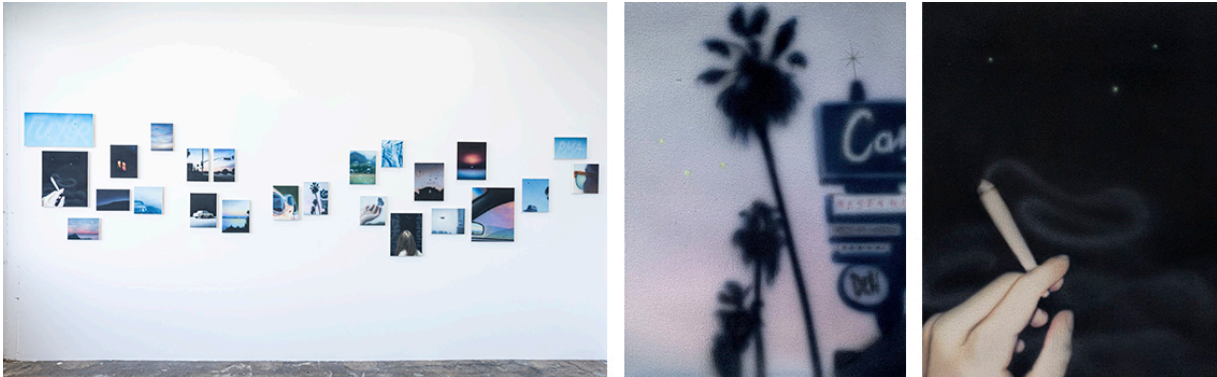


Art Now L.A.
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Aryo Toh Djojo
Transmission
Capturing a Moment Both Familiar and Foreign

Wilding Cran Gallery
January 9 - 30, 2021

by Jody Zellen



Aryo Toh Djojo's quasi-narrative sequence of paintings are hung in clusters that extend across two adjacent gallery walls and suggest a science fiction film. Each modest sized acrylic includes a UFO — either as the main subject of the work, or as a subtle, sometimes fuzzy dot near the distant horizon. It is hard not to read the works in relation to the pandemic, as well as the political climate in the U.S. today. The first image, *Suck at pulling out* (all works 2020) depicts the word “fucker” as if written in the sky with jet fumes, juxtaposed with two small blurry dots ringed by a thin dark red line. Below this painting is *Contact High*, an image of a hand holding a lit joint or cigarette whose smoke gracefully billows into the night sky where there are three glowing green-yellow spots. Fragmented paintings of Los Angeles exteriors and interiors follow. Toh Djojo never reveals too much and his airbrushed technique gives the paintings a dream-like quality. He states: “*To most people UFOs are exactly what you see in the media: malevolent, mind-controlling invaders who are trying to take over the planet. However, I’d like to believe they are benevolent vehicles to help us transcend to a higher state of consciousness. Hopefully, my handling of the paint adds to that experience.*”

The paintings reference the expansive vistas and vantage points endemic to Los Angeles that are often represented in films and capture the ambience of silhouetted palms, sunsets, vintage cars and reflective sunglasses. At first glance, the paintings are straightforward snapshots and impressions, until the UFOs are spotted. *On the one hand* is a painting of a lit room at night. A lone figure is seen by the window. While it is hard to discern where the building ends and the night sky begins, the glow of the tiny spaceship in the top right corner of the work suggests a supernatural light source. In *Just Pass Supreme* four towering palms share the space with the art deco sign for Canter’s Deli — a quintessential L.A. landmark — and three ambiguous light green dots. *Heavy Petting* is a painting of an outstretched hand with a butterfly resting on the middle finger. The subtle palette of light grays almost masks the small UFO in the upper half of the image.

While in most of the paintings the UFO is rendered as a far-off, distant dot or sequence of dots floating high in the sky, Toh Djojo also includes larger and (perhaps) more threatening depictions of flying saucers as in *Adult Entertainment* and *Channel 99*. The largest and most realistically rendered painting in the exhibition, *Two in the pink, One in the stink*, is a drone or satellite surveillance image focused on a black spot in the landscape. While the textual information is incomplete, the image clearly suggests a foreign presence.

Toh Djojo's paintings are seductive and intimate. They perfectly capture a moment that is at once familiar and completely foreign. For Toh Djojo, the UFOs represent a way to move beyond, to transcend, and to project a different present. Together, the painted fragments — both expansive, as well as cropped compositions — feel like jump-cuts or quick edits in a long trajectory and disjointed narrative about Los Angeles that exists in the space between what is real and what is imagined.

<https://artnowla.com/2021/01/23/aryo-toh-djojo-transmission/>