



PRESS RELEASE

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GALLERY is pleased to announce

José Lerma

I am sorry I am Perry

December 11, 2010 – January 22, 2011

On the Title:

The title is the punch line of a joke I heard as a child in Puerto Rico in which an English-speaking fox and a Spanish-speaking dog bump into each other and exchange apologies. Their conversation embodies the resulting layers of meanings that stem from the inadequacies of translation.

My practice consists of finding ways within painting to collapse the historical and the personal. In this exhibition, I intend to create a narrative from a combination of 3 separate ideas that I have been working with over the past few years: the bankers, the reflective curtain, and the keyboards. What I hope emerges is a kind of “fourth reading”, one that cannot be immediately grasped or understood, but one that stays with you, and largely because of its inability to be immediately comprehended.

On the Bankers:

While I was still a law student, on my first visit to the Met, I encountered the bust of the French banker Samuel Bernard by Guillaume Coustou. Bernard had been one of the richest men during the reign of Louis XIV. I shot a full roll of images of this work. I still have no idea why I did it; at the time I had no intention of making art or even being an artist. Many years later, I began to paint a series of abstract portraits, which loosely referenced those photographs. As with Bernard, I made paintings of two other financiers. One was Jacob Fugger, banker to the Hapsburgs and creator of the first public housing project. The third was John Law, a Scottish-born banker and economist who was responsible for creating one of the first bubbles and nearly bankrupting the French economy. I picked these men rather than more obvious choices (Rothschilds, Schiffs or Salomon Chase), because these figures were for me, at most, a point of departure. They're faceless, lack likeness, and are an ideal space for formal invention.

On the Reflective Curtain:

This is the fourth and largest version of the reflective curtain I have made so far. The fabric is made by 3M, and it is used for night safety. The curtain is a classic motif for many painters (Richter's gray curtains for example) due to the story of Parrhasius. I was interested in reversing its function (light suppression) to, if not light emission, a hyper-reflection. This idea of being aligned with light picks up on a parallel narrative to a strand of positivist ideas in art and painting in particular. A previous version referenced an abstract motif in Frank Stella's “de la Nada Vida a la Nada Muerte” creating only one pinstripe, by means of two gray colored bands, the most minimal allusion I could make to contemporary banking attire. This one I left untouched, and only reversed its title. The curtains can go from dull, to sublime, to cheap depending on one's physical relation to it...that is my favorite quality about them.

On the Keyboards:

In 2003 in Chicago I did a sculpture which I titled “The Saddest Chord in the World.” The piece was very simple. It consisted of a Yamaha DX7 keyboard, which leaned vertically against the wall and had the D, F and A keys held down by means of masking tape, creating a D minor chord. Less a Cagean tinkering than a riff on Keith Emerson knives, or Dennis Oppenheim organ pieces, the work results in a New Age-like drone, which slows down the read. Here I placed the synths the way painters place wood blocks under unfinished paintings. Unlike in “The Saddest Chord” there is a dissonance in this work that is dictated by the large physical supports pressing any key while being set up daily. In this work the paintings make the music, which is set off against the bureaucratic grays, the fluorescent pink highlighters, the Bic pen blue doodles and the kind of daydreaming that occurs in the workplace.

-José Lerma

Andrea Rosen Gallery is thrilled to present José Lerma's third solo exhibition at the gallery. Lerma, born in Spain and raised in Puerto Rico, studied political science and law at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, before switching his major to art and earning his MFA. He was granted a year-long residency in Puerto Rico, attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and the Core Program (affiliated with the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, TX). Since his previous exhibition here in 2006 Lerma has exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Milwaukee Art Museum, El Museo del Barrio, New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture to name a few; as well as showing internationally with recent solo gallery exhibitions in Seoul, Berlin and Madrid. José Lerma lives and works in New York and Chicago, where he is on faculty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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