

## NEW BEGINNINGS? ALEJANDRO CARDENAS AT ALMINE RECH

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Alexandra Zirinis



Photo credit: Dan Bradica. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech

The Los Angeles based Chilean artist creates abstract figures that vaguely resemble some sort of cross between human and animal. In his latest exhibition (and first solo show with Almine Rech,) Cardenas compiles his work across three rooms, and a hallway, of the Gallery's New York location. The result incites a colourful, energetic, intense and, most importantly, necessary conversation. In my interview with Paul de Froment, the gallery's managing partner, he underscores the artist's choices behind the exhibition's design and curation. "Cardenas chose to paint the walls of one room a deep green shade to emphasize the glow of the works in that room. In a similar way, the white walls of the front room pair well with neutral tones, but also accentuate the pops of color present in these works.

This show, entitled Alexandria, concentrates on the state of our currently crumbling world—it is then a desperate plea for action. The title references the ancient Egyptian city "where the East and the West came together, producing new, unified ways of thinking." To parallel this, "Alejandro's recent works both reflect on, and put forward," new ideas surrounding "our current social, political, and environmental unrest." The artist's use of different mediums (sculpture and painting) further accentuates a bold confrontation between the works.

Unlike the colourful and enchanting exhibition that preceded this one, (Vivian Springford,) Alejandro Cardenas' Alexandria is a harsh reality check. Cardenas uses his talent to directly address essential issues, many of which have long been ignored. Specifically, the decaying condition of our planet, and the quality (or in some cases lack thereof) human existence today — neither of which the artist deems acceptable. And for a good reason.

This new body of work responds directly to living in Los Angeles during the devastating wildfires, that of course only compounded disasters already brought on by the pandemic. Cardenas stays with his “unique humanoid forms, but gives them powerful, yet suggested, emotional expressions.” The figures are then directly contrasted with the “decaying outdoors visible through the gridded windows” Froment said. The eerie scenes mimic the artist's own view from his studio.

While the exhibition centres on a long list of issues plaguing our current world, there are hints of optimism. But, said optimism is only a possibility, if collectively, people do the necessary work. So, the artist has not completely given up, and his aim is not to zap viewers of all hope either. Instead, Cardenas aims to remind viewers of the power that we as humans hold, especially in the here and now. The power that we have to make major and meaningful change.

Despite the “direct correlation to our shared challenges over the past year,” Cardenas cautiously floats the possibility of a brighter future. Each piece in this new body of work contributes to an overwhelming and urgent sense that viewers have to seriously contemplate the present moment. We are pressed to “pause, reflect, and process our emotions as they relate to these issues.” Only then, can we begin to “hope for a more peaceful future of coexistence.”