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Pedro Vélez

05/05/14 at 06:27 am by admin



Pedro Vélez is one of the participants in the Whitney Biennial in New York.

Through his artwork, Vélez explores issues of moral coercion and political corruption. “Coming from the Caribbean, one can’t help but be overwhelmed by corruption. It’s an integral part of life,” said Vélez. He also often intertwines his experience as an art critic with his work as an artist. “You can’t have one without the other, so to me they are both the same: art. I can’t separate them. I promote the same ideas with my writing that I use in my paintings and photographs. Think of Orson Welles. What if he had decided to only be a radio personality? People do many things in life, and I can’t be one dimensional. That would be boring – it would be the antithesis of art,” explained Vélez.

Annlee Lives (Mónica Rizzo), from *#TheMonochromaticCritics*. Courtesy of Pedro Vélez.

Vélez’s current exhibition, *#DrunkDictators* at Monique Meloche in Chicago, mimics the approach that the majority of art critics take to distribute information, ideas and judgment. “It’s about how the center [NY] hijacks the information,” said Vélez. “How condescending they are to other regions. How white they are. How provincial they are. Places like Detroit, Milwaukee and Chicago have more than capable journalists and cultural reporters. Let those experts deal, or create consensus on the issues affecting those scenes. They are the ones in the know and not Jerry Saltz on Facebook, who never leaves Manhattan.”

Leading up to his participation in the Whitney Biennial Pedro Vélez was recently granted a two-month residency at APT Institute Studios in Brooklyn, New York. “APT Institute is supporting me at this crucial and exciting moment in my career. As an artist, the security of having a studio provides me with the total freedom of focusing on my pieces, rather than having to worry about my financial situation, along with the hassle of moving,” explained Vélez.



For the Whitney Biennial, Vélez created a visual essay made of banners and photographs in which art journalism, social media, beauty, race and political corruption collide. “Take all the art editors from the major art publications in the US. How many of them are Brown or Black? None. It’s not representative of our society today and we have to change that,” said Vélez.

His main project for the Biennial, *#TheMonochromaticCritics*, assesses how art critics distribute information to the public, which shares similarities to that of *#DrunkDictators*. “*#TheMonochromaticCritics* is an artful form of critique – it is a cryptic riddle,” explained Vélez. “I combine text sourced from various art reviews with images of models (fellow artists/critics/editors/friends), and create a simultaneously optimistic and fatalistic dynamic.” This project explores the established art criticism center of New York and compares it to the often marginalized art scene in other regions of the United States, conceptualizing the problems of the art world with ethnicity and race. As an event specific side project, Vélez created time/site-specific postcards that served as a review of the Whitney’s exhibition from an artist perspective, which were handed out at the show’s opening.

It is no secret that Vélez’s artwork resides within the political spectrum. When asked what role he believes that artists should have in society, he said, “In my opinion, artists are not a tool for change in society. My role is to analyze this information and make it known to the public. It is up to the people what they are going to do with it. We [artists] propose ideas, and it is up to the people to accept or reject those ideas.” We look forward to seeing what other projects Vélez has in store, as he continues creating art that uncovers the ugly truth of the politics involved in the art world.

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