

## Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck

### Autocratic Nostalgia: Venezuelan Contemporary Landscapes

Opening Reception: Friday March 31, 6-9 pm

Exhibition runs through May 6, 2017

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 11-6 pm

Henrique Faria Fine Art is pleased to present *Autocratic Nostalgia: Venezuelan Contemporary Landscapes*, Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck's third solo exhibition with the gallery. The works in the exhibition span twenty years of the artist's career. Since the mid-nineties, Balteo-Yazbeck has developed a hybrid practice that incorporates, across various mediums, the activities of a researcher, archivist and curator. His productions formally resemble or incorporate the works of others and stress notions of authorship and cultural authority. Also for Balteo-Yazbeck, the exhibition design is an inseparable part of the artworks' conception, calling attention to the way our environments are mediated and configured by different layers of power. This exhibition specifically looks at the current landscape of Venezuela, one that is both simultaneously mired in widespread scarcity and uncertainty and suspended by the memories of the country's past cultural and economic greatness. In his choice of images, Balteo-Yazbeck attempts to break down this schizophrenic reality by examining the power of nostalgia and its ability to shape how the present is seen and experienced.

As Manuel Silva-Ferrer writes in the exhibition text, Balteo-Yazbeck's mining through historical images isn't based in wistfulness or sentimentality, rather "it's focused on critical observation" and informed by the evaluation that the "past tends to be idealized in moments of crisis." The series *Nostalgic Apparatus, Caracas: Heaven's Branch on Earth* (1998) captures different views of Caracas' 1950s-era skyline as it is depicted on the inside of the dome of the Humboldt Planetarium, which began construction during the regime of dictator Pérez Jiménez. In each frame are symbolic examples of modernist architecture that were also built during this regime, and which continue to dominate over Caracas' collective imagination. This "architectural profile" of the city hasn't been updated with new buildings since it was first installed, and, with the Planetarium continuing to be an attraction in the city, inadvertently glorifies the monuments of the country's authoritarian past.

Balteo-Yazbeck's ongoing exploration into the connections between art and politics is demonstrated in what the artist calls "Entanglements" and the ensuing series *Modern Entanglements*. The installation *2006* (2008) lining the gallery walls is a collection of logos of Venezuela's independent cultural institutions that not only represents the breadth of cultural activity in Venezuela during the latter part of the twentieth century but also the strength of its graphic design tradition. In 2006, in the midst of the Chavez administration, these various institutions, along with their emblems, were condensed into one. This action was an attempt to not only control cultural visibility but also to align creative and museological production with the government's propaganda. In reprinting these original logos, Balteo-Yazbeck aims to reveal the motives of authoritarianism to modify history by showing how intricately aesthetics are wrapped up in propagandistic efforts.

As one of many who have voluntarily left Venezuela because of its political conditions, Balteo-Yazbeck chooses not to remain silent as his native country falls into ever more direness and isolation. As Silva-Ferrer concludes in his text, "Thus the dynamism and present-day communicational flows [between Venezuelans living in exile], which have intensified connections and exchanges regarding this lost territory, have also brought about a significant reservoir of some of the most important manifestations of Venezuelan art and culture in these times."

**Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck** (Caracas, 1972) graduated in Fine Arts in his native city. His work has been exhibited in Venezuelan institutions since 1994 and at international venues since 2000, most recently in the 16th Quadriennale di Arte di Roma (2016); 12th Bienal de Cuenca; the Museum of Art and Design, New York; Bronx Museum of the Arts (2014); the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit; the Phoenix Art Museum; Steirischer Herbst, Graz; The American University of Beirut; Creative Time, New York (2013); CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco; El Museo del Barrio, New York; Artspace, Sydney (2012); 12th International Istanbul Biennial; Lütze-Museum, Sindelfingen (2011); Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo; 2nd Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan (2009); the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge; Cisneros Fontanals Art Fund, Miami (2008); El Museo de Arte de El Salvador (2006); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago de Chile (2005); Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru (2004); Guggenheim Museum's Sackler Center for Arts Education; Pretoria Art Museum, South Africa (2003); Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro; MACBA-Convent dels Angels, Barcelona (2002); Art in General, New York; 7th Bienal de la Habana, Habana (2000).

For press inquiries please contact Eugenia Sucre, Director, at [eugenia@henriquefaria.com](mailto:eugenia@henriquefaria.com)