

ART REVIEW CITY

Club Cementerio

Julia San Martín solo show: Proyectos Proyectos Raúl Zamudio / Empty Circle NYC

Proyectos Proyectos Raúl Zamudio / Empty Circle NYC presents the solo exhibition *Club Cementerio* by Julia San Martín, curated by Raúl Zamudio, director of said space. It is a multimedia show that includes painting, drawing, video, sculpture, and textile interventions.



Club Cementerio exhibition view, 2023

The artist began to develop the concept of “Club Cementerio” in 2020 amid COVID-19, riots, and social demonstrations in different parts of the world, especially in her native Chile,

where she was at that time. Around the world, in an act of weariness, hundreds, perhaps thousands of monuments have been torn down; the hero, the explorer, the conqueror, the white and masculine victor, who swarms in history, in particular of Art (with capital A) suddenly lost its pedestal, and its head. It is almost unbelievable that it took hundreds of years to take a pair of ropes and throw them to the ground. That Club Cementerio of San Martín is made up of a whole context of daily and historical violence. In this way, the works that are part of the exhibition are scathing laughter from those who have experienced, in their own flesh, the systematic voracity of colonial and capitalist thought.

Julia San Martín has extensive knowledge of the history of Western art, the periods, the systems of representation, and the characters. She also has academic training in various traditional drawing and painting techniques; those skills “can make her as uncomfortable” as an acquired vice that is difficult to break. Like the majority of her work, the Empty Circle show is self-referential and consists mainly of self-portraits, heroines who make fun of themselves, of their social status, gender, or race. Structural violence on the body of non-white women is present in the exhibition; “La gata bajo la lluvia” (“The cat under the rain”) is a self-portrait that takes up the title of a song popularized in 1981 by the Spanish singer Rocío Durcal, in which a woman in absolute depression tells a great love that he has abandoned her, that she recognizes how little value she has: “*Ya lo ves, la vida es así / You see, life is like this / Tú te vas y yo me quedo aquí / You go and I stay here / Lloverá, y ya no seré tuya / It will rain, and I will no longer be yours / Seré la gata bajo la Lluvia / I will be the cat in the rain / Y maullaré por ti / And I will meow for you.*”. In Julia’s oil on canvas, a battered cat appears, with her breasts drained and no fur on her body; she is singing to a small black cat that watches her while she holds a microphone, which may as well be a dagger or a dildo.



La Gata Bajo la Lluvia / The Cat Under The Rain (Karaoke series), oil on canvas, 60 x 49 in | 152 x 124 cm, 2018

“Oveja Negra” (Black Sheep) and “Nude Black Sheep” are two paintings of midsize format with similar iconography. In the first, the sheep stands on a cheap pedestal made of actual recycled cardboard that protrudes below the canvas’s lower edge; it is the typical image of a monument that we can admire from a low angle. In the second, the black sheep appears painted with an almost primitivist gesture; she wears a hairstyle similar, but battered, to that of the Infanta Margarita portrayed so many times by Diego Velázquez. She holds a withering flower in her hand while shamelessly displaying her large breasts and abundant pubic hair. In a traditional discourse of control over the female body, we could see her as being torn between being a court lady or a street prostitute. Another powerful self-portrait is “Colgada como las monas” (Hanging like monkeys), a bright pink primate who amuses herself by swinging on a thick brown rope. They all show a big smile that is more of a sarcastic gesture; they laugh at us and at their own condition and perhaps are laughing as well at the determined audacity with which they were painted. Their bodies are painted with brush strokes that might seem like careless stab wounds. However, in reality, they are intentional decisions, comments, or reactions to the social signals that control the woman’s body and establish the frameworks of what it is allowed to do or not to do for those with a body with a uterus.

The exhibition also includes archive materials. San Martín began collecting images from the internet about our political landscape, especially climate change, social demonstrations, and homicides. For this exhibition, she and curator Raúl Zamudio selected three videos: the funerals of Mao Tse Tung, John F. Kennedy, and Elizabeth II of England. However, what relationship do these events of great magnitude have with a black sheep on a poor cardboard pedestal? Here, the political and feminist sharpness of the artist is precise, and her self-referentiality reveals how large-scale events affect people’s daily lives and decisions at the macrostructural-social level alter and govern our daily evolution. Once again, sarcasm appears to allow one to disagree and resist, and above all to fight, because Julia’s work is a form of guerrilla that methodologically uses the counter-archive; the dialogue between her works and the collection of images on the internet is actually a weapon to reverse the categories imposed on her, race, gender, and social condition.



Colgada como las monas / Hanging like monkeys, oil on canvas, 40 x 31 in | 102 x 79 cm, 2022

“Club Cementerio” is the work that gives the exhibition its title; it is composed of an upturned tire and an ear that gives it the shape of a cup and contains roses and red carnations. It is a kitsch decision that sets the tone of the exhibition. Usually, kitsch is considered a form of an idea of imitation, where the objective is to copy the beautiful, not the good. For Walter Benjamin, it is a utilitarian object that lacks critical distance between the object and the observer, offering gratification or enjoyment without any critical effort. However, in this case, we may define kitsch as the social distance between two objects: the gold gilding of the crown of some European queen and the plastic tiara of a fifteen-year-old; the vital thing here is that the tiara is not a referent of the crown, what there is, is a series of intervals, between one and another object. In this way, kitsch emerges from the distance that the crown requires to become the tiara and vice versa; in reality, it is a social distance, evident in the shapes, colors, materials, and uses given to each object. Julia claims those social distances; she uses both the traditional representation system of art history and the monument or the court portrait to demonstrate the tragicomic existence humanity lives in. Pain and joy are hidden behind the smiles of her characters, who look at us shamelessly as if trying to see us on the scale, the twists and turns we must go through every day in order to get by and enjoy life in a capitalist world, which offers us something non-existent called ‘money,’ in exchange for the only thing we possess, the rental of our body and our time, known as labor force. This exhibition is a tragicomedy where we can laugh ourselves off to death and thus recognize that we are part of that Club Cementerio that Julia San Martín has represented for us so freshly and sharply.

Nude Black Sheep, tempera and oil on canvas, 40 x 31 in | 102 x 79 cm 2021



[Yohanna Roa](#) [August 23, 2023](#) [Exhibition Reviews](#), [Figurative](#), [New York](#), [Painting](#)

HYPERALLERGIC

Kyle Goen: *Let Art Be Training in the Practice of Freedom*



Installation view of Kyle Goen's *Let Art Be Training in the Practice of Freedom* at the Empty Circle (photo Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

Kyle Goen's *Training in the Practice of Freedom* is a breath of fresh air. Goen is uninterested in the art market — like so many cutting-edge artists nowadays — and has collected together a wide array of work from his decade or so helping social movements create graphic materials that speak loudly to a large audience. His style is most often connected with the [Decolonize This Place](#) movement that was born here in New York City, but the language has been disseminated far and wide, helping in turn to influence other movements. This lovely little exhibition allows you not only to see the graphic work and read the related publications (which he ALSO designed), but to go through and listen to his record collection, as well. Highly recommended. —*Hrag Vartanian*

