

BORTOLAMI

Juan Antonio Olivares

Naufragios

6 September – 19 October 2019

Opening Friday, 6 September from 6:00 – 8:00 pm

55 Walker

We are pleased to announce *Naufragios*, an exhibition of new work by Juan Antonio Olivares, and Bortolami's inaugural presentation at 55 Walker Street.

Olivares's work spans a variety of media, exploring the nature of the contemporary human condition; including themes of alienation, displacement, memory, loss, and connection. The scope of his work shifts from the deeply personal and autobiographical to the universal—a visceral celebration of what defines and unites us as human. This is Olivares's first solo exhibition in New York after his 2018 show, *Moléculas*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Fermi Paradox III is a 24-channel sound-sculpture in which sound is emitted from speakers embedded in large seashells suspended from the gallery ceiling as well as from surface-transducers hidden in the walls. Using production methods characteristic of electronic music, the audio installation mixes a range of sources: readings of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, examining the fundamental reality of our world; Stephen Hawking's 50th anniversary speech of NASA, expounding on the possible existence of extraterrestrials; a Gabriela Mistral poem lamenting a lost love; Bob Lazar interviews on his clandestine work at S4; and samples of Nina Simone's "Wild is the Wind" and George Harrison demos. Each audio source, whether from a seashell or the wall, emits its own channel creating a dense choral arrangement that shifts and evolves, drawing the viewer through the space.

This work is Olivares's third and most ambitious iteration of his *Fermi Paradox* series started in 2016, produced as a response to Italian-American physicist Enrico Fermi's open-ended prompt to explain the seemingly paradoxical fact that given the evidence of billions of earth-like planets existing in the universe, and hence a high probability of extraterrestrial life, the human race has yet to make contact with a civilization beyond our own. Since the 1950s, the Fermi Paradox has generated a canon of scientific and statistical responses. Olivares poses a more poetic rumination: that the search for extraterrestrials might be a desire to disrupt the understanding of what makes us human, from submicroscopic biology to the philosophical and spiritual components of our species.

Alongside the installation, Olivares will show a suite of new graphite drawings: *sfumato* renderings of human sperm and egg based on scanning electron microscope images. Ordinarily invisible to the naked eye, Olivares draws these computer-generated images with an emotive hand. These extreme closeups of concrete biology become abstract at an outsized scale. As with the seashells, the familiar becomes strange.

The title of this exhibition, *Naufragios* (which translates from Spanish to mean "shipwrecks" or "castaways", depending on the context) references a 1555 book of the same name by Spanish explorer Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca that detailed a maritime expedition to the Americas gone awry. Cabeza de Vaca's semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical account describes in great detail his experiences meeting the indigenous tribes as the survivor of a shipwreck in what is now the gulf coast of the United States. The protagonist's greatest discovery in this foreign land is that search for the unknown is ultimately more of an internal voyage.

This is Bortolami's first exhibition in 55 Walker, a space programmed collaboratively with Andrew Kreps Gallery, and Kaufmann Repetto Gallery. Concurrent with Juan Antonio Olivares's *Naufragios*, Kaufmann Repetto will be presenting Lily van der Stokker's *exhibition of the medicines* on the ground floor.

Juan Antonio Olivares (b. 1988) lives and works in New York. He studied Art & Philosophy at Columbia University, New York and at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, studying under Christopher Williams. His first major institutional solo show took place at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and he has shown internationally at Bungalow, Berlin; Fürstenberg Zeitgenössisch, Donaueschingen, Germany; and Filmwerkstatt, Düsseldorf. His work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, and Adrastus Collection.

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Addendum

We believe life arose spontaneously on the Earth, so it must be possible for life to appear on other suitable planets—of which there seem to be a large number in the galaxy. But we don't know how life first appeared.

We are caught in an endless present.

If we turn our glance from our own condition to those who have overcome the world, having attained perfect self-knowledge, merely waiting to see the last trace of themselves vanish with the body they animate; then, instead of the restless striving and effort, instead of the constant transition from joy to sorrow, instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope which constitutes the life of the person who wills, we see that death is above all reason, a perfect calm of the spirit—only knowledge remains, the will has vanished.

*With your kiss
My life begins
You're spring to me*

We are a breach in the very unity of life, a biological paradox. Life has overshot its target, blowing itself apart. Our species has been armed too heavily—by spirit made almighty without, but equally a menace to its own well-being.

As long as humankind recklessly proceeds in the fateful delusion of being biologically fated for triumph, nothing essential will change. As its numbers mount and the spiritual atmosphere thickens, the techniques of protection must assume an increasingly brutal character.

*For my love is like
The wind
And wild is the wind*

To those in whom the will has denied itself: our world, which is so real, with all its suns and milky-ways—is nothing.

*¡Oh, no! ¡Volverlo a ver, no importa dónde,
en remansos de cielo o en vórtice hervidor,
bajo unas lunas plácidas o en un cárdeno horror!*

*¡Y ser con él todas las primaveras
y los inviernos, en un angustiado
nudo, en torno a su cuello ensangrentado!*