

Lyle Carbajal, *Libertad* (detail), 2016, 40 x 48 inches

Romancing Banality

Lyle Carbajal

Exhibition dates: January 27 - March 11, 2017

Opening reception: 6 – 9 PM Friday, January 27, 2017

Main Gallery | Artist talk: 6:30 PM

Art League Houston (ALH) is excited to present *Romancing Banality*, an installation-based exhibition by nomadic artist Lyle Carbajal. The exhibition features a mash-up of anti-artistry, folk, and contemporary themes, which pull from art history, cultural, economic, geographic and personal references, creating an immersive installation of densely layered mixed-media paintings, and sculptural compositions that combines everyday materials and aesthetic traditions. Carbajal, who was born in Los Angeles, and has lived in Mexico City and Buenos Aires, draws on imagery and narratives from his nomadic perspective, creating work that acknowledges the deep-rooted anthropological connections and patterns that traverse across history and place. The exhibition features an essay by Sara Lee Burd.

Excerpt from *Lyle Carbajal's Authentic World* by Sara Lee Burd:

Graffiti covered walls, commodity centered living, obesity, bravado, spirituality, sexuality, poverty, and adversity all have a place in Lyle Carbajal's art just as they do in the everyday world. For Carbajal, public spaces are the foundations of a culture; they anchor communities and provide democratic experiences for all who pass. The *Romancing Banality* exhibitions are all encompassing installations that act as public spaces for viewers to entangle their imaginations with disparate yet cohesive elements he incorporates

within the show. Solitary structures, mixed media works, and collaborations with musicians and filmmakers provide genuine expressions of Carbajal's anthropological and artistic observations.

Place is significant and pluralistic to Carbajal because of the connections amongst the ideas, sounds, colors, words, and values that pervade the roving artist's perception. Taking reference photographs as he goes, he returns to the studio to make art with imagery that is so common it is easily overlooked by passersby, but that is immensely important to his understanding of the world. With his exhibitions, Carbajal invites viewers into his world to see what he finds evocative and meaningful in mundane life and urban detritus. He is not defining a particular culture as much as sharing himself by displaying curated selections of what he sees as the universal connections among urban environments. *Romancing Banality* is Carbajal's place. It is an extrapolation of what he has found and processed as authentic and meaningful in the world.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lyle Carbajal is a nomadic artist, born and raised in Los Angeles, California, whose work exists somewhere between the vernacular and contemporary avant-garde. His work has been featured in numerous solo and group shows at national and international venues including Tinney Contemporary, Nashville TN (2015, 2012, 2010, 2009, 2004, 2002), Art Chicago; Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA), Seattle WA (2013); Cartwheel Street & Outsider Art Show, Hollywood CA (2013), The London Art Fair; Mark Rothko museum, Dünaburg, Latvia (2012), The National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago IL (2007), Museu de Estremoz, Portugal (2007), The Raw Arts Festival, London (2004), La Luz de Jesus Gallery, Los Angeles and The Mark Rothko Museum in Latvia (2012) while participating in an artist residency in Daugavpils, the country's second largest city. *Romancing Banality* began in Seattle in 2013, and has since traveled to New Orleans (2014), Tennessee (2015), and is currently in its fourth iteration at Art League Houston.

In 2010, Carbajal published his first book, *Urban+Primitive: The Art of Lyle Carbajal*. Lyle is currently represented by CG2 Gallery in Nashville TN; The Frederick Holmes Gallery in Seattle, WA; Gallery Orange in New Orleans LA; Sardac Gallery in The United Kingdom; Galerie du Temple and Galerie Gabel in France; and Mika Gallery in Tel Aviv. He currently lives and works in Houston and New Orleans.

