

Alberto Berdugo: *John*

30.08.2025 – 27.09.2025

John is an exhibition of recent works – namely sculpture, painted and expanded media – by artist and curator Alberto Berdugo. The works are clustered into several distinct series, grouped for their conceptual reference which usually relates to their material composition. The works speak about public space and the public sphere, and instances of being in public with a particular sensitivity, vulnerability or even weakness.

In the first room, with one work extending out into the entrance way, there are three painted sunsets. The artist is interested in the sunset because of how ubiquitous and generic images of them are, relaying beauty and peace which tend to feel deep and one's own when experienced. In the exhibition, they're meant to be welcoming and comforting. Sunset is also the time of lowest cortisol of the day and low cortisol = low anxiety. Two of them are painted on acoustic diffusers. Berdugo is interested in sound because of its acute responsiveness to spatial conditions and also because of his own phobias of many noises. The diffusers are engineered to deflect sound waves in many different directions so as to cancel out physical characteristics of a space. These devices counter echoes, reverberations or any other sonic aberration, maintaining a voice pure in any room, and the diffusers used as substrates here for the paintings are designed to work in a range of frequencies that cover the entire human voice. The sunset in the entranceway is painted on a folded truck curtain, used by truck drivers who spend a lot of time on public roads to make their cabins feel a bit more like home.

The orange work set on the floor is a to-scale replica of an Elevated Plus Maze, the most commonly used behavioral assay to test benzodiazepines on mice. When the mouse stays on the arms of the cross with sides it means its fear is greater than its drive for exploration. If it ventures to one of the open arms, it means that the benzos are having an effect. For Berdugo, this shape seems to make the relationship between space and anxiety more explicit. Its vibrant orange is a warm and outward counterpoint to the lab maze, with silhouettes of some famous adventurous and tender mice from children's fiction.

In the next room, there are two paintings of football players that have to do with embodying defeat in public. Images of defeated players have quite a smooth and fecund existence in the public sphere, in newspapers, TV or in children's mythologies. There's something dignified and exemplary about them. Since we're clearly losing politically and socially, the artist is interested in these images that seem to give loss and shortcoming a place in public life, some traction, some lexicon, some gestural repertoire, somewhere to build on from.

The yellow sculpture is a canary lung, a medical resuscitator adapted to have three bags of air – like the lungs of a canary – rather than just one. The artist is interested in the hypersensitivity of these animals to their environment, the vulnerability that comes from an extra airy respiratory system. Carbon monoxide knocks the birds out in a second, which is why miners took them down with them to the mine in case there were leaks. This sensitivity is paradoxically also what allows them to sing so beautifully.

The remaining works speak about magnetism. Berdugo researches groups of people that pay special attention to interesting instances of electromagnetic interference and then document them, a community that is quite literally tuned in to the invisible charge of spaces. For the instances referenced with the pieces here (the titles of which explain the specifics of their stories) these occurrences of electromagnetic interference describe unusual relations, sometimes speaking of power or love. The works replicate examples of: airplanes landing earlier than scheduled because of low wage labor, as if frying fish was some form of intense longing that had the power to bring your loved ones back to you; or radio talk between truck drivers jeopardizing some sense of business and family safety imbued into the ABS system of morning commuters; or a pacemaker-wearing man's racing heartbeat during sex exposing his neighbor's property to the night and its thieves.

The work on paper titled *St John* (which gives title to the show like some advocacy) is embroidered in magnetic cassette tape and nailed to the wall amidst this particularly magnetic intensive atmosphere. Berdugo speaks of this work: *I like that John the Evangelist is the volatile one, the oversensitive one, and also the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of his own mother moments before his death. His gospel is also the most questioned: many doubt that the Gospel of John was actually written by John the Evangelist. I'm interested in this elevated vulnerability of voice and testimony.*

List of Works (clockwise from entrance):

Entrance:

Late sun through the window, 2025

Oil on truck curtain

50 x 50 cm

Room one:

Elevated plus, 2024

Self-adhesive PVC sheets, Wood

113 x 113 x 103 cm

Sunset over the city 900 — 3650 Hz, 2025

Oil on skyline acoustic diffuser

62 x 62 x 20 cm

Sunset over the sea 700 — 2200 Hz, 2025

Oil on acoustic diffusers, acoustically transparent fabric, wood, frame

105 x 55 x 12 cm

Room two:

Team defeat, 2025

Oil on glass, frame

45 x 33 cm

Rodri, 2025

Oil on canvas, leather

50 x 40 cm

Some people tell stories, some happy, some sad, about unsuspected magnetic contingencies 3: My neighbor has had a new heart pacemaker fitted — every time he makes love my garage door opens, 2025.

Oil on canvas.

82 x 62 cm

Canary lung, 2024

Acrylic on modified resuscitator, saxophone strap

Dimensions variable

Some people tell stories, some happy, some sad, about unsuspected magnetic contingencies 2: A number of car accidents were caused by mobile radio transmitters interfering with early anti-lock braking systems, 2025

Wood, ABS module, mobile radio transmitter

Dimensions variable

Some people tell stories, some happy, some sad, about unsuspected magnetic contingencies 1: The radiofrequency emissions of a frying machine at a fish restaurant near Heathrow made planes land earlier than they should, 2025

Industrial fryer, toy airplane, pewter sheet, metallic tape

Dimensions variable

St John, 2025

Cassette tape, paper

25 x 49 cm