

SEANKELLY

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ARTE FUSE

"Lapse" – Alejandro Campins' first U.S. solo show at Sean Kelly



Installation view of Lapse, Photography: Jason Wyche, New York, Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

What does it feel like when the world is changing all around you? How do you capture a place in time? Havana-based artist Alejandro Campins, (born in 1981, Manzanillo, Cuba) puts forth answers to these questions in his first U.S. solo show, entitled "Lapse" currently on view at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York.

Granted, no place ever stays the same, but with direct commercial flights for the first time into Havana and developers champing at the bit to provide luxury accommodations and American products to an influx of waiting tourists, Cuba is arguably becoming an epicenter of change. Interestingly enough, despite what one would expect to be a frenetic transformation, Campins' exquisite mixed media paintings – oil, watercolor and pencil – are in fact surprisingly calm, and beautiful. They do not simply recreate the changing Cuban landscape in the literal sense, but they capture the mood, the essence, of how it feels to live in a failed utopia, a place filled with so much impermanence.

The handsome, soft spoken young artist explains, "Cuba is a place where the idea of impermanence manifests itself all the time." His landscapes, he continues, are like "a mirror into the minds of the people surrounded by impermanence everywhere." Although they are mysterious and unspecified, with titles like "Secreto", "Frozen", "Bunker" and "Suspense" the paintings in the exhibition are based on real places. He sometimes takes photos of both urban and rural spaces around the island, but when back in his studio he doesn't paint the actual image, but the feel of the site.

Campins graduated from the Academia Profesional de Artes Plásticas "El Alba" Holguín, Cuba in 2000 and from the Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba in 2009. At 99.8%, Cuba has one of the highest literacy rates in the world and the art schools provide broad and rigorous instruction. In a few short years, he has developed an impressive portfolio of solo shows in Cuba and Spain, and has been featured internationally in biennials in Cairo, Lisbon and Havana. In 2015, he was named a finalist for the Farber Foundations inaugural Young Cuban Artist of the Year. But this is his first solo show in the U.S.

Clearly, Campins is a well-trained, amazing painter. His sense of perspective and use of light are about as good as it gets. Influenced by the Old Masters, he speaks fluently for example of Titian's use of landscape and horizon in relation to his own. In his canvases, both large and small, (and some of them, are very large) the horizon is tempting, inviting the viewer into the scene, yet at the same time deceptive. "The horizon is a good point of view," he explains, "for me, the horizon is not real, it is an illusion. You can get closer but never really reach it, so it makes an interesting point of view."

While he may speak to other artistic influences, Campins' style and vision are clearly his own. And how could it not be? Formed by his experiences living on a seemingly allochronic island, known for its cultural diversity –

built from Spanish, African, French and Asian influences – Cuba is a curious place. As a result Campins' paintings can be described as “evocative” and “timeless.” For an artist with such an eye for detail, there is still a feeling of spontaneity and chance in the brushstrokes and the seemingly random, yet deliberate specks of paint interrupting the earth or sky in his paintings. His work radiates a gift for seeing those shadowy ominous places that can be easily overlooked by the hurried passerby, yet once seen they really stay with you. He also shows that change is not necessarily linear, his work reminds me of the poem “Time Xxi” by Khalil Gibran, “But if in you thought you must measure time into seasons, let each season encircle all the other seasons, And let today embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing.” In his paintings, Campins embraces what was, what could be, and all those feelings of being in between.

Alejandro Campins' exhibit “Lapse” is on view February 12-March 12, 2016 at Sean Kelly Gallery, 475 Tenth Avenue, NY.



Installation view of Lapse, Photography: Jason Wyche, New York, Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York