

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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Alex Becerra: Las Putas Problematicas at ltd los angeles

October 8, 2014 by Easton A. Miller

Alex Becerra recently made his solo debut at ltd los angeles gallery with eleven icing-thick paintings that would fit nicely in the company of Werner Büttner, Philip Guston, or Willem de Kooning. Immense quantities of paint are brushed, squeezed, and caked together to form images that are as much mark and material as they are figure and object. Each piece offers itself up to the viewer like a freshly roasted pig, and the skin of the outrageously thick dried paint only serves to elevate the supple flesh beneath. The complexity of the work belies the artist's mere twenty-five years of existence and his recent graduation from the Otis College of Art and Design.

In an obvious homage to *The Greeting* (2003; a collaborative painting between Albert Oehlen and Jonathan Meese), *Strictly for the CADDY Lovers* (2014) depicts a female figure naked from the waist down and standing on a mirror. As unceremonious as her pose may be, the painting does not come off as pornographic in nature—the work functions as a moment of self discovery and the newfound awareness such a realization creates. This piece is also an image strongly rooted in the language of drawing, and it actively addresses its relationship with paint as a physical material and an ideological tool.

Becerra's paintings fester with lurid visceral figures that are simultaneously explicit yet vulnerable. This type of tension courses throughout the exhibition and pushes the work into psychological territory that necessitates a deeper level of contemplation from the viewing audience. The only non-figurative piece in the gallery, and perhaps the most curious painting in the show, *Couch and Table with Light* (2014) transforms an empty chair into the physical embodiment of the vulnerability patients surely experience in a therapist's office. The aforementioned painting also serves as a breath amid the sea of impastoed bodies that comprise the rest of the exhibition.

Once birthed from the womb of a major art institution, some young artists seem crippled by acquired knowledge, but Becerra is comfortable addressing the canon without being consumed by it. Indeed, aesthetic references are surely present in his paintings, but as de Kooning once said, "All painters are susceptible to inspiration." The success of Becerra's work is not found in a shared moment from the past, but in the idiosyncratic personal narratives that allow paintings like *Brookstone Woman* (2014) or *Living in the Suburbs Can Be So Depressing* (2014) to function as their own worthwhile contributions to a conversation started many years ago. *Las Putas Problematicas* (The Problematic Bitches) is a bold statement that addresses the artist's difficulties with the process of painting while simultaneously providing a tongue-in-cheek response to his own cultural influences. The works are raw and unyielding, explicit and vulnerable, playful and complex. In short, the work is highly engaging. It will be interesting to see how Becerra continues to evolve the dialogue of contemporary painting in the coming years.

Las Putas Problematicas is currently on view at ltd los angeles through October 11, 2014. Easton A. Miller is an artist and writer currently based in Los Angeles. He holds dual degrees in Fine Arts and Art History from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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