note, however, that the season is autumn.

45. Romeo and Juliet



Acrylic on canvas. 20" by 24". October, 2008.

I started this one as a pattern of rectangles. The shapes reminded me of buildings, so that's what I went for. The steep city street is inspired by Wayne Thiebaud. And the idea of Romeo and Juliet appealed to me—my wife and I had just seen a ballet version of it. I like having the woman be in silhouette with a ponytail, and she's painting a picture. Romeo seems somehow to have the moon inside his room with him.

46. Caw!



Acrylic on canvas. 16" by 20". November, 2008.

A lot of noisy crows gather in the trees near our house. I love them and their cawing. I think I'd like to be a crow. There's an inhuman, predatory side to birds as well—after all, they're probably descended from dinosaurs. These two are about to share a lizard. I like the anxious look in the poor lizard's eyes. I put a pattern of nested scrolls into the tree foliage.

47. Welcome to Mars



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". December, 2008.

I wanted to do a big science-fictional painting. In the title, I'm using "Mars" in the generic SF sense of "a strange alien planet." I started out with an abstract pattern created by using up the paint remaining on my palette from my previous painting. The first thing I got was a big yellow triangle, which seemed like a beam emanating from a flying saucer. That green band started as a line of foliage, and became a hive creature with multiple eyes and mouths. The very last thing I added was the group of little people and critters watching the saucer land. It represents a new order. I thought of the pair of people in front as newly elected President Obama and his wife at the Inauguration! Welcome to Mars, indeed.

48. Thirteen Worlds



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 18". January, 2009.

I started this painting before Christmas—we were hanging up some glass ornaments and I was thinking about the reflections in them. I remember reading somewhere that a good exercise for a painter is to practice drawing circles—and then spheres. I didn't actually look at all that many mirror balls to paint this, it's more than I thought about them a lot, although I did keep one reflective ball next to my easel so I could figure out how my hand with the brush would look. It seemed more interesting to have all thirteen artists be different. Cory Doctorow used this image as one of the alternate covers for his collection *With a Little Help From My Friends*.

49. The Flims



Acrylic on canvas. 20" by 16". February, 2009.

I was working on a novel called *Jim and the Flims*, about a man who finds a way to get to an afterworld beside our own reality. And this world is inhabited by the so-called "flims." I wanted to see what they looked like. To start with, I took some leftover paint from 48: Thirteen Worlds and painted a landscape in the shape of some shadows that were falling on my canvas. The straight lines are shadows of telephone wires; they indicate this is a portal zone. I call the menacing beast at the lower right a "yuel." When I was in Louisville in January, 2009, I'd imagined seeing something like this in the woods, with a Tibetan demon look. The other two beings are modeled on what the cartoonist Jim Woodring calls "jivas." Jivas appear, for instance, in his book *The Portable Frank*. For him they're a bit like free-floating souls, or paintbrushes. They're villains in my novel.

50. Four Mile Beach



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 24". February, 2009.

I was out at Four Mile Beach on Route 1 north of Santa Cruz. I brought a big canvas there and my paint kit for an en plein air session.. The only other people around were surfers; they thought it was nice that I was painting them. This was a clear day before a big storm moved in. The waves came out well—I did that part in under an hour, right there on the beach. I reworked the cliffs and rocks at home. I like this picture a lot. Sometimes the easy ones are the best.

51. Yellow Vines



Acrylic on canvas. 18" by 24". March, 2009.

I took a picture of this spot a month earlier, when it was raining a lot, and I was struck by the contrast between the snaky pale vine and the damp bark of the branching tree. And I loved the 3D curve of the vine. I went back a week or ten days later, and it wasn't so rainy anymore, so the contrast wasn't so high. I had my paint kit with me and I started this picture on the spot. I noticed two more vines I could put in the picture. The picture seems symbolic of something—but I'm not sure of what.

52. Pig Surprise



Acrylic on canvas. 40 " by 30 ". March, 2009.

I had a big canvas and I wanted to do something flashy. I started out with random blotches of paints, and then I started seeing some images. At first I had the picture rotated 180 degrees from this, and the claw was fire, and the red disk was a setting sun. But that looked dull. So I turned it the other way, made the claw...and added a pig snout and ears. Pig Surprise! Another reason for the title is that I went to Big Sur a week before painting this, and my daughter Isabel was teasing me, and said I was going to Pig Sur. Yet another interpretation might be that I was working on my income tax return while painting this—a docile citizen facing the Eagle.

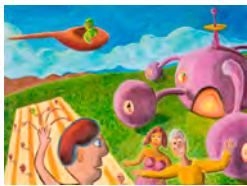
53. Big Sur at Lucia



Acrylic on canvas. 20" by 16". April, 2009.

I started this on my birthday at a rustic old motel, Lucia Lodge in Big Sur, about 30 miles south of the hamlet of Big Sur proper. I was perched in a meadow of poppies at the edge of a cliff, just like the painting shows. That's a century plant on the right, a fitting thing to paint on one's birthday.

54. The Clone Garden



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 18". April, 2009.

In working on my novel, *Jim and the Flims*, I wanted to get an image of another world called Flimsy. And this was the picture I came up with. My original inspiration was van Gogh's painting, *The Sower*—I started with a man sowing seeds into a field. Two people greet him, they just came out of that interdimensional tunnel visible in the house-like structure made of lavender spheres. The sower is casting baby-seeds into the field; we see human heads growing up—and the head of one green alien.

55. Geranium



Acrylic on canvas. 16" by 20". April, 2009.

I wanted to paint a still-life for a change, and I ended up combining aspects of two potted geraniums in my back yard. At some point, I always have to stop looking at the object and start making things up, otherwise I'd never finish. With this geranium I did have something extra in mind, that is, I was working on a kind of urban fantasy/SF novel called *Jim and the Flims*, and my characters were about to make their way to the castle of the King of Flimsy. And I had the idea that the castle could look like a giant geranium. Those leaves are thick, you see, with rooms in them, and the flims are buzzing around them like gnats, only too small to see in the painting but in 57: The Abduction I came back to paint the details.

56. Man in Flame Car



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 18". May, 2009.

I've been fascinated by cars with flames ever since I was a kid poring over my big brother's hot rod magazines. In 1973 I had a fairly generic white Ford that I painted some flames on myself. It was an amateur job—but it was fun. I happened to go to a car show in Southern California in May, 2009, and I got

the idea to paint one. It's hard to pin down the mood of the guy in the car. A little sad and lonely, but calm. In a loose sense, the guy represents me—he has flashy flames on the outside, but inside, he's on his own, as we always are.

57. The Abduction



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". June, 2009.

I painted this scene to help visualize a chapter in my novel, *Jim and the Flims*. In the background we have a giant geranium plant that's being used as a castle by a race of flying people. In the foreground, a man's girlfriend is being abducted by an alien who's taken on the shape of a dinosaur. The sun is a glowing alien being known as a "jiva" and shaped like a beet. On the left is my old dog, Arf.

58. Fjord at Balestrand



Acrylic on canvas. 20" by 16". July, 2009.

On a trip to Norway, I was struck by views of the fjord, as seen from Balestrand, a town where painters used to gather. I like the theatrical way that the mountains on either side of the fjord frame the view.

59. Magic Doors



Acrylic on canvas. 14" by 18". July, 2009.

In fairy tales and science fiction stories, people often encounter magic doors to other worlds. Here I started with a kind of grid that's based on the reflection patterns in water. And then I filled in a lot of little "doors," arranging them so that the whole pattern makes a door in itself.

60. Topology of the Afterworld

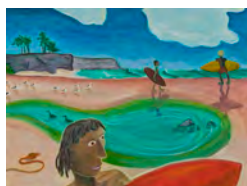


Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". August, 2009.

This picture has to do with my mental image of Flimsy, an afterworld that I describe in my novel *Jim and the Flims*. I wanted to fit an endless world into a finite volume—that Flimsy (the afterworld) is inside each electron. I turned to M. C. Escher's engraving, *Smaller and Smaller I*, as an example of how to fit

infinity into a nutshell. He has things shrink as they approach the middle. I started with six streams of beings: humans, cuttlefish, dogs, ants, lizards, and birds. And then I filled in the blanks with globby beings designed to fit the extra spaces.

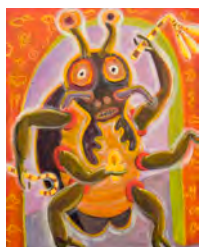
61. Surf Pilgrim.



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". October, 2009.

I trekked down to Four Mile Beach north of Santa Cruz with Vernon and started this one en plein air, getting the composition, and finding some of the colors. Some of the surfers at Four Mile noticed me working on this canvas—and they approved. The “surf pilgrim” in the foreground looks determined. At home, I dialed up the colors to match my memories, which tend to be brighter than reality. It was a big canvas to carry to the beach. A certain amount of blowing sand got stuck to the paint, which is nice, as it adds physical texture and a you-are-there quality. My mother was a painter, and she liked to do this, too.

62. Amenhotep’s Ghost.



Acrylic on canvas. 16" by 20". February, 2010.

When I painted this, I was nearing the final stages of my novel *Jim and the Flims*. In my story, the characters have stolen the ancient gold sarcophagus of the pharaoh Amenhotep. And Amenhotep’s ghost has emerged from the casket in the form of a menacing, unhappy scarab beetle holding an ankh, a crook, and a flail. In my designs of the hieroglyphs on the walls, I was influenced by my daughter Isabel’s graphic novel, *Unfurling*.

63. At the Core of the World.



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 18". February, 2010.

I considered calling this painting *Unknown Legend*, as it's not very obvious what the story is here. I painted this is a previsualization of the second-to-last chapter of my novel *Jim and the Flims*, just before writing the chapter. Those flying beet thingies are called “jivas.” As I mentioned in my comment on picture #46, *The Flims*, I got that word from the artist and cartoonist Jim Woodring. The tall figure in back is the goddess of Flimsy, she’s made of mist. And in front, that’s my hero Jim and his wife Val. I was surprised to see that jiva not putting up more of a fight in my picture, and this affected the way that I wrote the chapter.

64. Flower Dream



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". March, 2010.

I think this picture might be the dream of the somewhat ordinary flower at the lower right corner, or maybe it's the dream of the bug. The picture arose fairly spontaneously. The first thing that went in were those two big red shapes, the fork and the hook. I combined the paint left over from my previous picture, 63: At the Core of the World, and filled in the background.

And then I kept on adding stuff to make it jungly.

65. Heart Exam



Oil on Canvas. 24" by 18". March, 2010.

I was having some pains in my chest, and I went in for a series of heart exams. Ultimately I had a relatively minor procedure done—some stents. At the start of the process, I was very anxious, and I painted a picture of myself lying on an examining table—with a curtain of blood overhead. I had been wanting to return to painting with oil instead of acrylic paints, and I made the

switch with Heart Exam. Looking through my old tubes of oil paint, I found an oddball tube of metallic gold paint. I used that whole tube on this painting, covering the canvas with an underlayer of gold paint, and leaving the gold exposed for the empty part of the background. It gives the picture a nice icon-like quality.

66. Giant Octopus with A Silly Hat

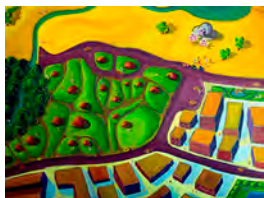


Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". March, 2010.

This particular picture emerged almost at random, I was simply fooling around with shapes and colors until I found something that I liked: a giant octopus in a silly hat that might be a washtub or a lampshade. At this time I was still waiting to have that procedure done on my heart. After I'd been working on this picture for a couple of days, I suddenly realized that the red

octopus was in fact a symbol of my heart with its arteries. My subconscious thoughts become manifest when I'm painting! Somehow doing this painting made me less anxious, and in the end, getting my heart fixed wasn't a big deal. In this painting and in picture 65: Heart Exam, I was using an alla prima technique—this is the practice of finishing a picture while it's still wet, as opposed to letting it dry and then applying successive layers. With oils, the paint stays quite wet for two or three days, so you can stretch out an alla prima session.

67. First Contact



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". April, 2010.

When I first started this painting, I was thinking about Aboriginal art paintings that I'd seen in Australia, paintings in which the artists would depict their home area in fairly abstract terms. But then, after I started, I went to a show of Wayne Thiebaud's paintings, and got drawn into his style of making colorful landscapes that border between being realistic and abstract. When I

was almost done with my painting, I felt that it still looked a little empty, so I added a UFO with starfish aliens in the same style that I'd used before in 2: Arf and the Saucer and in 37: Montgomery Hill. Maybe the UFO is a little too large for the perspective; the hope is that the viewer will understand that the aliens are of a giant size.

68. Werewolf



Oil on canvas. 20" by 16". April, 2010.

This was a fairly quick painting. I started by painting a "hen and chicks" cactus that was growing in our garden. And then, to liven it up, I put a wolf-like figure in the background. To give his eyes more impact, I glazed on a thin coat of metallic gold paint.

69. He Sees The Fnoor



Oil on canvas. 16" by 20". May, 2010.

This is an image of a guy seeing a vintage fractal in the sky, an object known as the Mandelbrot set. When I painted this, I'd just come back to fractals after a twenty-year hiatus, and I was creating extremely gnarly images. I was thinking about fractals all the time, seeing them in my dreams, and seeing them when I closed my eyes. I made videos, art prints, T-shirts, and a blog post at tinyurl.com/rudyfractals. At the same time I was thinking about a made-up word of mine, fnoor, which first appeared in my novel, *The Hacker and the Ants*.

Fnoor is meant to be an old-time graphics-hacker term for incredible weirdness on your screen, a kind of image that the early programmer Bill Gosper used to term "seething dog barf." I was writing a science fiction story with the working title, "Fnoor," in which the characters see some fnoor-like aspect of the natural world that suggests that (a) the world is a type of computation and (b) they can learn how to tweak this computation to improve their lot.

70. Fractal Skate Posse

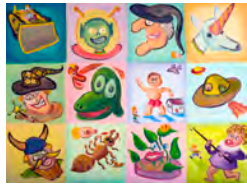


Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 18". May, 2010.

As I mentioned in the note on 69: He Sees the Fnoor, I was working with higher-order fractals during this time period, and I found a really nice double spiral that came from a cubic Mandelbrot set. I saved off a high-res image of it, and started selling the image online as a print and as a skater T-shirt with the caption "Seek the Gnarl." And then I decided to do a painting of this

fractal, quixotic effort though it is to paint an infinitely complex object. Once the painting of the fractal was done to my satisfaction, the image needed peppering up, so I put in five thrill-crazed skaters.

71. Billy's Book



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". June, 2010.

My friend Terry Bisson talked me into making illustrations for an illustrated version of his collection of off-kilter stories, Billy's Book. There were thirteen stories in the book, and to speed things up, I divided a large canvas into twelve squares, and did a Billy picture in each square. (The thirteenth picture is a detail

of my Fractal Skate Posse painting.) Billy has yellow hair and a green shirt, and traces of him can be found in each picture.

72. Buddha and the Mouse



Oil on canvas. 18" by 24". July, 2010.

I took a photograph of an interesting statue of a twelve-armed Buddha in a small Asian art museum in Pasadena, California. The somewhat sinister pattern of the arms and shadows interested me. So when I got home, I painted the image, and I added a mouse to give the picture a bit of a narrative quality, that is, a story-telling flavor.

73. Davenport Cave



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". July, 2010.

This one started as an en plein air painting atop a cliff in Davenport, California. I was there with Sylvia and Vernon. It was a windy day, so I didn't work on the picture for very long at the site. I was struck by a little sea cave in the side of the cliff and by the towers of a shut-down cement plant to the right. Back home I worked on the painting for another week, adding a man, a

woman, and a shadowy crab-like shape inside the cave. I like that the cliff shape looks a little like the head of an elephant.

74. The Riviera



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". August, 2010.

