

Press Release

Alex Becerra Trance Anxiety

2 February – 16 March 2024

Opening 1 February, 6 – 8 pm

Trance Anxiety, Alex Becerra's new solo exhibition at Karma International, seeks to string together ideas of compositional improvisation based on a story told to him on his travels in the Yucatán. At first glance, the works are not easily decipherable, transparent washes exchange interactions with heavy impasto marks and smears.

Finding his voice for this exhibition, Becerra was trying to work "behind the paint" to create a barrage of sounds, textures and rhythms, aiming for hypnotic fullness and, at the same time, reassessing his working class background as an aesthetic lens.

Ahead of the show, Becerra conducted the following conversation with Karolina Dankow:

Karolina Dankow: You said the the whole idea for our show started with a trip to Yucatán. Can you explain a bit about this?

Alex Becerra: I spent some time down there last year and, like most people who visit but who did not grow up in or around a jungle, I immediately had a strong physical reaction to the power of the immense beauty the Yucatán had to offer. One of the most visually striking landscapes I've ever visited in my life that naturally sparked a creative state of mind for me. I had feelings of joy and anxiety simultaneously. I couldn't quite put my finger on what that meant at the time and now, thinking back, it's even harder to put into words. I guess you can say it was a spiritual awakening of sorts.

KD: You mentioned a particular story that shed some light onto your feelings?

AB: Yes, at one point I got to talking with a man who had grown up near Ek' Balam (now a Mayan archeological site). He recounted a local folklore tale to me. Unfortunately I cannot tell it the way he did with such ease and elegance, but it touched on ideas of anxiety and fear of the jungle to outsiders, both then and now. A fear that stemmed from not being able to see a horizon line in the depth of the jungle's greenery. The only breath of air was the small bits of light coming through the canopy. He went on with the story and I must admit, I couldn't quite ignore having those feelings myself. My imagination began to spiral in the best way and I instantly connected that with the body of work you are looking at now. I was fascinated by those all too familiar feelings that also were somehow connected to other parts of my practice.

KD: How so?

AB: If it's not apparent by now, I'm quite the maximalist when it comes to making art and how I navigate life in general. That's basically the beginning of these works. For me of course, this feeling is very much connected to my working class upbringing. Ideas of minimalism or minimal living were for the well-off. My world has been informed by noise, clusters of stuff, and no space is left unused. Ideas of luxury and open space were not my home. A friend once told me an easy way to see the imbalance of wealth and non-wealth is if you have enough space in a home to walk around a couch! This simple statement blew my mind. I can't remember any part of my childhood where we had this luxury. The couch had multiple functions. One day it served as a room divider between the living room and dining room. Always up against a wall and sometimes even serving as a way to create "more" storage space between couch and wall. We also never used the dishwasher, so in my house it was yet another space to store family photos or anything we might reuse. I think you get the picture where my need to fill every inch of the canvas may come from (laughs).

KD: How would you say this connects to your paintings?

AB: At least for me, it's very connected and how I related the anxiety I felt in the Yucatán and nature's way of claiming back its own. If the jungle gave me no room to breathe or gave me hints of escape, I would try to convey this in paint. An overwhelming sense of claustrophobia. If you look at my body of work as a whole, it seems to always be in dialogue with this. Every space must be utilized to convey something even if it's nothing. Every open space is worth something and can be used. I am working on not always doing this !