

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

2685 S La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90034
T 310 838 6000 | F 310 838 6001
gallery@luisdejesus.com | luisdejesus.com

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Media Contact:

GABRIEL SANCHEZ: *MIRANDO AL MUNDO*

March 6 – April 17, 2021

Opening Reception: Saturday, March 6, 12 – 6 PM

gallery@luisdejesus.com

310-838-6000

Luis De Jesus Los Angeles is very pleased to announce **GABRIEL SANCHEZ: *MIRANDO AL MUNDO (Looking at the World)***, the artist's first solo exhibition with the Gallery, on view from March 6 through April 17, 2021. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, March 6th, from 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Visitors are encouraged to make an appointment at www.luisdejesus.com/contact.

In 2019, sixty years after his grandfather fled Havana, Gabriel Sanchez became the first in his family to return to Cuba. Like many first-generation Cuban-Americans, he grew up understanding Cuba more as a mythical and fabled paradise, fleshed out with familial anecdotes and old photographs. Painted over the last two and a half years during extended visits to Cuba, Sanchez has created a deeply empathetic body of work that captures the spirit of an emerging avant-garde living and working in Cuba. Artists, writers, photographers, dancers, and opera singers—this sub-culture of young, bold, and restless Cubans represent the future of the island's art scene, and to a large degree the dreams of many, untethered from the moribund Cuba of the past and the suspended reality of the present. Vulnerable yet proud to be who they are in the face of an oppressive system, they stand naked and exposed for the world to see—a symbol of honesty and simplicity—their lives captured by Sanchez with inquisitiveness and sensitivity. Painting is praise, and with this exhibition Sanchez honors his compatriots, joining their ranks as a Cuban artist and native son.

Recently, Gabriel Sanchez shared some personal thoughts that offer an invaluable glimpse into his current work and life in Cuba.

Havana, February 9, 2021

I love the gentle nature of the people here. The lack of technology and 21st century distractions makes for a community of people who are present and engaged. Kindhearted people who will share the little they have with you for your company, and a good laugh together.

I choose my subjects based on their willingness to express themselves with freedom and openness and what they represent as Cubans. Most of my models are young millennial artists and include musicians such as my partner and wife, Laura, who is an opera singer. She is someone who loves her country fiercely and also longs for a life outside of Cuba someday, pursuing her career as a singer. She is unwavering about self-expression and is one of the main inspirations for my work each day.

Laura has introduced me to a number of friends including Brayan and Felix who are both singers and her contemporaries in the opera circle in Havana. Felix is an outgoing, bubbly figure and Brayan is more reserved and serious. Other models include two modern dancers that I met through a mutual photographer friend, as well as several older models like Babalao, a Yoruba

priest, Abuela Fifa, and a group of shirtless men who were playing a friendly game of dominoes in the street on a hot day.

Many of my models are openly gay and express themselves without any reserve. This is an important characteristic because Cuba can be an overly macho culture which can make it hard to openly come out. The government does not allow gay marriage and is known to stifle any sort of LGBTQ expression including marches that occur in Havana every year. My models are strong and courageous and are willing to pose for me in order to have their stories told through painting.¹ They represent all the different qualities and personalities of the Cuban people.

I met Ricky while he stood in front of El Floridita (Hemingway's old drinking spot) handing out flyers to a clandestine club that has the best party in Old Havana every night. He's always dressed very stylishly, and I was immediately drawn to him. We started talking as like minds, both of us around the same age, and he expressed his willingness to model for me. I find many of my models while walking in the streets. We spark conversation, which is really easy to do in Havana, and we talk about the arts in general. Most people are very open and comfortable about being photographed and painted once I open up about my career as a painter.

— Gabriel Sanchez

Gabriel Sanchez is a Cuban-American artist. Born in 1993 in Miami, Florida, he received his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Solo exhibitions include *Mirando al mundo*, 2021, at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA and *Remote Generation*, 2019, at Lora Schlesinger Gallery, Santa Monica, CA. Group exhibitions include *Stay with me*, Luis De Jesus Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA; *Figures*, Lora Schlesinger Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; *Tiny Visions*, Hive Gallery, Los Angeles; *Armix*, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO; *Synchronicity*, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO; *Take Me Back to November*, 1015 Pearl St, Boulder, CO; *Where We Stand*, Visual Arts Complex, Boulder, CO; *Something that Means Something*, Madelife, Boulder, CO; and *Kings Exhibition*, Visual Arts Complex, Boulder, CO. Sanchez's paintings are held in prominent collections across the United States, including Diane Allen, Los Angeles; Fadi Braiteh, Las Vegas; Mary Caulkins and Karl Kister, Denver; and V. Joy Simmons, Los Angeles, among others. Fluent in Spanish and English, he splits his time between Colorado and Cuba.

¹ "Recently Cuban performance artists have been arrested for using the flag in their work, and now the use of the Cuban flag in any way, shape or form can be seen as a threat towards the government. In my work, I use the flag subtly or with obvious intent as a way to symbolize the country directly or indirectly. Making these paintings in Cuba was a risk I undertook to express the dichotomy for love of country and anger towards the way things are." - GS