

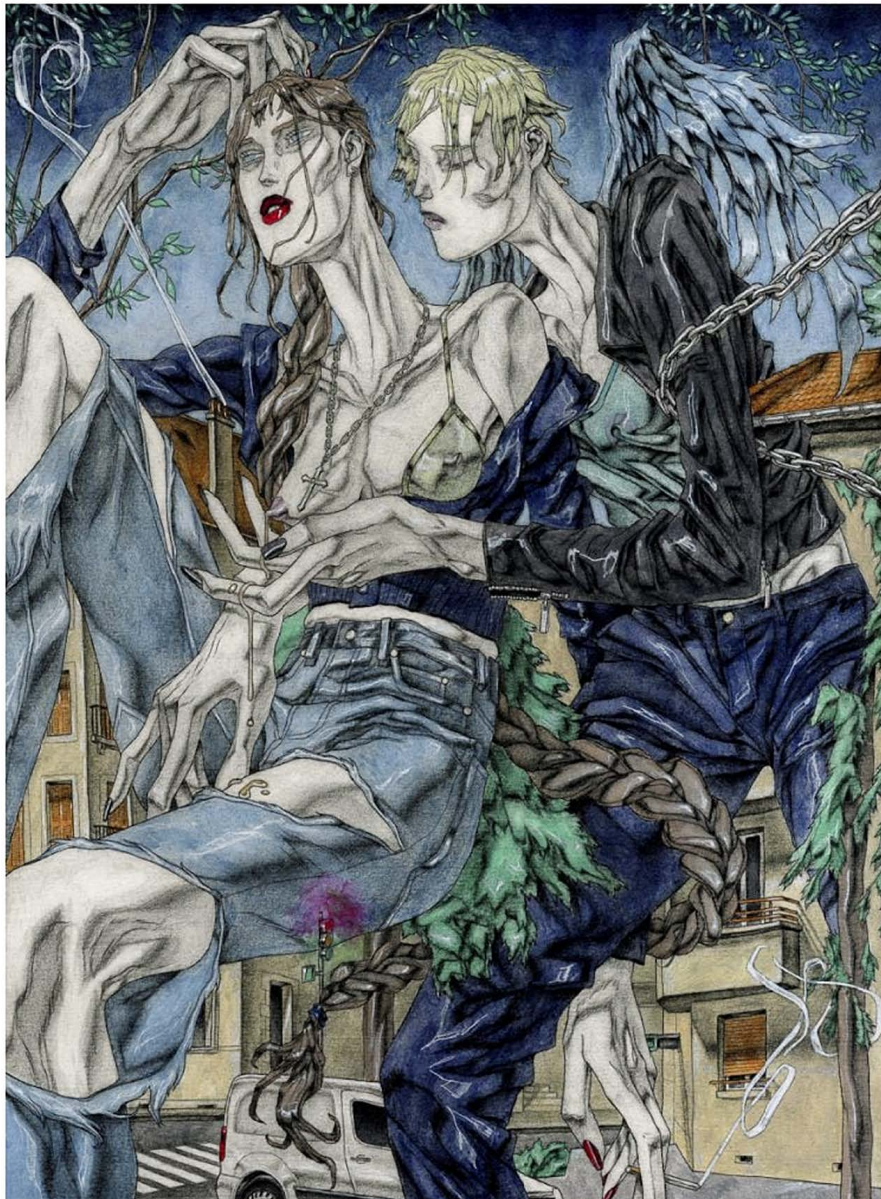
Kate Brown, "David Rappeneau Is a Fast-Rising Star. But No One Knows Who He Is - Not Even His Gallery,"
Artnet, August 20, 2025

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David Rappeneau Is a Fast-Rising Star. But No One Knows Who He Is—Not Even His Gallery

The enigmatic drawings of David Rappeneau and his absence from the spotlight have fueled his cult following and career.