I was going for a kind of French Impressionist look with this one, thinking of a garden party. Another inspiration was that I'd recently seen the Mel Brooks theater production of Young Frankenstein. But I went for a robot or mechanical man rather than a Frankenstein's monster. I like how he's glowing from the inside. In a way, this painting is an image of my Sylvia and me, on a

car-trip we took to the French Riviera in 1966, the year before we were married.

75. Nude Nabs UFO



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". August, 2010.

I started this one during an en plein air painting session on a pocket beach near Davenport with Vernon Head. I had the rocks and the water, and I added the UFO, modeling its shape on the lid of my water bottle. And at home I put in the two nudes, to liven things up. The scale of the flying saucer didn't look quite right, and it was unclear how far away it was, so I had the

guy take hold of it, thereby shrinking it and bringing it into the foreground. I have it casting a shadow like a beach umbrella onto the California woman to further anchor its position. And finally I had the idea that the guy is shaking the UFO, and two of the little aliens inside are falling out.

76. She Has a Pet



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". September, 2010.

This picture began as a landscape painting in a hot, dusty park near Cupertino, California. In the park, I was thinking about Hannibal crossing the Alps with his elephants, but I didn't actually put in the elephant until I got back home. The landscape seemed like it needed something big to pep it up. And, as I added layer after layer to the picture, I came up with a

somewhat mysterious encounter between a woman leading the elephant, and a man she meets. The title is a bit of a joke, as in, "I met a nice woman, but she has a pet." I was also thinking of someone who carries a lot of personal baggage. But ultimately, I'm getting at something more general, mythic, and imprecise. An encounter.

77. Turing and the Skugs



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". October, 2010.

I made this painting while gearing up for *Turing and Burroughs*, a novel involving the computer pioneer Alan Turing, the beatnik William Burroughs, and some shape-shifting beings called skugs. I got the word "skug" from my non-identical twin granddaughters, aged three. When I visited my son's house in Berkeley, I always liked to open up his worm farm and study the action

with the twins. We found a lot of slugs in there, and we marveled at them. The girls tended to say "skug" rather than "slug," and I decided I liked the sound of this word so much that I'd use it for some odd beings in my novel. I was supposing that Turing would carry out some biochemical experiments leading to the creation of the skugs. Here we see Turing outside the Los Gatos Rural Supply Hardware garage, with two skugs backing him up. Alan is meeting a handsome man who may well become his lover. Unless the skugs eat the guy.

78. Monument Valley



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 18". January, 2011.

I started this en plein air at Monument Valley in September, 2010, and finished it at home a few months later. Those rock formations on the left are called the Mittens. This is an amazing place, with a strong spiritual vibe. The day after I painted this, I got up before dawn and hiked down into the valley, around the mitten on the left, and back up which took about four hours.

79. A Skugger's Point Of View



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". March, 2011.

In this painting I wanted to create a rendition of an extreme first-person point of view...in which we see the dim zone around a person's actual visual field. The person in question is the Alan Turing character in my *Turing and Burroughs*. He has become a mutant known as a "skugger," and he has the ability to stretch his limbs like the cartoon character Plastic Man. He is

traveling across the West with two friends, a man and a woman. In this scene, Turing's cohort is being attacked by secret police, one of whom bears a flame-thrower. Turing is responding by sticking his fingers into their heads, perhaps to kill them, or perhaps to convert them into skuggers as well. We can see Turing's arms extending from the bottom edge of his visual field. Even though it's not quite logical, I painted in his eyes as well because they make the composition better.

80. Painter Near Mt. Umunhum



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". June, 2011.

Vernon Head and I were painting en plein air in the Almaden Quicksilver Park south of San Jose near the Guadalupe Reservoir. I was about to get my left hip joint replaced, due to arthritis, but I led Vernon up to a nice oak I admired on a hilltop. I framed my picture to include the reservoir, Vernon, the oak, and Mount Umunhum in the background. "Umunhum" is an

Ohlone word meaning "home of the hummingbird." The box on top is a leftover from an Air Force radar station, and it's due to come down...someday. I layered on my paint thicker than usual, using my palette knife to imitate the grooves of the bark on the tree, the waves in the water, and the long stalks of grass.

81. V-Bomb Blast



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". July, 2011.

This painting relates to my novel, *Turing and Burroughs*. My hero, Alan Turing gets inside a nuclear weapon called a V-bomb it lies beyond the A-bomb and the H-bomb. Also, I occasionally use "V-bomb" as a nickname for Sylvia.

Turing is in there tweaking the bomb until the last minute. And due to Turing's efforts, the bomb explodes in an odd fashion: it makes a fireball

that shrinks, rather than growing and then the bomb explosion tears a hole in space and disappears into another dimension or into another level of reality. The early nuclear devices really were hut-sized metal constructs, as shown on the right. Somehow I ended up putting a naked woman inside

the bomb instead of Turing. In the middle we have a kind of sunflower/fireball with a zonked face on it. And on the left, a small explosion-ball disappears into a vaginal rent. The woman seems to be pulling a cord that sets the bomb off in the first place. I like the picture because, as with some of Bruegel's paintings, it seems to illustrate a detailed parable whose precise meaning is forever a mystery.

82. Stolen Picasso



Oil on canvas. 18" by 24". July, 2011.

Imagined news story: "A 1939 Picasso painting, *Woman in Blue Hat*, which was stolen from the Picasso show at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, has now been located in the home of an ex-professor who styles himself as a painter and a writer." Software theft that is. I liked this painting so much after seeing it at the show, I painted a copy as a kind of homage and to learn a little more about how Picasso did it. The more I worked on this painting, the more little things I saw. I missed quite a few of the master's tricks but eventually I was happy with how my version looked—it had become mine. Stolen.

83. Noon Meeting



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". August, 2011.

This is one of those pictures that is a bit like an unknown parable. I started out with a set of pebble-glass windows that I like, making a background grid of green and yellow rectangles. I put three characters in front of the windows, happy to be getting together in the daytime: a woman, a dog, and an octopus. I feel like these three friends are people I know. Indeed, I might be the dog in the middle, bringing the two others together I've mentioned that I used to have a dog who looked a lot like that, Arf. When I told Vernon about the theme of my new picture, he said, laughing, "Ah, yes, the three fundamental elements of any successful painting: a woman, a dog, and an octopus." My other artist friend Paul Mavrides had suggested that I try using an impasto medium to build up more of a texture on my pictures and I did this here, with a nice effect.

84. Cow and UFO



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". August, 2011.

I like to use certain simple images when I'm scribbling a drawing for my children or grandchildren. Over the years, I've honed my favorites down to clean, cartoony icons such as the "Cow and UFO" shown in this painting. Back to basics!

85. Santa Cruz Harbor



Acrylic on canvas. 20" by 16". September, 2011.

Vernon Head and I went to Santa Cruz Harbor for a painting session. The waters were full of life—apparently a school of mackerel had swum in, and the pelicans and seals were there feeding. I liked how this cute baby seal seemed to hover so weightlessly in the very clear water. I started this painting on the spot, and finished it at home, working with some photographs I'd

taken. It had been awhile since I used acrylics, and I was pleasantly surprised by how quickly I was done.

86. Rigging



Oil on canvas. 20" by 16". September, 2011.

The reflections of sailboat rigging fascinate me. I took some photos for this painting during the same session where I started 85: Santa Cruz Harbor. Back home I copied one of the photos for an oil painting. I put on quite a few layers, and used a gel impasto medium to emphasize the brush strokes on the masts and lines.

87. Four-dimensional Ducks



Oil on canvas. 30" by 40". October, 2011.

I started with an abstract painting with seven globs. I tried to make the globs look different from each other, and to have intricate, three-dimensional forms. And then I started thinking of the globs as cross-sections of four-dimensional creatures. And then I realized they should be loosely based on the master cartoonist Carl Barks's drawings of Donald Duck, as if they were rotating in and out of our space. Four-dimensional ducks. A way to move my pop surrealism style towards abstraction.

88. On My Home Planet



Oil on canvas. 20" by 24". November, 2011.

This is a fairly abstract picture. I started it with that squiggly green line. And then I had the idea of making the lower part be like the surface of some jungly world, with the upper part being like the sky above. The yellow network might be a kind of planetary mind, or perhaps it's the nervous system of a blob-creature. I used an impasto medium on this picture in order to get a lot of surface texture.

89. The Lovers



Oil on canvas. 24" by 20". January, 2012.

The idea is that these two lovers are in a nearly telepathic state, sharing a single thought balloon. And in the thought, they're merged like a yin-yang symbol. Her 1940s bob acquires an infinity symbol, and their lips form a pair of little hearts. An early Valentine's Day picture!

90. Loulou and Skungy



Oil on canvas. 30" by 30". February, 2012.

Loulou is the somewhat mysterious woman in green, Skungy is the rat, and the guy holding the rat is named Zad Plant. Loulou is luring Morton and his helper-rat Skungy to follow her. When I painted this it was, once again, like an illustration of an unknown proverb or a forgotten fable. I didn't entirely know what was going on. I was feeling around for ideas and images for a novel I was just then starting, *The Big Aba*. The composition was inspired by a

Joan Brown painting, *The End of the Affair*.

91. Garden of Eden



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". May, 2012.

My frequent partner in art, Vernon Head, went out for an en plein air painting session with me on the bank of a stream that runs into the south end of Lexington Reservoir near Los Gatos. It was a lovely spring day, and we daubed away. The one thing that caught my attention the most was a particular bend in the trunk of a tree overhanging the creek. That made it into

my painting, but not all that much else about the actual scene. Instead I put in two of my favorite things: a dinosaur and a UFO. I'm not exactly sure what the scenario here is perhaps the UFO is in some way bringing enlightenment to a prehistoric pair, an Adam and an Eve.

92. God's Eye



Oil on canvas. 24" by 20". June, 2012.

I've always been intrigued by a certain image that one sees in old European churches an eye inside a triangle. This icon also appears, of course, on the dollar bill. It's meant to represent the all-seeing eye of God or perhaps the divine light within every object. In researching my novels with Bruegel and Bosch as characters, I got the impression that medieval people really did think

God was watching them. So here I've painted the eye as looking down through clouds like a spy-satellite. I made the "skin" in this image pink as a kind of joke on the fact that God is sometimes visualized as an old white man. The eye looks engrossed, with a possibility of becoming judgmental.

93. Louisville Artist



Oil on canvas. 24" by 20". October, 2012.

I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, so the title of this picture is a bit of a parodistic self-image riff. In other words, that could be me on the right, shirt all untucked and with no fingers on my hands. The woman might be my muse. Another interpretation is that the two figures are characters from the novel, *The Big Aha*, which I was working on when I made the painting. In

painting this picture, I thought it would be interesting to put in some figures that looked like children's drawings, so I worked from a messy sketch I'd made. The colors are more pastel than usual for me, and there's a bit of a Japanese quality.

94. Night of Telepathy



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". November, 2012.

This painting started out with the abstract background pattern, which I made using leftover paint from 93: Louisville Artist. I decided to put in some figures in, and I thought I'd like to reuse the Louisville Artist figures. In the novel, *The Big Aha*, that I was working on at this time, the two characters (Zad and Loulou) had spent a night in bed in telepathic contact with each other.

And I wanted to give an impression of an odd, dreamy night. The six little rats correspond to some subdimensional creatures that might be scuttling around inside people's dreams. And the other creatures are just there for fun.

95. The Two Gods



Oil on canvas. 24" by 24". March, 2013.

Working on my novel *The Big Aha*, I was trying to visualize a pair of warring supernatural beings in the background, and I came up with these guys. They're like lizards, a little bit, with long tails going off into the beyond. The background is based on the start sequence seen in old Warner Brothers cartoons of the Merrie Melodies or Loony Toons ilk a colorful tunnel or perhaps a sequence of doors.

96. Grandpa's Birthday



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". March, 2013.

I based this painting on a photo taken of me on my birthday. Grandpa has 67 candles—42 on the cake and 25 stuck into strawberries. A granddaughter is helping him. I like Grandpa's hair, and the patterns in the tablecloth.

97. Ant and UFO



Oil on canvas. 20" by 16". May, 2013.

Somebody mentioned that they'd like to see me do another ant painting. I searched the web for good images of ants and I found a nice clear drawing in an exterminator's ad. After I'd painted the ant, I wasn't sure what else to put in, although I was thinking it would be nice to have a tiny UFO another of my recurrent motifs. The ant's body was at an odd angle, so I had the idea of having her be standing on three blades of grass, which made for a nice composition.

98. A Gub On Her Bed



Oil on canvas. 24" by 20". June, 2013.

I always like the idea of a painting that seems like an illustration of some unknown proverb or fable. At a metaphorical level, the gub might symbolize some kind of marriage problem. At a more factual level, the painting relates to my novel, *The Big Aha*, which features unprepossessing yet god-like alien beings called gubs. The piebald gub shown here is named Duffie, and he's in love with a green female gub you can glimpse her in the sky outside the window. The gub is perched on my character Jane's bed, and he isn't particularly welcome there, as he's somewhat shabby and unclean.

99. The Mr. Normals vs. The Myoor

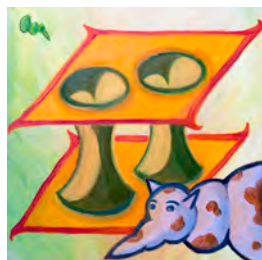


Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". July, 2013.

This is another of my paintings for my SF novel, *The Big Aba*. The picture has to do with a scene where my hero has sicced some creatures called Mr. Normals on a sinister giant alien slug called a myoor. In the process of making this painting, I decided to make the Mr. Normals look like Gyro Gearloose's Little Bulb in the old Donald Duck comics. The way I painted

the hero matches my two earlier paintings 93: *Louisville Artist* and 94: *Night of Telepathy*. In a certain very loose sense these are self-portraits. This might be the worst painting I ever did; it looks horrible.

100. Gubs and Wormholes



Oil on canvas. 22" by 22". September, 2013.

Yet another painting relating to my novel, *The Big Aba*. This painting started with a depiction of two wormholes, also known as Einstein-Rosen bridges. Wormholes can act as tunnels connecting two parallel universes. For the purpose of illustrating this concept, I'm depicting the universes as simple planes in this painting. Although the purely geometric version of this painting looked nice, I felt it needed some life. So I went ahead and included two of

the alien creatures that I was calling gubs in *The Big Aba*. I like how alertly the green gub is watching the spotted one, just like in 98: *A Gub On Her Bed*.

101. Picasso's Girl Before A Mirror



Oil on canvas. 20" by 24". August, 2013.

Picasso's original has always been a favorite painting of Sylvia's, and I love it as well. It was lots of work to copy it, as so many details kept unfolding. I'd never quite understood the face of the shadow woman on the right, but I learned how to see it. Also I'd never before realized that the woman on the left is pregnant.

Also, her hands can't penetrate in the mirror world, but it looks as if some sketchy, skinny arms might be reaching out. For my final sessions, I put the original out of sight and focused on making my version smooth and balanced. Fun. If only I had enough momentum to keep painting like this on my own!

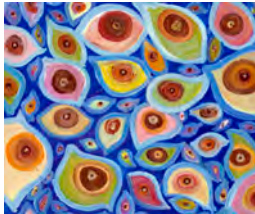
102. In Her Room



Oil on canvas. 22" by 22". July, 2013.

This is a painting of our bedroom, showing Sylvia's mirror and some of the things on her dressing-table. That painting on the left is by her, it's called Kate Croy. I got the idea for the painting when I was coming into our room, and it was dark, and the hall-light behind me was on, haloing my silhouette in light, and I saw myself in the mirror. I like the little objects on the dressing-table, they're like symbolic icons in a medieval portrait but they mainly represent aspects of Sylvia. That green shape is a wormhole bridge between two realities.

103. Eyes



Oil on canvas. 20" by 24". October, 2013.

This was an easy painting to make I just did a lot of eyes. I didn't particularly try to make them scary. I was more interested in them looking alert. I had fun with the colors, getting all the shades to be fairly even intensities of mild pastel colors.

