

ALEXANDRIA, AN EXHIBITION BY ARTIST ALEJANDRO CARDENAS

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Photo credit: Matt Kroening. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech

Almine Rech presents ALEXANDRIA, an exhibition of new works by artist Alejandro Cardenas, currently on display at the gallery's New York location.

Born in Santiago de Chile but based in Los Angeles, Alejandro Cardenas is an artist known for his surrealist humanoid figures. Before becoming a full-time artist, Cardenas had a successful career as a multimedia artist, working in illustration, graphic design and videography. For over a decade he was the lead textile designer and art director for the fashion brand Proenza Schouler.

Cardenas's new body of work is a personal reflection on the present moment that the artist describes as a time of profound global unrest due to climate change, the ongoing pandemic and the economic and social crisis.

Executed during Los Angeles' dual crises of the Covid-19 pandemic and the wildfires, the artist's new paintings and sculptures provide a vision of a post-human world in which the relationship between human forms and the environment is one of unity and coexistence. Cardenas creates surreal scenes of glossy grid interiors populated by eerie angular figures getting his inspiration from a wide variety of influences ranging from surrealism, science fiction, to magical realism.

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Cardenas' characteristic humanoids lie, sit or stand relaxed in minimal architectural settings. These faceless figures convey their emotions through body language, resulting in a wide variety of suggested emotional expressions.

The outside world, which can be glimpsed from the large windows present in some paintings, is represented in decomposition. The streaming sunlight takes on an orange glow, similar to the color of the sky Cardenas saw outside his studio during wildfires.

Cardenas uses the grid as the only defining element of the architectural space. The grid is a reference to Superstudio's iconic Il Monumento Continuo, used at the end of the 1960s by the group of Florentine radical architects to address the issue of homogenization caused by globalization. Cardenas called this grid architecture a "nonspace" that has been stripped of all traces of history and design, with the exception of a few prototypes of iconic chairs, designed by the artist.

Cardenas explained his idea for the show, *"It is about the present moment and the choices we have to make in order to exist as a culture in a world we are destroying and which we have to start fixing. I feel that our survival as a species depends on an agreement among all of us, a kind of unification of ideas, a non-space wherein everything this is possible. The grid, to me, is representative of that possibility."*

There is another recurring element in the paintings and sculptures: the snake. Inspired by Nehebkau, the primordial snake god of ancient Egyptian mythology originally considered an evil spirit and later a benevolent god associated with the afterlife, the snake here symbolizes the often-conflicting impulses at the core of the human experience and throughout history.

The title of the exhibition, ALEXANDRIA, is an ironic reference to the artist himself, but also to the Egyptian city, the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient Mediterranean world for much of the Hellenistic age and known for being a place where the scholarship of 'East and West has been studied on an equal footing with the aim of creating a unified source of knowledge.