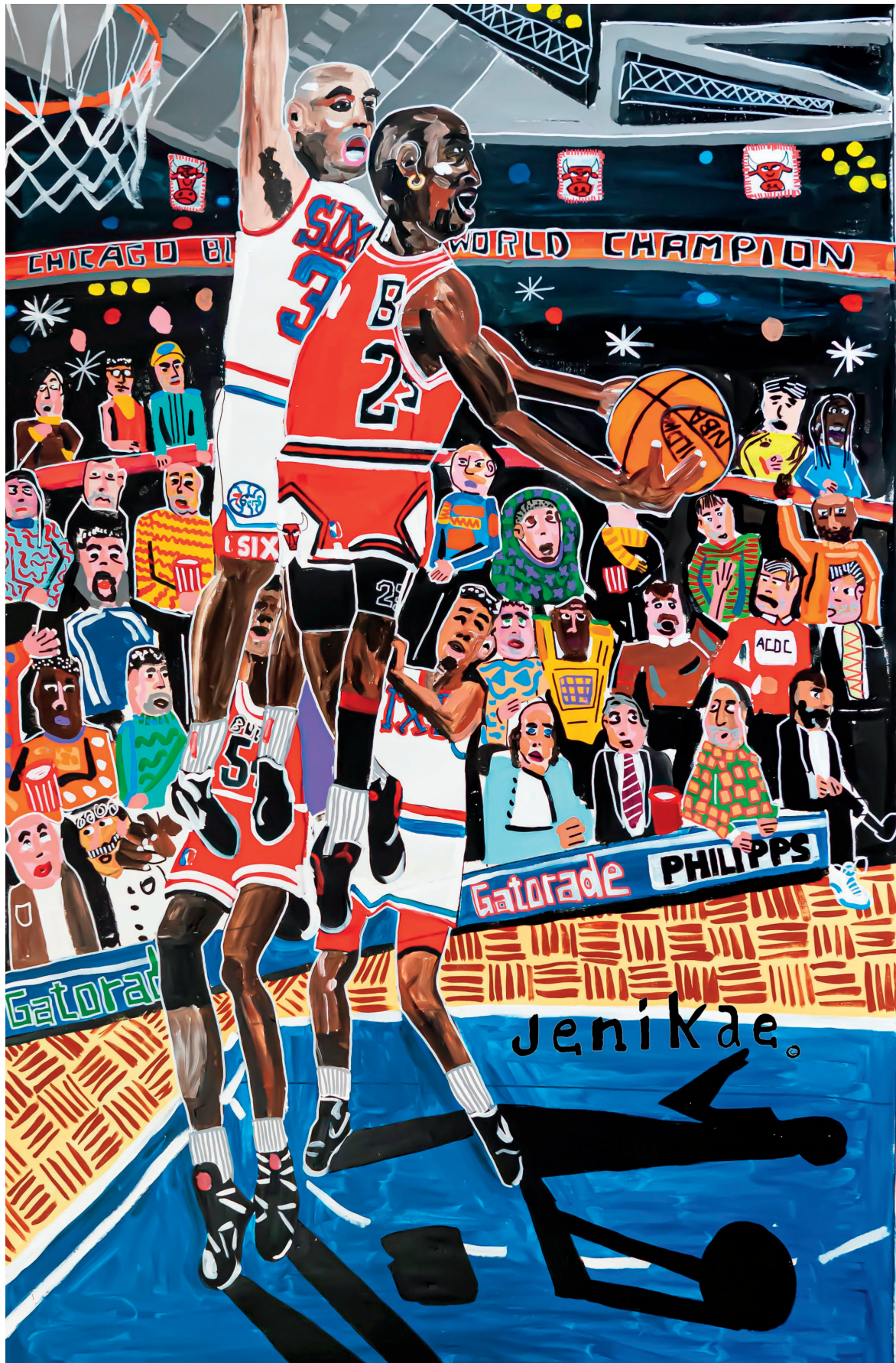


THE AMERICAN DREAM, DEFERRED

FILIPP JENIKÄE



20TH - 27TH APRIL
GALERIE XV
15 QUAI VOLTAIRE 75005, PARIS

FOREWORD

'The American Dream, Deferred', is a solo exhibition by German artist Filipp Jenikäe, curated by Chantel Akworkor Thompson. An ex-basketballer, Jenikäe gave up his dream of playing in The NBA to pursue a career in painting. One dream deferred and another actualised, his naïve approach to painting and somewhat child-like execution exudes a level of fantasy that evokes nostalgia in his spectators, taking us back in time when dreaming provided us with a portal to another world.

