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Mario Martinez: Mindscape

January 11 - February 24, 2024



Probably Magic, 2004, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 76 x 135 inches

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by Mario Martinez, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Opening January 11, 2024, the exhibition will feature drawings and paintings from 1985 to 2023.

The paintings trace the artist's development over a number of decades. In *Desert Night* (1985), wax and oil separate into flickers of saturated color. White light emanates from the center of the composition, illuminating a dance of abstracted patterns and forms. A great admirer of the New York School and Abstract Expressionists, Martinez often packs his canvases with turbulent painted surfaces recalling those of Gorky or de Kooning.

In *Emotive; The Yaquis & The Gowanus* (2023), a tree-like structure emerges from multicolored horizontal bands into vaporous washes of color. The blue and green fields morph and warp, animating and suspending strange, inexplicable objects. Natural, organic forms repeatedly assert themselves within the otherwise abstract compositions.

Martinez avoids direct references to Yaqui traditions, but cryptic allusions permeate his work. "I know people expect figuration from Natives," the artist says, noting that abstraction itself has "been in Indian and Indigenous cultures forever." Traditional Yaqui patterns emerge fleetingly, but with potent visual power. Despite the influence of Spanish Jesuits in

the 17th century, Yaqui religion maintained a deep, foundational reverence for nature. “Our most ancient spiritual and ceremonial traditions honor the earth and the heavens,” says Martinez. Much of his work recalls this very tradition.

It's Probably Magic (2004) is anchored by two strong horizontal lines. Above the horizon, the composition is dense, chaotic, and turbulent. Below, the forms spread tranquilly, like a reflection in calm water. The painting feels almost allegorical. A busy and chaotic world obscures a simple and tranquil one below. Yet, in its totality, the composition is harmonious. In many of his works, Martinez hints at the pre-Christian Yaqui concept of *Sewa Ania*, or the flower world: a beautiful, ever-present parallel reality.

While Martinez’s compositions often contain some of the tempestuous energy of modernism, the artist seems to sidestep its more torturous elements—its disorientation, alienation, and remoteness from the past. “I’m part of a 40,000-year tradition,” Martinez says of his practice, which comfortably integrates pre- and post-colonial painting traditions.

Born in 1953 in Penjamo village, a Yaqui settlement in Scottsdale, Arizona, Mario Martinez is an enrolled member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona. He received his BFA from the School of Art, Arizona State University in 1979, and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1985. Since 1991, Mario Martinez’s work has appeared in over 48 solo and group exhibitions at prestigious venues, such as the Denver Art Museum (1998), the Montclair Art Museum, (2018–2020), and the Eiteljorg Museum (2015–2016, 2017–2018, Indianapolis). In 2005, he was the subject of a major mid-career retrospective at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian (New York). He has received numerous grants and awards, including a Native Arts Research Fellowship, (1998, National Museum of the American Indian); an Artist in Residence Fellowship (2001–2002, National Museum of the American Indian); a Joan Mitchell Foundation CALL Grant (2013–2014); a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Residency (2014–2015); and the Murray Reich Distinguished Artist Award (2017, New York Foundation for the Arts). Martinez’s work is featured in the collections of numerous museums and institutions across the country, such as the Museum of Contemporary Native American Art (Santa Fe); the Eiteljorg Museum (Indianapolis); the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, D.C.); the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Chicago); and the Heard Museum (Phoenix), among others.

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