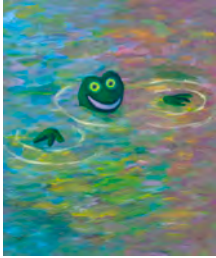
104. Woman With Jellyfish



Oil on canvas. 24" by 30". December, 2013.

At the Monterey Bay Aquarium, my wife and I admired a big tank of sea nettle jellyfish. I took a photo of her by the tank, and at first I wanted to paint that. But in the end, the woman didn't look at all like my wife, and the painting's viewpoint suggests that either we're looking out from inside the tank at the woman, or maybe the jellyfish are floating around in mid-air. I gave the woman green hair and made her kind of punky. I think she's talking with that big jellyfish.

105. Frog Man



Oil on canvas. 20" by 24". January, 2014.

This painting started out as a horizontal canvas of a Monet-style scene with trees and cliff or a sky...made up of vertical daubs of paint left over from *Woman With Jellyfish*.. I let the landscape dry for two weeks, then had the idea of turning the picture to a vertical orientation, and now the horizontal daubs were water. On a quick inspiration, I painted in the head and webbed hands of a “frog man.” He looks friendly, but I don’t think I’d jump into the water with him.

106. All the Visions



Oil on canvas. 24" by 20". February, 2014.

The painting is based on a 1983 photo of me. I was working on Kerouac-style novel called *All The Visions*—I typed it on a single long scroll of paper. I still have that rose red IBM Selectric typewriter in my basement. The acme of modern writing equipment in 1983. I wrote a lot of books on that thing.

107. Laser Shades



Oil on canvas. 24" by 20". February, 2014.

I made this painting while I was working on an SF story, also called “Laser Shades.” The story was for inclusion in an art book, *The Superlative Light*, by the photographer Robert Shults. The book shows photos of a petawatt laser lab, where “petawatt” means that the laser beams being generated are insanely powerful. I wasn’t quite sure how to end my story, this painting was my way of previsualizing a climactic scene. The guy is wearing special laser-proof shades and he’s (rather unwisely) holding a fetal “egg” in the path of a powerful laser beam. That zapped egg is going to hatch out some kind of weird person, so look out!

108. Petroglyph Man



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". March, 2014.

Petroglyph Man shows three big plants and three petroglyphs, although the guy on the right is perhaps morphing into something more. This painting has to do with an experience I had on a trip to the big island of Hawaii in 2007—I had stepped on a petroglyph carving and I was imagining that it might come to life.

109. Two Ducks



Oil on canvas. 20" by 16". April, 2014.

I went back to the Carl Barks drawings of Donald Duck for this one. I used a lot of impasto to build up the tornado-like clouds. The two ducks might be two people you know, or the warring dyad within yourself, or the cosmic yin/yang. Or all of the above. Which are you today...the calm duck or the angry duck?

110. Hungry Bird



Oil on canvas. 18" by 24". May, 2014.

I like how the bird is about to eat a yellow square from the underlying pattern of squares and rectangles. Maybe he's come into this abstract world from the funky analog world and he's eating it. I had painted the background pattern a couple of weeks earlier, and then one morning I saw an article in the paper, with a photo of a hungry baby black-crested night heron, and I added him to the picture.

111. Cows on the Run



Oil on canvas. 30" by 24". June, 2014.

This landscape shows the hills above Alum Rock Park in East San Jose. I felt the picture needed something extra, so I went for a saucer and a hungry, starfish-shaped alien. And everyone knows how aliens feel about cows. Even the cows know! I painted the cows a little large for how far away they're meant to be—but these cows are important, and I wanted to give the viewer a good look at them. They kind of make me laugh.

112. Sea Monsters



Acrylic on canvas. 18" by 24". June, 2014.

I made this painting after studying a picture book about the monsters that appear in the blank spaces of medieval and Renaissance maps. It amused me to learn the “sea pig” was often included. To juice up the picture I added a questing youth and a maiden in a tower. I like her expression. For her, maybe that guy in the boat is just another sea monster. I used quick-drying acrylic so it would be easier to revise the detailed little figures several times as I went along.

113. Dog UFO Gub



Oil and acrylic on canvas. 30" by 40". July, 2014.

I made a squiggly abstract underpainting with acrylic paint, covered that with a white haze/glaze of acrylic paint, and then layered on some free-form drawings with thick oil paint. You might say the background is an underlying subdimensional reality. In the oily world on top we see my dog Arf, a UFO, a spotted alien “gub” from my novel *The Big Aba*—and an infinity sign.

114. Beak Totem



Oil on canvas. 16" by 20". August, 2014.

The background is drawn from a sunset I saw over Lac Desert in Canada, and the model for my totem pole is in a historical museum in Ottawa. I like the bird's beak, and the little man peering out of the totem pole.

115. Endless Road Trip



Oil on canvas. 30" by 24". September, 2014.

I painted this to help me imagine a scene for a novel I was starting to write: *Million Mile Road Trip*. We see two aliens on a very long road trip, and they're looking at some animals, a capybara with squirrel monkeys. I didn't feel like struggling with the human form which is why I went for expressionist zigzag aliens. I like how the guy on the left looks, he's like a cartoon-character tough

guy with a whiskery jaw, and the round thing on top of his head might be a derby. And the lady alien, she looks like she's screeching, "Aww, aren't they cute!"

116. Flying Cone Shells



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". November, 2014.

I started this painting as an abstraction. I started out with those four fat lines that weave over and under each other. And then I wanted to decorate the sectors of the canvas that the lines made. I was thinking I might emulate an Aboriginal Australian painting, or painting of an aerial view of crop fields as in Wayne Thiebaud's paintings of the California Delta region. For the longest time, my painting reminded me of the works you see hanging on the walls in art schools. Unfinished, harsh, dissonant, with the paint colors right out of the tubes. I kept at it, layering on the tints and shades, blending, toning, and glazing. Finally the painting seemed warm and harmonious to me. But it still needed something. At this point I needed a cover painting for the new edition of my old novel, *Mathematicians in Love*. So I decided to use this new painting. There's a scene in *Mathematicians in Love* when my characters are driving along the coast of Big Sur, and a giant flying alien cone shell is following them—I think her name is Rowena. So I added Rowena and one of her smaller friends to the painting, also a tiny image of my characters' car.

117. I Once Was Blind



Oil on canvas. 18" by 24". January, 2015.

This painting was inspired the work of Keith Haring—I'd just been to a big show of his at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco. My painting's title is taken from a line in the gospel hymn "Amazing Grace," that is, "I once was blind, but now I see." The saucers are enlightening the benighted humans below. These days I tend to think of UFOs as organic living beings—and not as spaceships with aliens inside them. The saucers themselves are the aliens—like rubbery flying jellyfish.

118. Deep Space Saucers

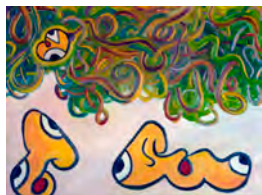


Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". January, 2015.

This is, in a way, an abstract painting. An exercise in composition and hue. I was thinking of the painter Larry Poons, who flourished in the '60s with compositions of ovals scattered across a large canvas. Of course I'd rather draw 3D saucers than 2D ovals. So I started out with the saucers, then found a nice background color that makes me think of deep space, very far from any nearby stars. Over several days layering hues onto the saucers, I slowly homed in on the colors for them. I was thinking

of the colors of Populuxe '50s cars. As in my painting *I Once Was Blind*, I saw those ovals on the undersides of the saucers as being eyes.

119. Tree of Life



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". February, 2015.

I started out by putting a lot of paint and gel medium in the top half of the canvas and finger painting with it. I decided this would be the foliage a tree, and that I'd put cool aliens under it—I needed mental images of aliens for my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*. I used variations on a Picasso-style face that Jasper Johns included in his 1990 painting called, unhelpfully, *Untitled*. And

then I put a little one of these guys in the tree with an umbilical cord. I think of this painting as showing parents awaiting the birth of their baby.

120. Saucer Hall



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 24". February, 2015.

I started this more or less at random, playing with the paint, using acrylic for a change. The triangle made me think of the Supreme Court building, which suggested a "Saucer Hall" where UFOs gather. And then I went ahead and put a Saucer Hall into my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*.

121. Dangerous Passage



Oil on canvas. 40" by 30". April, 2015.

I painted *Dangerous Passage* to help previsualize a scene in my novel *Million Mile Roadtrip*. My three characters are on an endless world, and they're migrating from one Earth-sized basin to the next. They have two flying mascots, one is a UFO named Nunu, the other is one of those blobby creature who appears in my previous painting, 119 *Tree of Life*. The red guy in

the rear is noticing the stones in this mountain pass are...alive. The composition and vibe of this painting were inspired by Peter Bruegel's *Conversion of St. Paul*.

122. The Sage and the Messenger



Oil on canvas. 28" by 22". May, 2015.

I did this painting while I was working on a short story with Bruce Sterling. One of the characters is sage or hermit who lives inside in a hollowed out spot high up in the trunk of a sequoia tree. And an artificial biotweaked organism comes to bring a message to him. It's a think like biological drone, or like a flying jellyfish. I like the interplay of the expressions among the sage,

the jellyfish and the squirrel.

123. Cells



Oil on canvas. 24" by 24". May, 2015.

I was gearing up for a show of my art at the Borderlands Café & Bookstore in San Francisco. And I wanted to have one more painting for my show. So I dove into Cells. I had no real idea what I'd paint when I started. First I did an underpainting in acrylic with a heavy gel medium to get some texture and to have some extra color glowing through. But I don't like how flat acrylic looks, so I layered an oil painting on top of that. I outlined some blobs in my

original painting, and then filled them in to look like living cells. I used a fan brush for the halo effect, and I flicked the bristles of the fan brush to add some life with splattered dots.

124. X-Ray of Failed Hip Implant



Oil on canvas. 18" by 24". August, 2015.

This is a painting in a mood that Frida Kahlo sometimes got into: worrying about a medical problem you're having. As is evident, I was having a problem with a hip implant. The cup, or round part, of the implant had failed to bond with my pelvic bone—and I was having steady pain. And I was facing the unpleasant prospect of having the hip replaced yet again. I based this image on a diagnostic X-ray, filling it in with color and with a symbol of the pain. It always feels better to paint an image of what's bugging you. Kind of a magical process. Even if the painting doesn't

actually change anything.

125. Saucer People



Oil on canvas. 24" by 18". September, 2015.

When I painted this, I was still working on my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*, which features some flying saucers that are meaty flying things. And— eeeek— it's in principle for a female saucer to fertilize her seeds with human DNA obtained by kissing a human male. When a saucer gets pregnant from a man, she lays some fertilized eggs, hatches them...and you get hybrid

saucerpeople, as shown in my painting! They have human bodies, but with saucer-like rims around their waists, and they can fly. I like how cute and cheerful the saucerpeople are in this painting..

126. Vlad and Monika



Oil on canvas. 30" by 24". October, 2015.

This was meant to be an image of a spacy and intimidating alien world, a part of my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*. At first I was going to call the painting "Bubbleman," and have the viewer imagine that the two eyes belonged to a single alien creature, but then I decided there were in fact two of them. And I decided to call them Vlad and Monika, and let them speak in Polish accents.

Technically speaking, this was one of the more difficult paintings I've done. It was tricky to give the bubbles the effect of being colored, translucent spheres.

127. Diego's Hunhunahpu



Acrylic on canvas. 36" by 36". November, 2015.

In the mountain town of Guanajuato, Mexico, I visited the early home of Diego Rivera. They had several gray and red ink wash paintings that Rivera had made for a never-published edition of *Popol Vuh*, a book of Mayan legends. I was struck by Diego's image of the god Hunhunahpu, who's magically impregnating a calabash bush with fetal forms for other gods and for human beings. So I made a copy of the painting, using an intense color palette inspired by the walls of the houses in lovely Guanajuato.

128. Defending the Royal Pupa



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 20". March, 2016.

All through early 2016, I had problems with my hip (See Painting #124). I couldn't get out much. I focused on my novel *Million Mile Road Trip* and wrote a lot. In the spring when it warmed up outside, I starting doing paintings relating to the novel, first doing some sketches in watercolor, and then working in acrylic to speed up the process. It was like I came alive again just in time for my 70th birthday on March 22, 2016. What you see here is, well, it's kind of complicated. That pupa-like thing in the lower left is the so-called Lady Filippa, who's helping my characters (top to bottom on the right) Villy, Scud, and Zoe. Scud has obtained a magic wand from the Lady. Villy and Zoe have magical guitars with great power. An evil creature whose name I've already forgotten is about to attack the royal pupa. So the kids are driving him off with the powers of magic and music. I like the colors in this one a lot.

129. Sky Skirmish



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 24". April, 2016.

This one relates to *Million Mile Road Trip* as well. I used four or five different shades of blue in the sky, and I like how troubled it looks. I like the purple/mauve shadings on the cuttlefish too. Here's my character Villy, along with a friendly giant flying cuttlefish who is zapping lightning bolts at two enemy saucers. The cuttle's name is Stolo. Unfortunately, Villy and Stolo haven't yet noticed the third flying saucer that's creeping up on them from behind. Look out, guys!

130. The Flat Cow



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 20". May, 2016

Here I'm still rocking along on my *Million Mile Road Trip* novel. The "flat cow" is something that just popped into my head for no real reason, but I thought it was funny, so I ran with it. A flying saucer that's shaped like a flattened out cow with no legs. Villy is riding on the flat cow's back—and by the way, I don't worry about making Villy look exactly the same from painting. His hair color, in particular, varies to match the compositions' needs. I liked making the other saucers look completely different and, wait, isn't that the royal pupa in there with them? It's all about eyeball kicks, and painting "flying saucers" gives me a lot of latitude. The flat cow's name is Yulia, by the way. She and our heroes are seeking to liberate the race of saucers from an evil being who controls them.

131. Saucer Bagpipe



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 24". June, 2016

Approaching the end of my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*, I came up with an idea for a “boss” enemy named Groon. He’s a mountainous bagpipe that spews flying saucers, and who forces the saucers to act as leeches. But you don’t need to know that. As I’ve said before, I like to regard many of my paintings as being illustrations of unknown parables or proverbs. Like medieval illos of tales gone missing in the flow of time. Just from the image, we have no way of knowing of the horn is sucking or blowing. We also have to wonder about the outer, wider horn, what is it for? And why does that top saucer look more alert and disturbed than the others? And who are the three tiny people watching? No answers are really needed. The bagpipe and the flock of little saucers are enough.

132. Attack of the Giant Saucers



Acrylic with Oilstick on canvas. 40" by 30". June, 2016

I’ve always wanted to paint a scene with a couple of giant saucers attacking, and with a crowd fleeing. Kind of a 1950s SF-flick scenario. The two people in front remind me of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, though I only noticed that after the painting was done. And that’s me on the right, the laughing skater punk, enjoying the scene. Like Bruegel in the corner of his

Ascent to Calvary.

133. “I Like Purple”



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". September, 2016

My friend Susie wanted to buy one of my paintings for her living-room, and she insisted the painting should have purple. “I like purple,” she said. So I went with that. I’ve always been intrigued about how hard it is to mix a really nice purple from a red and a blue. So I went and bought three tubes of offbeat purples and violets and mixed up a lot of shades. Those eyes in the lower right—that’s the person who likes purple.

134. Tourists From Atlantis



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 24". October, 2016

My wife and I visited our writer friend Marc Laidlaw in Kauai. Marc and I started talking about collaborating on an SF story involving beings from Atlantis beneath the sea. I especially wanted to see man whose head looked like a Hawaiian humuhumunukunukuapua'a fish. I did some watercolors of those fish in Kauai and when I got home I did this painting. I thought the two big ones looked like a mother and father, tourists, with three children.

