



GABRIEL LIMA *life, vest ; coffee, tray*

by Joyce Beckenstein

KAI MATSUMIYA | MARCH 18 – APRIL 17, 2016

Seeing works in an artist's studio as they're readied for exhibition is oh so different from viewing them in the surround of a gallery space. Prior to seeing Gabriel Lima's paintings at Kai Matsumiya's Lower East Side gallery, I visited the Brazilian-born artist in his Brooklyn studio. My visits to both venues crystallized—literally and figuratively—the meaning behind this show's strange title: *life, vest ; coffee, tray*. So did the unfolding of art-as-process-in-progress elucidate Lima's notions of space—his belief that matter, as we experience its physical and psychic presence, is something fated to an inchoate destiny.

It's a soulful journey that begins in Lima's studio. Here, reality reigns: agate chips sit scattered about a table; paintings hang on splattered walls amid pencil scribbles; others, propped on the floor, await attention alongside plastic tubs of paint and the artist's strewn stuff—shoes, lumber jacket, sweater, tools, a broken chair. In the studio, the “thingness” of a painting prevails, an object that triggers art-speak about the metaphysical and the transient. All of which reverses in the quietude of the gallery. Here, the painted “thing” and the art-speak evanesce as expanses of diaphanous color take hold, like the surround of Debussy's Impressionist tonalities. It's not about objects, the viewer, or the artist for that matter, but about the existence of all of the above as they are destined to enter and disperse in the fourth dimension.



Gabriel Lima, *Untitled* (polyptych), 2016. Oil, tempera, and acrylic on stretched canvas over wooden panel. 33 x 50 inches. Courtesy Kai Matsumiya Gallery.

Lima's elegant paintings, best described as spacescapes, allude to the ephemeral coalescing of earth, sea, sky, and universes beyond. In *At Giza* (2016), for example, natural color-enhanced agate crystals—chalcedony with concentric bands of color—float upon aqueous washes of blues and blue-greens that mimic the hues of the stones. Adrift in painterly space, these geologic forms articulate the mystical narrative embroidered throughout the works in this exhibition: the eternal odyssey of the visible and the palpable towards an unfathomable impalpable void. And, as the title of the show implies, things and the words that stand for them are little more than obscure particles ricocheting

through the infinite depths of time and space.

This is especially true of *Untitled* (2016), the seven-panel polyptych dominating the first room of the gallery. These panels feature an ambiguous mass of black matter that sequentially rotates as an embryonic iteration of itself through a seemingly infinite painterly universe. The script-like progression in this work reflects Lima's dedication to the Brazilian author, Clarice Lispector (1920 – 1977), whose surreal and mystical writings have been compared to those of James Joyce. One of her most famous stories, "The Egg and The Chicken," reads as a free-associative self-dialogue that swerves through time: a moment in her kitchen, for example, segues through the travails of the unwitting chicken, stretches back through pre-history, and finally ends up—*splat!*—in the sizzle of her frying pan.

The forms in *Untitled* similarly exist as kernels of disparate insights dispatched through painterly space—the way words soar through air—each element an interlocutor to another thought. Similarly, the variegated colors in *Culture Of Wool* (2016) morph into blobs of bluish-black "matter." These arbitrary shapes, encircled by whitish womb-like forms, suggest they will gestate—the way micro-crystals coalesce within rock to burst forth precious gemstones.

Lima's myriad perspectives owe much to his urbane upbringing. Born in Brazil in 1984, he lived with his parents, both academics, between his native country, the United States, where he studied at Cooper Union, and London, where he obtained a Masters Degree from The Royal College of Art. The techniques and art historical sources for his works are thus mixed and varied. He works with tempera, oil, and acrylic paint, applying pigment to canvas with his fingers and hands, brushing, staining, smearing, and dripping it to create what he describes as a "reflection of something that is concrete [...] something ethereal that hovers like a shadow of something out there."

This transcendence of organic, inorganic matter, and manufactured objects has long preoccupied artists, particularly those drawn to landscape painting; think of Ruisdael's *Wheat Fields* (c. 1670), with its ever-shifting cloud formations, or Monet's translucent reflections of sailboats in *Regatta at Argenteuil* (1872). Lima's allusions to an object consumed by an infinite universe also summon William Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway* (1844), his swirls of rain and dust obscuring the momentum of a speeding steam engine, reducing it to a blip devoured by almighty nature. And his use of actual objects—crystals mined then enhanced—brings Malevich to mind: his *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918), subjects the logic of the square to a dissolute essence that resonates within Lima's abstractions.

The remaining individual works exhibited here, such as *Cloud* (2016), echo *Untitled's* slow motion and its reiteration of forms. These quiescent but unrelenting shifts through time and space call attention to our own existential journey, one that encourages us to celebrate the ultimate extraordinariness of being, no matter how short-lived that may be.

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