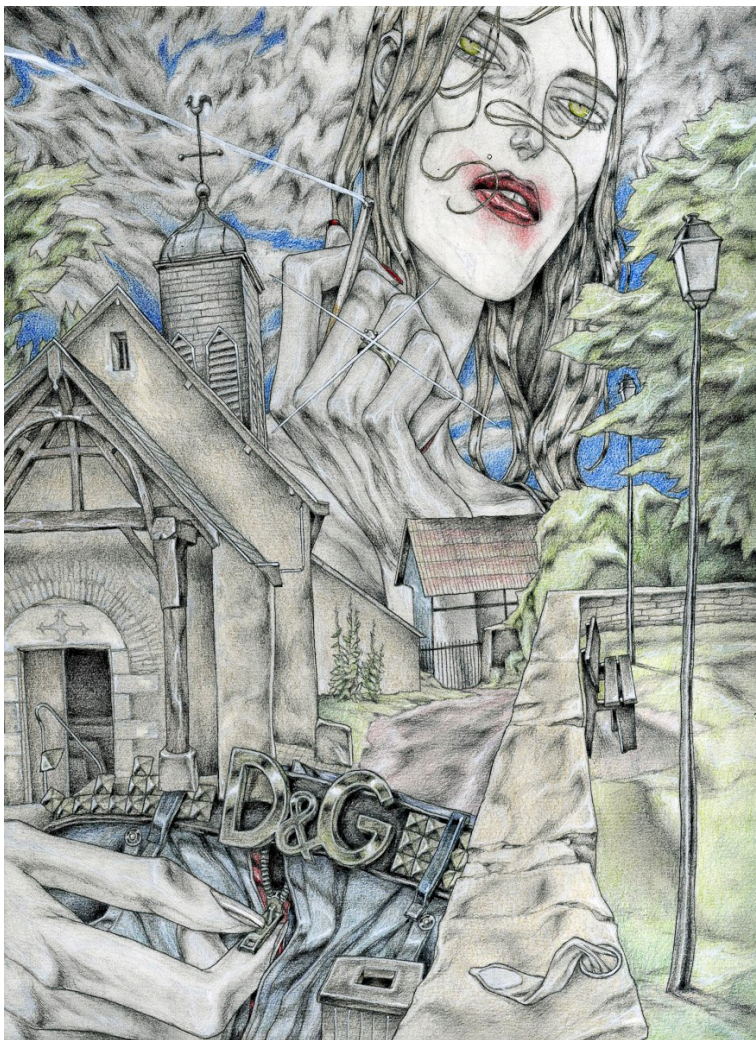


David Rappeneau, *Untitled* (2019). Photo courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Queer Thoughts, New York. Copyright: David Rappeneau.

Kate Brown (<https://news.artnet.com/about/kate-brown-671>) August 20, 2025

Earlier this summer, the French artist David Rappeneau posted a confession to his 72,000 followers on Instagram: “I woke up today deeply wanting to stop making art.” Hundreds of them rushed in with encouragement. The post eventually disappeared, leaving the grid full of colors: his densely wrought hyper-figurative drawings with subjects who themselves seem stuck in a melancholic existential limbo, wound up in sensual vignettes, against interiors and cityscapes. They seem adrift, in wait or searching for something, caught between melancholy and rapture.

