

# GAVLAK

## JOSE ALVAREZ (D.O.P.A.) *Elegy for the Venezuelan Exile*

November 23 – December 12, 2022  
GAVLAK, Palm Beach, FL

*"If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense."*

- Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 2009

Palm Beach – GAVLAK is pleased to present *Jose Alvarez (D.O.P.A.): Elegy for the Venezuelan Exile*. This show marks the artist's eighth solo exhibition with the gallery and will feature 13 new works made in 2022 employing his well-known materials of mica, quills, feathers, and acrylic paint to create an elegy for the Venezuelan crisis. An elegy is a lyric poem composed "to praise and express sorrow for someone who is dead"; a way to aesthetically represent loss and to share it with others going through the same experience. An artist talk with Jose Alvarez (D.O.P.A.) and Rosario Güiraldes, Associate Curator at the Drawing Center will take place on Saturday, December 3 at 4 pm, coinciding with the New Wave Art Wknd Gallery Open House from 3 to 5 pm. *Elegy for the Venezuelan Exile* will be on view from November 23 – December 12, 2022.

In this new series, Alvarez uses his psychedelic and imaginary style, to explore social issues that up to this moment were considered a self-referential escape in his work. Alvarez left Venezuela and established himself in the United States at the age of 24. His life story as an immigrant is unavoidably linked with the painful rift in the Venezuelan social structure. Venezuelan society has been witnessing a prolonged Complex Humanitarian Emergency for many years<sup>2</sup>. As of September 2022, more than seven million Venezuelan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers live in different countries around the world, many people not surviving the journey and perishing along the way<sup>3</sup>. The exodus from Venezuela is among the few countries that do not have international protection policies matching its magnitude.

Alvarez's work looks to answer the question: How do we conceive the lives of those lost? The first voice of this elegy song is, *Going Back to Infinity (Víctor Rincón, Elegy for a Venezuelan Dream)*, 2022. On top of a wood panel and covered with an iridescent mica surface, feathers, ink, color pencils, and acrylic paint are compiled to produce a baroque microcosmos of enthralling textures and charged materials with different densities and a luminous chromatic range. From a nucleus, multiple forms of petals, buds, and shoots explode. In the center of this seductive organic group, there is an image of a laying body that is akin to an icon, the only image of a figure in the exhibition. It's an intervened photograph of the lifeless body of Víctor Rincón, a young Venezuelan who was a friend of the artist's family. The young man perished while crossing the Darien jungle. The Darien jungle is one of the most biodiverse places on earth. Today it is tragically famous for being considered one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world, spanning 165 miles between Colombia and Panama. In the middle of this extraordinary nature, Víctor becomes a martyr, a collective symbol for all those who lost their lives trying to reach a brighter future.

Likewise, the twelve pieces consisting of the series *Songs of Freedom*, 2022, answers to the same conceptual aesthetic logic as *Going Back to Infinity*. In these works, there are no figures. They are concentric compositions that irradiate vital impulses and bursts of color from a central nucleus. The bursts reaching out to be seen and felt by the viewer. Each one of these pieces has a subtitle with the name of a Venezuelan who has perished while escaping. They are Pedro Ascanio, Humberto Avila, Judith Cáceres, Yurvi Caridad, Silverio Colmenares, Daniela García, Carmen Ortega, Juan David Pulido, Yaelvis Santoyo, and Virgilio Trujillo. These names symbolize broken and lost lives. Two works in the series do not hold names but represent those whose names and stories that may never be recovered. The light within them carries on through this work and will not be lost or written off as a statistical number.

The visual language of *Songs of Freedom* is defined by the materials Alvarez engages with. The materials used in these fantastic collages are feathers, quills, and crystals, powerful objects used by shamans. In Alvarez's work, they become a source of the imaginary, emblems of place and transformation. His works are on flat panels, but they radiate out, catching light and shadows in the mica and feathers, creating a depth of dancing beauty and meaning. The dark

# GAVLAK

center gives way to bright rings of pinks, blues, and yellows that fade out into leaping feathers. The nucleus both pulls the viewer in and expands beyond the borders of the work.

*Elegy for the Venezuelan Exile* establishes itself as a profoundly subjective declaration seeking collective poetic and political consequences. There are no portraits of migrants, instead a collective memorial dedicated to the ongoing human catastrophe. An elegy to symbolize the inability to portray the millions of stories, faces, and lives that encompass the narrative of the Venezuelan exile.

This writing is an adaptation of *Elegy For The Venezuelan Exile* written by Fabiola Arroyo, an accompanying essay for the exhibition.

Jose Alvarez (D.O.P.A.) has performed and exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Kitchen in New York, NASA Johnson Space Flight Center, Parkes Radio Telescope in Australia, Gavlak Gallery in Los Angeles and Palm Beach, Marlborough Gallery in New York, The Moore Space in Miami, Ratio 3 in San Francisco, Jeffrey Deitch in New York, the Yerba Buena Center for The Art in San Francisco, The Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke, Beth Rudin DeWoody's The Bunker Artspace in West Palm Beach, The Kemper Art Museum in Kansas City, The Drawing Center in New York and the San Antonio Museum of Art in San Antonio, Texas, among others. In 2020, he was included in *A Very Anxious Feeling: Voices of Unrest in the American Experience* at the Taubman Museum of Art, he created for the Sarasota Art Museum, an impressive 10.5 × 78 foot vinyl mural, his largest vinyl mural to date, he was included in a group presentation by GAVLAK at The Armory Show as well as creating his largest painting to date, *The Life Within You*, a 9' L × 24' W tour de force for The Core Club in NYC.

## Notes

- 1 Dictionary, Merriam-Webster
- 2 "Complex Humanitarian Emergency". "This term started being used at the end of the eighties by the UN to describe the differential character of the major crisis that have proliferated since the end of the Cold War. They are complex mainly for 3 reasons: a multiplicity of causes that are interrelated to various political, economic and sociocultural causes. Its impact is all inclusive, meaning that it affects all life's orders, with a strong destructive and destabilizing effect. Lastly, it requires an international response based on multiple mandates which allow to work on various fronts, such as humanitarian action (including providing essential goods and services to survive, as well as the protection of victims), high level diplomacy." "Civilis | The Complex Humanitarian Emergencies have a political character". October 10, 2017 <https://povea.org/actualidad/civilis-las-emergencias-humanitarias-complejas-son-de-caracter-politico/>
- 3 According to numbers provided by the Venezuelan Interagency Coordination for Refugees and Migrants. [www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes](http://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes)