

MAKE ROOM

Yoab Vera

Circadian Memories: Amar Pacifico

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The image of the open ocean has long been used as a metaphor for the spirit of art. Mallarmé's *Poésies* of 1899, published shortly after his death, opens with a toast ("Salut") in honor of the expedition that the reader is about to embark upon: for Mallarmé, poetry was a vessel commuting between ordinary life and everyday language to the unexplored regions of aesthetic experience. Half a century earlier, Gericault used the ocean's horizon as a convergence point where the hope and desperation experienced by the shipwrecked passengers of the *Raft of the Medusa* could become a single, unified feeling—its own suspended reality. More recently, Tacita Dean's short film from 2001, *The Green Ray*, narrates the artist's attempt to record a common but rarely seen optical phenomenon in which the setting sun emits a flash of green light just before it slips below the horizon. Sailors, for whom the ray has taken on an oracular significance, see it as a harbinger of change; for Dean, having almost failed to capture it on film, the ray represents the act of looking and the faith it entails.

In Yoab Vera's new body of work, imagined views of the ocean provide a liminal space between pure abstraction and representational painting. Roughly worked colorfields, built up with a fresco technique with layers of acrylic, concrete, and oil stick, are left exposed to the elements in Vera's garden studio, washed by rain and sun until their weathered surface begins to spark memories of other places and moments in time. He calls them 'haptic-contemplative' paintings and describes his process as a kind of visual touch, operating at the inflection point of thinking and feeling. Vera traces his fascination with the relationship between texture, color, time, and space to the experience of traveling between places that has characterized his nomadic studio practice. An acute awareness to the transitions of material in space comes from his training as an architect in Mexico City, where Luis Barragán, Helen Escobedo, and Mathias Goeritz's particular strain of modernism—using highly pigmented concrete to transform geometrically defined spaces that reference syncretisms of traditional colonial and autochthonous architecture—served as a touchstone for Vera's own investigations into the affective qualities of hybridized materials and forms. Another important source has been the 2007 Katy Siegel-curated exhibition *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975* which introduced Vera to the post-minimal, provisional painting of artists like Mary Heilmann, Blinky Palermo, and Jack Whitten. For Vera, these artists showed a new way forward for painting: one less concerned with making pictures than with finding a process that would allow the artist to remain open to the rhythm and suggestions of feeling while relinquishing control of the final image.

Circadian Memories: Amar Pacifico is about the possibility of change embodied in painting's ability to trigger a contemplative mood in which tides of memory wash over consciousness, offering themselves up for reflection anew. Many of the paintings in the show reference *boleros*, a type of romantic ballad that recounts the ecstasies of love through the sufferings it enacts. The image at the heart of the *bolero*—of love after all—represents faith in the redemptive powers of time. For Vera, painting is an ode to everything that has been and is yet to be felt: the entirety of existence condensed into an experience of time and space, color and light. The sun rises and sets today as it did yesterday and will tomorrow. Each moment passes eternally, containing all of the past and all of the future.

Yoab Vera (b. 1985, Mexico City) holds an MFA in Painting from UCLA (2021) and a BA in Art and Art History with a concentration in Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art from Hunter College (2013). Vera's work has been shown at Saengar Galería, Mexico City; GAVLAK, Los Angeles; CFHILL, Stockholm; LaMontague Gallery in Boston, MA; Arróniz Gallery, Mexico City; the New Wight Gallery at UCLA, among others. He is the recipient of a New York Community Trust Award in Painting and Poetry and has also received awards from the Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City.