

**JULY 6, 2022**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**NERY GABRIEL LEMUS**

***IN THIS PLACE***

**961 CHUNG KING ROAD**

**JULY 23 – SEPTEMBER 3, 2022**

**ARTIST'S RECEPTION:**

**JULY 23rd, 6-9pm**

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Nery Gabriel Lemus, *Can't Stop a Dreamer*, Watercolor on paper, 23.25 x 37 inches, 2021

**Charlie James Gallery** is pleased to present *In This Place*, our fifth solo show with Los Angeles artist Nery Gabriel Lemus. *In This Place* explores the immigrant landscape of the Pico-Union/ Westlake neighborhood of central Los Angeles, where the artist grew up. The artworks take inspiration and include text from the poem, *In This Place (An American Lyric)*, by Amanda Gorman. Gorman's poem points to an America enveloped in tension yet eclipsed by hope and empowerment. With this work, Lemus explores the vernacular of his childhood neighborhood through a series of watercolors, textile works, and sculptures.

The watercolors are inspired by early uses of the medium in America that set out to record factual documentation of the "new world." These paintings incorporate phrases from Amanda Gorman's poem, *In This Place (An American Lyric)*, as a means to give insight into the individuals that inhabit the neighborhood and the political nature of the urban landscape.

As written by writer and critic Catherine Wagley, "The line "depleted but not defeated" surfaces in a watercolor of a puddle in MacArthur Park, scratched into one of the park's big orange planters like an optimistic epitaph. Lemus has zoomed in on this big, orange, weathered, concrete object so that it fills the frame, its paint peeling near its base. The scratched-in poetry is far smaller than the white, dripping graffiti that floats above it, cropped and thus again unreadable. Lemus makes the details almost engulfing, recording the city's anatomy. You may not see the fountains spouting from the lake in the background, but you cannot miss the contours of the sidewalk crack."

The exhibition's textile works reference the artist's Guatemalan background and the Guatemalan presence in the Pico-Union/ Westlake neighborhood where he grew up. The pieces are made from huipils (Guatemalan blouses) that the artist sourced. Wagley writes, "The Guatemalan huipils that Lemus

uses in his work are nearly always inside out. This way, the stitch-work of these handcrafted tunics—with their pre-colonial, Mayan legacy and their often-bright, regal embroidery—is what you see first. Sometimes you don't recognize what you're looking at right away, if at all. Instead, craft, color, and pattern (abstracted now, because of this reversal) take over, creating a different kind of visual terrain, one that manages to be both messier and still so clearly composed and crafted." Lemus says that these pieces are symbolic for the lack of access to the Guatemalan culture he felt he had growing up 1st generation in the US- hence the works being created with the backside "wrong side" of the fabric.

The sculpture in the exhibition has a "rascuache" sensibility, which points to a resilience to create things out of scarcity. As scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto wrote about the word, "it is a sensibility attuned to mixtures and confluences." The sculpture is composed of a vintage 1920's iron window grill, a Guatemalan morral belonging to the artist, scraps of walnut wood glued together, and decorative artificial cacti. Lemus speaks about the work as a metaphor for overcoming. This work is about overcoming. The apartment I grew up in had iron window grills. I remember feeling like I lived in a prison. My father was very private, and we rarely had company over. There was also a lot of fear of being robbed. The bars in this work symbolize restrictions, obstacles, or fears. The actus is generally viewed as being synonymous with brownness or "Raza." The cacti in the artwork have grown despite the restriction of the bars. The morral is a symbol for work or the campesino in Guatemala. Through hard work, we overcome.

**Nery Gabriel Lemus** is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. The subjects in his work range from issues of stereotypes and immigration to problems in society that can lead to the failure of families, such as poverty, abuse, and neglect. Lemus received his BFA at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California (2007) and his MFA at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California (2009). Lemus also attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine (2008).

His work has been featured at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; the California African-American Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Vince Price Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA; New Americans Museum, San Diego, CA; El Paso Museum, El Paso, TX; Bethel University, Saint Paul, MN; Roberts Wesleyan College Rochester, NY; Project Row Houses, Houston, TX; District of Columbia Arts Center, Washington, DC; Indianapolis Art Center, Indianapolis, IN; 9.99 Gallery, Guatemala City, GU; Museo Regional Guadalajara, Jalisco, MX; and the Centro Cultural Tijuana, Tijuana, MX, among other venues.

He is a recipient of a California Community Foundation Fellowship, a COLA Fellowship Grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles, the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Fellowship Award, and a Mignone Fellowship. He is represented by Charlie James Gallery in Los Angeles and is the director of the MFA in Visual Art program at Azusa Pacific University.