‘Exit From 18th Street,’ a painting the size of a small dresser, is a collage of assorted outlooks on society and culture as the artist Marcos Raya sees it through his experiences. With this painting, Raya imagines himself fleeing his hometown of Pilsen, Chicago to escape the violence and turmoil in the area. He depicts a multitude of overlapping cultural references in a busy city setting, pinning himself in the center of it all.

The painting is part of a varied collection of art pieces in the Wunderkammer exhibit at Gallery Victor Armendariz, which is found at 300 W Superior St, Chicago now until March 31. Translated to “cabinet of curiosity,” the Wunderkammer exhibit showcases a room full of wondrous and exotic artwork mimicking how Wunderkammers were originally created in the sixteenth century before museums ever existed.

Gallery curator Victor Armendariz collects fascinating artwork to share with the world. Knowing several of the exhibit’s artists personally, he only asked to see what they had been working on; There was no predetermined outline or planned theme he was looking for. “I don’t want artists to create art for something,” Armendariz said, emphasizing that no instructions were given to any artists regarding their work. “It doesn’t come off as honest to me,” he added.

After categorizing and connecting his gathered works, Armendariz discovered memento mori to be an overarching theme of the exhibit. Skulls, death and guns are seen throughout the pieces, entrancing viewers in an artistic exploration of race relations, religious connotations and cultural phenomena. Memento mori reminds viewers to fully grasp everything in life before it inevitably comes to an end. Mystical pieces of art fill the entire room, ensuring that viewers find another spectacle to gaze at with each step.

“Not everybody would want everything in this entire space,” Armendariz said. “You take one thing to live with … and it elevates everything around it because of its bizarre nature.” Marcos Raya’s bejeweled, life-sized skulls are encased and engaging at every turn, while Rick Ferrell’s odd mix of objects he finds off the street are strung together to simultaneously fascinate and confuse viewers.

Meanwhile, John Subert’s clocks with racist phrases and depictions use provocative imagery to reflect on issues currently in our society. “It’s repulsive, but it’s also there,” Armendariz noted, regarding the importance of starting conversations on racism. The exhibit is also the first to display Jay and Hank Kupjack’s hand-crafted miniature rooms. “They’re meant to transport you into a different world,” Armendariz said. Scenes like ‘Alexander’s Siege Tent - 333 B.C.’ are created with precisely detailed objects small enough to fit into a box the size of a toaster.

Armendariz said the beauty of the exhibit is that viewers will experience more and more the longer they survey the room, even without prior knowledge of memento mori. “People will look at the artwork the way that they come to it,” he said. “There is no one way to take this show.”