The world explored in this collection is The United States of America, or more specifically, the America of the late 80s through to the 90s when Jenikäe was a young kid seeing Whitney Houston top the charts and Michael 'Air' Jordan soar through the sky. Like the rest of the world lured by Coca-Cola adverts and Palm Spring holidays, America was the destination of his dreams, and chasing The American Dream was the sport of his nighttime.

Older and somewhat wiser to the realities of living in the global epicentre of capitalism, Jenikäe revisits the dreams he once had and later deferred. Taking reference from Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, whose 'A Dream Deferred' poem hypothesised on what happens to a dream unrealised, Jenikäe's paintings present an opportunity for one to reflect on a time of more hope and optimism when the glory of Lady Liberty seemed but one sleep away.

The American Dream, Deferred captures the magic of America that we consumed through our TV screens as children binging on countless hours of sitcoms and music videos. It captures the desires of not only a young boy but also those of entire nations. As well as this, it captures the vibrancy and creativity of marginalised communities, whose exceptional talents became the hallmarks of America's definitive and most celebrated cultures.

The America presented is an America for all, but does this America still exist? And is the American dream still accessible? The author of a book with a similar title, Senator Cory Booker, stated that 'the American dream isn't real for anyone unless it's within reach of everyone.' With this in mind, Jenikäe hopes that through this collection of works, not only are you transported back to the dreams of your childhood, but you are also able to reflect on the current reality of the world as it is today.

