

The Measure of Man
Natalia Garcia-Lee
April 22 - June 25, 2022

A Note from LnS GALLERY

As we move through Spring of 2022, we are pleased to present *The Measure of Man* by the talented and visionary artist, Natalia Garcia-Lee. Nearly five years ago, we were captivated by her work, and the layered, painterly language used to discuss relevant themes through a scientific lens. This latest body of work explores and challenges our relation to one another as members of the same species in constructed, yet hostile environments. *The Measure of Man*, the artist's first solo exhibition at the gallery, is a timely and arresting presentation at a pivotal moment.

In *The Measure of Man*, Garcia-Lee showcases twelve grand oil on canvas renderings, a series of intimate oil gems, and a mixed-media installation titled *War Machine* to interpret the tactical complexities burrowed within the human psyche. Inspired by the findings of American psychologist Edward C. Tolman, and behavioral research of ethologist John B. Calhoun, the exploration of mammalian behavior and the cognitive reactions to both physical and societal structures provide the foundation on which the paintings emerge. The output of both Tolman and Calhoun serve as landing points in Garcia-Lee's interpretation of the paradoxical nature of the human experience, assumed on the basis that living creatures are inherently alike.

Our gratitude to Carol Damian, Ph.D., and to Melissa Diaz for their invaluable and comprehensive essays on the work of the artist. Their research into Garcia-Lee's series provide the necessary insight to further understand the exhibition. We would also like to extend many thanks to friend and curator, Adler Guerrier for assisting us in curating and thinking through Garcia-Lee's collection of paintings, drawings, and collages for this show. A special recognition to our LnS Team: Scott Bernstein, Isabella Marie Garcia, Sofia Guerra, and Frederic Walter Vega Olivella. Without you, none of this would be possible, Thank you!

We welcome you to maneuver through the maze of *The Measure of Man* by Natalia Garcia-Lee.

Luisa Lignarolo and Sergio Cernuda



Natalia Garcia-Lee

The First Death, 2021

oil on canvas

60 x 72 inches

152.4 x 182.88 cm

\$20,000.00 USD

LnS GALLERY

***The Measure of Man* | Natalia Garcia-Lee**

by Carol Damian, Ph.D.

How to measure human behavior? What does science tell us about the process of survival and extinction for all the species? Can we learn from rats and mice subjected to challenging situations as the keys to solving humanity's difficult problems? These may seem obtuse questions to ask an artist, but for Natalia Garcia-Lee, the measure of man is about human actions, reactions, and interactions, and art is a means of expression to address complex social issues.

As she explores several themes and media for this exhibition, from science and mathematics to war and survival, the underlying structures in her paintings are based on the maze and the social relationships necessary to succeed or fail to navigate its often confusing and arduous paths. The maze is an ancient subject that represents a metaphorical journey, with its challenging twists and turns and many dead ends. The word "maze" dates from the 13th century and comes from the Middle English word *mæs*, denoting delirium or delusion, and the complicated dynamics revealed in her paintings also bring perplexity to a quest for stability. The process involves a keen sense of drawing, multiple layers of pigment, collage and scraping to reveal new surface textures. The construction and destruction of the maze are the foundations of all the work, from subtle transparencies to the ever-present grid in which the action occurs. The process, a reflection of the course of life itself, also challenges the very concepts behind the creation of a painting. These are physically and intellectually challenging works, whether large paintings or small mixed media drawings and collages and humanity is always the focus.

The works with the grid as the underlying image, are inspired by the maze experiments of two scientists. Psychologist Edward C. Tolman (1886–1959) assessed the cognitive power of rats and their ability to create rational maps to reach an exit through latent learning and active exploration. Ms. Garcia-Lee invites the viewer to experience the ways of the maze and find an escape. We activate and participate and must contemplate the paths inherent in her works as a form of personal meditation, and quest for survival. At the same time, the experience draws upon and challenges another maze experiment that reflects individual social behavior through its association with the creation of a mouse utopia.