135. Californians Request Secession



Acrylic on masonite. 30" by 20". November 9, 2016

I painted this the day after the 2016 presidential election. Its short title is "Californians Request Secession," and its long title is "November 9, 2016: Californians Request Secession from the Trumpic States of America." The little saucer guys with cubical heads are Californians, you understand. I made their heads be cubes because cubes are easy to paint, and because I felt like I had my head inside a media box of bad news. I painted this on a big rectangle of masonite from a local history museum. They had a historic photo laminated onto the masonite, and it was a scene of a work crew building a road up Mount Hamilton. I thinned down my paints, and painted right over the photo, letting the lights and darks show through.

136. Red Scribble



Acrylic on canvas. 16" by 20". December, 2016

We were visiting my son and his family in San Francisco, and I found a child's drawing on the floor. A triangle with some circles and a red scribble. I decided to copy—and, inevitably, to mutate—the image for an abstract painting. I see it as a family of the circles working their way up a triangle and escaping. When my picture was done, one of my fourth-grade granddaughters loftily told me that my source-drawing was by a first-grade acquaintance of theirs, and that it was supposed to be a slice of pizza. I still prefer to see it as an abstraction—with a circle making its way to freedom.

137. The Elephant Bush



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 20". January, 2017

My son and I were at a garden supply place with my grandson along. My son bought a plant called an elephant bush, and I had the notion of a little boy finding tiny flying elephants in a plant in his yard. So I made the painting and hung it in my grandson's room. I think he likes it.

138. In the Lost City of Leng



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". March, 2017

I've always been fascinated by H. P. Lovecraft's novella, "At the Mountains of Madness." The characters explore a lost ancient city buried beneath the ice of Antarctica, and they find a passageway with cryptic designs that represent the history of the lost alien civilization. Apparently the aliens looked like sea cucumbers, and they were destroyed by giant slugs. Whoops! One of those slug-things is waiting just around the bend! I did this painting while the writer Paul Di Filippo and I were working a sequel story to Lovecraft's tale—with the title, the "In the Lost City of Leng"

139. Antarctica



Acrylic on canvas. 24" by 20". March, 2017

I was playing with Capow, a continuous valued cellular automata program I wrote with my students in the late 1990s. I captured a series of really nice-looking gnarly images, and decided to base some abstract paintings on them. As it happened, this image dovetailed with my obsession with H. P. Lovecraft's story about the lost ancient city of Leng in Antarctica. I think of this as an aerial view of the ruined city. Synchronistically enough, the Capow pattern happened to have a shape like the head of a penguin.

140. Origin of Life



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 20". March, 2017

This painting is also based on an image of cellular automata. This computation is characterized by having double scrolls known as Zhabotinsky patterns. These patterns occur naturally in certain chemical mixtures, and they could have played a role in the origin of life within the primordial soup.

141. Soft Zhabo



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". March, 2017

Another cellular-automata-inspired painting. This activator-inhibitor rule has soft Zhabotinsky patterns that never stop seething. That thing toward the top—is that Wile E. Coyote, a seahorse, a kangaroo, or a prehistoric turtle with a knob on his head? All of the above. Chaos is everywhere.

142. Alien Taxi



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". April, 2017

Another cellular-automata-inspired painting. I started with a simulation of water waves on a surface, and it made a really nice chaotic blob. I ended up calling the painting “Alien Taxi,” because I’m imagining that those two odd looking “people” are unsure about whether they should get into it. The people were initially part of one big face, but then I split it in two to make things livelier. I like that lower face, how worried it looks, it makes me laugh.

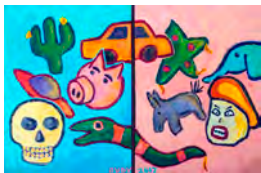
143. Wild West



Acrylic on canvas. 30" by 20". April, 2017

After doing four CA-inspired paintings in a row, it was easy for me to go all the way into abstraction. Daubing away, hour after hour, until the colors all looked right. I made the blue things look a little like legs with feet because I my own leg was sore from bicycling. And then I decided they were blue boots and that, come to think of it, the whole painting has something of a Western theme.

144. Piñata (Dptych)



Acrylic on two canvases. 18" by 24". May, 2017

I was inspired by piñatas I saw in the Mission district of San Francisco. I had two smallish canvases, and I decided it would nice to make a diptych. I saturated the backgrounds with two shades you might see on walls in Mexico. You can probably guess who the mean guy is! The elephant and donkey look a bit bemused. And naturally I included my two favorite icons, the flying saucer and the pig.

145. Hooray!



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". June, 2017

I started with a loose yellow scribble. I wasn't sure what to put into the holes. Our grandchildren came visiting, and I let them use the acrylics off my palette to make pictures of their own. I tried to work on my new painting, but I couldn't focus on it, and I ended up offhandedly drawing a big crooked smiley face in the middle. A troubled happy face, with two clashing

expressions. A week later, I got a publishing deal for ten of my books, and by then our joyful fiftieth wedding anniversary was coming up. So then I was like, yeah, make this a happy painting, with, like, party balloons and confetti and lots of bright yellow. So then it became an abstract art color-balancing exercise, juggling the colors of the disks, and layering on more and more and more coats of different shades of yellow for a richer background. The paint store was out of titanium white, and I got an off-white color called titan buff, and that was good.

146. Monkeybrains ISP



Acrylic on canvas. 40" by 30". July, 2017

I started this painting by making spontaneous squiggles, using the paint left over from "Hooray!" I was thinking about my son Rudy Jr. and his Internet Service Provider company, Monkeybrains.net, run by Rudy and his business partner Alex. They have a logo that looks like a monkey. And they have about 5,000 wireless dish antennas scattered around multi-culti San Francisco. And

from the window of my son's house, I can see some Wayne-Thiebaud-style loops and ramps of the freeways. So I made a big, reddish, living, walking building like a giant King Kong ape—with dish antennas, and with the two boss monkeys inside it, and with the diverse heads of their customers outside, and a freeway arcing upwards in back.

147. Bugs and Stars



Acrylic, 24" x 18", July, 2017

I did this one pretty quickly. For the background, I used the paint still on my palette from my previous painting, Monkeybrains ISP, wrapping the pale blue-green around some purplish blobs. I added some strands of grass, and a bunch of bugs. The dots further back, they could either be bugs or they could

be stars. Which is kind of how the world is.

148. Forged Matisse



Oil, 40" x 30", September, 2017

I've always loved Matisse's 1935 painting, *Large Reclining Nude*. That rectangular blue patch between her body and the arm along the right side. And the joyful curve of her bottom. So I copied it, and it took me four or five sessions. I wasn't sure it would be possible to get even as close as I did—not that it's all that close. What makes a project like this even possible for me is that, if something is still wet, I can easily rub it off, and if it's dry, I can paint over it. I used oils for this one, and oils are especially easy to rub off, and, since they stay wet, it's easy to blend in color adjustments. And in this way I homed in on what I wanted to see.

149. Riding a Nautilus



Oil, 24" x 18", October, 2017

I was working on my novel *Return to the Hollow Earth*, a sequel to my earlier *The Hollow Earth*. I have some giant flying nautilus creatures in these books. Their shells are filled with hydrogen, and you can ride in them like on a hot air balloon. The catch is that the giant flying nautiluses are man-eaters, with fierce beaks amid their tentacles. But my characters have magical rumby gem stones that give them control over this particular nautilus, whose name is, by the way, Cytherea. They plan to ride her down through a giant maelstrom at the North Pole, down into the interior of the Hollow Earth.

150. Shrig and Krakens



Acrylic, 40" x 30", December, 2017

This is another painting relating to my novel, *Return to the Hollow Earth*. A shrig is a giant creature with a pig's head, and with a body like that of a shrimp. They live inside the Hollow Earth. They're scavengers, and pose no threat to humans. My wife says this shrig looks like me, and there's something to that, as I did at some level mean him as a self-portrait. I was lonely on the day that I painted him. A couple of weeks later, I gave him some company: the smaller critters called krakens. Supposedly the krakens hail from the Sun, and they're not entirely friendly. I wanted to get an alien, outlandish shape for them, so I based them on a detail of a certain fractal that's a generalization of the famous Mandelbrot Set. I discovered this more general fractal some years back, and I named it the Rudy Set, and the kraken-like detail is called the Horse.

151. Ratfink Pollock

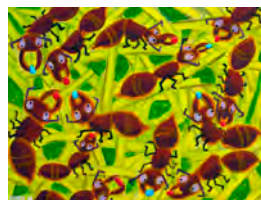


Acrylic, 24" x 18", January, 2018

I started this one by dripping paint that I had left over from Shrig and Krakens. Then I started thinking about Jackson Pollock and I wanted to see if I could start to emulate his effects. I watched some videos of him for help.

It's hard to get just the right thickness to the paint so that it dribbles off a brush or a stick or a rag in an interesting way. Eventually I had some white spaces left over among the thicket of drips, so I made those into eyes. And then I noticed two eyes together that had a space under them like a mouth. So I made that a mouth and went for the Big Daddy Roth cartoon hotrod-art Ratfink look. To tie it together, I added one more thick black drippy line. And to liven up the black line, I flipped yellow droplets all along it.

152. Ants and Gems

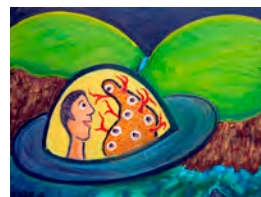


Acrylic, 40" x 30", February, 2018

I started this one by covering the background with overlapping yellow brushstrokes, like a pile of straw. I decided to put big ants on the straw, and I quickly brushed in thirteen of them, putting their bodies in lively poses. I polished up the bodies and I gave them big eyes that I colored with a tube of iridescent violet paint I happened to have around...I think my grandchildren

gave it to me. Then I made some of the background sections dark green, to let the image breathe. And finally I had the idea of letting each ant be carrying a gem—some red and some blue. And while I worked on the painting I got the idea of having some big ants carry gems around in the novel I was working on, *Return to the Hollow Earth*.

153. Honeymoon



Oil, 24" x 19", April, 2018

Another painting for my novel *Return to the Hollow Earth*. The climax of the book takes place near Santa Lucia in Big Sur—where I'd recently been with Sylvia. The passengers in the UFO are more or less my hero Mason Reynolds and one of the mysterious sea-cucumber-like woomo who live at the core of the Hollow Earth. I like the Gaian, Mother Earth appearance of those two

green hills.

154. Mason in the Hollow Earth



Oil, 30" x 30", May, 2018

This is Mason, the seventeen-year-old Virginia farm-boy hero of *Return to the Hollow Earth*. That shape around him is a 2D model for the notion that the Earth could be like a hollow rind with a few holes in it where people can travel through.

155. Seela in the Hollow Earth



Oil, 30" x 30", May, 2018

And this is Mason's wife from *Return to the Hollow Earth*. He met her on a giant flower inside the Hollow Earth. At one time her skin was white, but now it's been tanned very dark by the light beams from the woomo creatures at the Earth's core. The issues of race and skin color are a theme in the novel, most of which is set in 1850.

156. Woomo Hunters



Oil, 24" x 18", May, 2018

I started this painting with the hovering sea-cumber shapes, partly because I like shapes like this, and partly because I was inspired by the woomo creatures in *Return to the Hollow Earth*. I needed something in the foreground, and I thought of copying a passage from Peter Bruegel's 1556 drawing *Big Fish Eat Little Fish*—I have a poster of that beloved work in my basement. So these guys are hunting and killing woomo—which may not be a such a great idea! Maybe the woomo aren't as docile and bovine as they look.

157. Manhattan



Oil, 30" x 24", June, 2018

My wife and I were in Manhattan for fun. I was struck by how much the skyline has changed just in the last year or two. Our friend Eddie took us on an aerial tram ride to Roosevelt Island, and I got a striking view of the Queensboro Bridge. I added a waitress and a truck driver and had them eye each other. I like the colors.

158. Delta Eyes



Acrylic, 30" x 24", July, 2018

Here I went back to a style that I used in painting #116, Flying Cone Shells. It's inspired by Wayne Thiebaud's nearly abstract paintings of aerial views of rivers and farmlands in the California Delta near Sacramento. I enjoy painting abstractly, just going with colors and shapes. In the end, however, I couldn't resist putting in two shapes like giant eyes.

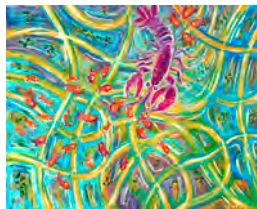
159. Up Creek



Acrylic, 40" x 30", July, 2018

On hot days, I like wading up a long, isolated creek near our house. I walk in the water, on smooth stones, wearing sandals. This particular spot with the fallen log always strikes me as somehow sacred. My old artist friend Barry Feldman had recently remarked to me that I should paint what he considers to be "real" pictures, that is, landscapes with no fantastic critters. I was annoyed by this, but I was in fact goaded into doing a pure landscape. And I'm forever intrigued and challenged by the shapes of running water. Despite Barry's injunction, there is a slight possibility that the pair of rocks near the base of the log are in fact a stone UFO. You never know.

160. Standing in the Stream



Acrylic, 30" x 24", August, 2018

Before I relapsed back into my full-on saucer-paintings mode, I did another somewhat realistic painting of that same creek. This one isn't very realistic, as the creek is, in a way, so abstract looking, especially if I focus on the ripples and the reflections. While walking the creek and photographing it, I happened to see a one-clawed crawfish of threatening me, or waving to me. So I painted him, starting out with swirls that were meant to represent the flows of the water, and the ripples on top. And I made him look more like a two-clawed lobster.

161. The Red Saucer



Oil, 40" x 30", September, 2018

I've always liked my paintings, Deep Space Saucers and Saucer Bagpipe. I wanted to go back and do another painting with scads of colorful saucers. I switched back to oil for this one, and it took me five sessions. When I use oil instead of acrylic paint, I have to go a little slower, giving the coats some time to dry. I was especially taken with blending the shade of that big red saucer; I did about ten layers on that one, trying for a kind of custom car Kandy Kolor hot rod sheen. And that orb...is it a sun or a planet? The saucers are interested in it. Is it the saucers' home, or are they invading it? As you will have noticed, I take a deep, atavistic, satisfaction in painting flying saucers. I think of them not as machines, but as meaty, living organic beings. They're Pop, ironic, science-fictional, easy to draw, and archetypal. In his classic 1959 study, *Flying Saucers : A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*, the C. G. Jung pointed that saucers are a symbol of wholeness and an image of one of a child's first sights: a nourishing breast.

162. People of the Red Saucer



Oil, 24" x 30", September, 2018

Early in 2018, Sylvia and I stayed at a hotel on 26th Street in Manhattan, near an imposing armory. I painted it in September, using my momentum from *The Red Saucer*, plus the leftover paint on that palette. Drawing in perspective isn't that hard, but it does take mental focus. After I had the buildings, I put scenes into each of the windows. I've always admired Wayne Thiebaud's window-scenes, which are calligraphic and abstract. Mine turned out more cartoony. I imagined these people come from the red saucer I'd recently painted. I put images of a red saucer on the posters, also the letters from the phrase "SAUCER PEOPLE," writing some letters backwards or upside-down to make things feel higher-dimensional. While I was at it, I signed my name backwards.

163. The Tyrant's Wife



Oil, 40" x 30", October, 2018

My wife and I were stunned by a day of TV-watching the Senate hearings for a controversial Supreme Court candidate named Kavanaugh. Wanting to transmute this dross into art, I did a painting of it. Using the messy oil paints gave the picture a dirty, grungy look, with the possibility of heavy impasto, and with an abstract-expressionist quality in the details. Technically and

emotionally, it was a hard painting to do. As the news cycles rolled by, I began making it a bit more general, a bit less situation-specific. And I began to realize that, in a sense, the wife is the center.

