

Portraits of "The Others"

By Nathan Madrid

September 5th – November 22nd 2017

Nathan Madrid's beautifully rendered large-scale portraits of "Otherness" speaks directly to some of contemporary Western society's most critical social issues. By personally depicting and designating "Otherness," these paintings confront the viewer and challenge preconceptions, implicit biases, or hardened prejudices. Nathan accomplishes this confrontation through several intrinsic painterly techniques.

Each composition features a single, tightly cropped face. The elimination of visual context beyond facial features establishes an intimacy and immediacy between the subject and viewer. Additionally, in a subtle theoretical juxtaposition, the scale and composition choices made by Nathan transposes "in your face" microaggression tactics; tactics that are casually, commonly, and often unconsciously used to further denigrate "Others" in Western society.

Using palette knives, brushes, brayers, and even his fingers; Nathan Madrid's frenetic and expressionistic application of oil paint onto the smooth aluminum or Mylar surfaces adds to the intention of social urgency examined in these portraits. His self-imposed tri-chromatic color limitation spreads over the surface in a calculated frenzy; showing process, underpainting grid systems, handwritten notations, and impasto edits. Leaving these trace elements of process references the true nature of personality. The amalgamation of built-up experiences, each layer informing the next, is what creates self-identity.

The smudges, hard-edged smears, and elongated blurs created by Nathan's gestural abstraction relies on the viewer to perceive the entirety of each face at a distance. However, true to his classical oil painting training the eyes are always rendered precisely and deliberately. The eyes stare directly at the viewer and reveal true character. From the childish innocence of a multi-racial boy to the sly incisiveness of a South American political dissident, Nathan paints his subjects' eyes with a realism that cuts through the rest of the painting and draws the viewer closer. Interestingly, as the viewer approaches Nathan's artwork, there is a loss of gestalt cohesiveness. This

effect suggests that to truly get to know someone, personal space must be broken down allowing all first impressions to fall away, exposing the humanity of a person.

"Portraits of 'The Others'" by Nathan Madrid is a valuable mechanism to engage precarious and potentially volatile discourse. In a world where discrimination is embraced by so many, these portraits are a visually exquisite means to break down prejudices and to move from cultural tolerance of "Otherness" to social affirmation of humanness.

Sean FitzGibbons

Director of the Meadows Museum at Centenary College