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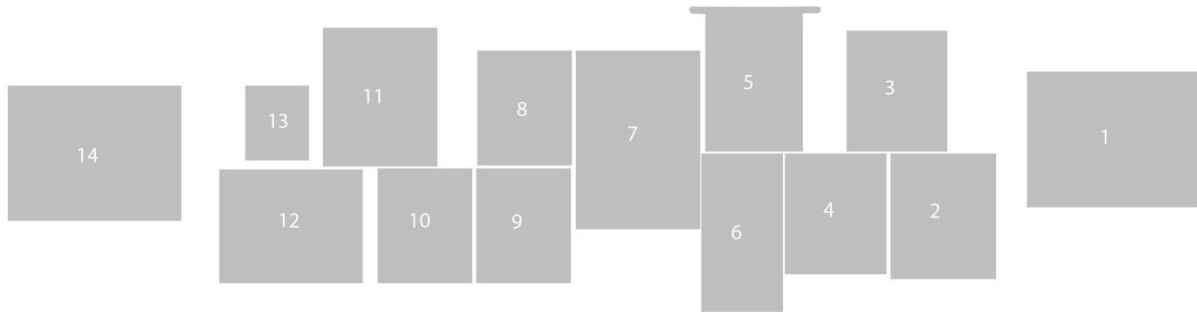


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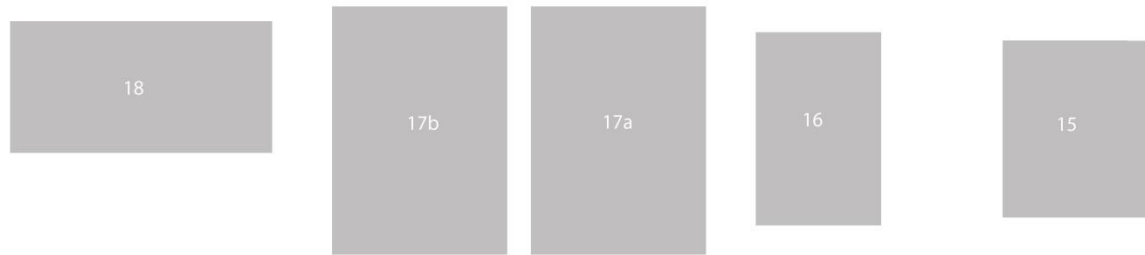
Checklist

Right Wall



-
1. *Untitled, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
40 x 48 inches
 2. *Tragamoneda, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
32 x 32 inches
 3. *Balloon Face, 2015*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
32 x 32 inches
 4. *Untitled, 2014*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin,
32 x 32 inches
 5. *Portrait as Narcissist, 2014*
Acrylic, house paint, lead, marker and paper
on wood with heavy resin
37 x 32 inches
 6. *Untitled, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel
42 x 27 inches
 7. *Bucktowns, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin,
48 x 40 inches
 8. *Profile, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
32 x 32 inches
 9. *Vicious, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
32 x 32 inches
 10. *Four Cultures, Three Continents, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
32 x 32 inches
 11. *Reach for it, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
42 x 38 inches
 12. *Gahboy, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
38 x 40 inches
 13. *Untitled, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
20 x 20 inches
 14. *One Arm Push-up, 2016*
Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
40 x 48 inches

Back Wall



15. *Cabezon*, 2016

Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
48 x 40 inches

16. *Bolsa*, 2015

House paint, fabric and Mexican boxing bag on wood panel
52 x 30 inches

17a. *Kings in Converse*, 2015

Acrylic, house paint, fabric, paper and lead on wood panel, in two parts
65 x 48 inches