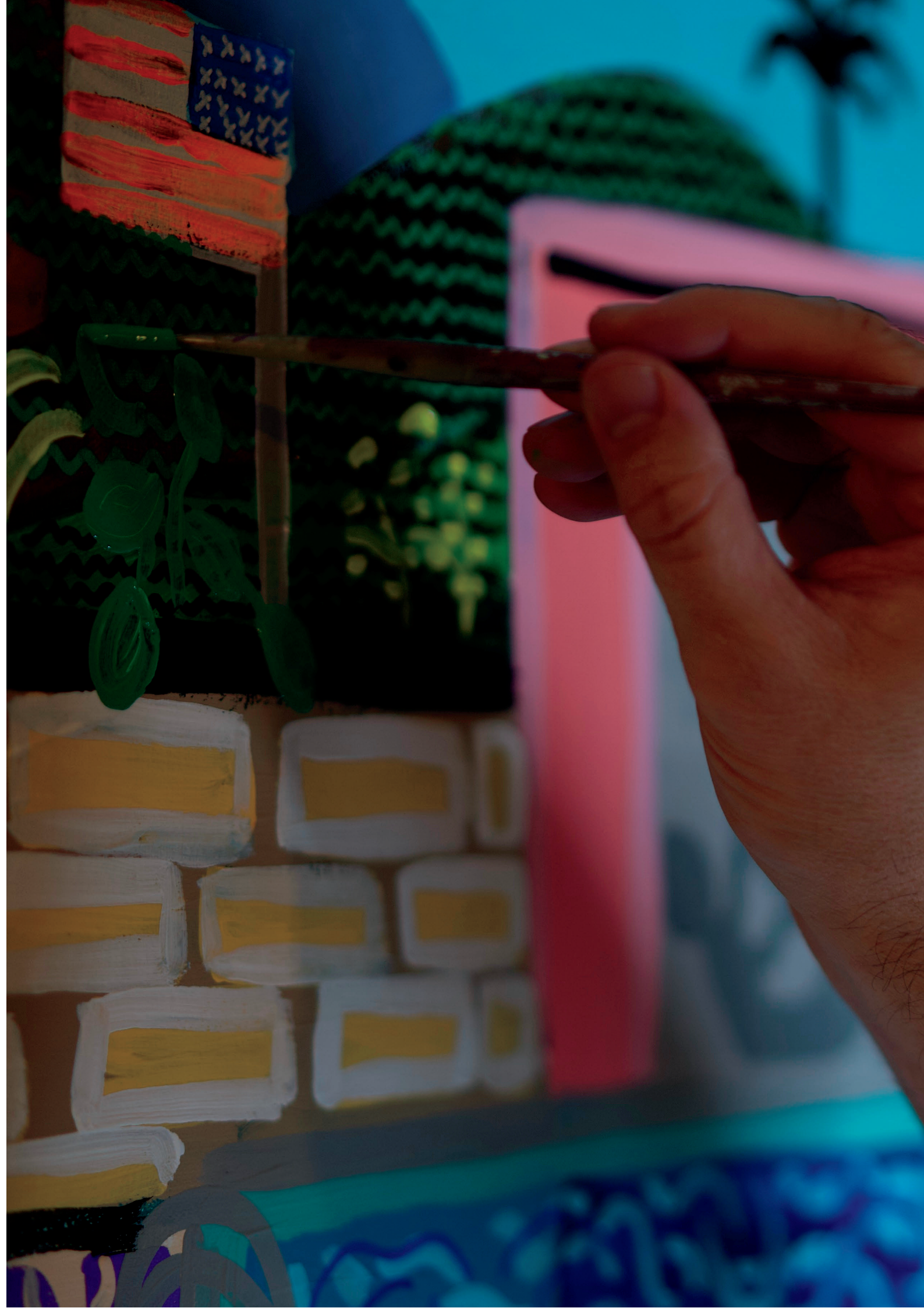


BIOGRAPHY

Filipp Jenikäe (b. 1987) is a German artist working and living between Münster Germany and New York. His access to the art world was through his mother who was an art teacher. A family of art lovers, his sister studied history of arts, but despite this, Jenikäe has no formal training in art. He studied Law and later political science at the UAB Barcelona, before studying business administration in the Netherlands. It was later in his life when he discovered his passion for art, following the end of his dream to play professional basketball due to injuries. At the time he was living in Berlin, which was a perfect environment for his creative pursuits. Painting mainly with acrylics on canvas his paintings document popular culture including the achievements of sportsmen and women, as well as musicians. His fascination with the nuances of the societies he has lived within also influence his paintings of landscapes and vibrant social scenes in a variety of location across popular cities including nightclubs, bars and backyards. His main influences include: Henry Taylor, Jonas Wood, Nina Chanel Abney, Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, George Grosz, David Hockney, and Faith Ringgold and references from their work are evident in his paintings.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022,	Kunstauktion, Münster School of Design, Münster, Germany
2022,	Collective Dreams in the Urban Experience, Galerie SLP, Berlin, German



FILIPP JENIKÄE - **THE AMERICAN DREAM, DEFERRED**

CURATORIAL ESSAY BY CHANTEL AKWORKOR THOMPSON

When we speak of dreams, what does one mean? If we were to look in a dictionary, be it The Oxford, The Cambridge, or even Google, they would define a dream as 'a series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep.' or 'a cherished aspiration, ambition, or ideal.'

Throughout American history, notable figures have discussed dreams -some, in the context of the politics of the country, most notably Martin Luther King Jr, who famously declared "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. "

And some in a more philosophical sense, like Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes who mused: What happens to a dream deferred?

In his new body of work, 'The American Dream, Deferred', German-born painter Filipp Jenikäe uses painting to explore a dream he once chased, a career playing basketball in America. Focussing on his early childhood memories of the nation-state, he explores how memory preserves the once idealistic visions of a child against the background of the harsh reality of the once sought-after dream.