Between 1968 and 1970, American ethologist John B. Calhoun (1917–1995) conducted a behavioral study of captive mice which became used as an animal model of societal collapse, and his study has become a touchstone of urban sociology and psychology in general. In Ms. Garcia-Lee's retelling of the narratives concluding the scientists' experiments, she creates a science fiction character and her environment in which nothing is random, despite the painterly confusion and process marks that intrude upon the grids of the maze. The artist has invented her visual language to intervene upon the surfaces informed by the grid's structure. Through different, yet related, painterly experiments, she follows the paths through diverse scientific means: a radial maze, the periodic table, hive shapes, diagrams for spatial memory, markings based on Morse code communication systems, and other symbols that go beyond the base initiatives and result in universal and global constructs for her work.

To symbolize the convoluted nature of human (and animal) actions inherent in the maze experiments, the specter of a female figure and her hands direct us through the paths and the life and death moments of the quest for survival for all. As the representative of the species, she navigates the vagaries of the environment and the behavior of its members. Soon, she loses her individuality, as do all the members of the species, and is forced into protective gear and trapped in the anonymity of a hazmat suit, with large round goggles shielding her eyes. If she does not survive, all life dies with her. It is an arduous responsibility and as the female witnesses the gradual elimination of the species under the stressful conditions of the maze experiments, she sees the end of the will to reproduce. The body has been reduced. Only hands remain – struggling to survive, often as mere outlines of a ghostly presence. Like a sci-fi view into the future, the end of the stories in the series is marked by the dominance of the hands. Is it a harbinger of population control necessitated from within or from nature herself?

Throughout her practice, Ms. Garcia-Lee has created original works that are never dependent on art history, technically or conceptually. This exhibition reveals a unique career trajectory based on her fascination with science, the human condition, and an innate ability to take art beyond the merely descriptive into the realm of mystery and imagination.

Carol Damian, Ph.D., is an emeritus Professor of Art History, formerly in the School of Art and Art History, and the former Director and Chief Curator of the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University (2008–2014). She is a graduate of Wheaton College in Norton, Mass., and received her MA in Pre-Columbian Art and her Ph.D. in Latin American History from the University of Miami.



