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## Know Your Street Art: BiP Opens Up About “Figurine”

The enigmatic street artist Believe in People's brains dominate the Alise Hotel in the Tenderloin

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*(Photo by Jonathan Curiel)*

As the sun was setting on the Tenderloin one July evening, **BiP** — or “**Believe in People**” — stood on the roof of the **Alise Hotel**, dressed like the stealth artist he is. He wore hooded painter’s coveralls and a breathing mask that keeps him safe from the spray-paint fumes that arise whenever he works on a big project. And the Alise is a big project: BiP had a seven-story canvas overlooking Geary Street like the face of a Pharaonic temple from ancient Egypt.

But BiP is no Pharaoh. He doesn’t want to glory in his own visage, and he refuses to be photographed or filmed with his face exposed. As he worked in June and July on his Alise mural — the fourth in his “MegaMural series,” which began in 2015 with ***Self Consuming Self — Dave*** on another Tenderloin building — BiP hid his identity as he trapezed up and down the wall with his lift equipment.

But this July evening was different, as BiP spoke with *SF Weekly* on the Alise’s roof. From beneath his get-up, as paint cans surrounded him, BiP revealed something that he’s rarely disclosed in public: his fears. BiP is still young — likely in his late 20s — and he’s still getting used to the scrutiny that comes from being a street artist with a growing international following. What if people hate his work? “I get terrified, because I’m putting myself out there to [potentially] be laughed at,” he says. “That’s my job. But hopefully, that won’t be the case.”

People did laugh at *Self Consuming Self* — *Dave*, which covers the side of a hostel at 685 Ellis St. But that mural — of a naked man looking at his own heart through a microscope — was designed to provoke a few. His new work, *Figurine*, has fewer apparent chuckles, if any. But it's just as thought-provoking: BiP painted gold-tinged brains on two gold-tinged flowers whose roots connect at the bottom. Nature. Humanity. Science. A gilded color. It's all there in a work that is both figurative and puzzling. All his works, BiP says, are "designed in such a way that there are multiple layers to it."

Those layers, BiP says, are inherent to street art, where "you have all these facets that aren't available in a studio, like the angles that people take to look at [the work] and the sunlight hitting it" and "what it's going to look like in a few years."

"Your job as an artist is to think how people are going to interact with it," he adds.

During the weeks-long painting of *Figurine*, many people gathered near Geary Street to look up at it. One man who saw BiP from the street, and who knew BiP's other murals, was thrilled to stumble across the scene. The man was homeless, according to BiP's Instagram account of the scene: "I saw a homeless person shouting to his friends 'guys come here it's that BLIP guy!! BLIP is back! HI BLIP!!!' And then they were waving. And he was doing some kind of celebration dance and ... I just felt great. that's the kind of art I want to make. You can call me Blip. I don't even mind."

No, he doesn't. As BiP told *SF Weekly*, with the sun finally setting behind him, "there's some degree of performance" to his work — of interacting with strangers, of staying aloft in the air, of gesticulating with his spray cans, and of watching the paint form on a formerly blank wall.

As BiP spoke that July evening, a high-end gallery a short walk away on Geary Street was showing the controversial Banksy rat work from 2010 that was formerly on Haight Street but was later physically removed. (It has

since traveled to different locations before returning to San Francisco.) BiP says he has little desire to have his work in museums or galleries.

"I feel graffiti has been this little-brother medium" of the art world, he says, linking his work squarely with graffiti art. "Graffiti is really in its infancy. My gut feeling is that this medium is part of the future."

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