

JANUARY 18, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

NERY GABRIEL LEMUS

THE POETICS OF PLACE

961 CHUNG KING ROAD

JANUARY 27 – MARCH 3, 2024

ARTIST'S RECEPTION:

JANUARY 27, 6-9pm

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“For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. The house shelters daydreams, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace...”

Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.”

- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Charlie James Gallery is pleased to present ***Nery Gabriel Lemus: The Poetics of Place***, the artist’s sixth exhibition with the gallery. Taking Gaston Bachelard’s 1958 treatise *The Poetics of Space* as its starting point, this body of work explores the physical, emotional, and psychological landscape of Latinx interior space, illuminating the beauty of a rasquache sensibility. By considering the home as an extension of the self, these works can be read as portraits of the immigrant experience; they are culturally specific vignettes that capture the visual poetry and hopeful ingenuity that blossoms where resources are slim.

This series continues Lemus’ work in watercolor, which he began in 2018 with his immigrant landscapes capturing the terrain crossed by those on their way to the United States, and continued in 2022 with a series exploring the Pico/Union neighborhood of Los Angeles. Most often associated with landscape or scientific modes, watercolor was historically used in service of colonialist projects to document the flora and fauna of far-flung locales. Lemus fully reclaims the medium, documenting the specificity of his own



Nery Gabriel Lemus, Life Begins Well, watercolor on paper over panel, 60 x 43.5 inches, 2023

culture and surroundings in luminous yet precise compositions. Watercolor's unforgiving nature – the layers of color bleed into the paper support like dye, rather than sitting atop it as paint would – renders the results all the more impressive. Lemus adheres the paper to a panel support, achieving a result that is reminiscent of fresco.

The centerpiece of *The Poetics of Place* is the large painting *Life Begins Well*, an oversized depiction of a pre-Columbian sculptural fertility figure. The figure embodies the first home of all life: the womb. A traditional Guatemalan tapestry covers the top half of the composition, providing covering and protection to the birthing mother and emerging child. Lemus often incorporates traditional textiles and other found objects into the work. The exhibition's lone sculpture features a found hybrid mask showing two faces: half conquistador and half Mayan warrior; a meditation on the two sides of history that can coexist in one person and a reflection of the artist's own mixed heritage. Throughout, objects are imbued with personal and historical meaning. Huaraches – depicted here resting in a bathroom sink – have pre-Columbian roots but continue to be popular today. They carry the soul of the wearer both literally (the sole of the foot) and figuratively (they hold their owner's stories), connecting humanity through the ages.

Many of the works employ perspective or cropping to dramatic effect. *My Door Remembers* shows the view from inside an apartment building, and the twisted frame of an iron screen door in the foreground builds an expectant sense of longing, as if the viewer is waiting by the door for someone to come home. The layered cinder block, lattice, and chain link fences in the background convey a particular sense of continual resourcefulness that is central to a rasquache sensibility. Another work depicts a bathroom vanity from a high vantage point, allowing a view of the accumulated grime above the light and mirror. The mirror holds a single sticky note with a line from Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, from which the painting takes its title: "*la poesía nace del dolor (poetry grows out of pain)*". The perspective doesn't allow thoughts of the self – the mirror's reflection is withheld – but encourages psychological rather than physical contemplation. Neruda's line underscores the thesis of the exhibition: beauty thrives in an environment of necessary making-do, of juxtaposition and reanimation born of need, in short: of rasquachismo.

Nery Gabriel Lemus is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. His work explores a range of subjects, including division, stereotypes, and immigration. Additionally, he addresses societal problems that can contribute to the breakdown of families, such as poverty, abuse, and neglect. His work also highlights the poetics of empowerment and self-determination of marginalized communities. Lemus received his BFA at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California (2007) and his MFA at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California (2009). Lemus 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 LACE Lightning Fund Grant. He is represented by Charlie James Gallery in Los Angeles.

Artist Instagram: [@nerygabriellemus](#)

Gallery website: www.cjamesgallery.com

Gallery Instagram: [@charliejamesgallery](#)