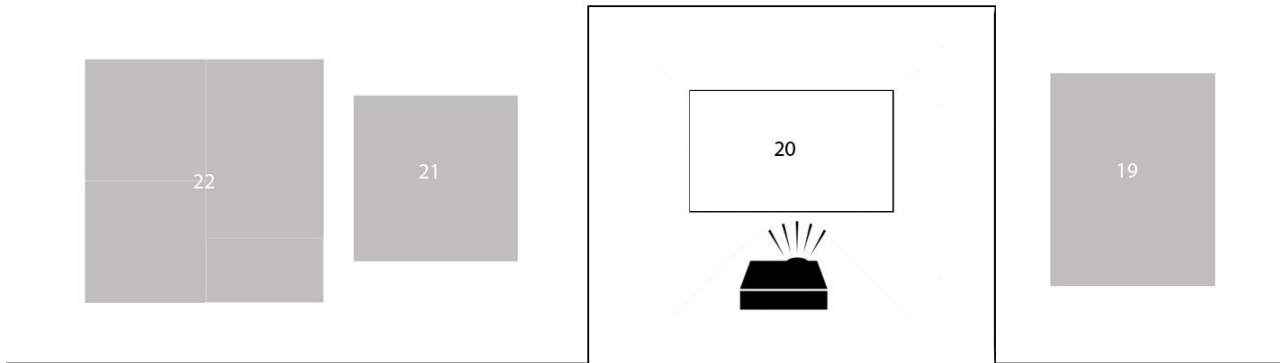
17b. *Kings in Converse #2*, 2015

Acrylic, house paint, fabric, paper and lead on wood panel, in two parts
65 x 48 inches

18. *Untitled (Churros) (Diptych)*, 2015

Mixed media on panel
36 x 52 inches

Left Wall



19. *Kings in Converse #3*, 2015

Acrylic, house paint, fabric, paper and lead on wood panel
65 x 48 inches

20. PerrosConSueter (Filmmaker based in Juarez, Mexico)

Santas Segundas, 2017

Single channel video: 7:00 minutes

21. *Cristo Redentor*, 2013

Mixed medium on panel

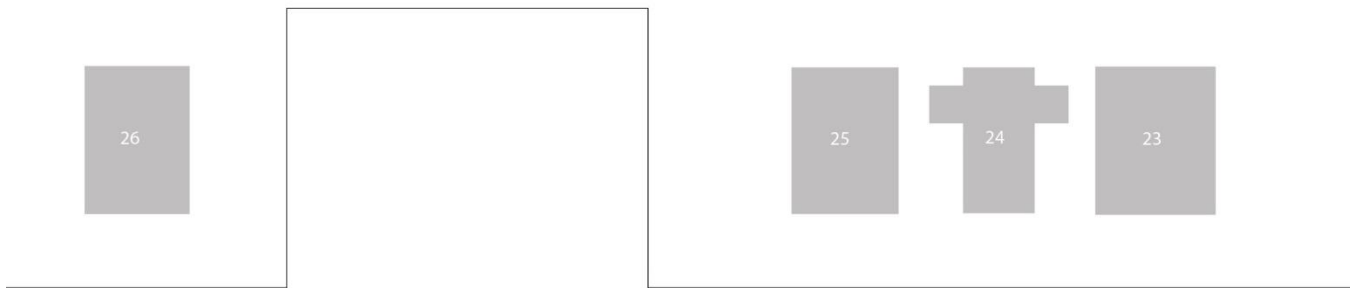
46 x 46 inches

22. *Assemblage #2*, 2016

Mixed medium on four wooden panels with heavy resin and porcelain

64 x 64 inches

Front Wall



23. *Boxeador*, 2016

Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
48 x 40 inches

24. *Untitled #3*, 2016

Mixed medium on panel
48 x 48 inches

25. *Libertad*, 2016

Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
48 x 38 inches

26. *Sexy Bitch*, 2016

Mixed medium on panel with heavy resin
48 x 40 inches

Audio

A Rap Opera

1. FIRST ACT:
Strife + Conflict by Yarrow Slaps
2. SECOND ACT:
Introspection by Yung Turk
3. THIRD ACT:
Concession + Acquiescence + Accession by Third Root

Lyle Carbajal's Authentic World

By Sara Lee Burd, 2017

Graffiti covered walls, commodity centered living, obesity, bravado, spirituality, sexuality, poverty, and adversity all have a place in Lyle Carbajal's art just as they do in the everyday world. For Carbajal, public spaces are the foundations of a culture; they anchor communities and provide democratic experiences for all who pass. The *Romancing Banality* exhibitions are all encompassing installations that act as public spaces for viewers to entangle their imaginations with disparate yet cohesive elements he incorporates within the show. Solitary structures, mixed media works, and collaborations with musicians and filmmakers provide genuine expressions of Carbajal's anthropological and artistic observations.

