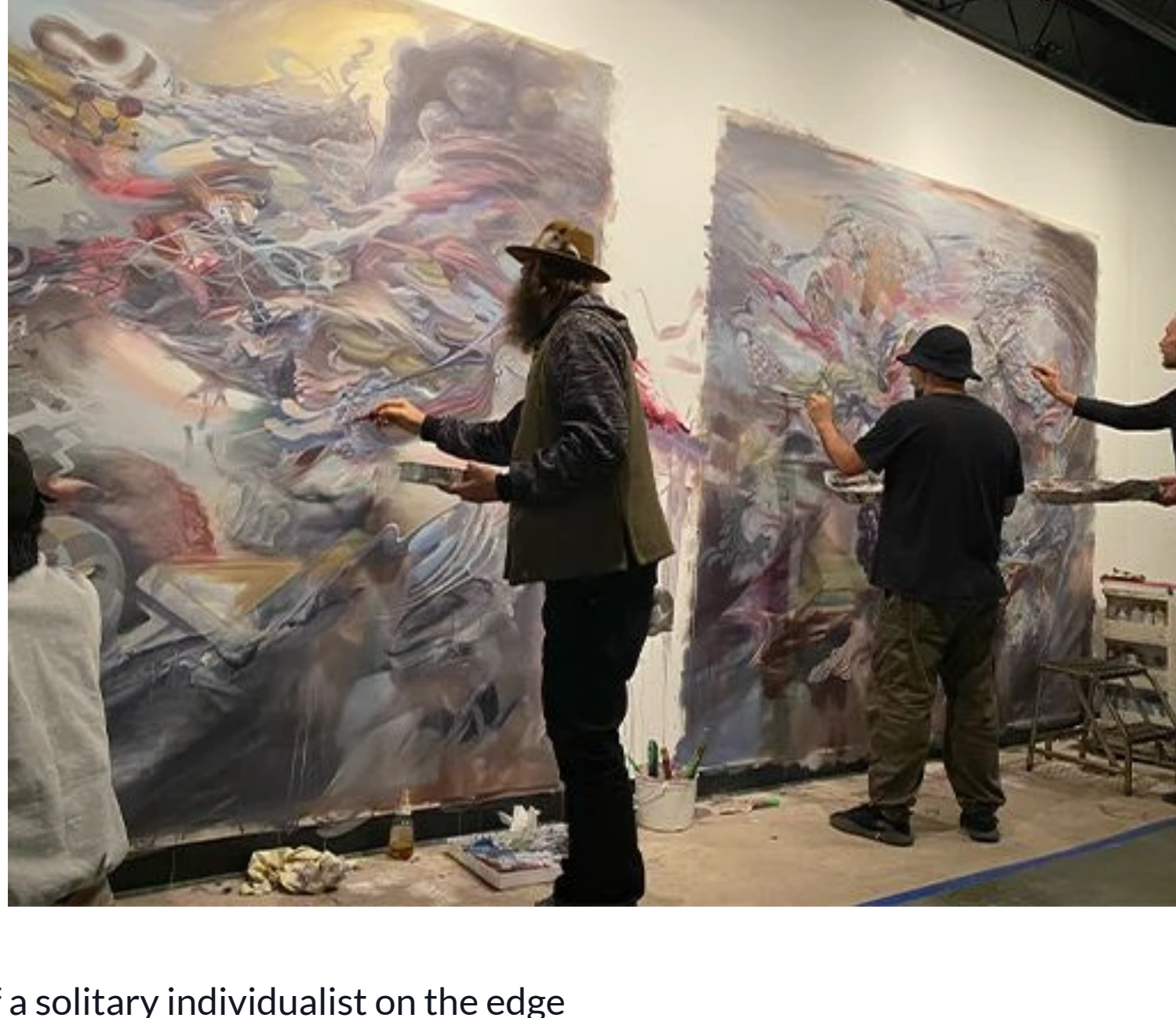


# Bridging the Gap

## Bridging the Gap: Collaborative Paintings by the Furtherrr Collective

Whereas the last decades have seen the sanctification of the lone artist, the Furtherrr Collective brings back qualitative collaborative artistry

