



Mar 4

Nery Gabriel Lemus and Noé Gaytán in Conversation

Interview

NG: Well for starters, I am wondering about your inspiration. The press release for your show mentions you have 14 years of social work. How does that influence the art you make, and what sort of life experiences drive you to make this sort of art?

NGL: I have come to see my job in social work as part of my artistic practice. What I do in my art is informed by the experiences I find with the families I work with. I have witnessed racial tensions, immigration issues, domestic violence, child abuse and things of that nature. With my art, I share these experiences to generate dialogue about the issues and working directly with families in society, I do something about it. Yet, I have come to realize that I cannot change anyone but myself, that being said, I have come to see both parts of my practice as planting seeds.



NG: From our talks we've had before, I know you've mentioned that you think artists today should not concern themselves with a specific style or medium to work in, but should instead ask themselves what is the best way for them to say what they want to say through their art. With that in mind, can you talk a bit about some of the pieces in this show, particularly the stuffed animal-like floor sculptures?

NGL: I honestly don't think that there is only one way of creating art. Some artists have an idea and fit it into their medium while other artist have an idea and find the best medium to articulate the idea. I work under the second model. I believe it gives me more of a liberty to explore new ways of working. For instance, I have gone into lumberyards collecting sawdust, gone into taxidermy shops, spent hours at Home Depot, bought items from flea markets, and bought fabric to sew.

This brings me to the stuffed animals you asked me about. They came out of a childhood experience I had. I remember having a similar stuffed animal that I got from Guatemala when I was a kid. These animals come from the same vain. If you look up Guatemalan stuffed animals, you will find something similar. What I have done with them is enlarged them and further added a trace of the child- since they are larger, they act almost as surrogates for adults. One has fragments of a child sewed on it and the other carries a child's toy. As adults, we are affected by our experiences as children.



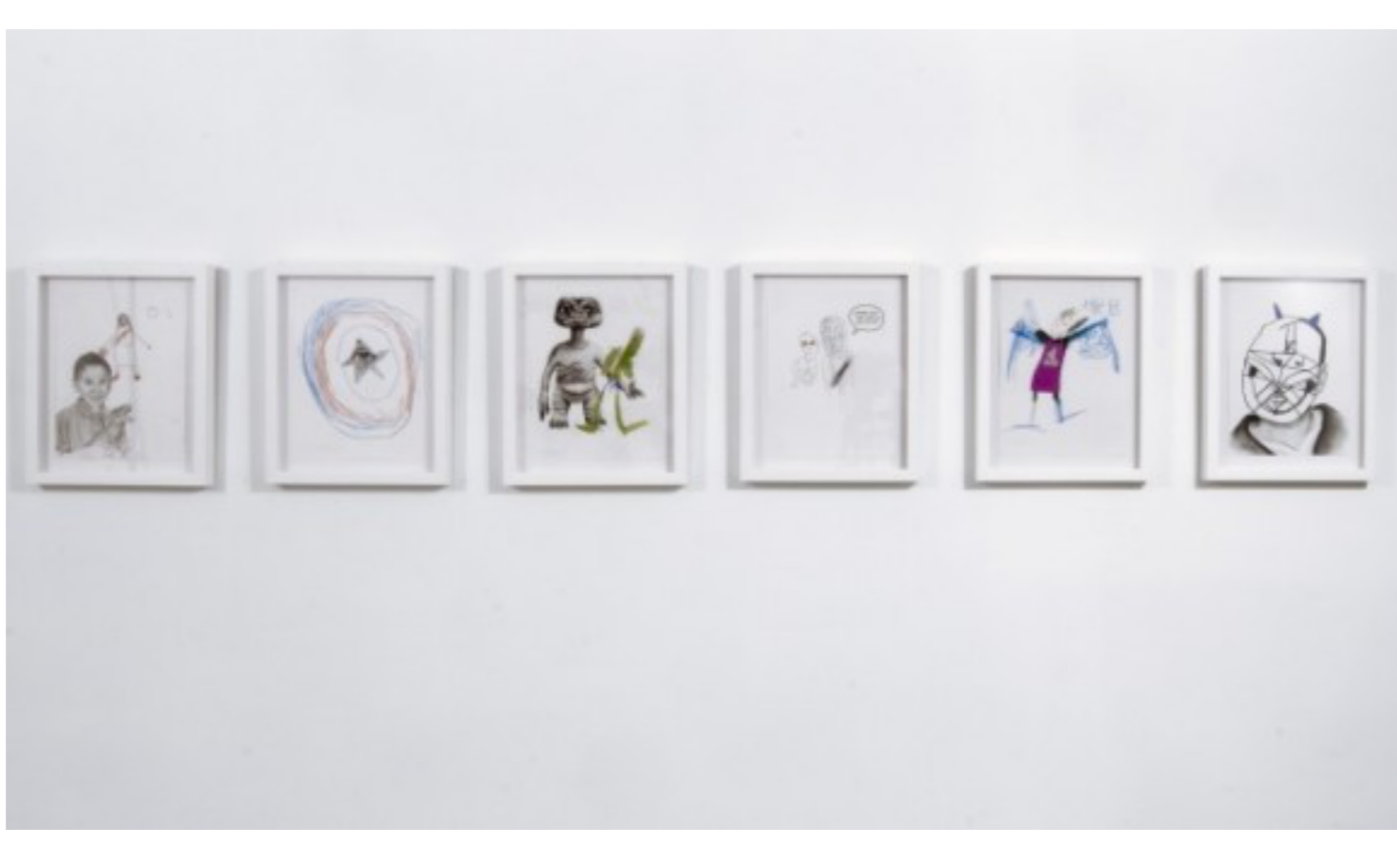
NG: Along these same lines, I know you don't have any one particular style, but there are several recurring themes in your art. What is it that made you work with textiles for the Happy Father's Day, Mom, A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich, and heroes collage pieces? Is there any relation to the Alfombra Domestica piece?

NGL: The tapestries in this show are about using a medium that has been stereotypically not associated to masculinity. The Alfombra came from a tradition held in Guatemala for Holy week where these sawdust rugs are made in reverence to the religious event. I appropriated the concept to bring attention to domestic violence. All works deal with domestic issues but the decision in materials come from two different spaces.



NG: Did these works come about at the same time under the same idea? Or are they projects that you had been working on that happened to have connections? How exactly did the show come about?

NGL: After working on domestic violence and child abuse issues with the last body of work I did, I thought about another related issue, that of absent fathers and the lack of positive male mentors in boys lives. Having two boys, this issue is close to my heart. I can't imagine not being part of their lives. Unfortunately, I see this two often with the families I have worked with.



NG: Considering the gallery's position in the art world, its physical position in Chinatown, and your own personal background, who do you feel is the audience for this show?

NGL: Anyone really. Chinatown is visited by different groups of people like: diverse cultural groups living in LA, tourists and the art community. I do believe though, the gallery is visited more, because of its location, by people outside the art world as opposed to the gallery row in Culver City.

NG: And finally, if there were one thing you would want people to walk away from this show with, what would it be?

NGL: An awareness for our responsibility to be positive examples to children. Whether we have or have not children, they are always watching. As James Baldwin said, "Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them".

To learn more about Nery Gabriel Lemus and his work, visit nerygabriellemus.com. To view the artist's current exhibit, visit cjamesgallery.com.

Images via Charlie James Gallery

A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich, Art, Charlie James Gallery, Chinatown, Contemporary Art, Interview, Nery Gabriel Lemus, Noé Gaytán, Tapestries