The artwork in *Romancing Banality* belongs within the artist's self-described Urban Vernacular artistic style. Together the words encompass Carbajal's thoughts, lessons, and perceptions of the world. The first part relates to visual and societal intersections he's encountered living in urban centers and traveling the globe. Vernacular is where the artist finds his inspiration. It's not the glitz and glamor that strikes Carbajal as authentic. His focus is on the ordinary world conceived, constructed, and populated by the majority of people, those with working class means or less. The concept of Urban Vernacular is visually defined by how he renders his subjects and presents his structures, which entails investigating the expressive quality of line in paint and the weightiness of juxtapositions.

Although he's lived most of his life in the United States, Carbajal's ethnic roots are tied to Latin America. As a man of Hispanic descent, his perspective is that of an "other" living within a white-centered culture. His travels through Mexico and Argentina profoundly affected his worldview as he found that he identified with the diversity of people, flourished in the colorful visual culture, and enjoyed learning about magico-religious spirituality. The visual references he makes in his art may not be recognizable to all, but creating encounters with the inaccessible or the unnoticed is what he strives to achieve with his art. The artist takes inspiration from the functional often commercial visual culture that shapes daily life to uncover universal elements that connect contemporary societies.

Carbajal's exhibitions feature three-dimensional structures that transform the gallery floor into an urban streetscape. *Romancing Banality - Houston* features four installations: Servicio Electrico store from Mexico City, a recycling junk shop from Manila, a commonly found church marquee, and a cinder block wall under construction. These scaled-down structures are equal parts biography and anthropology: a memory in Carbajal's visual journal and a document of the functional spaces. The commercial stops from Latin America and Asia provide numerous means for understanding the life and culture of the people who shop there. The eye catching color combinations used on the walls and signs of the storefronts are made to attract the attention of consumers. By including details such as dirty walls, missing lettering, and patched awnings, Carbajal indicates the lengthy time the stores have provided services and goods to the community, and also the lack of funds dedicated to upkeep. The barred shop windows reveal the store owners' primitive security systems and signifies a general lack of safety impoverished communities suffer when economic disparity leads to crime. This

interpretation is not fixed, however. The artist expects viewers to make their own associations and come to their own understanding of his artworks.

An essential element of Carbajal's exhibitions is his mixed media wall hangings, which he arranges in groups like advertorial paste-up posters or as stand-alone works. As he compiles emblematic imagery and ideas, he processes his musings into multi-layered, multi-media works that eschew classical artistic beauty for authentic visceral honesty. Connoting the commodification of culture, Carbajal combines mass-produced materials such as paint, toys, and printed paper packaging into multi-layered representations of people, animals, places, and objects. For example, in *Boxeador*, the artist draws from the style of promotional posters for boxers to create this iconic, yet crudely rendered boxer. Identified with the word "Julisco" above his image, the man's power is expressed through his aggressive stance and muscled body, which emphasizes the cultural value of masculine strength. The fighter appears heroic and is venerated despite the fact this debilitating sport disproportionately negatively affects the lives and finances of those with low economic means.

