

MILES

McENERY

GALLERY

OVERSERVED

CURATED BY RAFFI KALENDERIAN + ALBERTO CUADROS

16 MAY – 3 JULY 2024
520 WEST 21ST STREET

Louden: You never took a night off to see me wrestle before. They'll dock you for that.

Elmo: Hey, kid - money ain't everything.

Louden: It's not that big a deal, Elmo. I mean, it's six lousy minutes on the mat, if that.

Elmo: You ever hear of Pele?

Louden: Yeah, he's a soccer player.

Elmo: A very famous soccer player. I was in the room here one day... watchin' the Mexican channel on TV. I don't know nothin' about Pele. I'm watchin' what this guy can do with a ball and his feet. Next thing I know, he jumps in the air and flips into a somersault and kicks the ball in - upside down and backwards... the goddamn goalie never knew what the fuck hit him. Pele gets excited and he rips off his jersey and starts running around the stadium waving it around his head. Everybody's screaming in Spanish. I'm here, sitting alone in my room, and I start crying.

That's right, I start crying. Because another human being, a species that I happen to belong to, could kick a ball, and lift himself, and the rest of us sad-assed human beings, up to a better place to be, if only for a minute... let me tell ya, kid - it was pretty goddamned glorious. It ain't the six minutes... it's what happens in that six minutes.

About two years ago, Miles McEnery generously invited me to curate a group show in New York City, in one of his fabulous Chelsea spaces. He threw out the idea of maybe focusing on the Black Dragon Society/the historic LA Chinatown scene I was lucky enough to have started my career in 20 (!) years ago. My initial response was "with all due respect, Fuck No!!!" First of all, I didn't want that responsibility! Do you even know how many people were a part of this scene?? Me neither. And I'm sure there are plenty of Chinatown purists who think that by the time I came onto the scene in 2004, the real LA Chinatown scene was already dead and buried.

And yet... I wondered what kind of show I would want to put together if I did indeed try my hand at *curating* (I still don't know what this is, someone please tell me). I hit up my friend Alberto Cuadros, a talented Los Angeles-based painter and Bolivian Dandy (carrying on his grandfather's legacy). Alberto has an impeccable track record as a taste maker in LA, giving many of the wild youth currently ruling the art world their first exhibitions in his artist-run space. After several Mindmeld sessions, we came up with this concept for an art show:

Turn Miles McEnery's West 21st Street space into a bar/artist salon in the spirit of the Kronenhalle bar in Zurich, Paris Bar Berlin, or the place I got my MFA: Hop Louie in Chinatown. We didn't want to recreate these places however; we wanted to make it something new, a snapshot of what's happening now. Bring all these different creative weirdos together and have a drink! (Literally and/or figuratively).

Because I am a solitary hermit-like painter who lives like an animal, I left Alberto in charge of the name of our artist bar and what it would look like/what the vibes would be. He came up with the name "Raffi and Al's" (I almost died from cringing).

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A lot of our friends make work that functions in a more conceptual/trompe l'oeil way, and of course there's the artists who make work that functions in a strictly painterly way, so one of the playful ideas for installation was we put all these works together in the *bar*. My friend Matt Johnson made a sculpture out of polychromed wood, looking exactly like a stacked pyramid of American Spirit cigarettes, and Mimi Lauter made a work that is beautifully existing as "a Mimi Lauter artwork hanging in the bar" (which is to say, the artworks in the show do not have to reference dive bars or anything like that, but if the artists felt inspired, then all the better!)