Natalia Garcia-Lee

The Building Of, 2022

oil on canvas

60 x 72 inches

152.4 x 182.88 cm

\$20,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

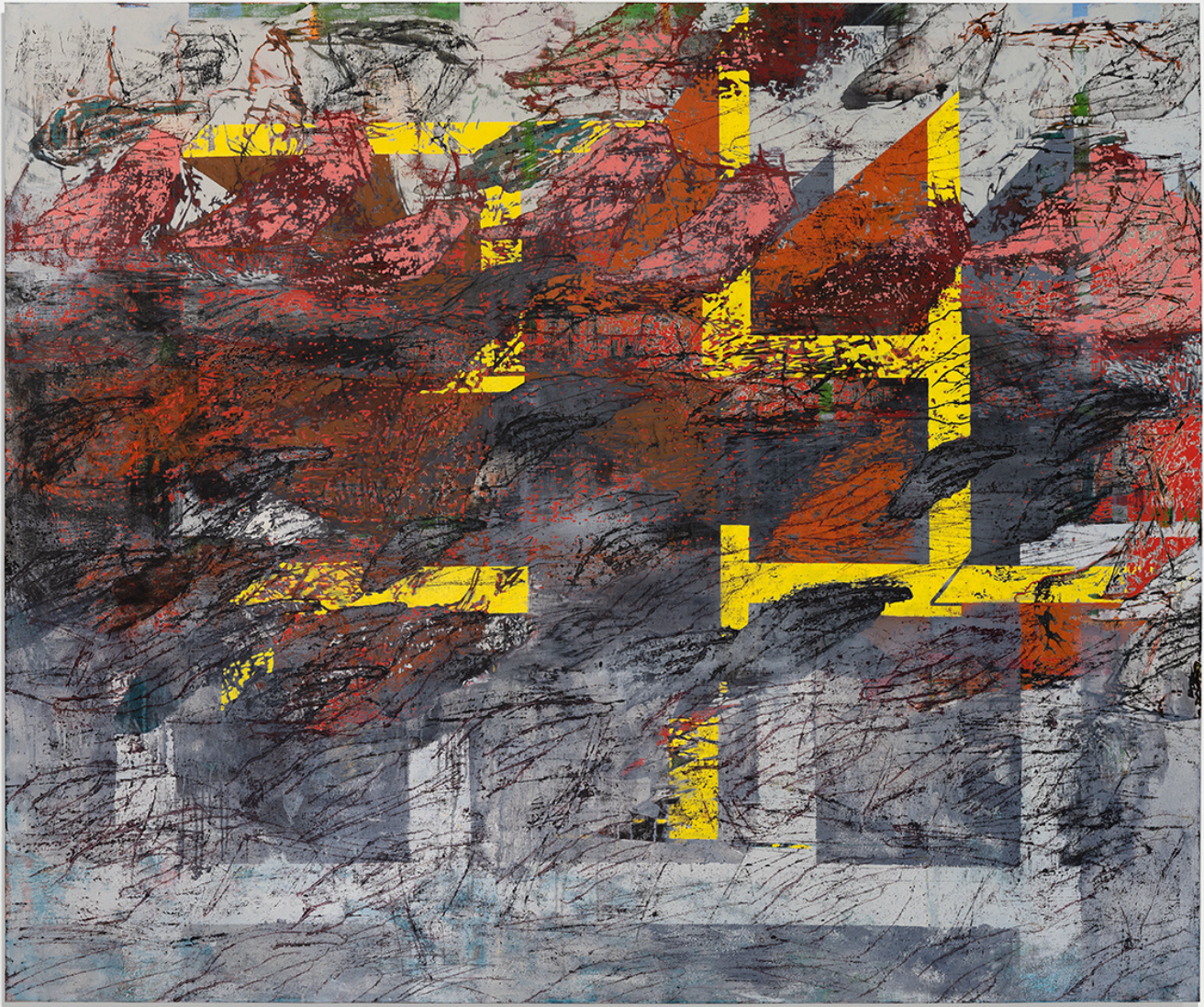
The Second Death, 2022

oil on canvas

60 x 72 inches

152.4 x 182.88 cm

\$20,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee
Tolman's Maze, 2021
oil on canvas
60 x 72 inches
152.4 x 182.88 cm
\$20,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