Through his audio journeys into rap and Latin music, he noticed lyrics and sounds that mirrored what he was also contemplating in his visual art. For his *Romancing Banality - Houston* installation, Carbajal has arranged a rap opera to play while viewers examine the physical structures, film, and art on the walls. In doing so, Carbajal immerses visitors into a multi-sensory experience of the perspectives he's gained. To accomplish a musical component for his exhibition, Carbajal invited artists to write and produce rap songs around fundamental themes. The first act focuses on strife and struggle. San Francisco-based rapper Yarrow Slaps posits his perspective on living in the trap where drugs are sold and the odds are stacked against you in "No Goodbye's":

"Funny how blocks determine The Territory of a man
I guess they forgot that it was all a setup
See we commit crimes
But understand it's just to get up"

The second act features Houston's Yung Turk's ruminations on introspection, particularly as a way to cope and rise up. San Antonio trio Third Root featuring Easy Lee, dj chicken George, and University of Texas Professor of bilingual-bicultural studies MexStep. Their song combines lyrics that resolve the third act with themes of concession, acquiescence, and accession. Easy Lee praises Carbajal in his call out to the visual artist: "abstract primitive canvas of a nomad / between the margins of this notepad / one glove crotch grab who's bad." His closing lyrics offer advice toward making a brighter future: "this world breeds the shallow / don't ever stop the digging / don't ever stop the digging." As a composition the opera reports on and responds to economic disparity, social segregation, and individual responsibility.

Romancing Banality also features a film produced by Mexican filmmakers Perrosconsueter, which features spliced images of documentary footage taken on the streets of Mexico. Graffiti tags on walls, trash in the streets, people walking, sunsets, people praying, and spectators looking, the content is mundane, but the presentation in film lends a spiritual quality to the rituals of life. The boundary blurs between the sacred and the profane in the film in the same way that cultures across the globe practice religions and build societies around the intermingling of sacrifice, suffering, redemption, justice, and salvation.

Taking up residency in areas where he is going to present his work provides a fresh context for Carbajal to create art that documents his ongoing explorations. *Romancing Banality* debuted in Seattle in 2013 and has been reconceived for New Orleans, Nashville, and Houston. Living in the Southern United States has allowed Carbajal to explore the roots-inspired artwork of the region, which captures his imagination and stimulates his own ability to depict strife, humor, and empathy. Admiring the honest expressions of Jean Dubuffet's "Corps de dame" series, Bill Traylor, Mary T. Smith's portrait of the South and in musical traditions of Rap, Blues, Country, and Jazz, Carbajal strives for the direct simplicity he finds in folk art and regional cultures.

Place is significant and pluralistic to Carbajal because of the connections amongst the ideas, sounds, colors, words, and values that pervade the roving artist's perception. Taking reference photographs as he goes, he returns to the studio to make art with imagery that is so common it is easily overlooked by passersby, but that is immensely important to his understanding of the world. With his exhibitions, Carbajal invites viewers into his world to see what he finds evocative and meaningful in mundane life and urban detritus. He is not defining a particular culture as much as sharing himself by displaying curated selections of what he sees as the universal connections among urban environments. *Romancing Banality* is Carbajal's place. It is an extrapolation of what he has found and processed as authentic and meaningful in the world.

A Rap Opera

FIRST ACT:

Strife + Conflict by Yarrow Slaps

No Goodbyes

Born and I'm ready for storms
stood in line a few times but i never set in form
creative child, a young leader of champions
just learned today, y'all rappers can't challenge him
coming from the underworld, where u can't hear sounds
its too deep down here to make yo rounds
good morning and thank u for the strength
lil mama send me love when she cant send me bank
top rank nigga at whatever i choose
i learned how to win, but theres nothing 2 prove
go head check my tweets, my ig and Facebook
every word i said ill back up but just look
and see nigga change for the better,
but lifers a roller coaster, stay strong if u a getta
if u moved form a mansion down to the favelas
would u still be down to look out for yo hittas?
i don't think so, those skills aint taught
so we rise we rise until we felt
started from the sea bottom jus like kelp
but now that we rollin better fasting ya belts

(Hook and KE verse)

I don't want a goodbye
I don't want a nice try
I just wanna live twice
I just wanna get high
Let's celebrate
Its a Celebration

This is for those that always stay
Just as I wud do me
I wud do you

(Verse)