My friend Nancy and I often talk about life, about whether there is intrinsic meaning in life simply by existing. Nancy has made the persuasive argument that it is up to each of us to find meaning in our own lives, and I have found myself agreeing with this idea more and more (especially as I get older). One of the most beautiful things about early 2000s Chinatown was you could get pretty damn close to finding meaning in life/art/whatever, just by being there. The sheer amount of talented, ambitious people within a 2 block radius was outstanding. It was like a lawless, joyful petri dish of clashing ideas, personalities, and aesthetics. Hop Louie was the dive bar everyone went to. You could see Legends like Henry "Chinatown" Taylor, Joel Mesler, and Frances Stark in Hop Louie on a random Tuesday watching the Lakers at the bar. For a young artist trying to figure it all out, this was unbelievable! Like the "Art World for Dummies" or something, all you had to do was just go to Chinatown. Show up. Bart Exposito generously gave Allison Miller a one day show at his studio on Chung King Road, and that directly resulted in her getting a show at ACME. Nate Lowman was in a group show at Peres Projects, and at the opening he gave me an extra painting he didn't use for the show. He just gave it to me! (It was of a silhouetted figure pooping, I still have it in my studio and cherish it very much!).

I saw "Drunk vs Stoned 2" (one of the major inspirations for Raffi and Al's) in 2005 at Gavin Brown Enterprises, and it had people I actually knew in it, along with *Legends* I did not know at all. This was a great thing for a young artist trying to figure it out. It was also during my first trip to New York City, an amazing place that makes you understand just how not a big deal you are every time you walk outside (This is truly a compliment!). I was not in this show or anything, but it meant so much to me because, like Chinatown back in LA, it was helping me understand this whole thing. One of the major things Alberto and I are trying to do with this show is bring these different generations together, and maybe give a little road map to someone trying to figure this thing out right now.

Organizing this show has been exactly as hellish and painful as you would imagine, but one of the greatest joys has been meeting and connecting with Saved By the Bell: The New Class. The kids are alright! It has also given me a reason to reach out to old friends I haven't talked to in years and just check in, see how they are doing, tell them how much they mean to me (why I have to curate a psychotic fucking group show just to do this is beyond me). Thank you to all the artists in this show, I love you! Huge shout out to Casinola and Jason Roussos, Raffi and Al's third Musketeer. Miles and Avery McEnery, and every single person who works at the gallery has been so lovely, I can't believe how lucky I am to show with such a supportive gallery. Special shout out to Lucasta, who has unfairly felt the wrath of my *curating*. And all the preparators! I'm so sorry for making your life hell, what you do is everything, and I literally would die if I tried to do your job.

I'm here, sitting alone in my room at the Chelsean, crying.

That's right, I'm crying. Because all these beautiful human beings, a species that I happen to belong to, could make such beautiful artwork, be so excellent to each other, and lift a sad-assed human being like me to a better place to be, if only for a minute... let me tell ya it's pretty goddamned glorious. It ain't the six minutes... it's what happens in that six minutes.

Raffi Kalenderian 5/16/24



520 West 21st Street

Adam Alessi
Mario Ayala
Michael Bauer
Whitney Bedford
Isabelle Brouman
Marcus Brutus
Caitlin Cherry
Jackie Cohen
Alberto Cuadros
Emmanuel Louisnord Desir
Tomory Dodge
Roy Dowell
Alex Eagleton
Bart Exposito
Sharif Farrag
Kim Fisher
Derek Fordjour
Al Freeman
Rochele Gomez
Sayre Gomez

Hannah Greely
Joshua Hagler
Roger Herman
Tristan Hirsch
Elliott Hundley
JPW3
Eunjin Jang
Matt Johnson
Raffi Kalendarian
David Kordansky
Mimi Lauter
Grant Levy-Lucero
Jasmine Little
Rachel Lord
Nick Lowe
Nate Lowman
John McAllister
Joel Mesler
Allison Miller
Leo Mock

Ben Wolf Noam
Laurie Nye
Joshua Ocegquera
Laura Owens
Allison Peery
Javier Peres
Lari Pittman
Nora Riggs
Ry Rocklen
Maja Ruznic
Analia Saban
Hubert Schmalix
Daisy Sheff
Frances Stark
Henry Taylor
Rob Thom
Paul Verdell
Miles Washington
Jonas Wood
Clare Woods