164. Dot the Eye



Oil, 30" x 24", October, 2018

In this one, I was ready to get away from politics and heavy emotion. I went for a puzzle grid of rectangles with scumbled messy colors in each one. I put a squiggle in most of the boxes, kind of like Sanskrit or, more fancifully, like High Martian. If I didn't like a squiggle, I rubbed it off, leaving some nice debris, and then I'd do a new squiggle on top of that. I called the painting

Dot the Eye because I put a pupil in that small white patch. Next time I do a painting like this, I'll draw the background grid first...this time, I painted spontaneously, and later I had to straighten some of the edges. What does the painting mean? Well, can't you read High Martian? It says "I like squiggles and colors."

165. My Flag



Oil, 30" x 24", November, 2018

This was a follow-up to Dot The Eye. I took the grid pattern from Dot the Eye and flipped it over. So My Flag is kind of a mirror image. I painted it on the November mid-term Election Day, thus the title. Like, this kind of painting is my kind of flag—as opposed to the stars and bars that politicians like to wave. Regarding the technique, I used very thick and heavy amounts of

paint, extreme impasto, and I held myself back from smoothing the paint over. I wanted to leave it rough, and with the colors not mixed within each rectangle, so each of them is like a tiny, spontaneous ab-ex work. I wasn't sure what to paint after My Flag. It felt like, in this work, I'd reached the end of my personal art history. But then, what the hey, I went back to acrylics and began working on a couple of fanciful portraits of two of my grandchildren, quite traditional, in a way. As long as I'm painting, my history's not over. The two new paintings aren't quite done yet, so I'll save them for the next edition of Better Worlds!

166. Young Acrobat On Silks



Acrylic, 30" x 24", January, 2019

One of my granddaughters asked me to do a painting of her. She's a bit of an acrobat, and has a set of circus silks installed on the ceiling of her room in San Francisco. So I took a photo of her, and based my painting on that. This took me a while, as I'm not trained in figure drawing. It helped that I was working in acrylic paint, as they're easier to revise—you can keep putting on

new layers.

167. Wow



Acrylic, 40" x 30", Feb, 2019

Having painted one granddaughter, I went ahead and painted another. This is a silhouette of her standing in front of some blown art glass in a museum in Madison, Wisconsin. I based the painting on a lucky photo I'd shot. I liked how excited she looked in the photo—she was making a face for the picture.

I drew grids on my photo and on the canvas to help me copy the image. But to get the curves of her profile right, I had to rework it a large number of times. It helped that I was using acrylic, as you can revise an acrylic image almost immediately after you paint it.

168. Moonrise



Acrylic, 40" x 30", March, 2019

Standing on the deck of our house near sunset, I was stuck by the shape of a long cloud—it looked a little like a cosmic arm. The sun was setting behind me. The a waxing moon was rising. The cloud was framed by a palm tree and a stone pine. The colors and shadings were ravishingly beautiful. I did many, many layers on the painting, trying to get some of the luminous quality that I

remembered.

169. Mexico



Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"

This is a painting of Guanajuato. Sylvia and I were there in March, 2019, and were blown away by the small mountain town's beauty. For this composition I fused fantasies with some of my photos. I did the one-point perspective thing, picking a vanishing point and drawing lines. Perspective is oddly counterintuitive, but it works. The colors are flat-out max, as they are in

Guanajuato. In the windows of the yellow wall I put a skull, a piñata, an old couple, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, who was in fact an occasional graffito on the walls of Guanajuato. On the street are a guy carrying a bread basket and an alluring woman. In the window on the pink wall, two white-haired tourists from the north: me and Sylvia. What's the story? I don't know. As I always say, I like the stories in my paintings to be like illustrations of forgotten proverbs or Oil stick half-remembered folk tales.

170. Cute Meet (Dptych)



Acrylic, pair of 24" x 30" canvases, May, 2019

I saw a diagram of a so-called Hele-Shaw ferrohydrodynamics pattern formed by, I don't know, something like a rotating magnetic field under a fluid with metal dust in it. I don't remember the details. But I liked the cool pattern. I love when nature makes these chaotic, odd things that look like paleolithic cave-wall drawings. So I picked one pattern, and painted two versions of it, copying the pattern by hand each time. I liked doing it so much that I did it twice, so we have a diptych here. The pictures are meant to be hung together. And the colors are kind of the opposites of each other. And if you rotate either of these patterns by 180 degrees, it's approximately the same as the other one. So they're the same species. But the one on the left is girl, and the one on the right is a boy. And they're having a cute meet, which is phrase used in describing romance movies.

171. The Two Lovers Walk Their Dog



Acrylic, 30" x 24", June, 2019

They had an En Plein Air painting festival in my town, and I was thinking I should do a quick painting of something I saw outside. So I went in my backyard and started painting the ivy leaves on the wall. And that got a little boring. So I started putting in critters. I made a spiraling black line, and then I put an eye in the middle, and that's how I got started on the figure on the right. I gave her pink flesh, and put in some 3D shading to round her out. the real stroke of inspiration was just filling in a crescent of orange-red for her mouth. And then I drew her lover on the left. His smile is even bigger. And the dog? Well, he was just a lucky hit. I made that red glob and put two things like ears on it, and then added another—voila! And I made the background an insanely bright and saturated shade of yellow-orange. I love how cheerful the lovers look. And the ivy leaves turned out to be hearts. And, all in all, there's seventeen eyes bobbling around! This one is a gift from the Muse, an unexpected masterpiece. Not that it would ever be accepted by the En Plein Air festival. But who cares.

172. Moon Launch



Acrylic, 40" x 30", July 20, 2019

I finished this painting on the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. I well remember how excited Sylvia and I were that day. The Moon! Sylvia was eight months pregnant with our daughter Georgia. At first I was going to call this one Moon Landing, but the orb in the background looks more like Earth than like the Moon. I put eyes all over it, for fun, and then I realized the eyes are the millions of people who were watching the moon landing on TV. And those eyes in the bone-like flying object with the blue-atmosphere shell, well, those are Neal Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin in their lander. And the chartreuse triangles? Well, those are bikini bottoms—or maybe non-Euclidean triangles in curved space. A year later, in June, 2020, I overpainted this actually somewhat drab canvas (also I was out of blank canvases) for painting 191: Leaving Earth.

173-1 and 173-2. Gems (Pair)



Acrylic, two 14" x 30" canvases, August, 2019

I started my first of these two paintings (the one on the right) by using a wide brush to draw a heavy framework of lines, as if designing Art Nouveau stained glass or furniture. Smooth, smoothing, organic lines. In other words, I started with the negative space. And then I filled in the empty spots with colors. I worked intuitively and visually, adjusting the colors till they looked right. And then came the work of shading each of these “gems” to be lighter in the center. This shading step took a really long time, maybe thirty hours for the first painting. It looked almost perfect, and then I had the idea of giving each gem a white outline. Beautiful. After I finished the first one, I just had to paint a partner. This one went a little faster, as by now I had a clearer idea of what I was doing. I photographed them as a pair, but they can be hung alone. They’re not an inseparable diptych.

174. Five Eggs



Acrylic, 14" x 30", August, 2019

All the time I was working on the Gems Pair paintings I was wondering if it would be a good idea to put some critters into the cells. So then I did this one: five eggs with little occupants. Here again, the coloring and the shading took a long time. I used this painting as a kind of model for a science-fiction story where some kind of magic egg appears from another world.

175. Nine Dragons



Acrylic, 40" x 30", September, 2019

I saw a museum show devoted to Ed Hardy, and featuring his remarkable 500 foot long scroll, 2000 Dragons, containing literally 2000 images of dragons. Hardy says his inspiration was a 13th Century scroll by the Chinese artist Chen Rong, an image some thirty feet long, featuring nine dragons. So I wanted to paint some dragons too. To clarify the image, I left out the

dragons' bodies, fangs, and whiskers. I just focused on making them look lively and fun. Once the dragons were done, I put in the background clouds, which draw the image together in a nice way, giving it a unified feel like a tapestry.

176. Ponytails



Acrylic, 40" x 30", October, 2019

This is kind of a Cubist painting, inspired by reading Francoise Gilot's *Life with Picasso*, a great book. As I often do, I started the painting by painting odd, somewhat mathematical patterns on a new canvas, using up most of the paint on my palette from the last painting. I noticed something a little like two women's faces, and I worked from there. I've always liked the big, high,

ambitious, expressive ponytails that girls and young women wear. My wife used to sport them, when we were newlyweds. So...Cubist ponytails on two Vogue models.

177. Rush Hour



Acrylic, 40" x 30", November, 2019

I was thinking of Italy, as Sylvia and I had just spent some days in Genoa. Initially the blue triangle on the left side was an upward-pointing steeple on the right side, and the circles were fountains and piazzas. Sylvia said that if turned the canvas so the "steeple" pointed down, then the blobs would look like cars

on wheels, and I went with that. I made a cool, bizarro motorcycle at the bottom—inspired by a show of Futurist art that we saw in Pisa during our trip. I used a lot of extra heavy medium to get impasto bumps, and I used a lot of yellow paint. Midway I ran out of yellow paint, and had to take a few days off while I got more. For a number of days, I kept putting on more layers, using various tricks to make the acrylic paint behave as if it were translucent. And I stuck to a fairly limited palette. Sylvia helped again when it came to picking the title. Rush Hour! Of course.

178. Neptune



Acrylic, 18" x 24", November, 2019

This is another of my “Zhabotinsky scroll” paintings, based on the double scroll patterns to be found in nature, as in turbulent water, or in the cross-sections of mushrooms or jellyfish. In this particular painting I’m thinking of Jellyfish Lake near Palau in the South Pacific. And I call this painting Neptune because, if you look at it a certain way, you can see a humanoid of figure with two tiny yellow eye dots.

179. Magic Door



Acrylic, 24" x 18", December, 2019

This painting is based on a photograph I took at sunset at Pfeiffer Beach in Big Sur. I’ve always loved the door-like hole in the big stone sea[stack] just off the beach. In my novel *Mathematicians in Love*, I wrote about this door as an actual portal to a parallel world. All you have to do is to surf through it...

180. Dino Balloon



Acrylic, 30" x 24", December, 2019

I saw an old black and white photo of a group of men holding an inflated parade-balloon. So I painted that, making the dinosaur a nice shade of green. The men didn’t show up well, so I gave them white haloes, and then I had to put edges around the haloes, so it looks a little weird, but maybe the men are like balloons themselves.

181. Pandemic #1: Infection



Acrylic, 30" x 24", March, 2020

In December, 2019, shortly after Dino Balloon, I had the lenses of my eyes surgically replaced by soft plastic lenses. My own lenses had gotten cloudy and dark over the years. I was delighted by how rich colors became, seen through new eyes. Maybe I’d been painting with such bright colors because my vision was dim? I held back from painting for three months, and in

March, 2020, spurred on by the onset of the Covid-19 plague, I started again. Turns out that now I'm using even brighter colors! Workin at a fever pitch, I painted a Pandemic triptych. The initial panel, Infection, shows a tumble of heedlessly festive micro-critters, spotted with itchy dots to suggest disease.

182: Pandemic #2: Panic



Acrylic, 30" x 40", March, 2020

In Panic, I went wild, hitting a nice strong abstract-expressionist style, with super-intense colors. I created some delicious shades of orange by mixing cadmium red and the lesser-known diarylide yellow. In all three of the Pandemic panels, I started by setting blobs of paint from my palette onto a damp blank canvas, along with gobs of heavy gel medium. And then I freely smeared, going for gestural brush strokes, and not letting the colors mix together and get muddy. To bring order, I outlined choice passages of action painting, and filled the extra parts of the canvas with flat colors. I think Panic looks, overall, a bit like a face with holes in it. But some of the smaller areas look like faces as well. Those two pink patches at the bottom might be a hapless Covid-19 victim's lungs. Or buttocks. Or shoulders. Or neck. Hard to be sure exactly what's going on...and that's the fun of it.

183: Pandemic #3: Peace



Acrylic, 30" x 24", March, 2020

For Peace, the third panel of Pandemic, I wanted a sense of recovery. As before, I smeared around some blobs of paint from my palette, and then I outlined them, and added fields of violet and orange. The central shape is perhaps a bit like a holy baby or, looked at more abstractly, like the famous mathematical form known as the Mandelbrot Set.

184: Hazmat Spring



Acrylic, 40" x 30", April, 2020

This was my fourth pandemic painting. It's thematically inspired by Botticelli's Spring, but with the person wearing a hazmat suit. S/he might be me or my wife enjoying a rare outing, or maybe the cheerful neighbor who's been trimming their hillside with a sickle and a weed whacker, right adjacent to our back yard, which is where I paint. I started with overall action smears, like I've been doing, then cropped down the marks to form odd, vaguely medieval plants. The flowers resemble breasts, fitting the rebirth motif of spring.

185: Happy Egg



Acrylic, 40" x 30", April, 2020

This started as a simple image of an egg, but I didn't want to be finished so soon. I painted a hole onto the egg, and then I needed some critters to be hatching out. Spring chicks? Not exactly. A bit like dinosaurs or parrots. Or ducks. Or, as my painter friend Dick Termes pointed out—if you look at their heads sideways—rabbits! Something cheerful, in any case, with the

brightest colors I could find. And maybe it's a chocolate Easter egg.

186: Bird of Paradise



Acrylic, 20" x 24", May, 2020

I spent over a week on this painting, repeatedly rearranging it as I went along. The breakthrough step was to include a bird of paradise flower; we have a clump of them blooming, and I set one down on my painting table in the yard.

Wonderfully raffish plants, with petals like donkeys' ears, increasingly mussed as the days go by. I went for a very dark blue sky, a mixture of cobalt blue, ultramarine, and some manganese blue at the bottom. My painter friend Vernon

Head pointed out that it looked like night, so as a last step, I put a few stars in the sky. And added a little snake—he was going to be a lizard, but I couldn't face doing the legs. And a snake is fine. Garden of Eden!

187: Astral Travel



Acrylic, 24" x 20", May, 2020

I painted this in the eighth week of quarantine in the pandemic of 2020. For an outing, my wife and I drove to Lick Observatory on nearby Mount Hamilton...and were barely allowed to get out of our car. I took in the uplifting view, and spotting a rusty iron chest set into the ground, I thought of my heart and mind and soul locked into the dull prison of shelter-in-place.

Driving home, we admired the bird's eye view of the fields and mountains. And I thought of a brain in a cube, traveling. To make the painting fun, I put sky and mountain ranges on the both sides—with no clear notion of up and down—so that now we're looking at an astral traveler who nears an agricultural asteroid. I had fun designing the quilt of fields; I tried to make each shade of green/yellow different.

188: Cells Eat Viruses



Acrylic, 28" x 22", May, 2020

So I had this vague, totally inaccurate notion of healthy blood cells killing off viruses by eating them—and I painted it. Cheerful round cells, and the viruses looking like stick-and-ball molecules. Nice colors, lively action, happy feeling. Almost like a Mardi Gras crowd! If only.

189: With My Friends



Acrylic, 24" x 20", May, 2020

I made this up as I went along, frequently overpainting sections until it looked right. Maybe that dopey guy with the pink head is me. And those are my friends. Squid, saucer, ant, paramecia, amoebas, asteroids, and weathered stone. No real message here, it's just about the colors and the shapes and some visual icons that I've come to love. Forgetting, while I painted this one, about the endless crises in the outer world.

190: Bicyclist



Acrylic, 24" x 18", June, 2020

As I sometimes do, I started this painting by covering the canvas with swooping thick-brush squiggles of the left-over palette-paint from my previous painting. Looking for a pattern, I saw a nice, loopy knot. I highlighted the curves I wanted, and filled the spaces with colors. And I made sure to have an extra-strong yellow in the background, a mixture of Hansa yellow and medium cadmium yellow. I changed the fill colors and the shapes of the curves a number of times—until it looked right, with a nice balance of lights, darks, and hues. The teardrop shape in the upper-left center reminded me of a modern bicycle helmet. And with a little more tweaking it seemed, to me, to resemble an Italian Futurist painting of a Bicyclist. A sunny cheerful image for hard times.

