ALMINE RECH

Alejandro Cardenas
FANTASMI DI PRIMAVERA

Oct 7 — Nov 26, 2023 | Venice

Fantasmi di Primavera [Ghosts of Spring] is the first Italian solo exhibition by the Chilean-born, New York - based artist Alejandro Cardenas (Santiago, 1977). It contextualizes a new body of work especially conceived for this occasion that merges, as always in his artistic research, a wide range of references borrowed from the history of art, science fiction, and Latin American literature.

Fantasmi di Primavera explores spiritual and fantastical subjects related to human interiority and cosmic landscapes, both inspired by *Children of Memory* (2023) - the third volume of a space saga by the British writer Adrian Tchaikovsky, and the experience of a non-objective, supernatural yet familiar world view taken from the tradition of magical realism, by authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez.

Over the years, Cardenas has developed a distinctive style oscillating between figuration and abstraction. He fuses different stimuli taken from Surrealist dream-like spaces, Futurist velocity, and Renaissance artistic references in a unique, imaginative vision populated by his personal, oneiric micro-cosmos of figures, entities, and humanoids, as evidenced in his latest production.

Companion (After Leonardo Da Vinci) (2023) echoes the illustrious da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine* (1489-1490). Dark backgrounds, direct, single-source light, and the figure holding a small greyish ermine in its arms - all refer to the original painting. Cecilia Gallerani, the 15th-century mistress of the Duke of Milan, is here transformed into a post-human, genderless entity whose bird head reminds the Egyptian god Ibis, while its features a disquieting stone sculpture dressed in a simple red tunic.

A shamanic figure is the protagonist of *The Witch* (2023), which merges different artistic references: while the title and the pose remind the homonymous Max Ernst's painting (*The Witch*, 1941), the protagonist in Cardenas' version refers to the figure of the *curandero*, the traditional native Latin American shaman and healer. It holds a black bird and looks imprisoned in a cave, symbolizing a constrained world. The theatrical, evocative scene of the rocks has roots in late nineteenth-century Symbolist painting. It opens on a deep distance view which suggests a prominent linear perspective, emphasized by the sumptuous tiled floor that clashes with the rocky backdrop of the work.

In the Regent and *A View of the Mountains* (both 2023), Cardenas recuperates the metaphor of a window on the world to emulate the vision of a specific moment in time and space. During the Renaissance in Italy and Northern Europe, windows negotiated the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm and, by extension, the relationship between the figure situated indoors and the cosmos beyond. In these two works, inspired by Erwin Panofsky's 1924 essay "Perspective as Symbolic Form", the window is not a simple architectural element that can stress the background with distant mountains or mark the composition but also functions as a metaphor for stepping into the unknown. The reclining pose of the first painting and the gesture recalling a praying figure in the second contradicts the organic forms of the figures portrayed, whose knife-sharp edges, compact twisted shapes, and stretching points remember the sculpture of Henry Moore, as in many Cardenas' paintings.

All these new Cardenas' works reveal a mineral quality and appear like captivating images of exquisite elegance. Cardenas' use of frozen subjects and razor-sharp strokes resembling incised lines gives these paintings a meta-pictorial dimension shrouded in mystery. The artist's oil technique stresses the brilliantly colored renderings, meticulously achieved through skillful use of glazing, which celebrates the reappropriation of age-old craft, experimented for the very first time for the painting produced on the occasion of this exhibition.

As in his paintings, Cardenas' sculptures short-circuit art historical references and contemporary sensitivity. In *The Ravener* (2023), the sinuous bronze lines recreate a quasi-spiritual, semi-fantastical ephebic nude figure holding a large patinated bronze Corvid that is aspirational and fictional, a visual symbol that can connect the two words envisioned in *Children of Memory*. Installed on a corten steel plinth is a captivating figure whose humanoid body and spherical marble head are natural, artificial, classic, and futuristic while recalling, with its contrapposto pose, in the tradition of ancient sculpture.

Cardenas' work is suspended between past and present, endowed with latent symbolism that invites the viewer's imaginative responses. It references subjects and prototypes borrowed from art history, accompanied by a parallel rediscovery of the refined techniques of painting learned from the past.

Cardenas' expressive world, populated by hybrid human and animal characters, reveals an introspective body of work filled with personal archetypes, which show a pronounced interest in detail and curiosity exemplified in the artist's elegant and timeless compositions.

This fascination populates all the œuvres included in *Fantasmi di Primavera*, at the intersection of contemporary desire, alienation, and fetishism, combined in an intensely evocative and personal manner dense with specific references to historical works. Cardenas' contemporary icons are depicted in classical poses of beauty and melancholy, representing the artist's personal, oneiric, and metaphysical Arcadia.

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