



sowing 15

**roberto gil
de montes**

misfits

kurimanzutto


siembra

Even when you're not in La Peñita the water is a stripe across the horizon. The sun is white and round in the morning, making cold blue light when fishing boats go out. Birds circle over waves and vultures peck at empty beer cans, cloro bottles, fish bones, water eels, swollen puffer fish in the sand. The sun hangs over the arroyo up the hill, making green light in the trees and falls over, spilling orange onto evening when the boats come back.

Some things are always the same. Yellow heat hums over the tarmac at the crucero, blurs the air, makes beads of sweat run down wet backs. There is dust and noise, fighting, laughing, banda music from cars and from inside bedrooms and the cantina where pelicans wait in the doorway. There is blood sometimes on the pavement. Birds squawk in the trees and men wear makeup. Boys wait for girls and wait for boys, people kiss in cars. Children are there too, plastic tables, chairs, doors open, dogs, a horse in the back of a pick-up, iguanas, coconuts in the wheelbarrow and pineapples. Buckets filled with salty earth to try and grow roses. Sometimes there is water, and other times there is no water.

Irreverent and serious, purposeful and inconclusive, Roberto Gil de Montes' paintings explore the hidden images and forgotten or imagined stories of the exuberant everyday life that he sees. A black mark in the centre is a void, or an egg, a mass grave, or a dance floor, a stage, and also a *veladora* flecked piece of earth for planting. The canvas is fertile terrain on which to realign the spaces between the real and the imaginary: figures float in abstraction or are laid across surfaces, misfits and explorers in their own habitat.

Gil de Montes approaches the mystifying and the unspeakable by turning up the volume as far as it will go and plunging into an idea, resisting discourses of violence and aversion in favor of intuition and pursuing a provocation all the way to its most vivid depiction. His is an imaginary of incongruity and color, of the instinctive and the misunderstood, where fidelity to the absurd and reverence for the humble clarify and illuminate with deceptive naïveté; of course a fisherman is Venus and a boy reads the news on a tumba in the panteón.

Symbolic charge pervades contemporary life if we choose to notice, and these images telescope history to draw on pre-Columbian and Huichol iconography and evoke the interplay between the fantastical and the mundane that characterizes so much of our experience. Here the *venado* are hunted, disappeared, voiceless, and they are also the celebrated adornments of folkloric illuminations and affirmative solutions. A goat is sacrificial and is also a man in a mask asleep on a pavement after a long night. Masks, oneiric encounters, the gestural remains at the end of the party that are also the signs of a next future already being conjured.

about the artist

Roberto Gil de Montes was born in 1950 in Guadalajara, Mexico. As a teenager his family relocated to the United States where he later went on to receive a BFA and MFA from Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles. As a young artist he became involved in the Chicano art movement in and around Los Angeles, developing relationships with artists such as Carlos Almaraz. In the 1980s, he returned to Mexico City where he worked at the Museo de Arte Moderno and on *Artes Visuales*, the prestigious arts journal that explored visual culture in Latin America. Roberto returned to Los Angeles to concentrate on his painting practice and began to exhibit widely. He also became involved in the creation of LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) and began to show with Jan Baum Gallery, the only gallery at that time to show Black, Latinx and Asian artists on the West Coast. In 2000, he and his partner, Eddie, packed up their home in Echo Park and moved, via San Francisco, to La Peñita, a fishing town on the Pacific coast of Nayarit, Mexico, where they had spent many holidays. Roberto continues to live in La Peñita and paints in a studio directly overlooking the town plaza, a block from the coast.

Among many other solo and group exhibitions, Gil de Montes was included in the seminal Hispanic Art in the US: *Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* which toured the United States in the late 1980s. More recently, Gil de Montes featured as part of *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and organized by ONE Archives. The exhibition, framed in the important city-wide event Pacific StandardTime LA/LA, mapped the intersections and collaborations among a network of queer Chicano artists and their artistic collaborators from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. In 2017, his personal archival collection was acquired by ONE Archives, University of Southern California.

Roberto Gil de Montes's work is part of various collections such as National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Museum Washington, DC; Los Angeles County Museum, Print department; Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach California; Mexican Government, Art in Embassies; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca, Mexico and The Arizona State University Museum Phoenix, Arizona.

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| 1. Roberto Gil de Montes
<i>The Dream</i>
2020
Oil on linen | 3. Roberto Gil de Montes
<i>Mystical South</i>
2020
Oil on linen | 5. Roberto Gil de Montes
<i>Chivo</i>
2020
Oil on linen |
| 2. Roberto Gil de Montes
<i>El Pescador</i>
2020
Oil on linen | 4. Roberto Gil de Montes
<i>Encuentro</i>
2020
Oil on linen | |