

MAKE ROOM

Make Room Los Angeles is pleased to announce *Elusive Nature*, the West Coast solo debut of Miguel Angel Payano, Jr.

“Are you here? Or are you there?” So asks the work of artist Miguel Angel Payano Jr. Born in New York City to Dominican immigrants, Payano has spent his life a cultural transient between three separate worlds: the Spanish-speaking enclave of his childhood in Washington Heights; the hallowed English-speaking halls of his Northeastern education; and his Chinese-speaking adopted home of Beijing.

Payano’s work shows that the question “Are you here? Or are you there?” is more rhetorical than definite. It perfectly encapsulates the core of what Payano terms his “triple-consciousness”, a phrase based on W.E.B. DuBois’ theory of African American cultural dissonance, whereby the artist is constantly analyzing his own actions through the lens of his multiple cultural identities (Afro-Latino, American, and Chinese). Triple-consciousness and transnationalism spur on habitual code-switching, wherein one jumps between culturally specific significations or registers. Personally, this modus operandi has primed Payano’s affinity for creating images and objects that visually, conceptually and referentially shift, often operating on a level of anthropomorphic synecdoche.

The peach, perhaps Payano’s most iconic referent, is a prime example. The inspiration to fuse mouths onto peaches had multiple triggers. In Payano’s mind, mouthed peaches become “single-celled” humans. The mouths serve as a component to uniquely individuate the peaches, while the relatively simple shape of the peaches facilitates their insertion into more complex scenarios and metaphors.

The works in *Elusive Nature* further interrogate Payano’s interest in cultural literacy, in particular the paths and power structures that constitute cultural indoctrination. Genealogies are present both thematically and physically. The works in this show provide a nearly comprehensive survey of the evolution of Payano’s practice. These visual leitmotifs appear in painted works featuring mothers, children, and family units, as well as Payano’s classic “heavy collages”— wall pieces of human figures that combine painting and sculpture, consisting of a buildup of different surfaces and materials.

There is often a natural deconstruction at play in Payano’s heavy collages, in line with their material construction. The figures’ heads are painted with the images of landscapes, their eyes folded bottle caps, their mouths ripe peaches that have often been left on the vine. This sense of communion between the human body and nature is further exemplified in his painted panels of legs upturned in a collapse of sea and clouds. The figures are caught between flight and drowning, heaven and earth, the imaginable and the absurd, evoking a deep feeling of the sublime.