Michael Pearce / MutualArt Mar 30, 2022



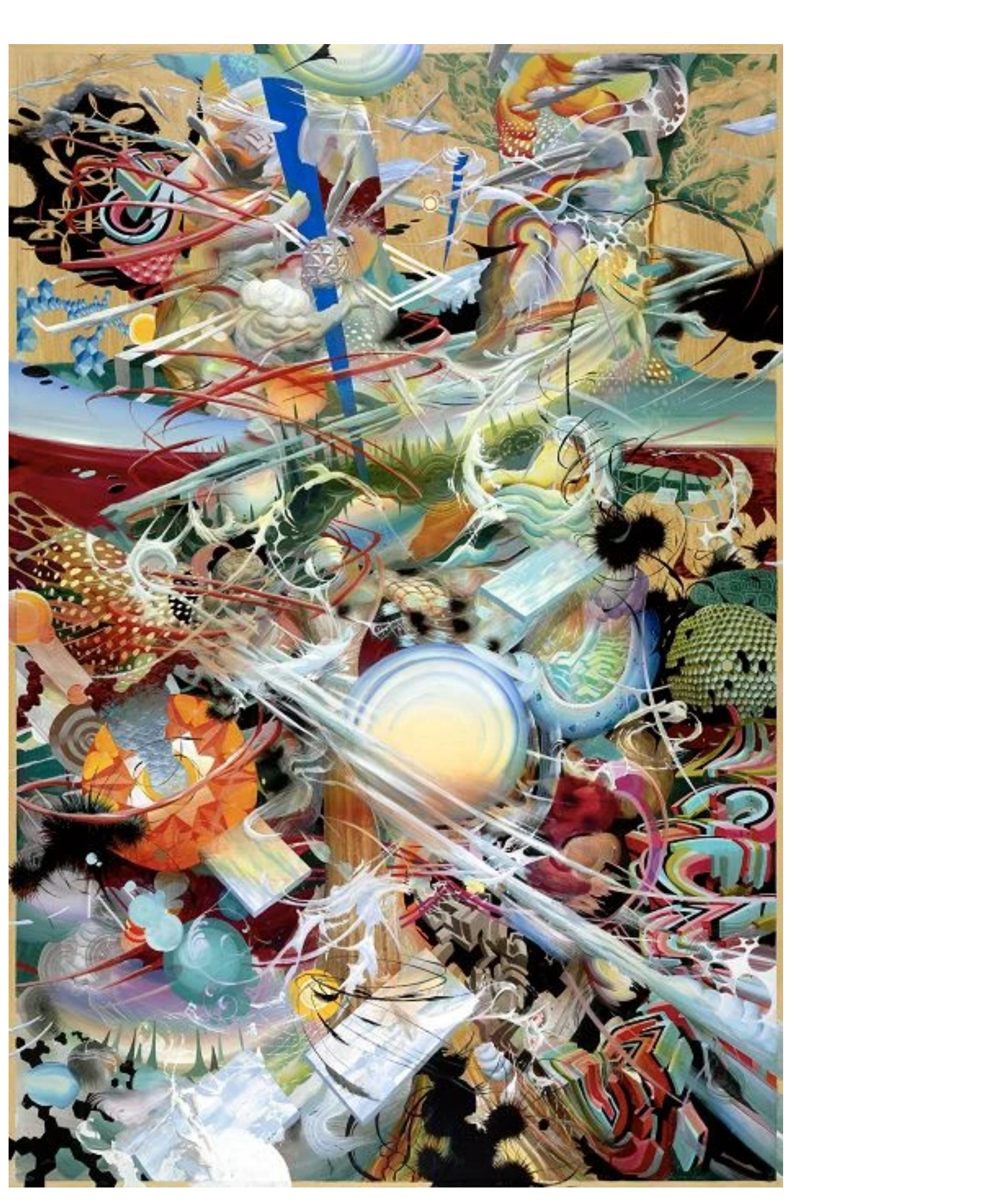
The romantic stereotype of the artist is of a solitary individualist on the edge of madness, wild-haired, shock-eyed and brimmed with genius, obsessively laboring in a chaotic studio in an alchemical frenzy of creativity, reaching through the threshold between worlds to tear paintings from the hands of the gods in their firmament, charmed with virtuoso gifts, and living a reckless, drunken, drug-filled burnout life. Courbet's famously frantic self-portrait, *A Desperate Man*, set the tone, and Vincent Van Gogh fulfilled the role to perfection. Pieces of the myth are true. Serious artists do work obsessively, and the modern studio is a personal space where artists work alone in solitary sanctuaries of productivity. But artists have worked together in groups since prehistory, beginning in the burning torchlight of 40,000 years ago, when our ancient ancestors painted beasts in the flickering shadows of the silent caves of Lascaux and Trois Freres with ochre, charcoal and scrapers. The holy temples of the world's religions were collaborations made and decorated by groups of artists. The ateliers of the renaissance bustled with the clatter of many busy hands. Enormous Baroque ceilings were painted by teams of artists working for a master who organized the project like a movie art director.

