

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

ART SPIEL

Rafael Delacruz: Healing Finger Clean Drawings at Mitchell Innes & Nash

POSTED ON JUNE 14, 2023 BY ETTY YANIV



Rafael Delacruz, *Don't sleep while we explain*, 2022, oil and cochineal on canvas, photo courtesy @ Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Neither the exhibition text nor the online imagery, although both generous, adequately primed me for Rafael Delacruz's spellbinding painting exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash. The moment I stepped into the gallery, I was engulfed in a world with vibrant enigmatic narratives, layered as a fusion of drawing, lino-cut-like marks, and a kaleidoscope of restless patterns, all shimmering under the play of vivid paint. The paintings reveal recognizable elements like cars or figures while hiding drawings underneath, daring us to embark on a delightful game of artistic hide and seek.

In some canvases Rafael Delacruz, who is a self-taught painter, uses Cochineal, a vibrant natural dye extracted from a cactus-devouring parasite. With a storied cultural history of adorning the capes of Catholic clergy and the coats of English soldiers, Cochineal seems to assume a prominent role in Delacruz's artistic alchemy. Through tireless experimentation, the artist has ingeniously transmuted the dye into a paint medium.

But no matter what paint medium Delacruz uses, all his paintings are luminous and conjure an indeterminate yet utterly convincing landscapes. They remind me of a *fata morgana* in a desert—where stability slips through our grasp and illusions abound. The elongated horizontal painting *Don't sleep while we explain* is one of the more figurative paintings, where a multitude of human and animal characters form a captivating crowd, standing before a pale pinkish curved horizon while enigmatic geometric shapes loom in the distant background. The amalgamation of faces, bodies, and avian presences meld harmoniously, giving birth to a feral entity that bears resemblance to Ensor's congregations, though in an abstracted form. This composite presence takes shape amidst a milieu evocative of Milton Avery-esque landscape, further accentuating the nuanced visual interplay.

As I immerse myself into the intricate details of Delacruz's paintings, I am entranced by the juxtapositions within the canvas. *Healing finger clean drawings*, is a more scattered landscape, where a diminutive car takes on the guise of a toy, next to it, enticing floral shapes reside beside traces of plant drawings, and bulbous red, pink and gray clouds hover above. It is a beguiling and flattened space that defies conventional logic, yet makes total sense in its inner visual logic—like glimpsing at a landscape from a speeding car. Delacruz's paintings have a powerful visceral impact with an elusive, airy and radiant quality—both timeless and timely.

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Rafael Delacruz, Don't sleep while we explain, detail, photo by Etty Yaniv



Healing finger clean drawings, 2023, oil and lithographic print on canvas. Rafael Delacruz, photo courtesy @ Mitchell-Innes & Nash