**WE HAVE LIFT-OFF !**

**Artist: Martin Doyle**

**2018**

**Mixed media on wooden wall. 4m by 10m.**

**3Mile Coworking Community, Carterton**

**Description of painting**

**The artwork is located on a 4m by 10m wall in a large chamber used as a coworking space.**

**The work has been executed using gloss and acrylic paint, Indian ink, pencil, biro, and marker pens. In itself, this is a very unusual range for an artwork, let alone a large mural.**

**Large figures have been painted, splitting the length of the surface into 10 clear phases/stages. There are also medium-sized figures and symbols and handwriting. In addition to this are numerous pieces of tiny handwriting and cartoon-style imagery.**

**To fully view the whole work, it’s necessary to stand well back for the large imagery and general impression; a metre or two back for the medium-sized elements; and extremely close to read the small handwritten pieces and drawings. The layout also demands walking along the front of the work, both from left to right, and also from right to left. Some of the writing is ‘back to front’, including the artist’s signature at the bottom. The majority of the painted work spreads along a central band across the length of the wall. The upper and lower sections remain substantially bare.**

**Apart from black and colour, the artist also paints white figures onto the off-white surface. This has the effect of exposing the whole off-white oblong wall as the ‘canvas’, in addition to making the (almost camouflaged) white figures stand out.**

**The artist makes use of physical elements on the wall or beside it. For example, a large glass door at one end opens against the pic, perfectly framing a large white figure. A piece of electrical wiring descending from the space above the white wall is commandeered as part of an ‘umbrella handle’ seemingly rising into the roof above. At the far left, a figure reaches helplessly towards a high, inaccessible power point. An actual pot plant with frond-like leaves touches a painted figure with green frond-like hair.**

**The key large figures comprise:**

1. **A small man in a grey lab coat.**
2. **A large sublime white head with penetrating eyes and fulsome red lips.**
3. **A woman in a blue dress holding an umbrella handle that spurts water like a fountain.**
4. **A man dying of thirst sticking his tongue out to catch water from the umbrella-fountain.**
5. **A building that is made up of the people who occupy it (large stylised heads)**
6. **A kind of ‘human pyramid’ of a naked human, a blue dog, and an Einstein-like master of ceremonies holding an umbrella handle that rises endlessly up into the dark upper spaces of the chamber. His other hand has a dripping arrow pointing towards a red hoop.**
7. **A red hoop, apparently moving, and blaring white within.**
8. **A flying figure with two large yellow banana ‘wings’ for arms. The bananas are also giant smiles highlighted by black dot-like ‘eyes’ and ‘nostrils’ above.**
9. **Various white angels in flight and a colossal white standing figure by the door with its arm raised in acknowledgement of either the banana-flier or the whole artwork.**
10. **The artist’s signature just above the skirting board at the bottom of the wall, along with the date of completion. Both are written backwards in dripping black paint.**

**ARTIST’S STATEMENT**

**My painting WE HAVE LIFT-OFF! is about the wonderful complexity, unpredictability, challenge, endeavour, resourcefulness, cooperativeness, and humour [Humour if vital] of human life. The whole artwork is an image of mental creativity, very messy in itself in a very messy world. Other natural processes of change are indicated in the mural eg evolution of fish and other morphing figures. Despite the huge amount of imagery and verbiage on display, I have tried to create a sense of a theatrical orchestration of elements. It’s a coarse circus of ambition and action, purportedly culminating in a victorious final lift-off on wings of smiling bananas. What a way to end! But the painting effectively asks, “Is it the end? Or is everything we’ve been through, all that’s shown, just the beginning?”**

**That’s why the title WE HAVE LIFT-OFF! is very appropriate – like a space rocket blasting off, it’s both a moment of success and also just the beginning of an as-yet unknown flight ahead. It’s also tongue-in-cheek. Is ‘Bananas’ just dreaming [like those people who jump off the wharf in Wellington trying to fly with homemade wings?] If it’s just a dream, what a dream… It comes with a strong sense of deliverance, escape, freedom at last. And if the future has already done this, then such freedom is available now (to us all). It has a true sense of don’t just dream it, do it. Don’t wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow is here now. It looks a bit too good to be true. And the Italian statement with its full-stop is surely a joke. It may in fact be saying to us, ‘Don’t be an Icarus-like dreamer searching for a non-existent tomorrow. Turn back and rethink the world you actually inhabit.’**

**My giant white figure at the end could be saying, “Well done! You’ve succeeded!” or even be pointing back to the real world and saying, “Turn around and go back. Think again.” Perhaps all of this – the striving to launch and the flight itself – exist in the one space (as here on the wall).**