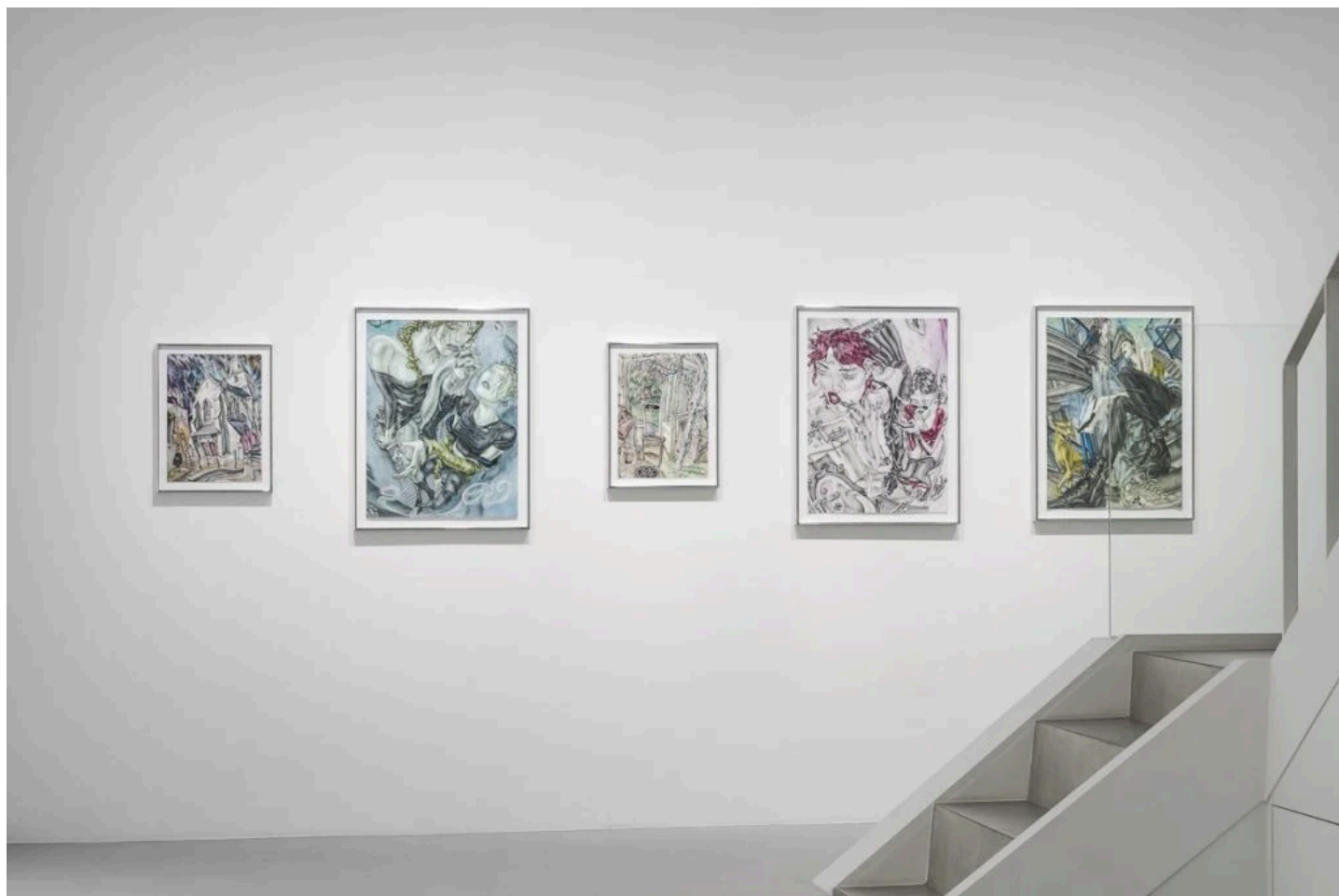
Rappeneau’s moody and surrealist drawings have made him one of the most buzzed-about artists of the moment. Yet even his gallery barely knows who he is. The staff couldn’t pick him out of a crowd. If he attends his openings, or if he does not, no one knows. He never sits at artist dinners or holds studio visits. Gladstone Gallery (<https://gladstonegallery.com/>) director Cooke Maroney, who has been working with him for several years, admits he has never heard his voice, never seen him; he doesn’t know his age, his educational background, or much more than the rest of us know, which is that Rappeneau is from France. The artist conducts his career entirely by email.



David Rappeneau, *Untitled* (2020). Courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Queer Thoughts, New York. Copyright: David Rappeneau.

In an art world obsessed with access, publicity, and hypervisibility, Rappeneau is building a rare kind of career predicated on the artwork and the artwork alone. The work alone, then, has garnered him a growing cult audience and major gallery representation. And in an attention-drained economy, being absent seems like a massive risk, but it also centers the art, not the personality. It makes people stop in their tracks and pay attention.