The myth of the maverick artistic genius was promoted by the champions of the post-war individualist American avant-garde, and establishment skepticism toward collaboration crystalized in the mid-twentieth century, when an anarchic form of messy collaborative painting emerged at the happenings of the hippy generation. Fueled by the egalitarian ideas of alternative education, the individual's experience of making was more important than the quality of the finished work. Painting events like the hippy happenings have been a perennial favorite at music festivals ever since.



Furtherrr, *Togetherrr 2*, Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 110, 2022

In the eighties, the streets became a canvas for graffiti crews, far from the conventional contractions of the ordinary art business and established a tradition of artists working together painting murals. In the early aughties, Doze Green, David Ellis and Maya Hayuk formed a group of street painters, known as Barnstormers, and roamed the East coast of the United States, painting murals onto barns. They worked on their own separate sections of the painting but made the full composition melt together as a singular piece of art. Jaceaer Kastor has described this kind of accumulation of imagery as "more of an aggregation than a true collaboration," and Barnstormers impressed more because they worked in unusual places, bringing street art to rural settings, than for the quality of their work, or for its collaborative nature. A collective group known as HVW8 (Heavyweight) emerged at about the same time. HVW8 worked fast, producing murals in a few hours, and they worked live, making the paintings for audiences at international events around the world. Their murals were large photographic portraits with decorative spray-painted graffiti flourishes celebrating their heroes. Although they made little impact as novel or unusual art, HVW8 murals were entertaining.



Mars-1, Oliver Vernon, Damon Soule, Ringwald, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48

Art galleries were quick to respond to street art, and the eighties saw the emergence of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, who both began their careers as graffiti artists. Culture-jammers like Banksy, Ron English, and KAWS soon followed, finding unconventional entry points to a populist marketplace by altering commercial billboards and making glib and witty paintings, creating a new kind of situationist commentary on social conditions. But these were all individual artists, and the collectives seemed to be unable to bridge the river between street and gallery.



