

Lydia Eliza Trail, "David Rappeneau: a metalheart," Carcy, May 2025

Carcy

ON MY NEW POST:"

ABOUT ME. LIKE AND COMMENT

"PLEASE DON'T FORGET

David Rappeneau a metalheart

Text by

Lydia Eliza Trail

The artist's identity is abstract. His known biography consists of "Born in France" and "Lives and works in France." He joined Gladstone Gallery in 2024 and has 70,400 followers on Instagram. On Tumblr, his handle is @prince_diamond, and his first book was published with American Art Catalogues last year. That is all the information known of David Rappeneau, an illustrator who works with acrylic and pen on paper to achieve his protagonists' washed-out, corpse-like skin. His illustrative style forms part of a broader cultural return to "The Gothic," characterised by a necrotic painting style; the cracked-out, zombified paintings of Catherine Mulligan or the Midwestern horror of Shelley Uckotter.

Most of his work follows a formula: one or two figures appear together in the corners of a metropolis. Often, these figures are fluid in terms of gender; one usually appears as a softer-masc, the other (slightly) more feminine. Their scale is impossible—superimposed over buildings like demiurgic club kids. Sometimes, he goes abstract. In my favourite work, the foreground is split between a provincial church and the titanic figure of a woman smoking—a chemtrail of clouds issues from her cigarette. It is unclear whether her body is intended to be architectonic and fused to the landscape, or analytically abstract, or both. Still, he is salacious: a used condom sits in the foreground.

I've followed Rappeneau, or *Mitsubishi_ujf_financial_group*, on Instagram for several years. His feed is mostly his art, sometimes punctuated by his decrying of Instagram's (now META's) algorithmic censorship. His pleas to his followers are vocal and desperate: "Please don't forget about me. Like and comment on my new post." Even if Rappeneau sometimes draws content that could be deemed explicit, they are a far cry from reality.

A vast number of Instagram pages that are unnervingly real, dedicated to women who don't exist, have overtaken Instagram. These accounts avoid META's legislation on pornography by virtue of their uncanny appearance. Not quite real enough for detection, these entities have enough proximity to the human for arousal: their breasts bouncing rhythmically on your phone screen, eyes fixed into the distance. Rappeneau's appeal, by contrast, is his stylisation of sex. He captures the *frisson* of a shared moment between the young and attractive. His sleaze, if you will, positions the viewer on the outside, wishing they could be part of his dionysian gothic universe. No AI girlfriend is beckoning you in, to scroll deeper, goon harder.

His is a vision of sensuality not quite meeting META's fetish for the artificial; it warrants you to step outside and have some good old-fashioned-sex.

In 2003, Slavoj Žižek wrote ridiculous Lacanian copy for Abercrombie & Fitch's back-to-school issue. It was superimposed over Bruce Weber's salacious images of adult models with teenage faces:

174. "The object of desire is hidden behind the thigh, but the true cause of desire is the tattooed cross on the arm."

