

Rubens Ghenov

Octave Face dos Santos: Linernotes.

Syllabus for Earrings and Ghosts on an Afternoon Shelf.

November 17 – January 5, 2022



Morgan Lehman is pleased to present “Octave Face dos Santos: Linernotes. Syllabus for Earrings and Ghosts on an Afternoon Shelf,” an exhibition of new paintings by Rubens Ghenov. This marks the artist’s fourth solo exhibition with the gallery.

In these latest works, Ghenov continues to mine and develop his ongoing conceptual project in which paintings serve as visual interpretations of the life and philosophy of an invented poet, Angelico Morandá. Morandá (a deceased Spanish poet) becomes an artistic proxy or a bodhisattva of sorts for Ghenov’s far-reaching interests including time, space, ontology, and his Brazilian ancestry.

The paintings on display bring together a plethora of mark-making techniques including brush application, masking, pouring, xerox transfer, and graphite drawing. Ghenov often leaves wide swaths of unpainted linen exposed, which provides a material and textural counterpoint to the visually dense painted areas. The color throughout is subtle and carefully calibrated, relying heavily on the artist’s signature muted palette of deep magentas, midnight blues, and inky chromatic blacks.

Each artwork presents a sophisticated arrangement of geometric forms and planes that touch, overlap, and open onto one another, creating the illusion of an architecture in flux. Ghenov’s visual orchestration guides our eyes across the picture plane and up against the edges of the painting itself. These playful formal moves draw our attention to each piece’s physical reality before we plunge back into the mimetic recesses of the image space, which has a quality not unlike traditional shallow field Still Life genre painting.

Ghenov’s intricate geometries are interspersed not only with more chance-based material passages like paint pours, but also with figurative imagery including human faces, text, pre-Colonial ritual masks, and beaded necklaces. These visuals are mysterious and ambiguous, and conjure a sense that, in looking at the paintings, we are entering some sort of sacred and esoteric space. In all, Ghenov’s approach to abstraction is unusual in that all of these elements (the formal, the figurative, process) can coexist in a single image. The synthetic language mimics the blending of the artist’s own mind with that of his fictive poet, leaving the viewer to parse out the interplay between fiction and reality.

Rubens Ghenov was born in São Paulo, Brazil and immigrated to the US in 1989. He received his MFA from RISD in 2010 and his BFA from Tyler School of Art in 1999. Ghenov has shown at Morgan Lehman Gallery (NY), Mindy Solomon Gallery (FL), Marginal Utility (PA), Geoffrey Young Gallery (MA), TSA (NY and PA), Ortega y Gasset (NY), Woodmere Art Museum (PA), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PA). Ghenov’s work has been featured in Art In America, Hyperallergic, The Village Voice, BOMB magazine, Title Magazine, and The Philadelphia Inquirer.