

## MATTHEW BROWN

### **Michael Alvarez**

*Good Looking Out*

633 N La Brea Ave

Opening Thursday, September 27

Matthew Brown is pleased to present *Good Looking Out*, a solo exhibition of recent paintings by Michael Alvarez. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Alvarez draws from the wellspring of his own experience living and working in the city to produce intimate yet sociological paintings that capture the particularities of civic life within the vast metropolis. Steeped in nostalgia, the over twenty works on view offer a closely-observed, hyperreal reconstruction of the city: its people, its culture, its politics, and the public and domestic spaces that constitute its visual landscape.

Influenced by graffiti culture and its transformation of the urban sprawl, Alvarez uses a combination of oil and spray paint to build up multilayered, diffuse surfaces which oscillate between the uncanny daze of a dream and the misty nostalgia of a memory. In preparation for his social-scapes, Alvarez undertakes multiple site visits, traversing the terrain to experience it from every possible angle. Always towing a digital camera, he takes dozens of reference photographs of the scene to capture both key features and the most minute of details.

Back in the studio, the fragments of his memories and reference images coalesce to form diffuse compositions that are reminiscent of a fading wall tag or a lossy digital image. Inextricably linked both to memory and to low-res photographs, Alvarez's social-scapes achieve an impressionistic openness by way of temporal and technological mediation.

Often collage elements are affixed to the diaphanous haze of paint, bringing moments of sharp detail to the overall impressionistic composition. In *Wasteland Paradise* (2018), an unexpectedly utopian depiction of an encampment situated beneath a highway overpass, fragments of thick dried impasto, representing discarded plastic bags and other refuse, are collaged to the surface alongside an actual piece of chewed gum collected from the scene. Rendered in vibrant hues, the graffitied architecture, tents, garbage bags, and other waste fade into one another to form a technicolor kaleidoscope.

*Barrier Bash (Art Show at the D.I.Y)* (2022) depicts a group exhibition staged at the end of a cul-de-sac. Mounted on the facades of buildings, we see several works from the exhibition meticulously reproduced with careful precision and attention to detail. Alvarez's approach to the exhibition's attendees is more varied: some are highly detailed, yet others are mere silhouettes, receding into their environment. Set against a doubled mirage-like hill is a "Call Jacob" billboard. Although rendered crudely with barely legible text, this advertisement for a local personal injury lawyer is instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with the L.A. landscape.

This economy of detail, or way in which certain elements recede in order to bring others to the fore, creates an attentional hierarchy that reproduces the artist's own mental state: what he recalls and where he places his focus. Deeply subjective in their selective description of a scene, the works are testaments to what we choose to explore, overlook, or remember within our environments.

This selectivity also nods to the very nature of memory itself, its susceptibility to becloud over time. In his photo album paintings, Alvarez fuses local history with his own personal history. Culling source material from school yearbooks and his own family photo albums, Alvarez skillfully captures the lossy-ness inherent in the low resolution or degraded images. Reproducing photographs in paint, Alvarez's verité approach to his source material attests to the singular role of photography in preserving shared history and collective identity.

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Taken together, the photo album paintings become a kind of historical archive, suggesting that historical fact is forged and preserved for generations through the act of recording ones own personal memories and memorabilia. In insisting on the personal as a gateway to the sociological, Alvarez demonstrates how the collective can arise within a city as fragmented and sprawling as Los Angeles: community is formed when individuals come to occupy and share the same space, and when they leave their marks for generations to come.

Even as the works are entangled with the urban decay and generational traumas they depict, Alvarez's representations of Los Angeles are by and large characterized by optimism and wonder. Like the central figure in *Take A Hike* (2014), Alvarez positions himself at a distance and looks out at his community with awe and admiration.

*Good Looking Out*, the exhibition's title, is understood as an expression of gratitude or appreciation, generally given to someone as a way of saying thanks for noticing something and being proactive or helpful in response. Throughout the exhibition, Alvarez functions as that careful and caring lookout, closely observing and documenting his surroundings so that we might look out too.

*Michael Alvarez (b. 1983, Los Angeles) lives and works in Los Angeles. He received his BFA from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena in 2007.*

*Recent solo exhibitions include Mama's Boys and Other Stories, Riverside Art Museum (2019); We're Out Here, Marlborough Contemporary, New York (2018); and Sorealism, MaRS, Los Angeles (2016).*

*Recent group exhibitions include Hot Concrete: LA to HK, with Sow & Tailor and Woaw Gallery, K11 Musea, Hong Kong (2022); What it Could Be, with Anthony Gallery, Stony Island Art Bank, Chicago (2022); Cheech Collects, The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture, Riverside, CA (2022); Hot Concrete, Sow & Tailor, Los Angeles, CA (2021); LXS ANGELINXS, Galeria Javier Lopez y Fer Francis, Madrid (2021); Top Wizards, Richard Heller Gallery, Santa Monica, CA (2019); HOW WE REMEMBER AND HOW WE SURVIVE, 45th Annual Gia de los Metros Exhibit, Help Help graphics, Los Angeles (2018); Divided Brain, Lava Projects, Alhambra, CA (2018); 35x35: Dual Vision, Mexican Cultural and Cinematographic Center, Consulate General of Mexico in Los Angeles (2018); Dark Progressivism: The Built Environment, Museum of Art and History, Lancaster, CA (2017); 4th SUR:biennial, Cerritos College Art Gallery, Cerritos, CA (2017).*