

SOL CALERO
Archivos Olvidados

ChertLüdde, Berlin

Opening reception 26 April 2019, 6:00 – 9:00 pm

26 April – 15 June 2019

For her first exhibition at ChertLüdde, Sol Calero presents a project in tribute to her late grandmother Luisa Hernandez. A pillar of the family, Hernandez (known familiarly as "Abuli") lived between her home in Caracas and her farm in Los Llanos, the flatlands of Venezuela, where she became an important member of the community, opening up her house for the local children to learn in classes, decorate the house and participate in social meetings. After raising her six children alone as a widow, she enrolled at the Escuela de Artes Cristóbal Rojas in Caracas and began to study fine art. Calero spent a large part of her childhood taking part in the organic learning process of her grandmother where art and craftsmanship became indivisible from a familial and social structure that allowed for and celebrated the collective aspect of art-making and understanding. The central subject matter of the exhibition is the most recent archive of her grandmother, who collected images from magazines as references for her paintings. These last clippings represent a body of work left unfinished upon Hernandez's death, picked up and elaborated upon by Calero.

The gallery space presents itself as a trajectory of Calero's process of approaching the archive, beginning with an intimate room of child-size proportions, where the original images that Abuli used as references for her paintings are displayed. In the same room, Calero has undertaken a drawing exercise taught to her by her grandmother: draw a line, then another one to close it into a shape, and fill the space with color. Covering the entire space with the gestural freedom that children naturally possess, Calero repeats the ritual of her childhood spent drawing with her grandmother. On the paintings in this room, Calero leaves chalk marks on the blackboard canvases as visible remnants of her attempts to draw horses for the first time.

In the following room, the paintings depart from Calero's usual visual language to feature fragmented compositions referring to the newspaper clippings of Hernandez. Including motifs such as horses, fruits and landscapes, the paintings contain bits of the archive and anecdotes of her childhood. This room leads to another which Calero has transformed into a patio: a place where visitors can gather and sit together, activating the social element of a space. The walls here are painted with a mural of pastel colors, decorative patterns and fruit motifs based on a sketch from the archive.

Behind this colorful façade lies the ambiguity that comes with trying to piece together memories, how selective the action of recollection can be, and the limitations of our efforts to capture the past. In the context of Venezuelan society, where culture is rapidly disappearing, the mural represents the smoothing out of events and the subsequent glossing over of history in favor of external narratives of a people's culture. Yet the process from archive to social space, in the gathering of people where they can speak, the word of mouth and community carries the potential to preserve the past. In the same manner, Calero undertakes the exercise of remembering over and over again, in the re-experiencing and interpreting of deeply rooted memories, in hopes for a revisitation of a history that is only personal on the surface.

In recent years, Sol Calero has developed a body of all-immersive installations that bring her pictorial exploration to a spatial and contextual level. With painting at the core of her practice, her investigation looks back to non-canonical, traditional and popular art forms excluded from western art history. In looking at how Latin American cultures are perceived and exploited, her work faces the spectator with the processes of exoticism inherent to the imagery and narratives of the cultural other. Under a festive and luminous appearance, Calero questions the production of standards and clichéd iconography with a singular and consistent presentation of abstracted tropicalism. In the form of paintings or objects, her patterns, floral and fruit shapes are mixed with elements of vernacular architecture, claiming self-construction as a medium of social action. The mosaics, corrugated plastics, latticework and the use of color that appears in her work allude to the abilities of individuals and communities to adapt; to create an aesthetic of survival while performing their idiosyncrasy.