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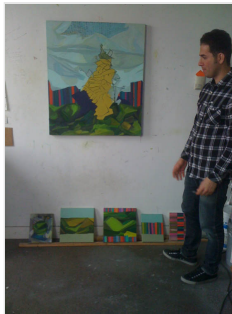
Sleepwalkin’

Fabian Lopez at Artspace Liberti

2424 E York St. Philadelphia

Through June 16, 2012

By Leslie Friedman



Fabian Lopez.

The Saturday before his opening at Artspace Liberti, Fabian Lopez meets me at his studio. I am immediately taken with a large painting full of rich tone, small marks, and a beautiful serpentine green. I grab my camera but Lopez asks me to stop. “I want this one to be a surprise,” he says.

Much of what is on Lopez’s mind this weekend surrounds the question of how to display his paintings. Not every piece an artist makes can be on display at every showing—and the choices of what to exhibit and what to exclude are sometimes as important as what color to paint what section of the canvas. Every exhibition space has its challenges, and at Artspace Liberti the gallery is a single wall, forty-five feet long. Lopez talks about how when you have a long line of works there is some expectation that there be a progression or chronological order. The stereotypical gallery is the four-walled white cube, and while few

spaces in Philadelphia typify this format, Lopez talks about the benefit of such a place. “With the white cube, you get a kind of dialogue between the paintings.”

White cube or single wall, Lopez’s work elicits much conversation. The vibrant colors and confident brush strokes are full of the mysteries of a lucid dream. As I look at his work, I see a connection between each painting—these two have similar marks, these two share a common tile pattern, and these both have a classical stance—but there is no linear progression between them. The common ground is that his paintings straddle the line between complete abstraction and unambiguous representation.

Lopez’s paintings are like diagrams of how dreams obscure our real memories. Situated in green and blue utopian landscapes, amorphous mounds appear like tumbleweeds of detail, losing order and place as they traverse the green plains. As the main subjects go in and out of focus, we are reminded of those waking moments in the morning and the difficulty of remembering exactly how things were imagined in the subconscious and what was real. Though these glimpses are literally colored with Lopez’s own understanding, there is something universal about them. What distinguishes Lopez’s work from others that live in this border-zone between representation and abstraction is his keen awareness that we can abstract from anyone’s personal story the common archetypes that exists among us all. But therein lies the tension—as a viewer I am sometimes left wanting more of the personal from Lopez.

I ask Lopez when blending the abstract and the real started to enter his mind. “I would say it goes back to seeing art when I was a kid. When I’d be out with my family, I would see images by household names, like in a Picasso calendar or postcard, and I was always drawn to them. At home we had other images.” Lopez talks about how no one in his family showed much interest in fine art when he was growing up. “I didn’t start painting until I was 22,” he says, “but I always drew.”

Lopez bemoans the fact his drawings will not be included in this exhibition. “I did a mock installation in the hallway to see how I might want to display my work for this show. The drawings looked too weak next to the paintings because the paintings are so large and colorful.” On the table, I see some paper with ink marks and gesso he is using for the larger surprise painting. I ask if these are his drawings and he laughs. “No, but sometimes people

come into my studio and grab these and say ‘Oh, these are incredible!’ They’re just studies.”

The show opened Friday May 5th, but the big surprise painting is still waiting for its grand entrance. When I walked into Artspace Liberti Lopez told me “We were installing the show, and the large painting that you liked so much looked very out of place, so I decided to take it out last minute.” I could see from his face that it was a hard-call—not only did I, the viewer, like the painting, but it seemed to be something that really excited Lopez, the artist, too. The show looks cohesive, though, and the exhibition is stronger for it. Still, I recall a lot of the other omissions from Lopez’s studio. Through my visit to Fabian Lopez’s studio and the opening of *Sleepwalkin’*, I am reminded that an artist’s work is a window into his mind, but is not a complete tour of everything he has made and will make in the future.

Leslie Friedman is an artist and co-founder of the member-based gallery NAPOLEON. She teaches studio and discussion-based courses at Temple University, Muhlenberg College, and the University of the Arts. She was also named a fellow in the Career Development Program of the Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA).

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