

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Rubber Biscuit, an exhibition of new paintings by Mario Ayala and the artist's first solo presentation with the gallery. The exhibition will be on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl., from November 11 through December 16, 2023. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, November 11 from 6 to 8 PM.

Arresting for their architectural supports, technicality, and refined surfaces, Ayala's paintings allude to abundant cultural histories not only in subject matter, but through technical and material investigation. In a process that begins with digital sketches, then relies on rigorous layers of stenciling, airbrushing, and brush work, Ayala's paintings emerge through alternating stages of planning, improvisation, and free association. Beyond airbrushing's myriad contemporary associations, the artist sees the medium as connected to the origins of painting itself, in which reeds or bones were packed with pigment, then blown against the body to create relief handprints on cave walls. No less deliberate, his choice to paint on traditionally stretched canvases ensures that even the most difficult-to-fabricate shaped supports, made of wood, retain clear links to craftsmanship and hands-on traditions.

Embracing music as an influential part of his process, the title of Ayala's exhibition is borrowed from a 1956 doo-wop song. While The Chips' "Rubber Biscuit" exemplifies an up-tempo, light-hearted nonsensical classic, it's also, paradoxically, about hunger and scarcity. The song's mostly unintelligible lyrics performed in a Dadaist poetry-scat manner, evoke the use of humor and satire to address social struggles, using imagination and expression as the last available tools of agency. With these themes in mind, and following Ayala's concept of the exhibition as a kind of remix, Rubber Biscuit offers a capacious view of absurdities and questions associated with ritual and design, trade and tradition, and the ideas that permeate the artist's work and illustrates his ongoing commitment to mining the intersection of the widely shared and intimately autobiographical.

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This exhibition finds the artist expanding the communicative possibilities of several already-established typologies, including depictions of the backs of cars exemplified in Emilia's Tortas (2023) and Road Opener (2023), the TV stack paintings Warning, Funny How? (2023) and WARNING, It Be's That Way, Los Angeles (2023), and in his exacting copies of restrictive parking signs. In these series and elsewhere, Ayala draws on source objects and referents that merge the recognizable with the distinctly personal, driven by a desire to represent the easily overlooked, but nonetheless indelible, stuff of the everyday. In CVS Pharmacy (After Hours Towing Inc.) (2023), for example, the formal restraints of a ubiquitous municipal artifact offer a template by which to mimic a message of surveillance and restriction, both of which shadow experiences of public space. In appropriating the sign to promote his own fictitious tow company, Ayala talks back to the one-sided order, using his own combination of language and graphic design to clown on performative flexes of power. Simultaneously, he invites viewers to join him: the address of "After Hours Towing Inc." leads not to an impound lot, but to Ayala's own studio.

By a similar logic of re-presentation and access, the images that fill Ayala's TV screens are sourced from his own VHS collection. Contained within their frames, the chosen stills engage a visual dialogue between themselves, while their larger architecture suggests makeshift memorials to bygone media. Warning, Funny How? and WARNING, It Be's That Way, Los Angeles take formal cues from the art historical as well as the commercial, equalizing global examples of sky ascendent structures alongside minimalist stacks, or the merchandising displays of analogue electronics stores. Exactingly depictions of two versions of the hyperbolic, now-obsolete "FBI" disclaimer against video duplication vibrate with an instinctively familiar, if half-forgotten, ambience of threat. The irony in the warnings' placement—atop stills from quintessential organized-crime film Goodfellas and the (fittingly titled) Terminator 2: Judgment Day—is doubled by the fidelity with which Ayala copies the ban on copying. In this sense, and echoed in the home-animated YouTube video for Chicano oldies rarity "It Be's That

Way” on another screen, bootlegging isn’t just a means of subversive circulation; it’s also an act of preservation and tribute.

In a painting of comparative visual restraint, the collage-like When Frogs Grow Hair (2023) combines text and symbolism to conjure family, spirit, and the unseen. Borrowing a phrase commonly used by Ayala’s grandmother, a Cuban immigrant and practitioner of Santería, the stenciled text at the center of the painting translates to “when frogs grow hair,” an idiom akin to “when pigs fly,” and used to describe occurrences of extreme unlikelihood. Examples of such sayings, called adynatons, span cultures and history, emphasizing the creative human impulse toward figurative description and humor in the face of impossibilities. Like the nonsense utterances of “Rubber Biscuit” or Dada’s scrambling of signs in rejection of the status quo, this incantatory phrase anchors When Frogs Grow Hair, suggesting future outcomes both speculative and magical, but which can only be discerned obliquely. The red and black palette, cowrie shells, and other elements of the composition evoke the trickster deity Eleguá, known in Santería cosmology as the keeper of the roads, and he who holds the keys to past, present, and future. Considered relationally, When Frogs Grow Hair unlocks new readings in three other works on view: Road Opener transforms from mere vehicle to the road, as its name implies. DOO WOPPERS ONLY, VOL. 3 (2023), based on a cherished, one-of-a-kind mixed CD, becomes the chosen soundtrack for the trip.

Rounding out this quadriptych is the future-facing and technically formidable Next Gen Technology (M.O.B. #6) (2023). Tongue-in-cheek in its representation of David Kordansky, the product’s typical messaging is repurposed to remind us that power and energy are also necessary to fuel the next generation of visual innovation—though such fuel can’t be so easily bottled and sold. Here, the literal act of driving is conflated with a metaphorical journey, both spatial and temporal. In keeping with the ways Ayala’s paintings repeatedly honor collaboration, from the polyvocal harmonies of soul music to the participatory experience of lowrider cruising, it’s no accident that Ayala represents

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the collaborative and dynamic relationship that exists between artist and gallerist, thereby situating himself within a collective unified by the shared project of art making.

Mario Ayala was the subject of a solo exhibition at Jeffrey Deitch, New York (2022). Recent group exhibitions include Sitting on Chrome: Mario Ayala, rafa esparza, and Guadalupe Rosales, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2023–2024); Hot Concrete: LA to HK, K11 Musea, Hong Kong (2022); and Made in L.A. 2020: a version, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2020). Ayala lives and works in Los Angeles.