

NEW YORK

# Joan Cornella's macabre but hopeful art is what we need right now

Being alive is hard – but it's also funny and beautiful, especially through the eyes of Joan Cornella. Meet the internet famous artist in NYC this month.

By Brandon Hardin | July 11, 2017



Despite suffering gunshot wounds, losing limbs and experiencing gruesome burns with alarming regularity, the characters in Joan Cornella's comics keep on smiling. They're both the stuff of nightmares and oddly hopeful at the same time — making the best of a bad situation.

Famous on the internet after unleashing his absurd slice-of-life sketches on Facebook five years ago, the Spanish artist is coming to New York for his first solo exhibition at Chelsea's Josée Bienvenu Gallery. The show runs July 14-30 and will feature new canvas

paintings and limited-edition illustrations, and the artist himself will drop by from time to time and sign copies of his new book, "SOT." To attend, pre-book your visit and pay \$8 at the door.

Cornellà avoids text in his vibrant work, letting his unsettling images do the heavy lifting of giving images of apparent cruelty meaning. But what pushes his art from macabre to black humor is the vein of humanity that runs through it.

Take Cornellà's cover for Wilco's "Schmilco" album, created with Stefania Lusini. It features a man grinning as he electrocutes himself to power a record player so a little girl can dance. Gruesome, yes, but accurate: Kindness requires a happy sacrifice. Without the happiness it's obligation, and without sacrifice it's selfishness.

That selfishness is visible throughout a body of work also that focuses on the very modern issue of pervasive narcissism and how we present ourselves versus how others see us: Gushing blood and missing an arm, a woman runs into a hospital not to have the wound closed, but to get a more attractive face.

In another piece, a man's phone replaces his head, which is itself perched on his selfie stick, allowing him to be the audience he is seeking in the first place. It's the final perfect, closed loop of a social system where the only self-reflection is in a mirror.

Cornellà also expertly leverages readers' expectations of the human form for laughs. A person with two heads and many abs takes a selfie – not an unthinkable occurrence in the fleshy playground Cornellà has constructed, where unusual growths are commonplace.



But no, the abs were a blanket! No, the person only had one head; a person with no arms was standing in front of them! Each panel unravels the first image until the person approaches normal — before flexing and sprouting more heads.

An uncomfortable initial impression gives way to smirks of surprise before ending in laughing bewilderment. In this, the exhibit is sure to be like his art. Go, and if you find yourself chuckling at the cartoonish horror that awaits, don't worry.

Because let's be honest: If you save someone with the Heimlich maneuver, only to have the dislodged food blind a woman on a bike, who then runs into a gardener, who bumbles into a man and shears off his head, sending it through a basketball hoop, you'd be tempted to cheer, too.

That was an impossible shot, and you're only human.