

CENTRAL FINE

JOSE DELGADO ZUNIGA. INTO ME SEE.

FEBRUARY 26TH - MARCH 23RD, 2023

Into Me See, Jose Delgado Zuñiga's third presentation at CENTRAL FINE confronts the symbols used to define Chicano identity, presenting a double consciousness¹ as a point of rupture that gives way to the Real.² The painting titled *I Am* (2022-2023) addresses that symbolic codification, when reframing the distortions placed on perception by oppression. In the background, we see Miguel Cabrera's 1763 painting, *De Español y Mestiza, Castiza*, one of a series of casta paintings³ which would provide a colonial Spaniard portrait of "the other." In the painting, the fantasy of what "the other" looks like spans from the colonization of Mexico, up until the 20th century American caricature of Latinos, such as *Speedy Gonzales* and *Slowpoke Rodriguez*, from the *Looney Tunes*. Relating to, and rejecting these portrayals, Zuñiga merges an image of masculinity projected from within the Chicano community: High white socks -often seen as a sign of toughness- are stretched out from Nike Cortez sneakers⁴ to form a curtsey, recalling *Las Meninas*, and in so, challenging a culture of machismo.

From this effort to historicize one's background and context, a lexicon emerges. An open mouth with golden teeth travels from painting to painting, accompanied by weeds with thorns, daisies, corn, sunflowers, and cityscapes. These recurrent motifs participate in a private system of permutation and rearrangement, as if telling the same story over and over, while focusing on a shifting narrative. The plot told by Zuñiga isn't transparent, as some aspects in the paintings are blurry, while others are filled with details, and written messages hide in plain sight. Zuñiga's decision to approach some areas of the canvas in a gestural way, and others in an obsessive and illustrative fashion, recall the psychoanalytic method of free association: In a psychoanalytic session some contents from 30 years ago, will emerge crisp and fully articulated, while what happened yesterday might lie in a blanket of repression. Painting is then an instrument that assists in the retelling and representation of one's moving self-portrait.

In *Into Me See*, the gaze looks inwards and everywhere, as if reaching for an enlightenment that can make sense of the mutating skeleton of boundaries. This intimacy is seen in what's engraved in the body, stored in the depths of what eludes speech. Veiling and unveiling reality, becomes apparent in Zuñiga's decision to 'brown' all the pigments in these paintings, by adding a bit of brown to white, yellow, red, green, etc. Browning, then, appears as an invisible actor that unifies all the elements, by coating memory in the sepia of the past, while addressing Zuñiga's nightmares, many related to the marginalization of Latinx culture. One could say that in this presentation, Zuñiga emphasizes the relationship between distance and control: Perhaps by painting shattered glass and burning letters, the artist brings hope and silence closer to the surface, in-forming them, through the resources developed by his own constitutional wound.

Diego Singh
Miami Beach, February, 2023.

¹ Double-consciousness is a term in social philosophy that refers to a source of internal "twoness," experienced by African-Americans due to their racialized oppression in a white-dominated society. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois first introduced the term in his groundbreaking *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The term has since been used in social philosophy to address experiences of other marginalized groups navigating this "twoness."

² Knockaert, & Geerardyn, & Van de Vijver, Gertrudis & Van Bunder, David & Bazan, Ariane. (2004). Trauma as an Encounter With the Real. *International Journal of Computing Anticipatory Systems*, 16, 81-91. The essay's authors assert that traumatic experiences can shatter the illusion of social reality, allowing one to experience what Jacques Lacan referred to as "the Real."

³ "Casta paintings used labels and visual details such as different skin tones, dress, occupations, and settings to distinguish ethnicity and to signal economic and class divisions. These images did not reflect reality so much as represent stereotypes arranged along a biased, hierarchical scale." Julie Wilson Frick, Denver Art Museum and Dr. Beth Harris, "Casta painting in the Spanish Americas," in *Smarthistory*, January 17, 2018.

⁴ The presence of Nike Cortez sneakers, a popular sneaker for Chicanos, draws up the association of Hernán Cortés, the conquistador who famously turned indigenous people against one another until he achieved the downfall of the Aztec empire. In Chicano culture, high knee socks are seen to be more masculine, by not showing one's legs.

José Delgado Zuñiga was born in 1988, in Ventura, California. He lives and works in New York. He completed his MFA in painting in 2017 at Columbia University, New York, where he was an adjunct professor of Painting from 2017-2019. He is currently the Lead Teaching Artist and Muralist at Groundswell, Brooklyn, New York.

Zuñiga was awarded the Rema Hort Mann Emerging Artist Grant; and the Rema Hort Mann Emerging Community Grant both in 2018. He has presented his first Solo show "Quotidian", in 2019 at CENTRAL FINE, Miami Beach; and exhibited his paintings at the ICA Miami, Miami, Florida; the Luhring Augustine Gallery, Chelsea, NY; Yale Divinity School of Sacred Music, in New Haven, Connecticut; The Ventura Museum, California; the Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, California; The Miriam and Ira D Wallach Gallery, at Columbia University, New York City; East Projects, New York; and has participated at the Bronx Museum program: Artists in the MarketPlace. (AIM), New York. His paintings are in numerous international collections. This is his third solo presentation at CENTRAL FINE, Miami Beach.