Painting in a style reminiscent of the New York illustrators and cartoonists of the late 80s and 90s, with clear influences from the work of Faith Ringgold, Henry Taylor, and David Hockney, Jenikae's work transports audiences back in time to scenes in the most bustling and vibrant landscapes across America. The absence of perspective in his paintings and pure narrative approach to colours and lines, as intentional artistic choices, give his work a somewhat child-like feel, which serves to inform the spectator of how his dream has become somewhat a figment of his imagination. The flattened images - symbols of the dream frozen in time - are what happened to Jenikae's dream, now deferred.

'The American Dream, Deferred', features thirteen paintings, which range from classic Hockney-esque landscapes, including a night scene at Mauri Beach, San Francisco, and a Palm Springs pool party -the quintessential holiday destinations of the rich and famous. As well as iconic moments in popular culture, with 'A Song of Hope' immortalising Whitney Houston's 1991 Super Bowl performance. In addition to this, there is a collection of paintings which pay homage to the great athlete Michael 'Air' Jordan' whose career for a young Jenikäe was the epitome of The American Dream.

These images, what Jaap Kooijman, author of Fabricating the Absolute Fake, would refer to as 'an imagined America', represent 'an America that is based on the mass-mediated images of Hollywood cinema, television programs, advertisements, and pop music.' (Kooijman, 12). They are the America of Jenake's childhood dreams—the ideas and images borrowed from popular culture - a construct as much as the paintings themselves.

It is thus in no way coincidental that these paintings are loaded with the symbols of America: The Stars and Stripes of the flag, The Golden Gates of San Francisco and the palm trees of Los Angeles. Such symbols contribute heavily to the myth of America - the American Dream, which was even more popularly circulated during the late 80s into the 90s through to the 00s when these images were being conceived in the young mind of Jenikäe becoming firmly etched into his memory creating the schematic diagram of America.

Growing up in the 90s, seeing out his teenage years in the 00s, basketball was Jenikäe's aspiration. A professional career played out in The USA was all he dreamed about. Legendary players just as Larry Bird and Michael 'Air' Jordan, undeniably the most highly esteemed basketballer, made this dream seem like a reality. This dream, now deferred, features heavily in this new series of works, and there are four paintings honouring the legend of American NBA stars.

A recurring figure in his paintings is Michael Jordan. Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1963, he amassed a level of success like none other, playing professional basketball for the Chicago Bulls. For many, he was synonymous with The American Dream. As stated by Michael Eric Dyson, 'he has attained unparalleled cultural status because of his extraordinary physical gifts, his marketing as an icon of race-transcending American athletic and moral excellence and his mastery of a sport which has become the metaphoric centre of black cultural imagination.' At a time in America when depictions of African Americans were in no way favourable, let alone aspirational, Jordan became a beacon of hope for all, not just African-Americans or even just Americans. His reach was global and didn't discriminate; males and females, old and young, of all cultural backgrounds, loved him and the possibility his career symbolized.

Often being nicknamed in ways that suggested 'herculean cultural heroism' (Dyson), 'the new DiMaggio' (Boers, 1990: 30), or 'basketball's high priest (Bradley, 1991-2: 60) had become somewhat like a 'superhuman', although still very much relatable and personable. Through his depictions of Jordan, Jenikäe is not just reminiscing on his past aspirations and the joy that watching his favourite player float in the air bought him, but he is also conjuring up in us a sense of the hope of endless possibilities. These paintings emanate joy and aspiration whilst lighting the internal fire needed to believe wholeheartedly in one's dreams. Thus Jenikäe's painting 'Sky is the Limit' is a visual ode to how Jordan's aura erased all limitations one could place upon themselves.

Another celebrity whose extraordinary skill and unwavering patriotism in the public eye has aligned them nicely with 'The American Dream' is Whitney Houston. Jenikae's painting 'A Song of Hope' captures the iconic moment when she performed the national anthem in 1991 at the Superbowl. The rousing rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" became a symbol of American unity and patriotism. Having been broadcast live on television only ten days after the official beginning of Operation Desert Storm, it has been argued that this performance turned the SuperBowl into a pep rally to cheer on the American army in its war against Iraq. The inclusion of this moment within Jenikäe's collection, as well as serving as a very 'American' depiction, is to interrogate further the power of celebrity and the ways in which popular culture sometimes fails to be separated from the political agenda of America.

