

No Art Here

Jul 12 — Oct 27, 2024 | Hangaram Art Museum, Seoul Art Center,
Seoul, South Korea

After exhibitions in Tokyo, Vancouver, and his hometown of Malaga, Spain, renowned Spanish artist Javier Calleja brings a comprehensive overview of his recent developments to the Seoul Arts Center. Titled *NO ART HERE*, the exhibition will open on July 11th, 2024, featuring approximately ten new canvases and drawings alongside over 100 iconic works spanning Calleja's career, including canvases, drawings, sculptures, and editions. Many of these pieces will be making their debut in South Korea. This statement, eponymous with his milestone NYC solo debut in 2015, holds particular significance for the Malagan artist, whose early work was often overlooked.

From experimenting with pictorial and textual elements to shifting scales, employing different mediums, forms, and formats or playing with ways of presenting the work, Calleja frequently challenged every convention set by traditional art. As a direct and honest manifestation of his quirky, vivacious, yet poetic and empathetic spirit, these works transformed his observations, concerns, critiques, and thoughts into rigorously simplified, poetic creations. Varying in scale, composition, and medium, his early drawings, paintings, and sculptures stemmed from the same emotive place, employed the same thought process, and were infused with the same attitude as his archetypal figure-based works today. 'Simple but not easy' has been Calleja's motto since the early days, urging him to synthesize his ideas into concise punchlines. This elusive and inherently contradictory paradigm demands ongoing reinvention and reevaluation of previously established concepts. And so, it was the moment when the artist merged the symbol of back then frequently used placards with the hand of the new characters he was developing that set his practice on the course we know today. Forging the way for many works through which his protagonists communicate with the world they're facing, *NO ART HERE*, was also the main idea of one of his earliest large-scale sculptural installations (No Art Here, 2019). Starring a carefree protagonist who transcends the limitations of architecture and physics, the logic-defying piece solidified the position of these characters in his oeuvre. Sprinkled with a pinch of irresistible self-deprecating humor, the statement itself, as well as the general attitude around it, became an essential part of Calleja's artistic vocabulary.

Presenting the work in a somewhat more intimate setting, with different periods or bodies of works distributed throughout many of the venue's rooms, gave the artist a different viewing of his oeuvre. The desire for a more direct and perhaps slower engagement with the artwork prompted the artist to reevaluate his practice from a new angle. As a result of this, for this particular exhibition, Calleja decided to revisit his small-scale portraits on paper, which were last showcased at his Hong Kong debut in 2017. Done with watercolor and charcoal, their comeback exemplifies the artist's ever-present urge to search for the unknown and discover new facets of his practice.

Whether through sketchbook-like drawings, meticulously rendered canvases, sculptures of various scales and mediums, or unexpected forms of collaboration with other creative minds, *NO ART HERE*, takes us on a journey through Calleja's unorthodox and dynamic practice while reflecting on the contemporary world with sincerity, bluntness, and innocence of a genuinely free spirit.