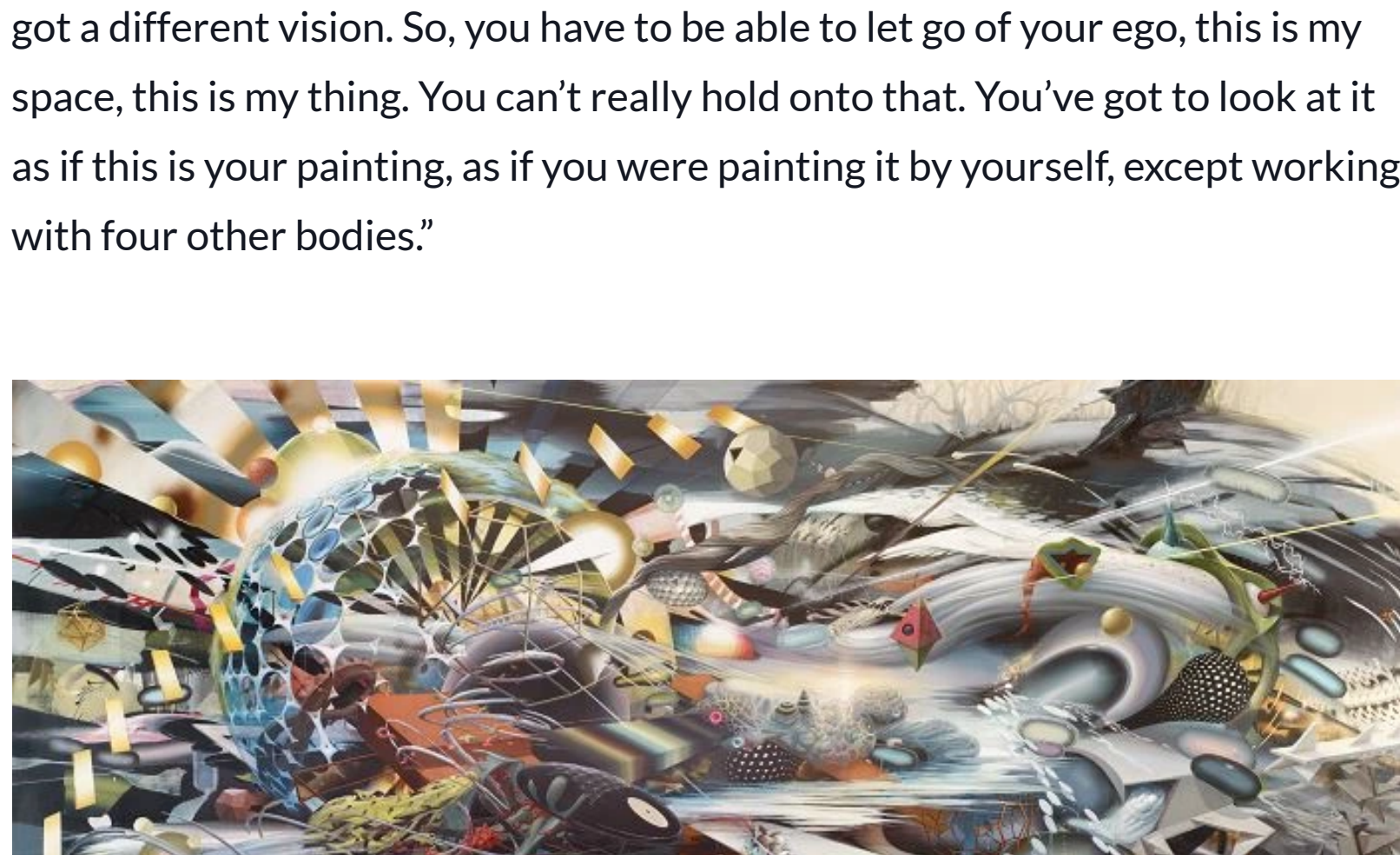
Furtherrr, *Symbiosis*, 2015

The Furtherrr collective - a tight group of live painters - have crossed that Rubicon, combining the collaborative energy and enthusiasm of live festival painting with the aesthetics of bright and brash street art, and driving forward the narrative of formal abstraction. They produce spectacular murals painted over several days. Their paintings are sophisticated, and hum with enthusiasm and energy, with illusory three-dimensional imagery that tumbles and spins over the flat surface. The first Furtherrr performance painting happened in 2009, when David Choong Lee, Mario Martinez (Mars-1), and Oliver Vernon created a live painting together at the Symbiosis music festival. Damon Soule and Nome Edonna soon joined them, and the core collective was formed. They have been painting together ever since. Furtherrr paintings are greater than the sum of their parts, and a mysterious alchemy happens when these painters work together. Soule says, "It's like a band. If you're a musician you can probably jam with anybody, but you form a band when you realize that you can really play together." The paintings are unified, and the artists manage to work together with what appears to be a unique vision, as if they have become an emergent mind, a single jazz consciousness made from five.



Furtherrr Collective at work

Mars, Soule and Edonna were street painters, and Edonna explains, "There's something about doing work on the street - if you do a mural or graffiti or whatever it is, as soon as you walk away from it you have to let go of it. Anyone can walk up and do anything to it - either it's going to get painted over by someone, or someone's going to tag it - that letting go of things is really helpful in the collaborative process, because no matter what, you're going to work on something for twenty minutes and someone's going to come and paint over it, so you have to be on purpose, but just because they've got a different vision. So, you have to be able to let go of your ego, this is my space, this is my thing. You can't really hold onto that. You've got to look at it as if this is your painting, as if you were painting it by yourself, except working with four other bodies."



Mars-1, Oliver Vernon, Damon Soule, David Choong Lee, Nome Edonna - Furtherrr, *Dark City*, Acrylic on Canvas, 144 x 78

As they have become accustomed to working together, they have become more ambitious. Furtherrr's recent paintings are house-sized spectacles that have taken the flat formalism of twentieth-century all-over abstraction, and injected it with depth, dimension, and color. This is new, American art, which is maturing with a characteristically optimistic and brilliant palette, movement, and depth. It is popular. A crowd of a thousand turned out for the opening of *Togetherrr*, an exhibit of collaborative art at The Chambers Project which opened mid-March, named in homage to the collective. Gallerist Brian Chambers has nurtured Furtherrr from its beginning, commissioning the artists and providing them with studio spaces. He says, "...you can see the chronological development of how quickly and cohesively things have changed for these guys over the years. They have redefined what live collaboration is, and what live painting can be."

*Togetherrr* is at *The Chambers Project*, 627 E. Main St., Grass Valley, CA 95945.

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**MARS-1**  
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