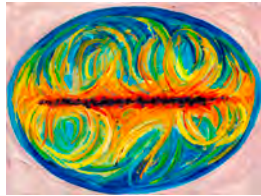
191: Leaving Earth



Acrylic, 40" x 30", June, 2020

At this point, having finished ten paintings during the 2020 shelter-in-place interval, I was out of blank canvases. I had sent off for six more, but it was going to take some time. So I looked over my stock and picked one of my less beloved paintings, poor old 172: Moon Launch. I'd always found that work a bit drab. So I overpainted it, amping up the colors, and, more or less by accident, I made it possible to view the lower right corner as the aerial view of a surfing beach—although you can still think of it as Earth in space. Whether it's the beach or the upper atmosphere, we can assume that the muscled dog-bone shape with two eyes might be leaving for a long trip. Note that there's an eye below whose colors match the eyes of the spacefarer.

192: Magnetic Fields of the Milky Way Galaxy



Acrylic, 24" x 18", June, 2020

I saw a new online astronomy image that showed the magnetic fields of our Milky Way galaxy. That lumpy black line in the middle is our galaxy, seen edge-on. And the colored curves represent the field lines of cosmic magnetic fields. I don't really understand how they made this image, but it's great. Got me to thinking about how truly tiny we are, and how incredibly vast the world is. It's kind of amusing to me to think that, here in my house, I'm smearing some colored mud on a rectangle of canvas and saying, yes, here's the galaxy.

193: Pop's Pipes



Acrylic, 28" x 22", June, 2020

This is one of those paintings where I start by smearing patterns on the canvas, and then slowly refine them into somewhat orderly shapes. That "pipe" at the lower left appeared, I knew I had a painting. Naturally I thought of Magritte's classic work that shows a pipe with the caption, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe"—but I wasn't really going there. It was Father's Day when I started this painting, and I started thinking of a white clay meerschaum pipe my father got himself when I was about thirteen. My teen brother and his friend Peter got drunk and broke the pipe. Lots of symbolism! To fill out my painting I added some circles and ellipses that might be the mouths of invisible lit pipes. And, of course, since this is a work of modern art, I wanted Formica-style kidney shape. To make the texture a little unusual, I used a palette knife instead of a brush to fill in the shapes.

194: Pinchy's Big Date



Acrylic, 28" x 22", July, 2020

This is one of my paintings that illustrates a fable or a proverb that happens to be lost to history. It's telling a story, but we don't know what it is. A somewhat tired-looking ant is in the company of a perky woman who may be wearing a superhero mask. They, or their images, are enclosed in an orb that emerges from the stalk of a plant. It looks like they're having a good time.

The rest is silence—but the colors are loud.

195: Two Lizards



Acrylic, 40" x 30", July, 2020

Two Lizards is inspired by the same location as #159 Up Creek. Sometimes in the summer, I hike up the bed of the narrow Lexington Creek to get there. This time my initial focus was on the geometry of the three fallen trees. And then—rather than showing the reflections of the trunks in the water—I put my energy into populating the scene. I came up with a pair of lizards who

look like they're talking to each other in a boy-meets-girl kind of way. My wife and I? The lizards needed golden outlines so as to show up well. And to balance them, I added a dragonfly. I like how strong and saturated the colors are...they carry the heat of a 95 degree summer day.

196: Healing Angel



Acrylic, 30" x 24", Sept, 2020

This painting relates to my novel *Juicy Ghosts*. My character Molly is in virtual reality, floating high above the US, and she's curing unfortunate citizens who are afflicted with "Treadle Disease," a brain infection which makes people vote for the evil President Ross Treadle. And if you think this relates to the politics of 2020, you're right! The novel is about telepathy and digital

immortality, classic themes of mine. But in 2020, the political aspects took on a new urgency for me. The colloquial title of the painting is "Molly Zaps the Treadlers."

197: St. Georgia and the Dragon



Acrylic, 30" x 24", Oct, 2020

As I sometimes do, I started this one by covering the canvas with fingerpaint-type scribbles—and scanning the result for patterns. I spotted the beginnings of good dragon on the right, and some other animal on the...maybe he's a horse. The randomness of the dragon's and horse's shapes gives them a lively quality. I've always loved medieval paintings of "St. George and the Dragon,"

and here I made St. George into a princess, and had her petting the dragon instead of lancing him. I painted a frame around the edge, setting gems into it, and highlighting it with low-brow gold paint that I had around. And I of course I gave the princess one of those classic cone hats with a drifty veil. I reworked this painting five times over several weeks, layering on fresh colors, going for intensity, harmony, and the feel of a cathedral icon.

198: The Halo Card



Acrylic, 40" x 30", Oct, 2020

The image relates to a my novel *Juicy Ghosts*. The donut-like halos are meant to store "lifebox" copies of users' minds. The round-headed guys are "ball walkers" named Glory and Miss Max. The humans are the telepathy hacker Gee and the energetic mountain woman Mary. Mary's mind is stored in her lifebox halo, and she has a newly grown clone body. I had the idea of

making the canvas be flippable, so you can rotate it 180 degrees—like a face card in a deck of cards. And then, I had the idea of adding suit symbols, really just for decoration. But this move suggested the title, which refers to the fact that my use of the halo lifeboxes was a tactical maneuver for the book's internal logic, so I did need to "play the halo card."

199: Zoom Meeting



Acrylic, 24" x 18", December, 2020

By this time I'd been under Covid lockdown for nine months, and one of my few social interactions was to attend Zoom meetings of various kinds. I was taken with the look of the Zoom screen, and I'd play with the layout during the meeting. Here we see an underlying "speaker view" with a "grid view" overlaid upon it, with part of the grid offscreen. I like how the speaker also

appears in the grid, and that she has a window behind her looking out onto the "real" world. There's an odd sense of multiple realities. That's me in the top center, of course, with my beloved bookcase

of my published editions. Some users show static photos of themselves instead of video, and the coiffed woman in the center is one of those. And of course we have an alien.

200: Rendezvous



Acrylic, 28" x 22", February, 2021

There's a two month gap between this painting and 199: Zoom Meeting. In that intervening time I was working very hard on finishing my novel *Juicy Ghosts*. When I was done, Sylvia and I took a walk in a nearby forest, and passed through a pristine glade by a creek. I got a photo of the spot, and painted it, but this was just a stage setting, and it needed some critters. I

decided to copy, in my own fashion, a dino from the second of James Gurney's great *Dinotopia* picture books. In this prehistoric rendezvous, we see a dino, I call her Elsa, about to meet up with a Cretaceous crocodile. It amuses me that the dino seems to be looking in the wrong direction. But I'm pretty sure she'll be able to run away in time. She has strong legs.

201: The Day We Met



Acrylic, 20" x 24", April, 2021

I started this the week that some artist sold a digital image for over sixty million dollars. The kicker was that he put a unique code number on his image. I thought I might paint a messy, Monet-style background, and overlay that with hard Kandinsky type abstraction with lines and triangles, and the background would be the artwork and the geometric part would stand for a code number.

But as I was painting, the background started looking like springtime to me, and instead of overpainting it with abstractions, I began overlaying it with little critters, like I'm always putting into my SF novels. I put a lot of effort to making the critters look unnatural, doing that classic Dutch-painter Hell thing. One of the critters, near the bottom, looked like a green worm or snake. And I started thinking this one ought to be meeting a partner worm or snake. A mate. My wife Sylvia and I met on a charter bus from Swarthmore College to Washington DC on March 21, 1964, the day before my 18th birthday. When I started this painting, I was coming up on my seventy-fifth birthday, on March 22, 2021, which would be 57 years and a day since I met Sylvia. Because I happened to sit down next to her on that bus. She was pretty, and alert, and I hadn't met her before. But I wanted to. And now we have three children and five grandchildren. I was feeling of sentimental about all this. It started raining when I was almost done with the painting—soft spring rain—and I was working outside in my back yard, so I had to paint really fast to finish. But I got it done, putting in an orange critter to be meeting the green one, and that's Sylvia and me. And I was happy with the painting, but two weeks later, in April, I started feeling like the background was

too muddy, and the critters too messy, so I simplified the background, smearing on a really nice shade of green with a rag, and I touched up the critters, clarifying them, and making the picture pop, which is something I like to see.

202: The 5 Got Away



Acrylic, 30" x 24", May, 2021

On my 75th birthday, our three kids and their families gathered in our back yard and decorated it with streamers and balloons, including a pair of large ones shaped like the numerals 7 and 5. And inevitably a certain grandchild let the 5 slip, and she was worried I'd be mad, but I thought it was funny and even, in a way, perfect. And I made a somewhat surreal painting of the event.

The 5 Got Away! At a subtext level, the image shows the years themselves flying away from me, leading the way to Heaven. This is another picture that I reworked quite a few times until I was happy with it.

203: Invaders

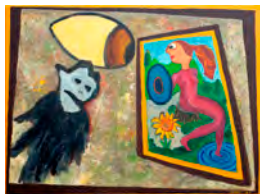


Acrylic, 28" x 22", May, 2021

Around this time my dear wife Sylvia was diagnosed with terminal cancer. For the next few years, many of my paintings dealt with this in various ways. And I'd be painting much more often. For me, painting is at all times an escape from daily reality. I get into the colors, the harmonies, and the problem solving. I did the background of this one by "stamping" the canvas with the

still-wet palette paper I used for 202: *The 5 Got Away*. It made a nice, mysterious subspace continuum. It needed critters, and I fell back on drawing them like eyeballs, which is something I like to paint. I thought of these critters a flock of invaders. The cancer invading Sylvia. I ended up using this image on the cover of my novel *Juicy Ghosts*.

204: Escaping Death



Acrylic, 40" x 30", June, 2021

I didn't take Sylvia's diagnosis particularly well. First I had a seizure. And then I had a vein burst inside my stomach, and I nearly bled to death. A surgeon stapled the vein closed, and I got a transfusion of four pints of blood. I had some heavy visionary dreams in the hospital. I saw Death as a shadowy figure with a helmet. I saw the afterlife as an "underside" of the world, covered with

shifting white fuzz. And I had a vision of returning to life in the form of a glowing image atop my sheet. In my first version of this painting, I had a bunch of grisly organs inside that skewed

rectangle. Everyone in my family thought it looked horrible. I kept revising, and the shapes became a woman warrior. A heroine fending off Death, and possibly on her way to escaping into a pool that resembles her shield. I was, in other words, still hoping that Sylvia might recover. I began to think of my *Escaping Death* painting as a magic spell or ritual with healing powers, like a Tibetan sand painting. As for the big eye, well, as I've said, I like painting eyes, and it was fun to shape this one like a torpedo. Maybe it's the cosmic One. The duality between the inner and outer skewed boxes reflects the notion of the psychic world as a different from the material world.

205: Galactic Saucers



Acrylic, 28" x 22", June, 2021

This is another painting where I started with a random background and put things on top. Just having fun. To make things easy, I turned to a favorite motif: flying saucers, as in my painting 188: *Deep Space Saucers*. And my saucer paintings always sell. I like the bright candy-colors of the saucers, and the way they overlap.

206: Saucer School



Acrylic, 24" x 18", June, 2021

I started with stripes, wanting a more orderly background this time. I almost stopped there, but Sylvia said it wasn't enough, also I wanted to keep painting. I thought of filling in the rows with symbols, as if in a classroom. The rows aren't perfectly level and aligned, but that's okay. We have ideograms, alphabet, math symbols, and in the bottom row we have the young pupils at the saucer school. In a way the second row almost seems to spell RUCKER.

207: Beach Morning



Acrylic, 30" x 24", June, 2021

I saw a scene like this on Seabright Beach in Santa Cruz in March, 2021, and I took a phone photo to remember it. I like the fog in the sky, and the lighthouse, and the eager boy and the sleeping dog. I simplified the breakwater which, in real life, is a pile of large concrete "jacks"—too complex to limn. I went for a quick, light painting that captures a happy mood. A symphony in yellow and blue.

208: Loplop



Acrylic, 24" x 18", June, 2021

The Surrealist artist Max Ernst used to draw a birdlike figure whom he called Loplop, with Loplop standing in for the artist in his paintings. Sylvia and I always liked that word. In my twenties, I got confused, and I thought “loplop” was the word for the lop-eared shapes that Jean Arp liked to sculpt.

I think of shapes in this painting as being loplops in that sense. The pale loplop at the top resembles a human profile, and he might be thought of as a stand-in for me, with a chain of pictorial causation connecting this Loplop to my signature in the lower right-hand corner. More simply, the painting is about balancing shapes and colors in a pleasing way.

209: Self-Portrait with Mandelbrot UFO



Acrylic, 40" x 30", July, 2021

In the 1990s I did some work with higher-order fractals akin to the famous “Mandelbrot set,” designing new algorithms and coming up with a superfractal that I dubbed the Rudy set. Every few years I go back and look at my fractals some more, using my ever-improving computers and a commercial program called Ultra Fractal. For this painting, I printed out a detail of a certain “cubic Mandelbrot” set that, to my mind, resembled a living UFO. I decided that the fractal’s tendrils would be abducting people and animals. To balance the design, I put part of a man’s face at the bottom, and I had the idea of making him look happy—because he likes higher-order fractals and he likes UFO. And then it struck me that this man is me. Thus: a self-portrait.

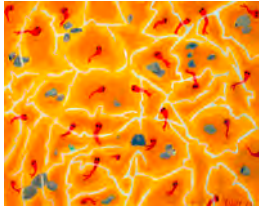
210: Althea’s Friends



Acrylic, 30" x 24", July, 2021. Painted with Althea Lasseter

Our granddaughter Althea was visiting us, and she worked on a painting with me. That’s how I ended up making a painting with a cat in it, which would never ever happen otherwise! But it’s cute. And I like the argyle skin on the snake. And the little toy donkey.

211: Minnows and Caustic Curves



Acrylic, 30" x 24", August, 2021

Sylvia and I were up at Lake Tahoe for a few days, swimming and wading in the preternaturally clear water off Sugar Pine Point. She wasn't feeling very well. I was sad and worried. As I often do, I found solace in the natural world's beauty. I love the light patterns made by the sun shining through the ripples on the water's surface. Scientists call them caustic curves—caustic being painting a fancy word for “hot.” David Hockney is really good at painting swimming pools with caustic curves. The Tahoe water and sand weren't yellow at all, but I had a lot of different shades of yellow around, and I wanted to use them. Also there weren't any orange or red minnows, but I invented them to liven things up.

212: High Five



Acrylic, 30" x 24", September, 2021

This was one of those paintings I started by smearing leftover paint onto the canvas and looking for patterns. A no-brainer. I saw the woman, and a caveman-like guy. Maybe he's a lifeguard. The woman like him; they're exchanging a high five. What about the crocodile? Well, I needed something on that side of the canvas. The croc is the woman's ally, a symbolic toothed

vagina.

213: Birth



Acrylic, 40" x 30", October, 2021

I started with a group of more or less grotesque heads, like in a James Ensor painting. And I put in a cartoon baby, who's an of icon I've been drawing for fifty years. Another factor is that we'd just been to see a big Judy Chicago show in San Francisco, with a whole room of dramatic birth paintings. So I put in a woman who's given birth, although I didn't go as far as Judy does.

Who are the other people? I'd say the little guy at the bottom is Dad, and on the left, that's Sis, and at the top we have Aunt Bea, Grandma, and a 50s Grandpa. Love his hairdo.

214: Our Back Yard



Acrylic, 28" x 22", November, 2021

I've mentioned before that I like old paintings that illustrate proverbs that have been forgotten. Unknown parables. Bosch's *The Cure of Folly* and Bruegel's *Peasant and Bird Nester*, his sinister *Beekeepers*, and his *Misanthrope* have this quality. Making a *new* painting of an unknown parable is a type of Surrealism. In this painting I started with a scene from my backyard, and added a squirrel, two chickens, and three somehow symbolic-looking bumblebees. Plus a cool towel with a mandala design. And a woman is dear, fading Sylvia, perhaps hanging the towel, or perhaps painting something on the back of it. The unknown parable of the towel!

