

MARTY SCHNAPF @ MaRS GALLERY Jan.
9–Feb. 20

Marty Schnapf (pronounced ‘snap’) is a Los Angeles-based artist with a multidisciplinary background. His upcoming solo show brings together paintings, sculpture and drawings. We spoke with him at his Boyle Heights studio.

GDT: These paintings appear to depart from the more conceptual nature of your previous work we’re familiar with. Can you tell us about their origins?

MS: I was working in Brussels with all these different organizations on a mega-project that was going to be installed over the whole city. Then the financial crisis hit, and the budget was wiped out. So I came here, wanting to make something with my hands, I wanted to look at it and say, “That’s the thing I made.” I started with figurative drawings, then did some sculptures, and then started making these trance-induced drawings. Everything just kept morphing and abstracting and becoming another thing. And so reflection and plasticity and abstraction and abjection, all of those things built up and would become part of this recent work. This show primarily consists of paintings that were started five or six years ago and then became something totally different as I returned to them in the last six months.

GDT: The raw emotion in these is really striking.

MS: Thank you. You’d think that that’s not hard to find in art, but it is. And it’s a really tricky place to walk because worse than making an unemotional work is making a sentimental work. It’s like if you walk up to somebody and say, “You should be sad right now.” That’s absurd! One, it’s not going to work, and two, it’s sort of offensive because it doesn’t appreciate that person’s intelligence and their own experience... Artwork for me is interesting when you think you’ve figured it out and then it

denies your thought. That's what makes a static thing alive: when it's causing you to shift and move to find something appealing and to find something repulsive.

GDT: We're curious about the trance-induced drawings that will also be in the show.

MS: I started those after I was lent a Sepik River canoe. It's quite big — probably 10 feet long. It's hand-carved, all dark wood. One end has a carved alligator head, and the other end looks like an alligator without being carved- an abstract end and a representational end. The alligator is the main point of worship for this tribe, and they're a pretty intense group. They create the pattern of an alligator's bite on their own skin through scarring. In this way, they are consumed by and become one with the alligator spirit. I started feeling like this canoe exists as a sort of spiritual conduit. So in communion with the canoe, I decided to open up, release a certain amount of judgment and essentially release authorship. What I was trying to do was to set up enough parameters that I could move without having to think about what I was going to do next. All of the drawings are on the same size paper, they all have to be finished in one sitting, and they all allow some preternatural visage to appear. I would put on music and play it on repeat. That's the music-induced aspect of the trance. Then I'd sit down with the board and the paper and work feverishly — too fast to think, really. What ended up happening is [stepping back], I noticed categories. Some look like saints, some like monsters, some like superheroes, some like models, some like aliens, some like gods. I realised these typologies are not that dissimilar. They all represent something that is both superhuman and subhuman- something just beyond reach.