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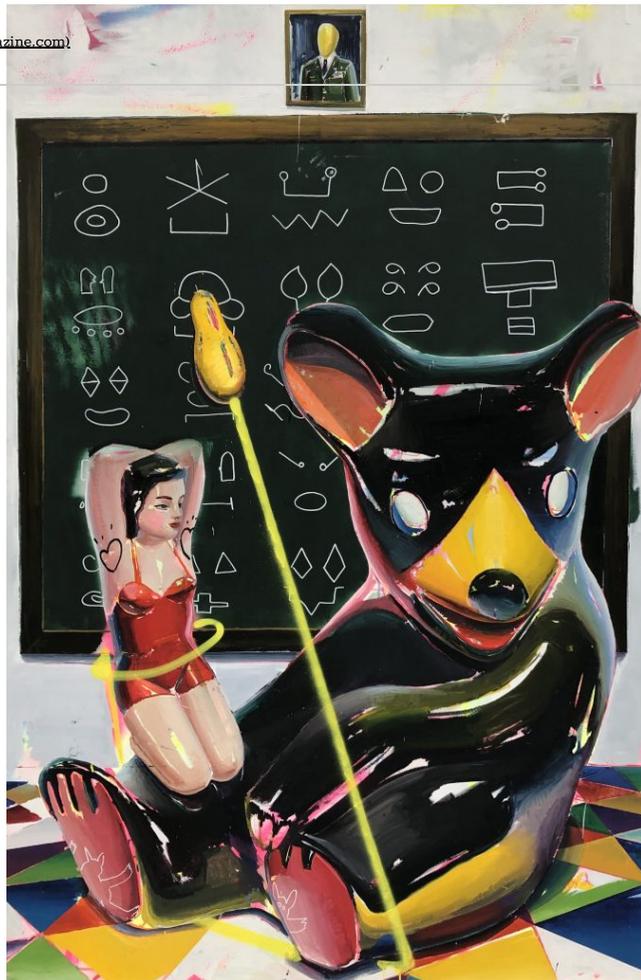
A giant peanut with a blue face and red lips resides as a deity over a vibrant world of cartoon-like creatures.



Ana Barriga *Tiempos Salvajes (Wild Times)*, 2019, Oil, enamel and spray on canvas (225 x 150 cm/ 88 5/8 x 59 1/8 in)

A giant peanut with a blue face and red lips resides as a deity over a vibrant world of cartoon-like creatures. This is Mani, the fictional civilisation created by Spanish artist Ana Barriga in which society centres around the peanut. For her solo show at Kristin Hjellegjerde's gallery in London Bridge, the artist presents a new series of imaginative paintings that visualise everyday life in the peanut community. Through these surreal scenarios, Barriga pokes fun at real-life conventions, offering the viewer the opportunity to both laugh at and question the foundations on which civilizations are built.

Barriga's practice is intrinsically playful and imaginative. She describes herself as working in 'a place shared by artists and children' referring both to her use of toys and decorative objects as source materials, and also to her creative process in which she paints, breaks, mutilates and reassembles as a means of liberating her imagination and the materials she's working with. For this latest series, the artist collected objects from flea markets to create a kind of curated archive of residual popular culture. 'These markets operate as a point of drainage for the city,' commented Barriga. 'Although the objects do not directly belong to London, the city makes them their own by filtering and classifying them into a diverse kind of ecosystem.'



Ana Barriga Dame de tu Mani, 2019. Oil, enamel, marker and spray on canvas (195 x 130 cm/ 76 3/4 x 51 1/8 in)

Instead of attempting to find some kind of cultural coherence or understanding through a conventional documentary method, Barriga has done away with 'real-life' contexts and reimagined the disparate objects as the inhabitants of fantastical society based around the concept of the peanut. In the artist's surreal visions, peanuts appear as everything from God to civilians, from monument to food. One image, for example, depicts peanuts being transported by a tiger, whilst another shows the guards of a sacred tomb eating the peanuts that they're supposed to be protecting. The scenes are purposefully humorous and playful, inviting the viewer to engage imaginatively with the work, and yet, at the same time, there are obvious parallels with the 'real world'. 'It is about interpreting the world through metaphors,' explains Barriga, 'exploring the truths hidden behind the images.' We might, for example, laugh at how this imaginary society worships such a banal object. This judgement, however, is based on our own interpretations of what sacred means, and by provoking these kinds of questions, the artist invites us to reflect on our own beliefs and cultural contradictions.

Contrasts and contradictions are at the heart of not just Barriga's imagery, but her creative processes. Whilst her artworks may be classified as paintings, her approach as a painter is unconventional in the way she combines different textures and physicalities. 'I like how opposing materials interact. Oil paint is physical, there's a grossness to it, whilst enamel feels artificial in its glossiness and spray paint references street art and vandalism,' she says. This again highlights Barriga's desire to experiment and dissolve artistic boundaries, allowing for fluid and spontaneous expression. In a similar way, the use of humour allows the artist to more freely explore historical and cultural issues. 'Play or irony are ways of approaching reality in a different and unexpected way, of breaking common patterns,' she explains. 'Unpredictable situations appeal to us because they do not conform to preset models.'

As viewers, we are seduced by the vibrant, mischievous world of Mani exactly because of its originality and otherworldliness. The surreal scenes provide the rare opportunity to dive into another person's imagination and it is through this form of escapism, that we are liberated from conventional ways of seeing so as to find new perspectives. 'Mani' is a celebration of how creativity and experimentation can inspire and motivate us to bring about change.



About Mark Westall

Mark Westall is the Founder and Editor of FAD magazine, 'A curation of the world's most interesting culture' [PLUS] Art of Conversation: A tri-annual 'no news paper'

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Privacy

from the series Eye
Body: 36
Transformative
Actions for Camera,
1963 / 2005, 18
gelatin silver prints.

Courtesy [\(https://fadmagazine.com/2020/01/07/the-first-institutional-exhibition-dedicated-to-the-legacy-of-the-pioneering-visual-experimental-artist-carolee-schneemann-since-her-death/\)](https://fadmagazine.com/2020/01/07/the-first-institutional-exhibition-dedicated-to-the-legacy-of-the-pioneering-visual-experimental-artist-carolee-schneemann-since-her-death/)
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Galerie Lelong & Co., Hales Gallery,
and P·P·O·W, New York
© Carolee Schneemann

 Don McCullin
The Road to the Somme,
France
1999
Gelatin Silver Print
Image: 37 x 54 cm
Sheet: 49.5 x 61 cm

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