215: Mr. Gray



Acrylic, 24" x 18", November, 2021

I painted this on automatic. I was thinking of M. C. Escher's images of tiled-together creatures. But I made this one more random and irregular. In grade-school we'd play a game of drawing a squiggly shape on a piece of notebook paper, and your fellow player would have to make it into an animal or a person. Really any shape at all can be a critter if you stare at it long enough. It's just a pattern of figuring out where to put the dot for the eye. The one human form is "Mr. Gray." And maybe he's having these colorful visions. I was also thinking of the Bob Dylan song "Idiot Wind" that opens with the line, "They say I shot a man named Gray and took his wife to Italy." To me this line represents Dylan toppling the old regime and running off with the country's youth. Taking them somewhere pleasant and colorful. And maybe becoming the new Mr. Gray.

216: Calder Grabs Crab



Acrylic, 30" x 24", December, 2021.

My nine-year-old grandson Calder was excited about catching crabs. He and my son Rudy Jr went down to a San Francisco beach at a certain time, and were in fact able to collect a few Dungeness crabs by hand—and they even had a license. And, yes, I know that an uncooked crab isn't bright red but, come on, what other color could I use!

217: Elephants



Acrylic, 30" x 24", January, 2022.

This was another of the canvases where I just started by smearing paint around, waiting for some shape to jump out at me. And I saw an elephant. So I painted a bunch of them. These are not political party mascots, you understand. They're just cute animals.

218: Covid: Third Year



Acrylic, 30" x 24", January, 2022.

I wanted to have a lot of orange and yellow in this one, I started with that. And I was thinking about what a bummer it is to have the third year of Covid coming up on us. So I went for something funky and biological here, not even thinking about it very much, just painting. Abstract expressionist style. I liked coming up with a ruffled edge, like on a rectangular pizza.

219: The Teacher



Acrylic, 28" x 22", January, 2022. Revised April, 2023.

Sylvia made quilts right up to the end, and she'd just made a really pretty one. And I was thinking it would be nice make a harmonious pattern of colored squares. I could have put patterns into the squares like Sylvia does, but instead I overlaid critters onto the grid. For the main critter I used a small madrone tree that I happened to see up in Castle Rock park in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I made friends with that tree. I like the way a madrone feels when you run your hands along its smooth orange bark. In 2022 painted three small critters talking to the tree, and in 2023, I added one more critter, and made them all be staring at the eye of the tree. The title became *The Teacher*. The students talk with the teacher, and in his head, the teacher watches himself, and he's, like, "Who am I? What am I doing?" On the lower right, that flows into the teacher about to teach another class. Teachers learn from their students.

220 & 221: Spring Oaks & Roots



Acrylic, 30" x 24", February, 2022. Two Canvases

The California oak trees are quite different from the ones back East. And I see many of them from my window, and around my neighborhood. I love the gnarly way they twist and turn. They're long-lived trees, and they grow slowly, and—I suppose—they "think" a lot about which direction to grow next, so often they "change their minds" and veer, creating these wonderfully gothic designs. We have several species of oaks. Some keep their leaves all year long, almost like holly. And others do shed their leaves in the fall, and sprout new leaves in the spring, which starts in January or

February in California. I started with three of those trees here. And then I decided to do a second canvas—with the roots. To liven things up, I put tiny pairs of eyes on the roots.

222: Los Gatos Hills



Acrylic, 30" x 24", March, 2022.

I was still on a tree kick, so I did a view of the hills behind my house. I was thinking about putting UFOs and birds on the hillside, but then I just went for some trees. And ragged clouds. I tend to get nice clouds pretty much at random, just smearing them on.

223. Hailing a Ride



Acrylic, 30" x 24", March, 2022.

This is a painting when I wanted to go wild with UFOs, including a type that has its lower edge tipped up and an eye peeping out. I'm thinking of a primordial beach here, kind of an Adam and Eve scene. They're holding up their fingers as if hailing a ride. Their heads are illuminated by the higher light emanating from those giant UFOs. And, as usual, they're probably

Sylvia and me.

224. Golden Eyes



Acrylic, 18" x 24", 2020

Generally the paintings in this catalog are listed from newest to oldest. *Golden Eyes* is an exception. I painted it sometime in 2020, but then then I forgot to photograph it and to add it to the catalog. And when I came across it in 2022, it seemed simpler to just list it of place. Something unusual about *Golden Eyes* is that I used golden metallic paint for the background. Usually I'd see that as a corny move, but it gives this painting a nice church-icon look.

225. Saucer Clam, Anchor Shrimp, Conger Eel



Acrylic, 24" x 22", April, 2022

Desperate to keep on painting, I slopped on some blobs to see what I might make of them. Added some legs to the blob in the middle, and then filled in a buff white background around the blobs so the images would pop. I went for an ocean theme, with a touch of saucers; for instances, the clam at the top is a double-domed UFO. The thing in the middle is talking crustacean with broadcasting antennae, like a reporter. An anchor shrimp. I put a touch of magenta in the shrimp's mouth to pep it up. Otherwise I stuck to cadmium orange, plus gray and blue. The thing at the bottom is a string of UFOs merged to make a long, wavy mouth. A conger eel—whatever that is.

226. Birding



Acrylic, 28" x 22", May, 2022

I wanted a "bird" painting to match the sea life painting *Saucer Clam*. We had a birdfeeder outside our bedroom window, and Sylvia had been looking at the birds a lot. She was increasingly weak, and we tended to stay in bed together for a long time each morning. Very loosely speaking, these three birds, top to bottom, are a junco, a nuthatch, and a bluejay. Plus an ungendered birdwatcher. For whatever reason, this painting took me a long time, with about seven layers. And then a couple of weeks later, I went back and did one more layer, retouching the person's hair, and making the background more irregular.

227. God is a Log



Acrylic, 24" x 18", May, 2022

This is based on a photo I took. The isolated log on the Santa Cruz beach. I rolled the log into the surf a few times, and eventually it always came back out. Something about the individuality of the log struck me, the “thingness” of it. And, being the kind of person I am, I thought about the notion that god is in every object, everywhere, all the time. God is a log!

228. Arf's Dream



Acrylic, 30" x 40", May, 2022

I was working a deal to sell my literary archive to the University of California at Riverside. So I was looking through my notes and journals from decades ago—one last time. And I found a drawing of our dog Arf having a dream, so I turned it into a painting. I limited the dream objects to things that a dog would definitely be interested in—mainly other dogs, and the kinds of animals that a dog might see around the back yard. Including, of course fleas and flies. And we have lots of small fence lizards at our house. The cow is an extra, as our daughter Isabel, who lived for a while in Wyoming, had an Arf-like dog named Rivers, and there's lots of cows at there. The star of the dream is a cute pink poodle.

229. Galactic Mail Dogs



Acrylic, 30" x 24", June, 2022

I was reading an SF space opera by Becky Chambers—a long novel with interstellar spaceships, odd aliens, and startling adventures. In this novel, the spaceship crew somehow gets physical deliveries of mail, with packages. And I thought it would be fun to paint this kind of scene, with a lumpy spaceship. I was already on a canine kick after 228, *Arf's Dream*, so I had the “mailmen” be dogs in spacesuits, a Mom and a puppy. Yes!

230. Family Tree



Acrylic, 22" x 28", July, 2022

Sylvia and I went to Angel Island for a picnic for the 50th birthday of Rudy Jr. And I got a nice photo of an empty room looking out on a slope with a tree. And then I painted that room, but I wanted some people in it. So I added, to the best of my limited abilities, a portrait of Sylvia coming in. And then I thought *family tree*! So I added framed portraits of our children Georgia, Isabel, and Rudy Jr, although only the Rudy Jr image is at all accurate. The door had five panes above it, which seemed a good spot for cartoony faces to stand for our five grandchildren. A family keepsake. Oh, and where is Grandpa in this painting? Well, if you look closely, there's a tiny ant on the wall next to Grandma. That's all a husband is worth. ☺

231. Galaxies



Acrylic, 24" x 30", July, 2022

Shortly before painting this, I saw some photos from the Webb space telescope, which sees via infrared light as well as via regular light. Sylvia was getting sicker and sicker, and I found solace in thinking about the vastness of spec. An early Webb image showed a spectacular cluster of galaxies some 300 million lightyears away. I started thinking about these galaxies, each of them with something like a million stars, and surely with hundreds or thousands of habitable planets, and about all the other galaxies scattered hither and yon...and it gave me some perspective. What a strange, improbable world we live it! So I painted a cluster of galaxies, giving them odd colors to reflect the notion of seeing via infrared light. I tried to make them look as if they're living beings, interacting with each other. And the black holes at their cores look a little like eyes.

232. Outside the Fillmore



Acrylic, 30" x 24", August, 2022

I have a recurring fantasy about being at a concert at the Fillmore West in San Francisco in 1967. I'm standing outside the hall in an alley, with the wonderful rock sounds echoing out. Peaceful, peaceful. A woman parks her flying saucer and walked down the alley to talk to me. Sylvia, of course. We're on the same wavelength, very spaced out, without even being high. And then I notice that, how great, it's Bo Diddley and his band on stage. Or maybe it's Quicksilver Messenger

Service playing Bo Diddley songs. And, as I began thinking about writing a story about this scenario, I did some paintings.

233. Saucer Party



Acrylic, 28" x 22", September, 2022

Following on the heels of 232: *Outside the Fillmore*, I painted *Saucer Party*. This is supposed to be the view out the windshield of a saucer. I love the concept of space squid, so we've got one of those. And a threesome of festive aliens, and a dancing couple That's Sylvia and me. Attended, of course, by our trusty dog Arf.

234. Cosmic Cliff



Acrylic, 30" x 24", September, 2022

And here's my image of Webb telescope's Cosmic Wall, a detail of the Carina Nebula in our home galaxy. Kind of ludicrous, the gap between my work and the hundreds of thousands of stars—my painting being crude ape-man daubs of colored dirt on a stretched piece of fabric. But I try. I decided not to add flying saucers this time around; I didn't want to drag my cosmic vision

through the gutter of SF.

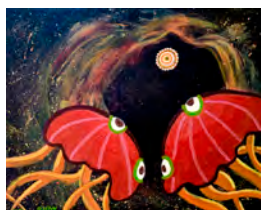
235. Space Jellies



Acrylic, 40" x 30", October, 2022

This time around, yes, I wanted to go for UFOs—as well as deep galactic space. But I used jellyfish instead of saucers. Living beings, like in the movie *Nope*, or in my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*. I started out with the dark blak/purple background, then put on small stars by flicking my thumb across paint-laden brushes. And then some bigger stars. The yellow-orange loplop patterns of the nebulae is, as I've mention, a kind of shape I like to draw. A hollowed out version of the wall in 234: *Cosmic Cliff*. I put eyes on the space jellies and on the orange nebula-creature. I think the first time I put eyes on saucers was in 117 *I Once Was Blind*. For a joke, I added a tiny planet Earth in the top, even though its scale isn't consistent with the rest of the painting. Alien invasion!

236. Going to Heaven



Acrylic, 30" x 24", October, 2022

I liked the space jellies so much that I painted them again, just two of them, poised at start of a great adventure. Sylvia was on her final decline by now. I think of the jellies as Sylvia and me—dying and going to heaven together. The hazy shape around the star was inspired by a photo of the Tarantula Nebula.

As in *Space Jellies*, I did a trick of giving each of the jellies two eyes, so they can be looking at two different things: here it's each other and their goal. A color move here is the green border around the jellyfish eyes. And the target star has a dot of green at its center. And my signature is green as well.

237. New Glasses



Acrylic, 24" x 18". November 2022

I decided it was time to get off my deep-space kick. I was in the process of buying new lenses for two pairs of glasses, and the lenses were unbelievably expensive, and then I had to get them redone. When things bug me, I try to make art from experience. So...what if my so-called glasses were some kind of teep aid, or empathy receiver, or pheromone sniffer, or vibe feeler. Suppose that, wearing them, I sense something unusual. Ghosts, aliens, creatures from the subdimensions. The experience ruins me, and I end up like those unfortunates I saw writhing in the alley behind the optician, the degens known as snorkers. Idea for a story? But too much trouble to write it. So I painted the view through the...*new glasses*. With the glasses in front of the bookcase in my office. My nephew bought the painting almost right away. He said I should do a second painting, in which you see the *books* through the lenses, and you see those fractal land-and-water patterns *outside* the lenses. It would be a whole different scenario, with the glasses an island of sanity, as opposed to a door into madness. But, yeah, in the story the guy could flip from one to the other. Hmm. Maybe someday.

238. Saucer Pals



Acrylic, 14" x 10". November 2022

I'd run out of large canvases, so I ordered more—believe it or not there is no longer a single artist supply store in my home city of San Jose, third largest in California. Meanwhile the only canvases I had kicking around were tiny ones. It was no-brainer time. I went for another all-saucers image like #118: *Deep Space Saucers*, #161: *The Red Saucer*, and #205: *Galactic Saucers*. I jokingly said that my small painting would be a religious icon that a pilgrim might carry along on a

quest, and they could worship the image every night. I used my saucer-eyes trick to give the saucers life, personality, and group dynamics. I don't know why I never painted saucers with eyes before. They *need* eyes. And those holes on the bottoms are mouths. Saucers are living beings!

239. Saucer Island



Acrylic, 24" x 30". Dec, 2022.

Sylvia was really fading now. We'd decided to let her stay at home for the end. And this meant I couldn't leave the house very often. But I could still go to my studio, that is, the back yard right outside our bedroom. And turn off my mind. Our daughter Georgia was visiting, and I started this one with Georgia brushing on it too. The canvas was super bumpy because I'd covered it with random daubs of the leftover paint from the one before. Fun to work together with Georgia; we understand and agree with each other so easily. The trees had been redwoods, but after Georgia left, I gave them curves. The ground beneath mutated into an island in the sea, and then to a saucer-shape, and as a last touch I populated it with some glowing...eyes. For the closing touch, I did an off-white frieze across the middle, which really makes it. And the leaves on the top have a nice fauve Gauguin/Cezanne feel. By then I was just letting the brush do the thinking.

240. Underground



Acrylic, 30" x 24". Dec, 2022.

Our artist friend Ronna Schulkin visited us along with her ex, Jon Pearce, formerly my officemate. Dear old pals, comforting Sylvia and me. Ronna appreciates my work, but she has a habit of saying things like, "Yes, but these aren't really *paintings*. They're illustrations. They're *narrative*." And this gets my goat. So here I decided to go fully abstract, and this what I ended up with. I decided to call it *Underground* because there's something like green grass at the top—it's not that I deliberately put grass there; it's just that, on the third revision, I felt like putting green, because of the color harmonies, and a hour later it occurred to me that it *could* be grass, and if it's grass, then, whoa, this is a painting of Sylvia's future grave. With the cemetery lawn and the crypts underground. Rudy Jr and I were at this point arranging to get Sylvia a headstone. In the end, every painting is a narrative, isn't it? Even if you don't know that you're narrating.

241. Math



Acrylic, 40" x 30". Dec, 2022.

Sometimes I just paint a nice background and scatter things across it. Here I used about four different shades of yellow. I laid the canvas on the ground and squirted on yellow blobs from above, along with globs of buff white along with impasto medium. I smeared it around, being careful not to overdo the smearing. I didn't want to homogenize it; I wanted the seething push-pull of the varying shades. That swoop in the middle is a shape from Wassily Kandinsky. And I added various shapes that are (or might be) from mathematics. Balancing the colors and inventing fake symbols was a big part of this.

