

NINO MIER GALLERY

LOS ANGELES | BRUSSELS | NEW YORK | MARFA

JOSÉ LERMA

A Trazos

September 23 - October 21, 2023

Nino Mier Gallery | Los Angeles

Nino Mier Gallery is pleased to present *A Trazos*, our second solo show with José Lerma. Comprising paintings and large-scale works on polypropylene sheets, the exhibition explores what the artist has called “featureless portraiture” and will be on view in Los Angeles from September 23 - October 21, 2023.

Lerma is well known for his economical portraits, comprising only a few strokes of paint to create nevertheless rich evocations of his genre and medium. Portraiture typically seeks to represent immaterial qualities unique to the sitter, conjuring a fuller view of their character through the still image. But Lerma is more engaged with the discrete elements of the medium—in the physicality of paint—than in evoking a particular subject’s psychology. Typically represented in profile or from behind, his subjects lack particularly distinguishing facial expressions. Instead, they are materially sumptuous, undulating with heavy impasto that casts subtle shadows that vary as lighting conditions do.

In previous bodies of work in this style, Lerma’s portraits were of historical figures like politicians and painters alongside people from his own life. In *A Trazos*, however, many of the portraits are composites of multiple subjects or include fictitious features.

The portraits in *A Trazos* also evince a uniquely disorienting experience with scale. Viewing a painting by Lerma in its entirety can often feel like viewing a smaller section of another painting through a microscope. He opts for the more visible weave of burlap over linen or canvas, and his thick acrylic mixture exaggerates textural irregularities that are often hidden in more conventional paintings. Overall, his sensuous facture evokes an intensely haptic experience in the viewer that subverts the aims of typical portraiture.

Lerma’s large-scale works on polypropylene sheets are featureless portraits as well – representing subjects’ contours from semi-obscured angles – but are executed with various repeating patterns rather than voluminous swaths of impastoed paint. In effect, viewers can toggle between focusing on individual patterns that roll across the surface like a landscape and focusing on the overall composition of the portrait.

José Lerma (b. 1971) is currently an Associate Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he has taught since 2009. He has exhibited broadly, with notable recent solo shows at Almine Rech, London UK; Kavi Gupta, Chicago, IL; Galerie Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, BE; and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY; and at museums such as the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL. His works are represented in numerous collections, including The Saatchi Collection, London; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.