The Beautiful Ones, 2022

oil on canvas

72 x 96 inches

182.88 x 243.84 cm

\$25,000.00 USD

LN S GALLERY



Natalia Garcia-Lee

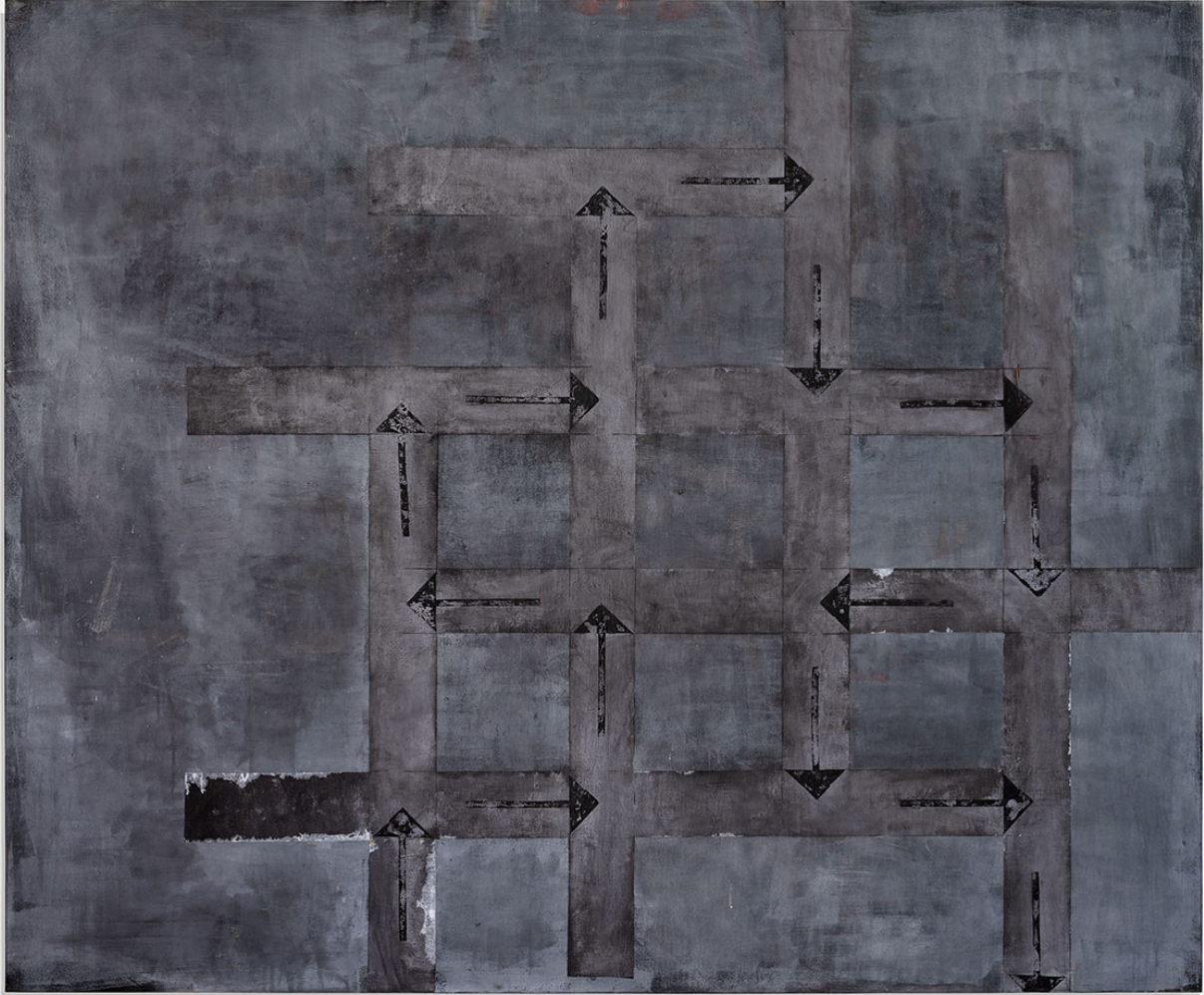
MONAD, 2022

oil on canvas diptych

60 x 144 inches

152.4 x 365.76 cm

\$30,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

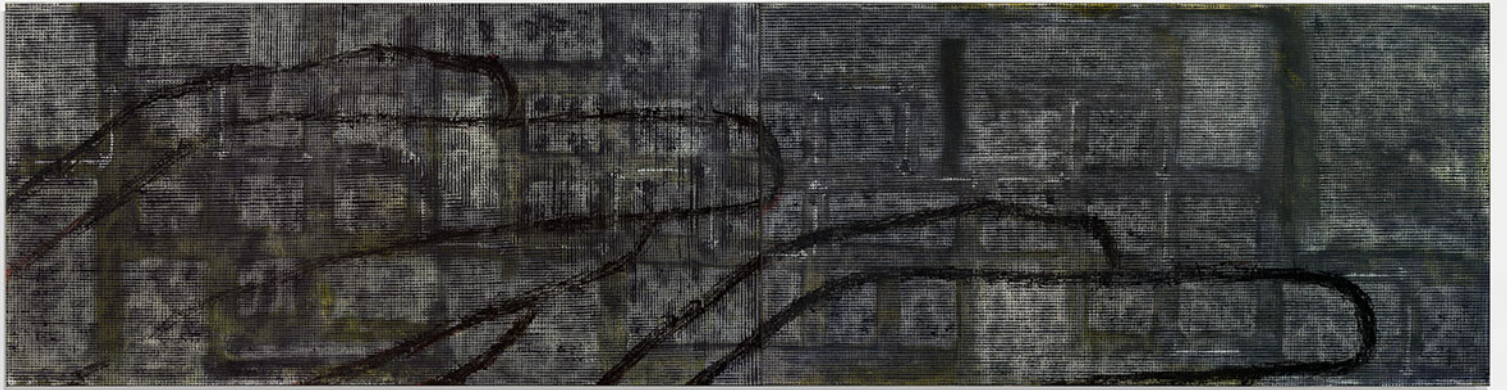
An Ode to Those Who Made the Most Mistakes, 2022

