

Marlborough

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For press inquiries please contact Janis Gardner Cecil at Marlborough Gallery at 212.541.4900 or jcecil@marlboroughgallery.com

Marlborough Gallery, Inc.

40 West 57th Street

New York, NY 10019

t. 212.541.4900

f. 212.541.4948

www.marlboroughgallery.com

mny@marlboroughgallery.com

JULIO LARRAZ: RECENT WORK APRIL 28 – JUNE 6, 2009

The Directors of Marlborough Gallery are pleased to announce the opening of *Recent Work* by the Cuban born American painter, Julio Larraz. This will be Larraz's third exhibition in New York since joining the gallery in 2000. The show will feature approximately twenty-one paintings and seven drawings and will represent figure paintings and landscapes.

As a conjurer of thought-images Larraz is one of the most provocative painters working today. In all his paintings there is an ostensible, visible subject, and then, lurking as if it were in the penumbra of the subconscious, one senses another presence, both mysterious and indefinable. At times, the presence seems to be one of menace or of something which is about to take place that one can't readily grasp. This enigmatic amalgam of the seen and the unseen, the knowable and the unknown, makes Larraz's work one of the most arresting visual encounters to be had in all contemporary painting. The paintings would seem to intend strange questions to which the artist gives no apparent answers, and their power lies in the potency of the images, the viewer's interest and curiosity to understand their meaning, and in the great mastery of the painting.

Stylistically, Larraz's work may be characterized by simplicity of touch, dramatic, brilliant lighting, vibrant, sensuous colors, exaggerated scale, and a combination of reality and fantasy that, generally, is tropical in atmosphere. His work has been called "playful," "extraordinarily fluent," "an art of subtleties, not of grand statements." His subjects are often used as metaphors for such things as isolation, melancholy, the absurdity of power, or political intrigue. In some works a sinister background is implied; in others, "the least frightening of objects is endowed with a strong sense of dread." Running through his work are Greek myths and legends, art history dialogues, and contemporary history.

Born in 1944 in Havana, Cuba, Larraz, the first of three children, grew up in a home of cultural and intellectual distinction. His parents ran *La Discusion*, one of the oldest newspapers in Havana. His father had compiled one of the largest private libraries in the country – several hundred thousand volumes on painting, history, philosophy, and literature. When the family emigrated to Miami in 1961, this invaluable collection had to remain behind. From the time of his arrival in the United States, Larraz has continued to live in various places: Washington, DC, New York City, Mexico, Grandview, New York, Paris, Florence, and currently Miami. Edward J. Sullivan, who wrote a highly perceptive book on Larraz (Hudson Hills Press, 1989) has observed that "uncertainty and unease are key to the indistinct details of his subtle dramas." This constant dislocation and relocation has had a probable influence on his art. Larraz has said, "I almost never do paintings that reflect the exact location in which I work, although there is obviously a general suggestion of place."

In terms of realist painting Sullivan points out that Larraz's work "goes so far beyond verisimilitude that the label 'realism' seems an uncomfortable word to use in defining it." Perhaps one might call his art evocative realism because his paintings, which are absorbed in a dimension of temporal suspension make us reflect. Writing for *Art Nexus* Carol Damian concluded her astute article by noting, "Erotic overtones within strange scenarios elevate the works of Julio Larraz above mere depictions of the real or imagined into the realm of the subconscious. Exquisitely painted for mesmerizing effects that emerge like strange dreams, his haunting scenes invite numerous interpretations and endless questions." The different themes of the works often contain a strong narrative element and generally have latent implications that go beyond what is represented. Christofer Finch says, "a constant in Larraz's art is the always ambiguous interaction between man and nature... Larraz has a virtuoso's ability to conjure up the physical world. Beyond this he takes a poet's delight in evoking imaginary universes, so that every image seems to take on a special significance in the context of the whole, as if it has been plucked from some epic that has yet to be written."

In his excellent and informative book on Larraz (Skira, 2003), Edward Lucie-Smith, who has written the introduction to the exhibition catalog, calls Larraz "an experimentalist disguised as a traditionalist." He says that Larraz "wants to draw the spectator into a meditative dream world, where narratives that were always subliminally present become more clearly visible."

The author compares the meditative and contemplative aspects of Larraz's work to that of the Spanish still life masters of the early 17th century but without their specific religious aura. Aside from his vast range of cultural, social and political references, Larraz, says Lucie-Smith, is "equipped with all the skill of the great masters of the past – it is in fact rare to find a living painter with anything like Larraz's fluency and confidence – or, indeed, his astonishing control of his medium."

Larraz's first exhibition was in 1971 at the Pyramid Gallery in Washington, DC. His first New York exhibition was at the Far Gallery in 1974. In 1975 he was awarded the Cintas Grant by the Instituto de Educacion Internacional in New York and also in New York in 1976 the painting prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and National Institute of Arts and Letters. He received in 1977 the Purchase Prize from the Childe Hassam Fund Purchase Exhibition, American Academy of Arts and Letters and National Institute of Arts and Letters. His paintings may be found in public collections and museums in Washington, DC, New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Colombia, France, and Mexico.

An illustrated catalogue, with an essay by Edward Lucie-Smith, will accompany this exhibition.

Marlborough Chelsea / International Public Art Ltd., 545 West 25th St, New York, NY 10001	t. 212.463.8634	f. 212.463.9658	chelsea@marlboroughgallery.com
Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd., 6 Albemarle Street, London W1S 4BY	t. 44.20.7629.5161	f. 44.20.7629.6338	mfa@marlboroughfineart.com
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