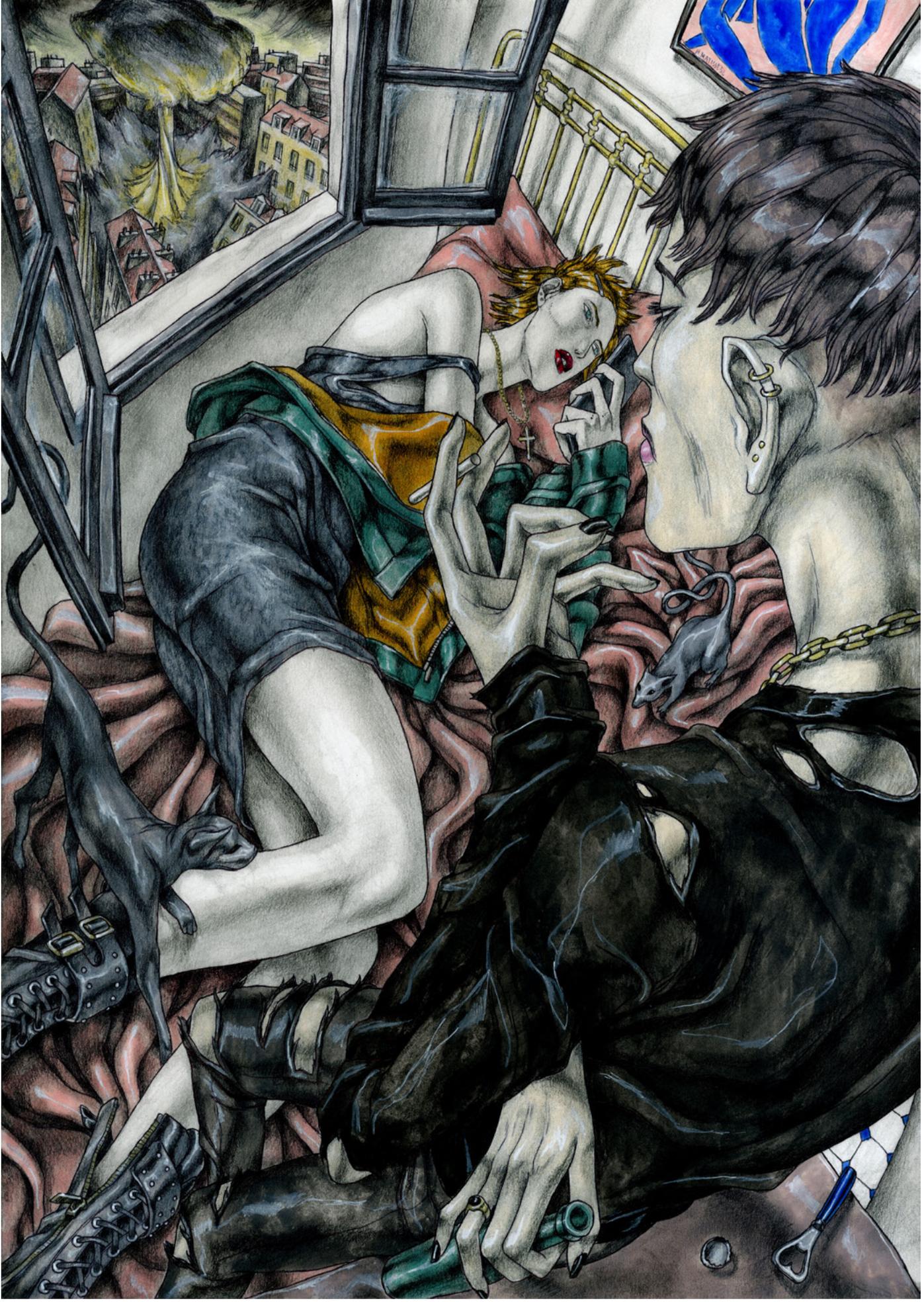
Rappeneau's fetishistic appeal to youth and beauty has this turn-of-the-century attitude: you want to be partying with these figures, you want to be in the frame.

Rappeneau, as artist, is always voyeuristic. His fisheye lens produces a claustrophobic, and therefore sensual picture plane. It's a technique used by hentai artists to heighten a sense of indecency, everything crammed into one text box, bodies intertwined—sometimes genitals exposed. Rappeneau's curvature is almost Art Nouveau: elongated and skeletal figures blend with the Parisian fin-de-siècle architecture of their environments. In one example, *Untitled*, 2020, a female-presenting figure's ass is distended into the viewer's face as her companion snaps a photo of his cum shot. In the foreground, a chain collared dog snarls, while in the backdrop, a raised motorway curves an anonymous cityscape. These cinematic "point-of-view" shots, rather than the holistic visuals of traditional pornography, have the effect of an LCD-induced psychedelic voyage akin to Gaspar Noe's *Enter the Void* (2009).

Rappeneau's illustrations also recall the work of Toulouse-Lautrec, the aristocratic, alcoholic dwarf and legendary lithographer of 19th-century Paris. While Lautrec took influence from the style of Japanese ukiyo-e prints, Rappeneau looks toward contemporary anime and illustration, like Takeshi Obata's Yamaguchi spirits in *Death Note*. Like Lautrec, Rappeneau is a social surveyor. While the former looked toward society's outcasts, the latter has a soft spot for clothing his figures in the semi-alternative items you'd find throughout the 2010s and 20s; a Dolce Gabbana belt, a Lacoste shirt, a tracksuit with an Ed Hardy dragon or Vapormax shoes with a TN upper and, always, a studded belt, cuff or tribal tramp stamp. Rappeneau elides fashion illustration and pornography. His attenuated figures are there to wear the clothes as much as they are to copulate, pornography that speaks to the cultural milieu, like Tom of Finland for leatherheads or Eric Stanton for 80s powerdressers.

On CARI (Consumer Aesthetics Research Institute), one can find a parallel for Rappeneau's retro-futurist aesthetic. CARI has undertaken the increasingly relevant task of categorising "consumer aesthetics" for the past fifty years. This involves a fair level of graphic design knowledge and an awareness of the increasingly accelerated cycle of cultural propagation. One categorisation on the site, "MetalHeart", caught my eye. Named after Andreas Lindholm's 2001 textbook on experimental digital design, "Metalheart" is equal parts futuristic and romantic, conjuring the feeling of late 90s-early 2000s techno-fetishism. One page is dedicated to 3D-rendered fonts—"Metal Pizza, Cyber Smoke, Heavy Bronze, Concrete Supreme, Cyber Metal Mother"—with unnatural textures that appear like metallicised human flesh. It is unclear in Rappeneau's oeuvre whether his figures are terrestrial or cyborg. In *Untitled*, 2020, a shard of metal breaks through the flesh of a figure's behind. It could be injured, but it could be a biomorphic malfunction. *Metalheart* reflects the distended futurism of Rappeneau's universe, filled with a fashionable nostalgia for the early '00s—a time when technology was uncorrupting, and cyber-gothic was a way of being.