oil on canvas

60 x 72 inches

152.4 x 182.88 cm

\$20,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

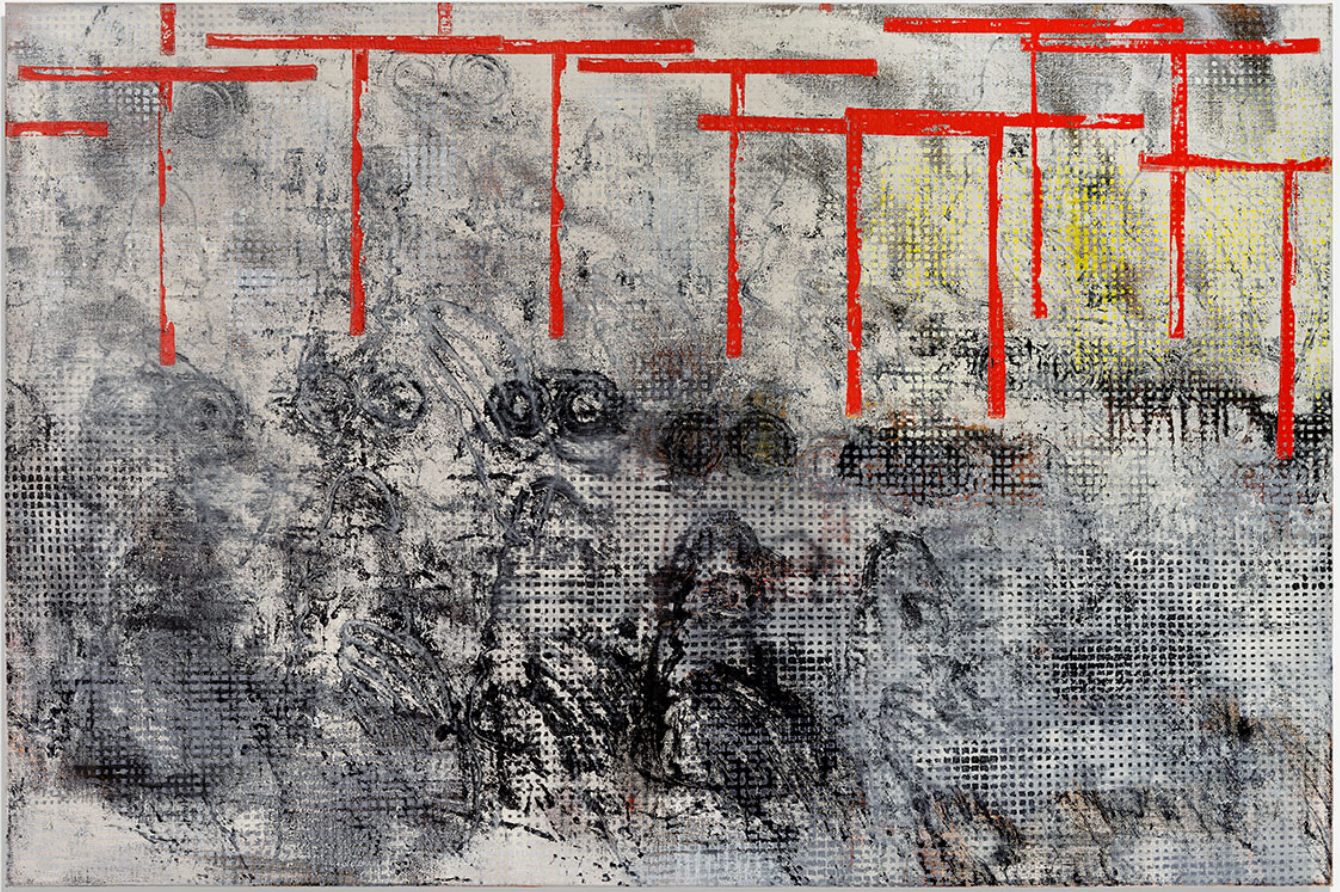
Natural Trails, 2022

oil on canvas

24 x 96 inches

60.96 x 243.84 cm

\$7,500.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

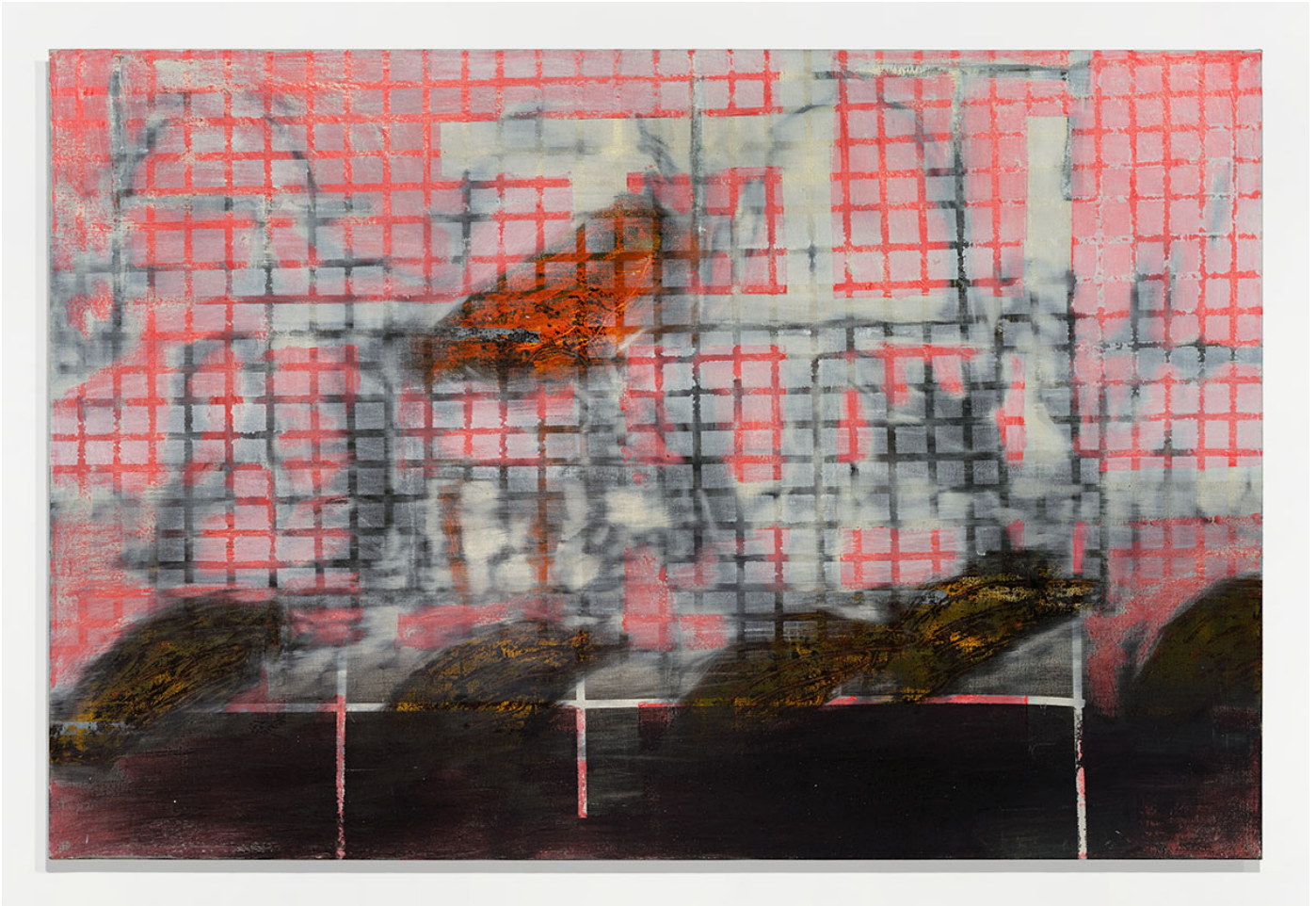
The Burden of Choice, 2021

oil on canvas

24 x 36 inches

60.96 x 91.44 cm

\$5,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

No Food, 2021

oil on canvas

24 x 36 inches

60.96 x 91.44 cm

\$5,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Low Level Learning, 2021

oil on canvas

72 x 96 inches

182.88 x 243.84 cm

\$25,000.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

By The 600th Day, 2022

oil on canvas

72 x 96 inches

182.88 x 243.84 cm

\$25,000.00 USD

BEYOND THE MAZE: EXAMINING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS IN NATALIA GARCIA-LEE'S 'THE MEASURE OF MAN'

by Melissa Diaz

Arranged in two parts, Natalia Garcia-Lee's first solo exhibition at LnS Gallery is a survey of her art practice and the culmination of her interest in the study of human behavior. *The Measure of Man* holds the main gallery space, while *The War Machine*, a collage installation, is in the Project Room. Both are representative of Garcia-Lee's lifelong interest in human behavior, psychology, sociology, and adaptation. Specifically, as she describes, the "how and why we behave as a species." In previous bodies of work, Garcia-Lee has explored the framework of human experience from the perspective of neuroscience and the organization of space through geo-architectural structures that delineate and define our habitats.

