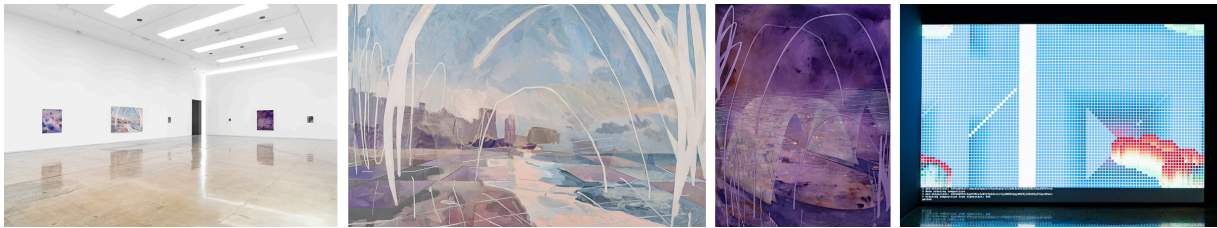


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Ricardo Cabret: 'Un Nuevo Manglar'
Reveling in Tensions Between Technology and the Natural World
Kohn Gallery
May 6 - June 17, 2023

by Jody Zellen



Ricardo Cabret is a Puerto Rico-based interdisciplinary artist who uses painting and software to revel in the tensions between technology and the natural world. At Kohn Gallery, he unveils a new body of work titled *Un Nuevo Manglar* (a new mangrove) that includes several paintings, as well as a generative artwork presented as a large scale projection filling one wall in a darkened corner of the gallery. Cabret has degrees in computer science and electrical engineering, and his artwork draws from his technological background.

Guión Criptográfico 3.0 (2021) is a web-based software piece that generates ever-changing compositions of different colored squares filling a gridded space. He draws from popular encryption algorithms and protocols that are commonly found in the building blocks of cryptocurrency blockchain networks, and specifically focuses on phrases that echo current concerns in his native Puerto Rico. The resulting display is a mesmerizing composition that nods to neo-geo painting as well as other browser-based works with ever-changing abstract compositions.

It is interesting to think about the relationship between code and paint. How does the generative display based on an algorithm translate into paintings, and is there a connection, or is Cabret making two discrete bodies of work? The paintings are not geometric or brightly colored. Rather, they are soft-hued and atmospheric. They could, perhaps, relate to the receding spaces in sci-fi themed computer games, but that feels like a stretch. For example, *Barracas* (2023) is an evocative landscape with what appears to be a city in the distance. Tall buildings painted as jagged abstract shapes fill the middle of the canvas.

In the foreground, is a flat multi-colored field comprised of different colored rectangles that perspectively recede toward the horizon. The top half of the work is sky — a hazy blue expanse with floating areas of white suggesting clouds. The painting has a second layer where it seems as if Cabret covered the surface with arcs of concrete-colored gel. A middle layer features a set of arches that cut across the horizontal of the composition and suggest open ended Quonset huts.

El secreto subterráneo (*The underground secret*, 2023) is also a sci-fi cityscape covered with more open Quonset huts that resemble extended underground arches or tunnels. The purple-hued sky gives the work an apocalyptic aura. Smaller works titled *Estudio de textura* are intimate fragments where Cabret focuses on layers of paint and varying textures created by overlaying gel polymer. These pieces have a grid-like structure, yet lack the movement of the digital iterations.

Cabret's people-less paintings allude to futuristic worlds. If based on systems or specific structures, they are overwhelmed by the process of painting and making something by hand. The imprecision makes them intriguing. Though based on Cabret's memories of the Puerto Rican landscape, the works are not specific, but rather a melange of past, present and future.

Because the paintings are seen in conjunction with the projected software work, one wants to draw connections, but the pieces seem to exist in different realms and rather than intuit relationships, it is best to enjoy both for what they are.

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