The biggest rocks
Become the smallest sand
Infinite wisdom is a kingdom
Funny how blocks determine
The Territory of a man
I guess they forgot that it was all a setup
See we commit crimes
But understand its just to get up
We don't look broke
Don't wanna guilt trip

Don't wanna kill folk

Don't wanna get hit
Don't want a Lil doe
Plotting on a big grip
But then I gotta think
How come every time I look at a plant
I'm thinkin bout the roots

And feel my most high
When I hippin and I'm hoppin
And I'm ripping in the booth
And everything that I'm talking
I'm spittin with my tooth
and the truth
I don't another fuckin use
For a mothafuckin fool
And Who ain't tryina hear the proof
The Pudding
Yea dats where it's at
Don't pass him the bullets
When he ask for the gat
the last is the past
Don't worry bout the place
We all come first
Gotta set ya own pace
Life is what you make it
Give before you take it
Don't get 2 close to fake shit
And rearrange the basic

SECOND ACT:
Introspection by Yung Turk

Roles Changed

we always learned about it
while we was reading in school
about how certain colored
people getting treated so cruel
about how they came to a world
where they didn't even have a chance in
but thats the type of thing i gotta feel to understand it
so i'm thinking to my self about how one could even fathom
just tryna be themselves knowing their dreams could never happen
while they just tryna spread their wings to see the things they've never seen
spend a couple hours turning feeling into ink
and i think that i'm tryna be the greatest MC
but standing on the stage watching people judging me
so i chose to do this challenge just to see what i can be
to find that roles change from old ways now we minorities

hook:

thats roles changed,
hey, yeah, thats roles changes,
man i said that yeah i said thats roles changed,
look, yeah, the roles changed,
look, yeah, the roles changed,
hey yea, the roles changed,
man i said that yeah i said thats roles changed,
hey, yeah, the roles changed

verse 2:

now its funny how they switched it up
white rappers never get the love
creativity was overlooked
but i came up in the game just tryna be an open book
white rappers with no names now they getting overbooked
thats the goal and i know i got my foot up in the door,
2017 that is when they saying imma blow
thats the struggle that they faced every day on the low
gotta shoutout to the greats who paved the way for us to grow
shoutout mac shoutout gerald shoutout eminem and all of them
i think i just owe to you all like y'all gave me a scholarship
but shoutout to the fans because they never kept it counterfeit
i'm feeling all the love and all the support they surround me with
y'all the ones that get me through it
aint no other place like houston
came up in the game i knew
id never have a lame conclusion
cuz my dreams are getting lucid
i put it all into the music

man i put it in the music

man i knew that i can do this

hook:

thats roles changed

hey, yeah, the roles changed

man i said that yeah i said thats roles changed,

man the whole thang changed

but i stayed in the game

and they say that the roles changed

(don't let them roadblocks stop you, keep doin yo thang)

THIRD ACT:
Concession + Acquiescence + Accession by Third Root

Dig

Easy:

The drum is like a heart beat
lion off the springs in his black feet
new cotton blood drip from a black hand
abstract primitive canvas of a nomad
between the margins of this notepad
one glove crotch grab who's bad
we all pray
cuz the skunks spray death when the guns play
the innocent might die when the cops say
freeze
ice hanging from the trees
apps hoggin up yo home screen
bills in your mailbox
days long gone we escaped in a hotbox
moonlight moonshine
slingshot a moonrock
take a step back snapshot when the verse stop
hip hop

Hook:

the art is in the dirt if you dig / if you dig / if you dig / if you dig / can you dig / can you dig it?