Seeing this image, those who lived it will remember the words spoken by the singer following the flawless performance, and for those who didn't, a Youtube search would enlighten them.

'And it was hope, we needed hope, you know, to bring our babies home and that's what it was about for me, that's what I felt when I sang that song, and the overwhelming love coming out of the stands was incredible.'

Using the plural personal pronouns "we" and "our" she refers to her performance as a collective experience that America needed during the trying time they were facing. As Kooijman points out, this exceptional performance, from one of America's sweethearts and best vocal talents, creates an atmosphere of 'overwhelming love' inextricably alleviating the severity of America's participation in the first Gulf War, allowing it to 'remain unquestioned.' As a child, would this have been a truth Jenikäe was privy to? Unlikely. By bringing this moment back into our consciousness, we are forced to re-examine our relationship with the country, or, with nostalgia guiding, we can simply choose to just enjoy the song of hope.

Other than celebrity culture, Jenikäe uses lively landscapes and lifestyle scenes to interrogate further 'The American Dream'. China Town, like Little Italy, Jamaica and Little Haiti, are symbols of the diversity of America and the idea of inclusion. The proof that the dream of equality is a reality. In American Chinese Town, Jenikäe explores the fusion of cultures in America, which Jenikäe finds fascinating. Using popular images from movies and other media outlets as references, he has been able to create what he believes is an accurate perception of the Chinatown in his mind which is easily identifiable as America but also distinctly Chinese. The way in which the city retains its national identity despite the influence of the foreign culture is what he finds most interesting, and he plans to integrate it further through a new collection of paintings. But ultimately, this painting shows how popularly disseminated images were free of the tensions that are often present in these communities, selling the dream that anyone can go to America and feel just like they are at home without the threat of having to give up their identity by assimilating. They can have both. Whether this is the reality is open to debate, but for now, to be swaddled by the dream of what it may be, seems so much sweeter.

Vibrant and widely vivid, bursting with colour and character, these paintings tell a story of hope, community, limitless possibilities, fun and unrivalled success. They are the dreams of a child, repeatedly experienced to the point they remain etched in the mind like a permanent window to a world within reach. However, as Jenikäe grew in age and gained wisdom, he locked them up in a chasm in his mind, later to materialise on a collection of canvases.

But why did he hold tight to these memories? Why not allow them to evolve in sync with his reality? For Jenikäe, the idealistic 'imagined America' of his childhood dreams sang songs of hope; and slam dunked all doubt showing that the sky was the limit. Families and friends communed around pools in their back gardens and partied with John Coltrane escaping through the speakers; and Cantonese cascaded down the walls of American brick buildings, admired and valued like the calligraphy of Chinese masters. It's a place free of racial slurs, fascist nationalism, and devastated forests. It's an America that he would be proud of, where he would be able to thrive and create a strong sense of himself.

But as Cory Booker reminds us, 'the American dream isn't real for anyone unless it's within reach of everyone.' So to the question, what happens to a dream deferred? It becomes frozen in time, flattened onto a canvas for all to admire. Nostalgia - the experience of autobiographical events triggering overwhelming positive emotions- stimulating neurons to make synaptic connections: the ultimate preservation of the euphoria that once exploded and enfolded the individual whose dream felt like a tangible reality. No longer a dream being chased, it is now one cherished in an attempt to bypass the disappointment of the reality of the dream actualised.