“It is extremely unique. He has always been very certain of how he wants to engage,” said Maroney in a video call, when asked about the artist’s way of working. The gallery announced representation of Rappeneau last year, and has had two solo exhibitions in Brussels and Seoul. “When you are an emerging artist, you want to have a moment when people are celebrating you—it’s totally natural. People do get reclusive for one reason or another. But to do it from the very beginning is so rare. I cannot think of anything like it.”



David Rappeneau, *Special K*, installation view, Gladstone Gallery, Seoul (2023). Photo courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery. Photo: Jeon Byung-cheol. Copyright: Gladstone Gallery.

Fan Fictions

At a recent group exhibition in Berlin that included Rappeneau’s work, I happened to be sitting with the show’s co-curator, collector Tiffany Zabłudowicz, when a group of young people quietly rolled in. They clustered in front of a pair of Rappeneau drawings. “They’re probably here because of David’s work,” Zabłudowicz indicated.

Intentionally or not, the kids were dressed like his characters, as if Rappeneau's drawings could be made into cosplay. Created with acrylic, ballpoint pen, pencil, and charcoal pencil on paper, the figures are hugged by Lacoste shirts, Chanel belts, a Gucci patterned long-sleeve, or the logo of Paris St-Germain, clothes twisted and cropped and ripped in places. The clothes seem to be protagonists. The figures wearing them crane their necks over cellphones, look out of windows or into mirrors, rarely engaging directly with each other, mediated via devices or objects. All this is set against swirling and teetering landscapes of a metropolis. In one image, a pill bag dangles from a manicured hand; a bit of white powder sits out on a table. The scenes seem warped, reminiscent of how a room becomes wobbly before you pass out.

The dedicated following, which tacks toward Gen Z and millennial, has been noticed by Maroney at Gladstone's openings as well. "People quite fanatically show up to the art exhibitions and show up like it is a band playing; they have handmade T-shirts that look like Rappeneau T-shirts," said Maroney. But collectors of all ages and stripes have been captivated by the art, which ranges from \$12,000 for the smallest works to \$32,000 for the larger pieces. Many fans are artists themselves, and many collectors are artists as well, said Maroney.



David Rappeneau, *Untitled* (2023). Photo courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery. Photo: David Regen. Copyright: David Rappeneau.

A Ghost

Maroney became aware of Rappeneau's work via a couple of artist friends, and he was immediately drawn to it. "The references and how they are depicted are hyper-contemporary, but there are some aspects that are strong references to art history," the director said. "There is a traceable European art history." He noted that references to Albrecht Dürer are present alongside '90s video game aesthetics.

Maroney included the artist in a group show in 2019 at Gladstone Gallery's 64th street called "Dry Land," which also featured work by Lucio Fontana, On Kawara, and Sarah Lucas. In Rappeneau's piece included in the show, his signature lanky figures together yet isolated. All seem to have Modigliani-like eyes and giraffe-like necks; one can't help but think of Egon Schiele when looking over their angular bodies and sexualized contortions. One figure gazed into a blackberry, while the other smoked, looking out of a post-war building window.

"I remember thinking as I was waiting for Barbara [Gladstone] to come to the show, 'Is she going to like Rappeneau's work?'" Maroney recalled. "She walked in, and it was the first she honed in on. She bought the work." Immediately, Gladstone wanted to do an exhibition with the artist, Maroney said.

Yet, even when the gallery was in talks with Rappeneau about working together, there were no phone calls or in-person meetings. It is unclear if Rappeneau came to any of his shows. "I really respect it," said Maroney. "Most artists feel a need or desire to be present and shake hands."

The gallery worked together with the taste-making New York gallery Queer Thoughts on the exhibition—they closed in 2023, their final exhibition being a solo Rappeneau show. Gladstone announced representation in 2024.

Maroney maintains that Rappeneau is always active in shaping his shows via email correspondence. "He is an excellent communicator, not in a flowery way, but he is efficient and clear," he explained. "He is so clear that it is what he thinks is best, and I believe that and I believe in him and trust his work and him deeply."



