

### Playing GOD by Ruzzeki Harris

*Playing GOD* features eight paintings, each painted with Ruzzeki Harris' sense of playful sarcasm. In comparison to *Gone Viral* – the artist's previous solo exhibition with the gallery – the works have taken on a much darker visual tone. A majority of the paintings comprise of two colours; phthalo green and black, blended together to create a "smoky-mysterious" background, as the artist puts it. The title also references a phenomena that seems to be occurring more often than not in recent times. A piece of news or a video goes viral, netizens who are driven by anonymity are quick to explode, and they leave a comment expressing distaste. Hence, with no direct consequences to their actions, they lead themselves to believe they have the level of authority equivalent to that of a judge of law.

Quotes of religious law are scribbled in the form of capital letters and exclamation marks. Apparently, even the layman can be an expert in such a topic; so long as they are in possession of a smartphone and a social media account. To which the artist responds with *Gavel*. The title implies an object used by judges in a court of law, slamming the hammer would usually signal attention or order. Though in this case, Ruzzeki has instead painted a toy hammer of his daughter's. He reasons this by stating that the law is not being taken seriously. To add insult to injury, the word 'LAW' is spray painted in red as if to mimic graffiti and bright colours of pink, purple and blue are splattered all over depicting the comical nature with which the law is treated.

Playfulness is portrayed with a tongue-in-cheek approach in *the promise cart*. Depicting a man in a suit-and-tie riding an ice cream cart and popsicles floating about. Across the left side of the cart is what appears to be the logo of a made up company *Janji & Co*. Ruzzeki references this from the recent trend of hipster restaurants adding the words '& Co' to the names of their businesses. The front of the cart has Mr. Monopoly – previously known as Rich Uncle Pennybags – in a sprint, clasping a bag of money in one hand, the other holding on to his hat. Mr. Monopoly symbolises our money being stolen while the popsicles are a metaphor for the "sweet promises" handed out to the *rakyat*.

Two-faced people appear to be the ones making "sweet promises" the most. In *Two Face*, Ruzzeki merges a figure of a man facing two ways into one, exemplifying the confusing nature of such people. The artist explains that the crown portrays a sense of faux royalty. The man's body is seen twisting and turning, just like his words, smooth-talking to get what he desires. At the end of the day, he is nothing but a culprit.

But who really is the *King Culprit*? That would be none other than the self-proclaimed "*Raja Bomoh*" (Shaman King). "*Raja Bomoh*" first gained recognition back in 2014, in which he was ordered to perform a shamanistic ritual to assist in locating the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 (MH370). The pair of sticks that were used as "binoculars" have been changed to a pair of bananas, symbolising masculinity and the fact that he was gutsy enough to ridicule himself in front of a large public audience.

It seems evident from "*Raja Bomoh*", that just by wearing a coat – one would automatically be considered – or at least consider themselves to be superior. Such is pictured in *Dark Saint* and *Sinner*. Ruzzeki paints himself squatting in the dark with nothing but the glow of his

phone's screen lighting up his face and a coat loosely wrapping around his body. The two paintings are a mockery of netizens, who comment with a holier-than-thou attitude, on just about any post that catches their eye.

As "Saints" and "Sinners" begin to engross themselves in all their new found glory, they begin to make others feel *Oppressed*. In this painting, Ruzzeki seems to have taken the meaning of "armchair" quite literally. As the chair depicted in the painting has human arms extending from the bottom of it. Situated on top of said chair, is a snake; hinting towards a forked tongue person who would deliberately say one thing and mean another or act in a duplicitous manner.

Eventually, as one rises up this imaginary ladder of ego, *The Tinker* then comes forth. A man, who appears to be wearing nothing but a 'Taqiyah' – a cap worn by Muslims for religious purposes – is shrouded behind an Illuminati symbol, clinging to his phone. Hovering above his head is an academic cap, followed by a crown, fully rendered, unlike *Two Face*, signifying that he is the true king and lastly a halo hangs above the rest. The variety of headgear represents the amount of boastfulness that *The Tinker* has. The man is a personification of the extreme in today's ridiculous society. The insanely vast-spread amount of fake news has driven this man to paranoia; which in turn, causes him to spread rumours like wildfire about how the Freemasons' are taking over the world.

As one moves through this body of work it is apparent that there is a hierarchy present in the paintings. From the layman thinking they are the judge in *Gavel*, to the sweet talking businessmen in 'the promise cart' and the fake Shaman King in *King Culprit*, holier-than-thou attitudes in *Dark Saint* and *Sinner*, the forked-tongue snake in *Oppressed* and eventually... GOD. Ruzzeki Harris sees himself as an observer of life, and his paintings serve as a platform to record what is happening around him. *Playing GOD* references the netizens on social media, taking advantage of the anonymity it provides to demean and slander at every window of opportunity.

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