

Anikoon: Mechanical Heart

February 24 – March 9, 2025

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 27, 6-8 pm

72 Warren Street, New York NY 10007

Text | Brett Lee, Curator

Jakupsil is pleased to present *Anikoon: Mechanical Heart*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Anikoon at *On The Fringe* in New York. The exhibition features twenty new works inspired by Anikoon's frequent travels to the United States, presented alongside his acclaimed robot series. Through these unique mechanical intermediaries, Anikoon examines the multilayered identities of contemporary individuals and the tension between solidarity and alienation in our increasingly mechanized world. His robots, deliberately removed from the sleek perfection of high-tech society, appear disarmingly awkward and vulnerable, with expressions ranging from playful bewilderment to profound melancholy—reflecting the complex emotional landscape of modern life. Expanding this inquiry, Anikoon's new body of work engages with American consumer culture through the lens of childhood memory and foreign perspective, incorporating iconic brands like McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Air Jordan. Also, his experimental painterly approach, which encompasses techniques from collage to augmented reality, bridges personal narrative with universal questions about humanity while creating innovative artistic experiences.

We all wear multiple masks in life, whether through social roles, cultural affiliations, or self-constructed facades. The concept of *persona*, rooted in ancient Greek theater masks, holds a particular significance in contemporary society. Anikoon's chosen pseudonym, merging 'animation' with 'kun' (meaning 'boy' in Korean), embodies his artistic pursuit of innocence and creative authenticity. Through his distinctive robotic medium, he examines the multiple identities we carry, exploring the possibility of genuine human connection that emerges when our inner voice meets another's true self. This conceptual framework manifests in works that balance playfulness with profundity, employing robots as metaphorical vessels for human experience. His choice of robots transcends mere aesthetic preference, serving as a conceptual basis for examining identity, interaction, and the ethical dimensions of face-to-face encounters in our increasingly digital world. Through this approach, Anikoon creates a visual dialogue that resonates with contemporary discourse while maintaining a deeply personal investigation into human connection.

Anikoon's robot series originated from a chance encounter with an abandoned toy robot at a flea market in New York. Once cherished but now discarded, this robot became a poignant symbol of the impermanence inherent in both consumer goods and human emotions. This discovery transformed both the artist's identity and artistic language. Departing from the sophisticated mechanical imagery prevalent in science fiction, his robots instead embody human imperfection and vulnerability. Their expressions—playful, vacant, disconcerted, and melancholic—reflect various facets of contemporary human existence, inviting viewers to confront marginalized narratives and forgotten emotional landscapes.

The robots within his canvases carry a spectrum of emotions, precisely capturing the psychology of contemporary individuals while functioning as the masks we all wear. Through these mechanical masks, Anikoon approaches both self-identity and relationships with others as an *epiphany of the face*, visualizing the gap between external appearance and internal voice. As seen in the *Rusty Robot*, *Adult Block*, and *Heart to Heart* series, his exploration of narrative through robotic faces and gestures reveals a core element that runs throughout his work: an interplay between cartoon-like imagination and longing for innocence, coupled with the recognition that such purity remains elusive. Yet, his intention to expand our perception becomes a joyful journey of finding the child behind our masks, while the process of confronting our inner selves and others enhances our capacity for sensing and imagining others' experiences. Anikoon states that in his artistic practice, evoking emotions of beauty itself fulfills his aspiration, and his work becomes the repeated endeavor of sharing these feelings with others. As Levinas suggested, such *face-to-*

face encounters with the Other represent moments of true realization, where accepting others as they are into one's domain ultimately leads to self-realization.

Alongside his established robot series, new works engage with American pop culture and consumerism through his lens as a foreigner. Iconic brands such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Air Jordan, and Spalding basketballs function beyond commercial symbols, serving as ambivalent markers of contemporary desire and alienation. The *Spalding basketball* series resonates with the artist as a Wilson-like companion from *Cast Away*, serving as both solace for the isolated and a medium for connection. The *Candy Box* series captures childhood excitement and nostalgia through vending machine imagery while expressing the tension of chance. The colorful capsules brimming within the machines playfully reflect modern society's promised possibilities and imagined worlds. The *Star Wars* series stands as his most emblematic work, recontextualizing iconic figures like R2-D2, C-3PO, and Storm Troopers not as Hollywood heroes but as solitary figures subsumed by material culture. The *Rusty Robot* and *You are not alone* series represent inner rage or collective discontent, while figures trapped within Coca-Cola and Campbell's soup cans evoke the existential predicament of contemporary life.

Anikoon's material use is also noteworthy in this show. His diverse painterly approaches—including collage with cut canvases and magazines, shaped canvases, and uniquely ground surfaces—emphasize both materiality and temporality. His distinctive technique of grinding surfaces creates an aged copper-like texture, adding a tactile reading and physical depth while functioning as a device to excavate layered memories in both subjects and viewers. He regularly incorporates materials collected from antique markets—vintage magazines, toy robots, and everyday brand items—as primary elements in his work. These objects serve as both an archive of contemporary consumer culture and vessels for the artist's perspective. For him, the crucial artistic act lies in discovering and conveying the narratives embedded within these objects, beyond their surface meanings.

Recent formal experiments demonstrate new artistic trajectories. His expansion into augmented reality giant robot works represents a significant exploration of the intersection between cutting-edge technology and art. The implementation of a platform allowing audience interaction with augmented reality robots through mobile devices presents novel modes of engagement. Through collaborations with Samsung Mobile, LG Display, and Makku, as well as his *Secret Wall* live performance at the Cincinnati Blink Festival, he continuously broadens the horizons of artistic realization.

The exhibition crystallizes Anikoon's pursuit of authentic communication through his distinctive vision of the inner child—one capable of maintaining cheerfulness despite wounds, anger, and sorrow. Through his distinctive robotic visages, at once playful and melancholic, he maps the complex terrain of modern identity and alienation, while the encounter with the Other becomes a vehicle for genuine connection. His work transcends mere nostalgia and consolation, revealing new narratives within robots and *things* that differ from their appearances, expressing inner voices that contrast with external facades. While sharply capturing society's structural contradictions, he continuously explores new possibilities for solidarity. The result is a powerful meditation on our shared capacity for both vulnerability and resilience, where an outsider's view of American cultural iconography converges with profound questions of universal humanity in our increasingly mechanized world.

Inquiries

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McDonald's, 2024
Acrylic on canvas, 46 x 35.8in (117 x 91cm)



Candy Box series 03
Acrylic on canvas, 57.2 x 44in (145.5x112.1cm)



Air Jordan, 2024
Acrylic on canvas, 57 x 35in (145 x 89cm)



You are not alone series 01, 2024
Acrylic on canvas, 35.8 x 28.6in (91 x 72.7cm)



Adult block series "M", 2023
Acrylic on canvas, 23.2 x 23.5in (72 x 60cm)



Star Wars ep.05, 2023
Acrylic on canvas, 20.8 x 17.9in (53x45.5cm)