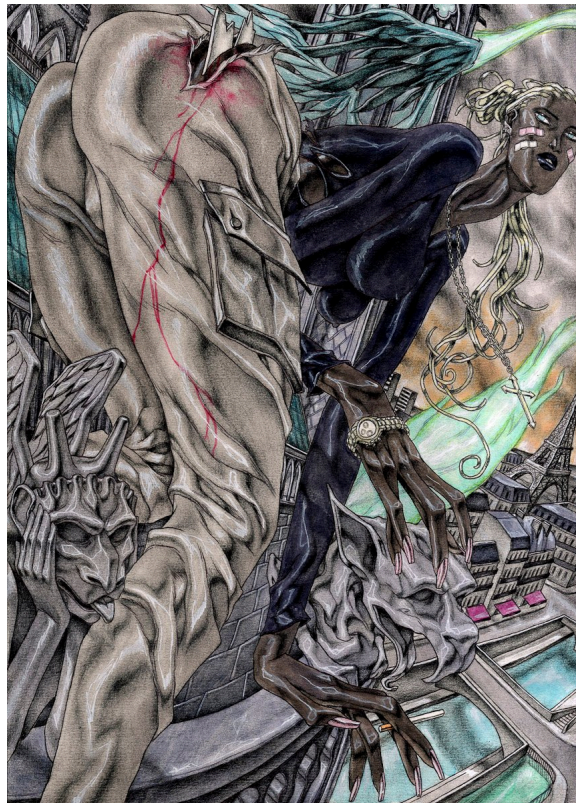
David Rappeneau, *Untitled* (2020). Courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Queer Thoughts, New York.
Copyright: David Rappeneau.

Presence and Absence

Much about his process and the “why” of his work is shrouded in mystery. “These are handmade and beautifully crafted artworks that clearly take a lot of time and thought,” said Maroney.

In juxtaposition with his absence in the physical spaces of the art world, Rappeneau’s online world is hyperactive and in some cases fleetingly very candid. He has been posting his art regularly on Tumblr since 2012. His username, Prince Diamond is an apparent homage to the lead antagonist of the *Sailor Moon* manga, a genre that clearly seems to be a strong influence in his drawings. It is fascinating to flick through his archive of images, some of which have thousands of likes, reblogs, and replies. One can see his style over the decade emerge and deepen: where early works omit the depth of shading and exactitude and warpedness to come, the capitalist critique and spun-out youth mode and outsider alienation is ever-present. A world-weary tribe of spindly figures have been a near-constant amid changing formalities and hues. They are sensual and yet statuesque, often genderless and highly sexualized.

On Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/mitsubishi_uji_financial_group/?hl=en), Rappeneau has a similarly rabid following, and he posts (he often deletes them) notes as a way of chatting with his followers. But his presence there has not been without its issues. He has faced censorship at a few turns, most recently in April. Some of his drawings are hyper-sexualized, even if still slightly existing in a state of alienation.



David Rappeneau, *Untitled* (2020). Photo courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Queer Thoughts, New York. Copyright: David Rappeneau.

That furious tenor of energy translates into his landscapes, which recall Van Gogh with their emotional candor and visual density, where everything is contorting in motion.

“He has his own supernatural vision of the world, which is something you don’t see a lot of now but then you never do or did,” said critic Charlie Fox, who wrote a catalog essay for the artist’s first monograph that came out this year. “That’s always rare. His depiction of trans bodies and bodies that are something other than human (angelic, etc.) is very contemporary, to do, again, with how being online has reshaped on a grand scale what a body might mean or can be for a lot of people. But it’s maybe more important that the work bequeaths them heroic and magical stature they deserve in the midst of a lot of what looks like mourning and ennui, which how things feel today, too. It feels personal, but of course I don’t know anything about him at all. Long live the new flesh.”

The withdrawal of Rappeneau seems less a strategy than an extension of the work itself—an art of vanishing, where his drawn bodies flicker between visibility and erasure, just as the artist does.

“You juxtapose all of what we know about David, which is this elusive and enigmatic and far-removed person, stands out in the contemporary art world on its own,” said Maroney. “He stepped back from the system, and it allowed for an organic foundation to be built... It is amazing to see.”