**If we start from the helpless man in a grey coat at the far left and end with ‘Bananas’ far right, we move from incapacity to a state of exhilarating empowerment.**

**ITALIAN STATEMENT AT END**

**The Italian words “Il futuro è passato qui.” are the motto of La Sapienza university at Rome (founded in 1303). It translates as “The future passed here.” In the context of my painting, the Happy Bananas person could represent the future. But it could also be any one of us with a smile on our face on our way into the unknown, perhaps chasing the ever elusive ‘future’. But it’s also a shock to anyone who poured all their effort into the ‘mess’ of human life to discover they still haven’t reached the glorious future they dreamed of. The future has already passed on its way to somewhere else. It might mean we should never give up, never rest on our laurels, never get too locked down in our beliefs, but always to continue developing and evolving. The “qui” [here] of the Italian statement may refer to the endless, restless evolution and constant re-examination shown in the artwork.**

**The Italian statement also raises the idea that the future is to be found within [or originates in] the glorious quagmire of language and imagery shown. Language, science, imagination and human effort possibly contain and demonstrate the future NOW. However, maybe we were too distracted by the nitty-gritty to even notice ‘the future’ in our midst, or when it went by? Another aspect of the future is its unknowableness and uncertainty. That’s why the Italian statement is so funny – it’s claiming to recognise the future and can definitively assert that it passed through here [with a full-stop at the end, to boot].**

**HOOP**

**The big red hoop is so white within that it’s like a hole in the wall. It’s pure, clear, perfect. It is ‘something else’ other than being part of a human pyramid or lost in the mess of existence. Perhaps the hoop represents a world that’s too perfect, too unrealistic, a false dream. The blue dog wonders if it should jump through it. What would be the implications of that?**

**PYRAMID**

**The thankless task of being the solid base of the human pyramid falls to an individual with a long straight back, sweating like a pig with his/her eyes riveted to the ground. Even so, someone has written jokingly [mercilessly] “DON’T LOOK DOWN!” He/She replies, “Where else am I supposed to look?” Good question. This individual is too preoccupied supporting Dog-face and Einstein to even think of leaping through some ‘final hoop’.**

**The attitude we adopt towards all challenges and all life is perhaps what it’s all about. The Laughing Bananas person at the end is deliriously, triumphantly happy and free (and moving). If anything, that’s what the painting is all about. Moving not moribund.**

**PAINTING STYLE**

**Throughout, there are images of ‘lightness of mind’ (eg the additional/repositioned plugs at the start [something an electrician actually chose to do in deference to my little man in a grey lab coat], the umbrella that’s a fountain for thirsty people, the human pyramid, the ballerina buried in the woman’s face). Even the way the painting has been executed in a rough, coarse, carefree way suggests breaking free from the expected, the known, the predictable. To do this requires making the choice to respond to what’s in front of you and taking your lead from immediate events on the canvas (or in your own head). In this regard, the key stylistic element of this artwork is a relaxed, casual, personal, hand-drawn, handwritten approach. It’s not trying to be grandiose, formal, professional, usual. There’s a sense of reading someone’s higgledy-piggledy notebook. The comments written are personal, intimate observations or memories. Most people glance at art but they don’t look at art. That’s partly why I was keen to utilise tiny handwriting in this artwork. It will only be seen by those who give respect, take the time.**

**But the image is alive, too, in its own way. Paint literally drips from many figures. Flawed but sensuous, living the moment we’re in now.**

**All of the infinite layers of culture and detail that imbue us add up to nothing unless we can ‘let our hair down’ and live, emote, react, laugh. Do anything but don’t, as the French say, forget to live. But above all else, we must be prepared to look at things differently. Ambiguous images, buried figures, and backward alphabets are meant to provoke the viewer to be open to new perspectives, new possibilities. It’s as if we are called to abandon all we’ve been told and make a leap of faith into a state of ‘happy bananas’. Of course, we don’t have to, but if we do, what a way to go… Life is saying to us, “Go, you good thing!” A huge clear sky offers the perfect canvas for new ideas.**

**I have written the alphabet and numerals backward to draw attention their power and mystery and infinite possibilities. In their own humble ways, these simple symbols have created human culture and are an eye into tomorrow. They are tools by which we will invent tomorrow. But it’s as if we have to look at even the alphabet again in a new way. That’s why I have written a number of statements backwards, and even my own signature on the painting.**

**The artwork appears messy. It’s a spontaneous, impulsive, whimsical work. It looks as if it’s been put together erratically, perhaps by a large number of people, and none of it trying to look tidy, or nice, or refined. At all stages, I tried to respond positively to unexpected developments eg paint that dripped or trickled, dyes that ran.**

**The big white figure is saying, “Go back. Trust yourself. Go bananas. Think again.”**