

GALERIA HILARIO GALGUERA

PRELUDIO

GABRIEL O'SHEA

April 20 - July 14, 2023

Press Release

Galería Hilario Galguera presents Gabriel O'Shea's (Metepéc, Mexico, 1998) exhibition *Preludio*, portraying the layered complexity of the contemporary digital age. Highlighting the decline of spirituality in society and its replacement by the veneration of virtual spaces, O'Shea seeks to explore and experiment with classic and contemporary media to reveal the decay of the body as a sacred symbol.

A melody penetrates the atmosphere of the gallery. It sounds distant, changing, heterogeneous. *Requiem* is the title of one of O'Shea's series, named after the hymn dedicated to the deceased in the traditional Catholic mass. In this environment one can find wax sculptures inspired by religious scenes reduced to fragments, the torsos of the body lonely vestiges of a powerful past. In *Tan Poco*, 2022, an eighteenth century sacred painting hangs lifeless in a rusty structure, the image blurred beyond recognition. In the central gallery space reside the sculptural casts of plaster torsos from the series *Elegías*, with mummified bodies resembling archaeological relics, their materiality containing earthly remains, ashes, human hair and dirt. Through the staged death of religious art, and its reappropriation and entombment of Greek sculptural forms, O'Shea physically encases the contours of an art history whose claims of originality and cultural relevance have been disrupted by digital innovation, just as it has disrupted traditional worship, idolatry, and devotion.

In the paintings, the presence of brushstrokes in dystopian scenes not only foregrounds the shift in art historical practice, but encourages greater affiliation with O'Shea's representational themes. Cloudy faces appear dreamlike, washed featureless as memories fade. In this period of transition to a digital future, subjects appear caught in a purgatory of lost identity and subjectivity, locked in gray rooms, protective masks, and unemotional embraces. Repurposing the technique of *chiaroscuro*, the play of light and shadows in his portraits only serves to highlight their continued abstraction. When illuminated, faces remain blurred, while others are so marked by a consistent subdued atmosphere that any visual contrast disappears. The vivid optimism of the religious scenes is juxtaposed against the blurred achromatic nihilism of the contemporary, and our uncertain ability to find purpose and individuality in this present.

O'Shea's own artistic training includes close study of Goya and Caravaggio, while his religious upbringing meant he had frequent exposure with Catholic iconography. O'Shea's Nietzschean questioning of the death of religion presents a necessary entry into an agnostic and digital contemporaneity, nonetheless responsible for a loss of traditional spiritual identity. Among O'Shea's representations of bodies, we find heads made of concrete with masks, illustrating the submissive quality of humanity. An unquestioning submission that was once presented in the face of religion shifts into a complete dependence on technology. Anonymous, contained, submissive and objectified, the images of faces painted with gas masks or virtual reality visors lie in a liminal space, portraying the uncomfortable dehumanization so characteristic of artificial intelligence.

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In challenge to these traditional artistic forms and their “auratic” status, the video piece *Polifonía (QUO VADIS)*, 2023, is the product of a compilation of images created and developed with different softwares. These images are the product of computer-generated interpretations of texts prompts carefully written by the artist, allowing him to use the digital media as a tool to create uncanny scenes. This process of refashioning leads to a surreal visual array, with faceless groups dressed in religious garb, monks in suffocating virtual reality headsets, and misty settings alongside post-apocalyptic fires. Within this digital dystopia, there is a compelling lifelessness to the pictures, their strangely inhuman qualities an apt metaphor for our increasingly online existence. However, all of these illusions are representative of a simulacrum of contemporary culture. Every image created is produced through training from millions of other images. It is an unfathomable compilation, and often appropriation, of surface representation. Artificial Intelligence (AI) art reproduces itself with voracious contempt in this vacuum of postmodern depthlessness.

Technology and virtual cultures have provided the foundation for a new belief system, one which facilitates the desire for a second life through digital doubles of “self” and virtual personalities. This can be liberating, allowing for an expression of identity that is impossible in everyday life. But as much as offering an escape, digital reality only offers a stable vision of the body that no longer exists in physical reality, just like O’Shea’s metaphorical sculptures. In the face of nostalgia, loss, and post-apocalyptic disaster, this exhibition continues in gallery tradition to open a window of hope, as the spirit of art inevitably saves us. Gabriel O’Shea and his work are throwing us a lifeline to survive in the midst of torment.

Gabriel O’Shea studied at the Barcelona Academy of Art in 2018. He has had solo exhibitions at the Casa de la Mora Museum, Toluca, Mexico. And has participated in group shows including *Index 5: estancias* at Galería Hilario Galguera, Mexico (2021); and *SOUND+*, Second Edition, Mexico City (2022). In 2023, his work was presented at Paris Fashion Week in collaboration with the brand Airei.

***Preludio*, will open to the public on April 21 and will remain open until July 7, 2023.**

Monday to Friday: 11:00 - 17:00 h

Saturday: 11:00 - 17:00 h

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