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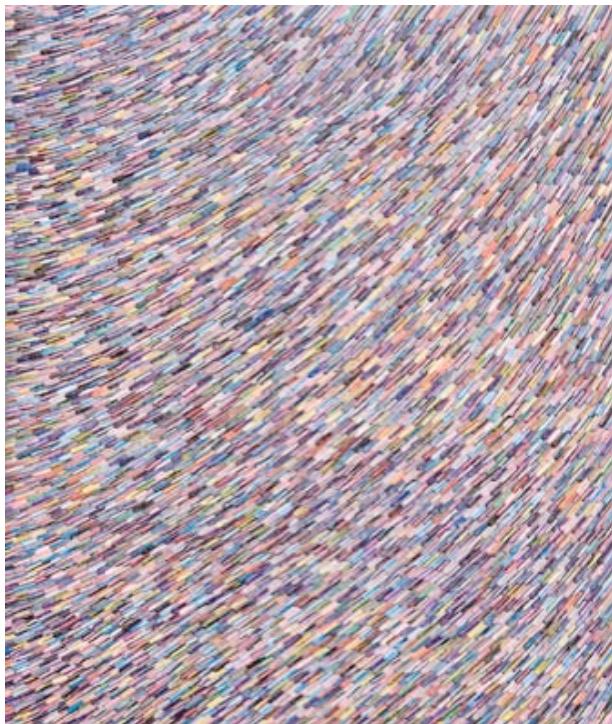
Omar Chacon: Bacanales

By Ernesto Menéndez-Conde
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BACANALES is the first solo show of the young Colombian, New York based, artist **Omar Chacon** (b.1979) at Margaret Thatcher Projects. Bacanales, as the title suggests, alludes to carnivalesque representations or collective festivities.

Chacon has referred to his artwork as the “coming together of the masses, for a festival or a protest”. (BBW Desks News) He represents this notion through vibrant colors, using the all-over painting technique, made with the repetition of the very basic unit: the circle. These forms are juxtaposed, filling the whole space and sometimes even dropping below the canvas border. They create an atmosphere of a crowd or a sticky and contagious sensuality. The acrylic discs are bright, plastic, polished surfaces, which are layered to add a sense of volume to the canvases.

These paintings are joyful and contemporary. They make use of a chromatic stridence and chaotic movement, which relate them to current media and fashion. In other pieces he uses small rectangles, whose proportions resemble human figures. They can be associated with massive migrations or populated



Omar Chacon
Marañón CCXVII, 2010

street life of today's societies. **Chacon** is an artist who plays with the visual analogy between contemporary life and natural features such as a peacock's feathers, or an imaginative swarm of insects.

Artists have used small colorful circles as elementary units in abstract art since the first decades of the 20th Century, from Robert Delaunay's Orphism to Op-Art, and psychodelia of the sixties. Many contemporary creators such as Yayoi Kusama, Damien Hirst, Fred Tomaselli, Beatriz Milhazer, Barbara Kreft, Mike Kelley, Casey Vogh, Federica Fiore, and Stephen Rolfe Powell are using the circle as pattern for producing compositions. Among these artists, **Chacon** is developing a very suggestive body of work, which is evocative of his cultural background in Colombia. He has mentioned the similarities between his pieces and textile patterns used in traditional craftwork from his homeland. His grandfather's art became an inspiration for him¹. **Chacon**, like many Latin-American avant-garde artists from the first half of the 20th Century, has found ways of integrating the Latin American cultural heritage into the rather universal language of abstraction.

Even if **Chacon** avoids symmetry and geometric dispositions, giving room for spontaneity and improvisation, the artwork keeps an ornamental function, and a sense of rhythm which is replicated in the titles of his pieces: Bacanales, Bacan, Bacanerias, and Bacanismo. (The word 'bacan' has several regional meanings in Latin American countries, but generally speaking it refers to something, or someone, who is nice, tasty, fun, and delicious.)

Chacon's show offers an example of the orientation taken by contemporary abstract art: the quest for hybrid cross-cultural language with diffuse boundaries between art and handcraft, and a playful, less transcendental and formalistic approach to art. Chaos, orgies, improvisation and displacement are his means of creating visual equivalencies for the experience of the 'bacan'.

NOTES

¹In *Omar Chacón Serves Up His Own "Sancocho" to the Art World*, Alya Poplawsky describes **Chacon's** way of producing his works:

His artistic process evolved from his grandfather's simple dot paintings, and developed a migratory element in which paint transferred from one surface to another. He would peel off the left over paint on the plastic he would use to protect parts of the canvas, and then use these "leftovers" to create a whole new work of art. Now his works consist entirely of these "leftover" paint drippings, which he designs either as discs, patches, or lines.