242. Whoop-Di-Doo



Acrylic, 24" x 30". Jan, 2023

Here, again, I wanted to get away from narration. Sylvia was in her last weeks, dying on a hospital bed in our living room, and we knew what was coming, even though at some level we didn't know. Couldn't visualize it. Taking solace in math, I decided to paint an intricate image that I found with a cubic Mandelbrot set algorithm that I unearthed some years ago. The interesting thing here is that there are two nested spirals. One goes in from the left, the other goes out the right. They meet at that yellow dot in the center. Like death and rebirth. And that lively green triangle at the lower right? That's paradise, the garden of Eden. The term whoop-di-doo is used by skaters, snowboarders, and bicyclists to describe a funky twirl.

243. Sylvia and the Shells



Acrylic, 40" x 30". Feb, 2023

Sylvia died around noon on January 6, 2023. The kids and I were with her in the living-room. So very sad and strange. A few days later we had a beautiful memorial service at our church. We put a radiant photo of her on the leaflet. And this is my version of that photo. Sylvia loved collecting shells, and at one point—this was nearly fifty years earlier—Sylvia gathered a lot oyster shells with holes worn through them. And she made four or five paintings of them. So I put shells into her picture. Goodbye, darling.

244. The Same Yet Changed I Rise Again



Acrylic, 28" x 22". Mar, 2023

Here, once again, I started with a background that I created by pressing my used-up paper palette against the canvas. As I've said, when I do this, I don't smear the palette around, I use it like a stamp, pressing it repeatedly. Then I touch up all the blank spots. And then I painted the simplest possible thing I could think of. The so-called logarithmic spiral or growth spiral, similar to

the one seen in nautilus shells. It was extensively investigated in the 17th Century by the Swiss mathematician Jacob Bernoulli who wanted it inscribed on his tombstone with the Latin phrase "*Eadem mutata resurgo*," which means "The same yet changed, I rise again." This phrase is a personal touchstone of mine, and I always invoke it when stating a new project, or a new phase of my life.

245. Elise



Acrylic, 28" x 22". Mar, 2023

Our house felt increasingly cold and silent without Sylvia. So I went on a roadtrip to Southern California with my daughter Isabel and my brother Embry. Near the end of the trip, Isabel and I spent two nights in Santa Monica with my SF-writer-collaborator Marc Laidlaw. I was enchanted by the graffiti in Venice Beach, and I based this painting on a work I

photographed. It was debatable what the graffiti actually *said*, but after much discussion on social media, we decided it said "Elise." Thus the title, although by now it doesn't say anything at all. It would have been less interesting (and too hard) to copy the image, so I went into Photoshop (as I often do when making preliminary treatments for a painting) and I collaged various pieces of my photo. Since the design is still based on someone's particular work of art, it escapes the trap of being a generic made-up scribble. I made a point of sticking to the original's shades of yellow and purple, always a lovely match.

246. Sly Saucer



Acrylic, 14" x 11". April, 2023

For some reason I was suddenly selling a lot of paintings, and I wanted to knock out an easy one. What else but saucers? I controlled the palette, sticking to relatively few shades, although varying the hues to keep things lively. And I didn't go and give an eye to every saucer this time. The main one is, of course, the guy in front. I like how, with his pupil to one side, he

looks a little sly.

247. Empty Mind

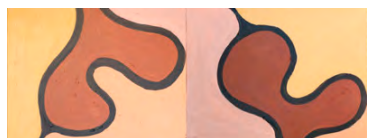


Acrylic, 28" x 22". April, 2023

This is related to my painting #203 *Invaders* of May 2021. Here again I did my reuse-the-paint-on-the-palette routine for the background. And I put lots of circles on top. This time I considered leaving the circles blank and empty, but in the end, it's more fun to see a lot of eyes. I wasn't thinking much of anything while I made *Empty Mind*, I was just painting, letting it come out. I

enjoyed the process itself, as a way to get away from the raw and heavy grief. And I thought of book called *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*, by D. T. Suzuki. I never read much of that book—it's extremely technical and philosophical, almost like Hegel or Kant, but I was always amused by the title. The connection/contrast between *Empty Mind* and the *Invaders* is as follows. When I painted *Invaders*, we were just learning that Sylvia had cancer, and I wondered if the eyeballs might be the disease. But when I painted *Empty Mind*, Sylvia's disease had run its course, and she was dead, but the painting's eyeballs were still there, now revealed as mirrors of the ongoing empty mind of the cosmos—quite unrelated, in the end, to our hard and tragic fates. The world just going on.

248. Yearn (Diptych)



Acrylic, two 24" x 18" canvases. April, 2023

I went full abstract on this painting, and then found meanings. I had two little canvases kicking around. First I drew that shape on the right, just liking the line. Then on the left side I drew a similar mirror-image and upside-down shape. I call these guys "loplops." The Surrealist artist Max Ernst used this word, and his friend Jean Arp made these kinds of shapes. Right away I thought of my loplops as living critters. I didn't want to collapse into literalism or into a fixed orientation so I didn't draw eyes. I had a lot of that brown color from the irises of the floating eyes in *Empty Mind*. And in the backgrounds I used similar colors on both canvases, with moderate brightness and saturation. So it's all creamy and mild. You can arrange the pair in thirty-two ways, making all kinds of scenes. In this one, the loplop on the left yearns for the one departing on the right. Sad, but nice to look at.

50. The One



Acrylic, 30" x 24". May, 2023

I was hiking with my friend Emilio in Castle Rock Park, and we were talking about gnarl, and the nature of mind, and of higher consciousness. When we lay down on a rock to rest, I was thinking about the cosmic One being present in every part of nature. And I got a photo of some trees. This painting shows a person looking at a flower, with a divine eye nearby. Instead of having the person look like me, I had them be a woman. And, as usual in my paintings in those days, I was thinking of my lost Sylvia. It seemed fitting to show her laid out with a flower, and with the divine One nearby. You might even call this a painting of heaven.

251. Veronica's Merch



Acrylic, 30" x 20". May, 2023

This one is inspired by a 16th C painting, *Christ Carryin the Cross*, attributed to Hieronymus Bosch. I love how intense and crowded his canvas is. It shows Veronica and her veil in the lower left corner and, respectively, the good thief and the bad thief in the upper and lower right corners. Around 1100, someone invented the non-Biblical tale that a Veronica wiped Jesus's face and that an image of Him appeared. And then forgers began selling version of this veil. These days, some joke that Veronica was the only one with the foresight to sell “merch” at the Crucifixion! Like at a rock concert or a sporting event. I thought it would be visually and conceptually interesting to put in *two* Veronicas. Pushing it further, I *could* say that the purple guy and the odd lady on the far right are time travelers. But I don't want to do that; I'm content with having an utterly weird crowd, just like in the Bosch original. One question lingers. Where are the two Veronicas from?

252. Big Game



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. May, 2023

After *Veronica's Merch*, which took a long time, I wanted something fast. I used a trick I've used before, which is to lay the canvas flat on the grass with the light and shadows of the tree leaves on it, and then I quickly dab in white and black paint matching the light and dark spots. I get a nice pattern that's gnarlier than anything I can invent—because this pattern comes from raw nature. And then I look for ways to make it prettier. Connecting the lines maybe or, in this case, putting in a bunch of red. Not even thinking about it much, just using my eyes to see what looks good. A nice rich red, a mixture of five tints. And then came my Rorschach move. “What does this remind me of? What am

I deep down thinking about?” And it hit me that I was thinking about the photos that big game hunters take of themselves with their slain quarry. My older brother Embry is such a hunter, and I’d been looking at about sixty of his prize photos—because I was advising him about how to design a memoir about his hunting expeditions. I dislike such photos—the cruelty, the blood, the cocky pride. The white shape is the pelt of a slain animal, or like the whole animal itself. The red of course is blood. And then—here was the crowning inspiration—the circle above the mountain range is the sun, and the hunter’s eye, and the muzzle of his rifle. Perfect. And even (or especially?) if you’re not aware of my subtext, it’s a pleasing pattern.

253. Neuron #1



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. May, 2023

Here I started with the reddish blob in the center, and went on from there, first adding an orange edge, then putting green outside the edge, and then coming up with a network of yellow dots connected by purple tubes. I began thinking of this as an image of a neuron in your brain, with its connective synapses. And of course I was inspired by the then-current work on artificial neural networks as a path to AI. These networks have a flaw, in that no processing is taking place within the individual artificial neurons. So inspired by a paper by Stephen Wolfram, I went ahead and put a cellular-automaton-like pattern inside the neuron—so that it can “think” on its own. But mainly this painting is about richly interacting colors.

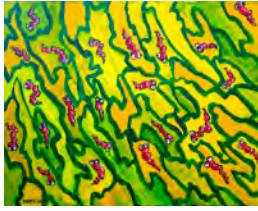
254. Stockholm



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. June, 2023

I was thinking about Stockholm because Sylvia and I went there on our very last trip together before she died. It’s a beautiful city, with an amazing mix of islands, peninsulas, rivers, and bays. A fractal landscape one might say. So here was thinking about a conceptual (not accurate) map of Stockholm. And I wanted to have a limited bright palette like you might see in a Scandinavian design. And it seemed mandatory to have plain titanium white for the background. At first I was using a lot of colors, but then I decided it would be nicer to limit myself to the canonical number of four. I say “canonical” because in mathematics, the Four Color Theorem says that no map in the plane ever needs *more* than four colors. I fixed on red, yellow, green, and blue. The painting took me a surprisingly long time, partly because I had to keep adjusting the colors so that they’d have comparable brightness and saturation. Also there was the matter of distributing the color patches in a harmonious yet irregular way. And in the end, it did look a bit like a “real” map.

255: Larvae



Acrylic, 28" x 22" canvas. June, 2023

I started with a background sweep of yellows and green, letting my arm do the thinking. Looking for a pattern, I noticed zones of similar color, and drew wiggly dark green lines along the edges. It looked nice, but I wanted some critters. I put wriggly little larvae in most of the cells. To liven up the larvae, I put eyes on them, and added character by having the eyes peer this way and that. And then I had a painting.

256. In the Woods



Acrylic, 28" x 22" canvas. June, 2023

I was hiking with my friend Joel along Jacques Ridge at the edge of Almaden Quicksilver park, and we came to a little glen that Sylvia and I were always fond of. This spot is at the top of a slope, with big old oaks and huge boulders. I took a photo, and recklessly told Joel I'd paint a portrait of him—which made my work harder. I had great difficulty in rendering Joel's right hand. Hands are hard. Finally I did what should have been the obvious thing: I printed a copy of my photo, set it down next to the canvas, and copied it. There's a nice sense of peace in this scene. Or maybe not. Those sturdy plants in the foreground look sinister aliens, akin to the creatures in John Wyndham's novel *The Day of the Triffids*. If I wanted to get all gutter-level-SF about it, I could call this work *What Are Those Plants?*

257. Bernal Hill on the Fourth



Acrylic, 40" x 302" canvas. July, 2023

My son Rudy lives near Bernal Hill, south of the Mission district of San Francisco. It's become a family tradition to watch the Fourth of July fireworks from there. Most of the rockets are in fact freelance launches from the Mission streets—as opposed to the official ones near the Bay. It's a wonderful scene, a panoramic view, and I drink it in with all my senses. For this painting, I did a vanishing-point perspective-lines thing. And I found all sorts of shortcuts to avoid having to specifically paint in the immense amount of detail.

258. Neuron #2



Acrylic, 30" x 24" canvas. August, 2023

Here I did my standard move of painting a textured background, putting a blob in the middle—and then going on from there. Given that I'd recently done a neuron painting, I decided to do another, numbering it to start a series. And now I've got a motif to fall back on. I like these colors a lot, and the smooth yet lumpy lines.

259. Bringing Home the Tiki



Acrylic, 28" x 22" canvas. August, 2023

To get started, I painted a bunch of shapes, fitting them together like a jigsaw puzzle. A big polygon in the middle reminded me of the plume of smoke from an time ocean liner. I fooled with that for a while, and it turned into a critter with toothy jaws. I put a boat under him, and added my dog Arf, plus a Polynesian dude. I'd recently read Herman Melville's South Sea journal *Typee*.

And I remembered from a trip to Micronesia that the natives would sometimes fetch large, possibly sacred, rocks from other islands

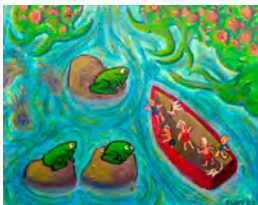
260. Cyberpunk Forever



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. August, 2023

I wanted to do a painting similar to #241 *Math*, but with shapes that aren't symbols like in *Math*, and which aren't cartoons like in #229 *Arf's Dream*. A painting like this is an exercise in balancing the forms, hues, sizes, and values of brightness. It took me a long time, with multiple revisions. I needed to stay continually open to revising major parts of it. By the end I was glad I was done, but it was worth it. I find the work pleasing to look at. A flag to celebrate my way of seeing things: *Cyberpunk Forever*.

261. Little People



Acrylic, 30" x 24" canvas. September, 2023

I was planning to make a painting based on a photo of the sky reflected in Los Gatos creek. But that seemed a little dull, so I put some frogs on the rocks. And then I felt the painting needed more action, so I added a little boat with little people in it. Also some squid or cuttlefish under the water. The people are my family, including Sylvia, plus our departed dog Arf, and Isabel's gone dog Rivers. Like a happy kids book, in a way, but a little scary.

262. Online Dating



Acrylic, 30" x 24" canvas. October, 2023

Once again, this is what you might call a Rorschach painting. I use my old disposable paper palette like a stamp, putting patterns on the new canvas. And then I paint what I see. That green thing in the middle was the first to appear, and I thought of the grill of a particular kind of car, the 1956 Edsel.

So the initial title for the painting was *Wrecked Edsel*. I added a tire, a gearshift knob, some kind of controller box, plus a couple of headlights which, in the end, look more like flowers. Plus a guitar—perhaps it was in the back And a Rudy-standard the blob with an eye. An alternate interpretation came to me: *Online Dating*. I had been trying, with little pleasure or success, to find a woman that way. And it occurred to me that my messy, disorganized image symbolized, in some way, e-dating. Not that the process fails for everyone. Note here that the candidates group into four pairs!

263. Moulin Rouge



Acrylic, 24" x 30" canvas. October, 2023

The title comes from an 1891 Toulouse Lautrec poster for the famed Paris night spot. The poster featured the two famed dancers, Valentin le Désossé and La Goulou, meaning Valentin the Boneless and The Glutton. I've always loved the man's profile and gestures, and I wanted to paint him. To make my image fresh, I replaced the can-can dancer with a big lobster, who's anatomically incorrect, but is definitely getting it on.

264. Kiss Me



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. November, 2023

The title was the last thing I came up with...after I noticed the shapes on the right and the left. This is one of those paintings I made up as I went along, just playing with shapes and colors, and getting the globs to dance around together. Over time I've gotten used to this method...changing shapes and colors, and sometimes even painting things out. Whatever the Muse says.

265. Riding the Flat Cows



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. November, 2023

In 2013 I painted *160: Flat Cow*, showing a squashed-flat flying cow that appears in my novel *Million Mile Road Trip*. The flat cows amuse me, so I painted a couple more of them here, adding a spacefarer couple (Sylvia and me) and three odd critters (not our children). I call the purple ones “Skinks,” after the name of a certain type of lizard, and also because it’s a creepy word. And it’s always fun to have a planet in the background. I this image for my 2023 Christmas e-card. And what’s going on in this scene? Who knows. Oh, and I’m thinking those warped little rectangle are teleportation portals..

266. Farmers Market



Acrylic, 40" x 30" canvas. November, 2023

I kept thinking about those Skinks and their teleportation portals. I formed the notion that the Skinks might be trading or shopping at a farmers market here. What would they want? Perhaps fresh fruit and vegetables, which are among the most unique treasures that a planet has to offer. To liven things up I added two more alien races that you might call Happies and Spikes. The aliens are emerging from an underground portal system, with volcano-like exits. I like the colors and the crowded feel of this one—perhaps a bit like a scene from my beloved Bruegel.