Much of her epistemological approach to humanity exists at a point in history where the internet, globalization, and the global pandemic, have forced us to reconsider how much of our behavior is a result of choice and how much is predetermined by external factors. It is reminiscent of the critical avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century, whose work and practices questioned artistic subjectivity in the wake of the inhumanity of two World Wars, nihilism, and several global health crises. Many of the artists and thought leaders of this period sought intellectual refuge in the notion of a utopia. However, Garcia-Lee detaches her work from any specific socio-political commentary, rather presents a matter-of-fact proposal that invites the viewer to engage with her work from a hypothetical and observational point of view. She invites the viewer to enter her multi-layered works to come to terms with the varying questions as to why people behave the way that they do; and consider the social outcomes of these choices.

The Measure of Man is taken from the book *The Measure of Man and Woman: Human Factors in Design* (1960) by Henry Dreyfuss, which sought to define parameters for universal design by reducing the male and female forms to single units known as "Joe" and "Josephine" and their anthropometric charts. The paintings and drawings from this series are based on the work of two major studies on behavior that utilized animal cognitive experimentation. The first is a 1960s investigation by John Calhoun on the effects of population density on behavior in rats, and later mice. Calhoun designed what he considered a utopian environment for the mice and observed and documented their behavior. The other reference is behaviorist, Edward C. Tolman, who defined 'latent learning' through a series of experiments with controlled populations of rats placed inside mazes to test spatial cognition and memory.

In this series, Garcia-Lee's process involved creating handmade stencils drawn from a found WWI photograph of a female figure wearing a gas mask and protective gear. The mask and suit make the figure seem almost androgynous. The stencils include the full form as well as disembodied elements such as the hand, the wide ghostly eyes of the figure, and a respiratory tube, which can be found repeated throughout all the works in the series. The repeated forms become an indexical language based on the Calhoun and Tolman experiments; whereby the hand comes to represent a mouse and a visual cue to denote humanity. Playing with repetition and scale is a key characteristic in Garcia-Lee's practice that functions to both orient and disorient the viewer.

Although the works refer to maze studies, she avoids recreating the maze as a compositional grid. She intentionally resists depicting clean lines and forms as a way of unsettling the viewer.

