

Love is not a maybe thing ... marks Berlin-based artist Xavier Robles de Medina's (*1990, Suriname) inaugural solo show in Germany. This exhibition integrates the artist's familial and Surinamese historical explorations through a monograph and a collection of new works. Drawing from a diverse array of references, Robles de Medina constructs a narrative that untangles the intricate threads binding personal and historical dimensions.

The exhibition's opening coincides with the birthday of Johan Adolf Pengel (1916-1970), Suriname's Prime Minister from 1963 to 1969. Notably, Robles de Medina's grandfather, Stuart Robles de Medina—an artist and educator—was commissioned to craft a bronze sculpture of Pengel after his passing that was revealed on Independence Square 50 years ago in 1974. The meticulous documentation of this process, captured in a family photo album, not only chronicles the artistic endeavour but inadvertently provides a snapshot of the societal climate during the politically tumultuous period leading to Suriname's independence in 1975.

Extensive research by Xavier Robles de Medina highlights the circumstances surrounding the sculpture's creation, culminating in a monograph that replicates the original photo album. This publication also features an edited interview with Stuart Robles de Medina, supplemented by conversations and commentary from other family members.

A pivotal moment in the narrative centres around the removal of the sculpture of Queen Wilhelmina, located in the same square as the sculpture of Pengel, on the eve of Suriname's independence. A photo from the archives of the *Stichting Surinaams Museum* shows Stuart Robles de Medina and colleagues during this removal. The artist renders this photo in acrylic paint by enlarging it until the sculpture assumes life-size proportions. Attached to scaffolding akin to that seen in the original album photos, the monumental painting towers over the exhibition. Though not needing a complicated cast, the painting's production is equally laborious as the artist applies coat after coat of various shades of metallic grey.

This rigorous approach, echoing an archaeologist's labour of unearthing remains in the ground, finds a parallel in a painting depicting an excavation site. In Robles de Medina's practice, meticulous research and the painstakingly slow application of paint become inseparable, thus heightening the relationship between the artwork's subject matter and how it materializes in the form of a painting. As he works, layers of societal and political history slowly unravel until they culminate in a shiny, grainy surface in which an image finally reveals itself.

The metallic hue of the painted surfaces gains added intensity beside a small bronze sculpture adorned with a green patina. In this artwork, the artist transforms a two-dimensional scene from Disney's *Snow White* into a three-dimensional object. This sculpture not only pays homage to his grandfather's pioneering work but also blurs the boundaries between the different mediums' material and spatial distinctions. Simultaneously, the artist's incorporation of borrowed images with personal memories merges the spheres of individual and collectively shared associations.

Xavier Robles de Medina (b. 1990) lives and works between Berlin (DE) and Paramaribo (SR). In 2019 he obtained an MFA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London and he is a current participant in the Berlin Program for Artists (2023-2024).