

MARC STRAUS

BERLIN LINK

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE

ON THE ROAD SERIES: A young Spanish painter takes over the Lower East Side

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The recently opened gallery of art collector, poet and oncologist Marc Straus emerges unobtrusively from its frantic environs. Located in the up and coming Lower East Side on Eldridge and Grand St, the four story gallery building does not only look distinct. Its environs is packed with storefronts that are transformed halfheartedly to artsy bars in order to benefit from a soaring circulation of hip and affluent art lovers. Combating gallery inflation, Marc Straus has transformed a historic building into a brick and mortar, upscale gallery with ample exhibition space for its roster of 14 international artists. He currently hosts Antonio Santin's (born 1978 in Madrid) first solo exhibition in the United States.



Antonio Santin - "Fiebre Amarilla" (2012), oil on canvas, 243 cm in Diameter; courtesy of Marc Straus Gallery

A circular canvas titled *Fiebre Amarilla* (2012) at the far end of the room arrests the visitor's gaze upon entering the exhibition space on street level. 8 ft. in diameter, the image of a round carpet is flanked by smaller, rectangular paintings with a strikingly different subject matter, as one assumes at first glance. The gallery orchestrated Santin's 11 most recent paintings in two groups that vaguely trace the painter's development over the past year. Living and working in Berlin, Santin has painted still life sets from photographs of women in their personal surroundings. Their distorted bodies are meticulously arranged between personal objects and stare lifelessly into the room of the beholder. Due to their apathetic look, many voices described

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their facial expression as projections of ennui, triggering the viewer to reflect on his own dissatisfactions with life and even as a “well-practiced mask of non-verbal, emotional warfare”.



Antonio Santin, installation view at Marc Straus Gallery; photo: Dina Münzfeld

Literally and mentally ascending, intricate pattern of female dresses seem to have incited Santin's most recent endeavor to paint elaborate rugs by means of enlarging a photograph on a projector. Inside Marc Straus' neutral white cube on the second floor, immersing in monastic vibes that offer a calm space to look at art, one is confronted with four monumental pieces. We see detailed depictions of luxurious carpets, spanning over bulky, unidentifiable organic masses. Suffocated clumps appear to move below monolithic canvases that cause claustrophobia.

Where his women appear mysteriously evocative, the carpet paintings speak to the viewer in many different ways. Trained as a sculptor at Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Athens Fine Art School, Santin introduces the third dimension through heavy folds and well executed shading. Achieving the effect of rendering three dimensionality by color only, one is inclined to bring in Spanish Masters or even Caravaggio as influences. Though, it is the fascinating subject matter, or should it be called “object on subject”, that keeps the viewer in the present.



Antonio Santin -"Danae" (2011), oil on canvas, 220 x 300 cm, courtesy of Marc Straus Gallery

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Santin builds up tubes of paint to model the carpet's lavish ornament, juggling with depth perception. Seen from a distance, his painting appears photo- if not hyper realistic. But, observing closely in the gallery, sculpted arteries of pigment cover the carpet's flat fabric ground comparable to a net.

In the work *Sofia* (2012), Santin triggers another reaction between reality and art. Paint drips from the edges of the canvas, assuring the present dimension of observing a painted canvas in a gallery. Gradually, a life size female body lying under what seems like a coat of snakeskin and lace emerges from the flat canvas. The figure appears to be in a state of transformation as if a butterfly metamorphoses from a cocoon. Santin hits at a vacuum between the past and the present moment not only by symbolizing multiple rebirths as alluding to a snake's skin implies, but also by his singular style. *Danae* (2012) shows a red carpet with bulky black structures floating on a background as even and white as the gallery walls. His formal vocabulary roots back to the Spanish Tenebrism, as stated in the Press Release. But, the thick capillaries of paint are dispersed without brushstrokes. Santin oscillates between a classical formal vocabulary and an idiosyncratic use of paint to combine the apparent and the metaphysical, the articulated and the metaphorical. His artwork is an unparalleled and thoughtful enrichment of the contemporary art scene that will outlive the artistic volatility of the neighborhood.



Antonio Santin, installation view at Marc Straus Gallery; photo: Dina Münzfeld