31. David Rappeneau

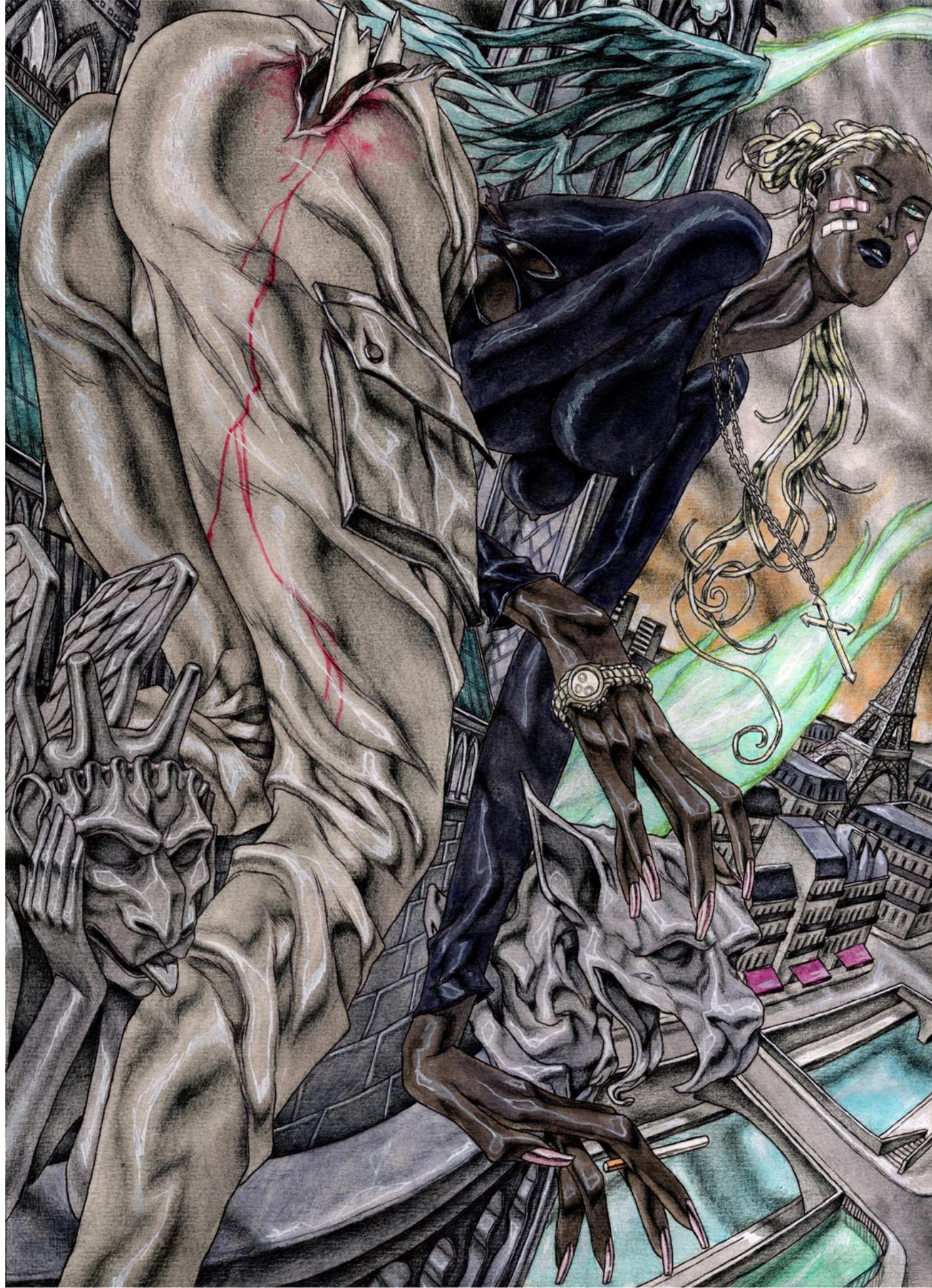
Acrylic, ballpoint pen, pencil, charcoal pencil, acrylic marker on paper. 41.75 x 29.5 cm.
© David Rappeneau Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone

Untitled, 2022

172. David Rappeneau

Acrylic, ballpoint pen, pencil, charcoal pencil, acrylic marker on paper. 40.3x28.9 cm.
© David Rappeneau Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone

Untitled, 2020





175. David Rappeneau

Acrylic, ballpoint pen, pencil, charcoal pencil, acrylic marker on paper. 40.3 x 28.9 cm.
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Untitled, 2024