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Artist Statement

My drawings, paintings, and sculptures humorously express self-portraits of incomplete modern individuals who seek to escape the excessive competition, endless work, complicated thoughts and emotions of their daily lives.

Most of my work features my alter-ego, a half-human half-fish figure that I call Fish Daegari (which is Korean for "fish head"). Fish Daegari doesn't overthink things. Fish Daegari does not suffer from the worries or pain of modern life. I paint Fish Daegari with bright pink flesh, because it lives in a state of raw freedom.

Fish Daegari almost always has a drink in its hand. In real life, drinking alcohol helps me embody Fish Daegari. Drinking liberates me from reason, which can be oppressing. I am inspired by the way alcohol represented liberation for citizens during the ancient Dionysus Festival in Greece. The fish head, in my art world, is like a mask worn for a Dionysian celebration. For philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, humans possess both Apollonian, reasoned qualities and Dionysian, irrational ones. A vital life requires embracing and keeping a balance between the two, through a Dionysian festival, for example.

I aim to convey humorously, through the juxtaposition of humans and fish, that this irrational, emotional, and venting desire is not negative or hidden but inherently natural. As an artist, my work is driven by the desire for all of us to live more authentic lives, to take more time to find happiness, to see that our lives are short and finite, and that beneath our skins, we're all just pink meatballs!

Fish have no eyelids or facial expressions, which has led to common misconception that they don't feel pain or have thoughts. But this is untrue. The same goes for my alter-ego: while I hope my alter-ego is completely free and liberated, there may still be internal oppression. 'Fish Daegari' cannot be perfect as long as it remains half-fish and half-human. Humans possess reason and must think. The Dionysia only lasts for a while; we cannot stay drunken forever, and we must eventually remove our masks. Nonetheless, I persist in working on 'Fish Daegari' because I believe that even the superficial, temporary liberation experienced in those moments is desperately needed for me and for us. What I seek is a respite, not a perfect utopia.