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A SONG OF HOPE

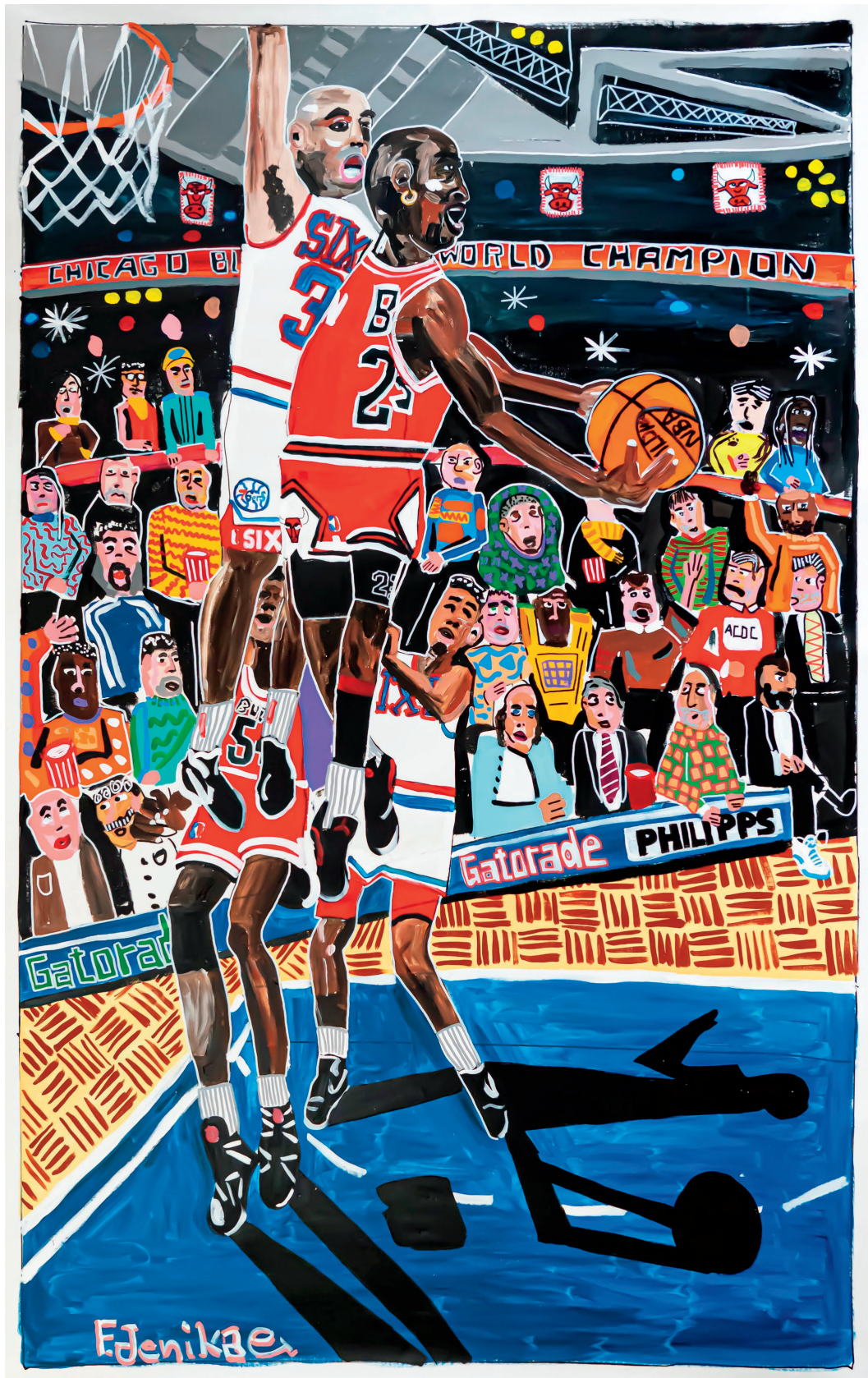
2023

Acrylic on Linen

70cm x 100cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





SKY IS THE LIMIT

2023

Acrylic on Linen

110cm x 185cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





LEGEND LARRY

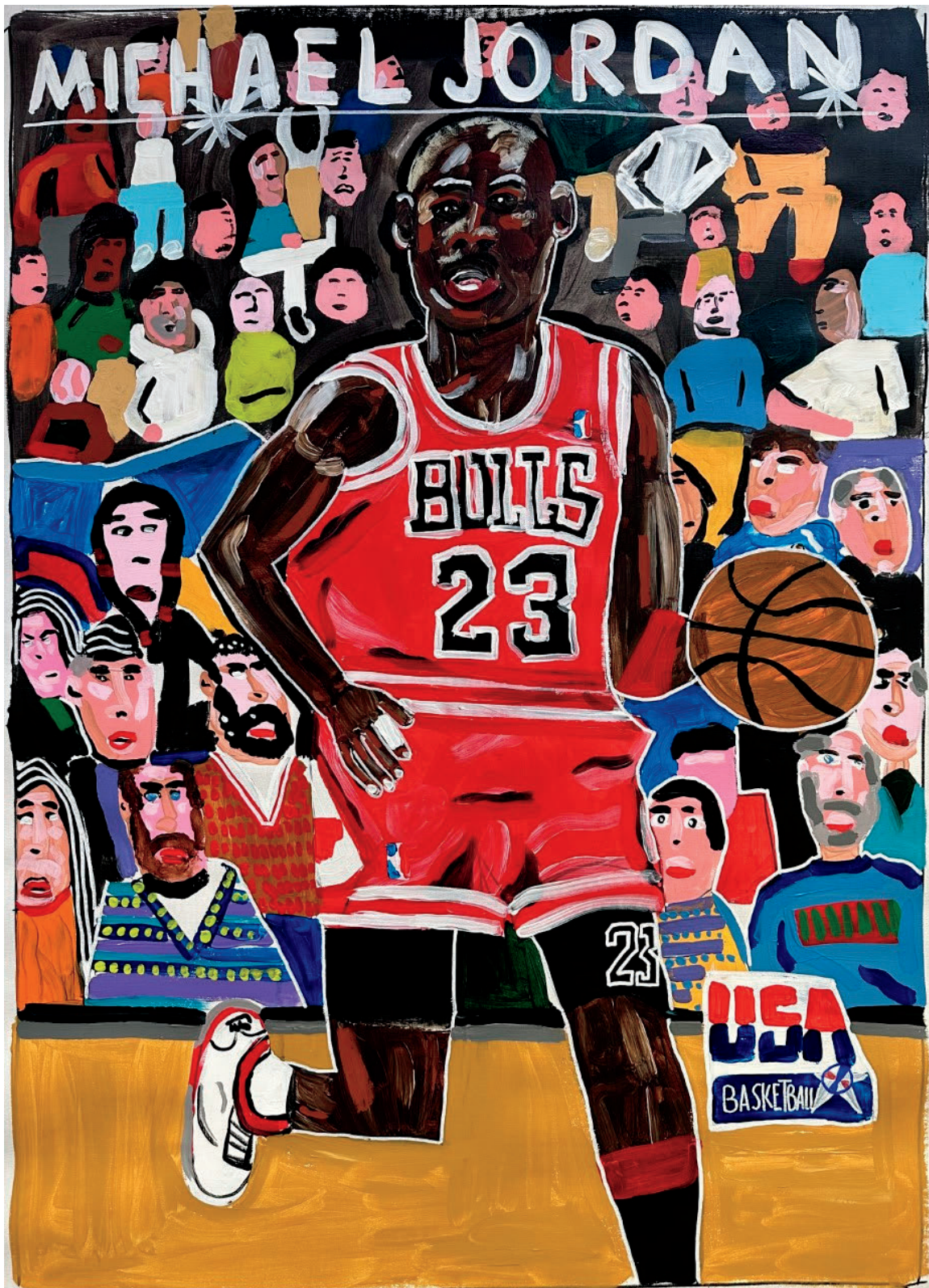
2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





AIR JORDAN

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





BIG PAT

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





AMERICA'S CHINESE TOWN

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





DOWNTOWN, NO FINER PLACE

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





HOLLYWOOD HAPPENINGS

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





PALM SPRING'S SORIETY

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 120cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





ENTER THE GOLDEN GATES

2023

Acrylic on Linen

140cm x 100cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





PICASSO'S HOCKNEY

2023

Acrylic on Linen

70cm x 100cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





MALIBU MUSINGS

2023

Acrylic on Linen

100cm x 80cm

[ENQUIRE](#)





OREGON

2023

Acrylic on Linen

80cm x 100cm

[ENQUIRE](#)



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20TH - 27TH April

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