Repeat 3x

MexStep:

Diggin in the crates with CG records dusty
Found in the basement; now played across countries
New life and breathe; sunshine, clouds and rain
Reading Malcolm, Huey, Angela in these days
elevate every time we educate and teach
With Easy Lee the scholar, kicking Rebel Music speech
Keep making gains, every time we train build the arsenal, equipped to spark change
focused, running trails; stacking mail, counting breathes
lifting weights, complete sets then manifest
The Art is in the dirt, in the pain and stress
no sleep; no rest thoughts processed
knowledge applied, now elevate high
walk, run, jump, look up and then we fly
Stay moving; with the bassline and drum booming
on the stage working rocking crowds building unions

Easy (Hook)

Life was rough / life is hard / & will be death / but in between / we hold our breath / and dive
for love / taste the spices / pass the sweets / I'm nice on beats / that jazz the room / this vibe
is right

MexStep:

after passing tests; go home and reflect
throwing out regrets playing keys and frets

when you break the cycle when you shake the system
move up transition
when late nights pay off

when you pass a test and move it on to the next one
That's elevation
when you Swim in the clouds and reach for the sun

Closing:

this world breeds the shallow / don't ever stop the digging / don't ever stop the digging

Santas Segundas

All the people who helped us in this video have confessed suffering some kind of orphanhood in their own childhood caused by the migration of their parents or guardians to the United States, they said that because of this, they drop off their studies and had to work, to earn living since they were kids, which allowed them to wander and know themselves. Focusing only in the things that they liked, getting a style of their own, to express themselves. Having fun, with no real life plan at all, and now they say they are suffering the consequences during the day but enjoy them at night.

They already worked a lot when children and now they yearn for an easier and simple kind of life, and yet they have three or four different jobs, but they can work them all at the same time and even mix it with some spare time.

They said that they like gambling, witchcraft, faith, believing in everything and nothing at the same time, they devote to any religion, ideology, what people tells them, they believe when it's something for their own benefit, when they need to believe. They will change their mind or simply ignore the information if it's no use to them, still they keep some object just in case they will need some saint someday, or at least to talk about it to another person.

We're just like them, and that's why we feel such empathy.

We started filming with no pretention, just hunting and spying people with Christmas depression or stress for the holidays, something that causes a serious amount of suicides or at least we notices how bars and flea markets are full with people that can spent a whole afternoon trying on second hand hats or shoes, with not a single dime in their pockets.

We wanted to create a saint, an im age, a face to become their accomplice, to become partners in crime, their tricks, their frauds, actions that for them are illegal or immoral, but necessary and that wouldn't do to each other, and if they do it's the end of their friendship. In other words, in a portrait made by Lyle Carbajal we found that face and that gesture that people do when they try to avoid responsibilities.

Lyle helped us financially to buy the equipment to film, rent spaces, whatever we needed, but we decided to use that money instead to ask a depress person for this portrait, despite of the fact that they're always up to help you, almost nobody wanted to paint in the canvas, because they didn't go to school or didn't know how to read or write, they didn't even wanted to draw, much less for money.

At the end, when ask to the waitress of our favorite bar, who made a draw from us during her break time at her job, she also made a portrait of Lyle, but when she found out that we would paid her a lot of money instead of one beer, just for one favor, she felt like she was robbing from us, so she insisted to make more paintings, she even gave us free beer and made us a couple of knitted hats, she also develop interest in Lyle's work and life, and she thought it would be nice to paint his couple, Lyle had no idea of any of this.

When she finished the painting, influenced by the work that we showed her, we thought it was nice how she told us she selected clothes that she saw at the flea market, and at the same time she looked deeper into her life and her environment, sick of it, she considered go to another place, but she felt such wellness when she saw herself in Lyle's portraits, and also how now she could select things from the city that she doesn't like in real life but made her feel good in the paintings.

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Juarez, Mexico

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Jaime Fernandez / [instagram.com/perrosconsueter](https://www.instagram.com/perrosconsueter)

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Marco Antonio Cervantes / www.ThirdRoot.bandcamp.com

DJ Chicken George / www.ThirdRoot.bandcamp.com

Adrian Quesada / www.levelonesound.com

Yarrow Slaps / www.yarrowslapsart.com

Yung Turk / www.soundcloud.com/yungturkk

Sara Lee Burd / www.artconsultantnashville.com

Jay Wehnert / www.intuitiveeye.org

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