

Callan Porter-Romero

There are infinite stories within one's hands. It does not matter if the story is unique or conventional. What matters is that the hand had to endure it. In some instances, the hand had to betray one's heart in order to push through circumstance.

As an ode to hands, I tell stories behind personal events, whether they are current or historical. I use mixed media and acrylic paint on canvas to convey texture and depth, giving the hands a 3D effect. Even more, the use of recyclable or repurposed material, such as cardboard and denim, is meant as commentary on the false and dangerous thinking that people are a commercial product rather than human beings. This idea is important to counter, particular for Black and Brown communities in Oakland and throughout the United States, as the loss of human connection to who makes and engages with these materials has exacerbated over time. There is life and value living in the materials society has deemed insignificant.

While not all paintings feature large scale hands, hands do play a significant role in supporting the honest emotion behind the characters within. Hands can show a range of feelings — be it curiosity, anger, dignity, and/or defiance. I use my own hands as references, drawing the hand(s) first before completing the rest of the painting. The hands are built onto the canvas using material, allowing me to experience or relive the story on my own terms.

Some paintings are based on my own experience, while others rely on how national or local events shape the people around me. Essentially, I paint to remind ourselves where we have been and where we are going. Additionally, the themes of empathy and defiance in my paintings ask the viewer to consider that not only are these stories worthy of being heard, it is also imperative to understand that these stories have been present for a long time without a wider audience to hear or see them.