Calhoun's studies postulate that the grim outcome of overpopulation was an eventual "behavioral sink" whereby the population would take up violence, cease procreation, eating, etc., and would eventually die off completely. Many of the paintings in the series are titled based on observational statements made by Calhoun and his team during his experiments. Titles like *The First Death*, which refers to the day the mice in the experiment demonstrated what Calhoun believed to be the shift away from normal behavior. Or the subsequent canvas, *The Second Death*, denotes the first biological death of a mouse in the system. In *The Second Death*, the large black hand looms over most of the surface of the painting like a dark specter that hovers over rich red pigment seemingly scratched into the painting.

One of the most energetic paintings in the series, *The Beautiful Ones*, illustrates the demarcation of the mice as they began to separate themselves along sociological patterns. The so-called 'beautiful ones,' isolated themselves from the rest, representing the elite of the population, and for Garcia-Lee serve as surrogates for the one percent. The lines in the background of the painting provide an echo of an imaginary structure with the 'beautiful ones' painted as the hands perched at the top of the canvas in vibrant red and warm tones, above the blue and green tones of the earth below. The varying orientation and direction of the hands ignite the painting with frenetic energy.

In the Tolman experiments, rats were compelled to run a maze with a single solution. Some were given a food reward every time they completed the maze, others only received the reward half of the times they completed the maze, and the last group never received a reward, even upon successful completion of the maze. In *An Ode to Those That Made the Most Mistakes*, Garcia-Lee provides a solution for the Tolman rats that were never given a reward after completing the maze. At first, the painting appears quieter than the other works in the exhibition. However, underneath the mist of grays, there are several layers of over 17 different colors pushing up against the surface. These subtle pops of color only come into view as you move slowly through the solution of the maze she provides. The painting reflects the connection she makes to these rats, as representative of the 99% of the population that functions without the recognition of rewards; and provides a hopeful, albeit unrealistic, fantastical sense of hope to the bleakness of the experiment.

Garcia-Lee's practice can be characterized by very specific and deliberate mark-making used to subtly subvert traditional views. Her work is the product of a calculated process that almost mirrors the scientific process of her references. Her marks vary from intricately detailed brushwork, to printing with various handmade stencils, to scratching and rubbing paint onto the surface of her works. Often, these techniques are layered and repeated to achieve different ends. In the diptych *Natural Trails*, Garcia-Lee instructed a visitor to her studio to make one of two hypothetical choices: go right or go left. As a result, she painted small white arrows across the center of the two canvases. Behind and in front of these arrows are several layers of seemingly infinite mazes and trails. The paintings become activated by the pixelated surfaces, while simultaneously grounded by the large scale of the hands. The visualization of this experiment becomes a key formal element of the painting. Her marks become less about expression, and more about choice and self-reflection. As viewers, we are invited to choose which path we would like to take, and which trail we will leave behind.

One of the more haunting paintings in the series is *The Burden of Choice*. Here Garcia-Lee printed overlapping masked figures, whose frontality address the viewer like the chorus in a Greek tragedy. Mazes are emblazoned above each figure as simplified and reduced red lines. This is a reference to the Tolman experiments, where each participant must make a choice: right or left, A or B, even though the outcome will likely have the same result.

The War Machine is a multi-media installation comprised of a series of collages executed on the pages of military strategy books. The pages are constructed to be viewed on both sides, with text and images on one, and maps on the other. To further complicate the reading of these works, various designated symbols of war are repeated throughout the pages: missile, skull, globe, gun, and grenade. In each of the pages, she has painstakingly redacted, cut, and erased much of the original text, and overlaid other texts to further deny any logical reading of the text. The redactions naturally challenge our desire and frustration to find meaning in the meaningless. Like the Futurist, Constructivist, and Dada practitioners of the early twentieth century, the installation challenges and dismantles the logic of linguistic codes.

Included in *The War Machine* are two jewelry pieces designed specifically for the installation. Garcia-Lee studied sculpture at the Pratt Institute where she received her BFA and continued to experiment with jewelry making. As a universal form of human expression, her jewelry practice is aligned with her larger two-dimensional works. The chokers are constructed from parts of used tear gas canisters she collected during an anti-vaccination demonstration in France in 2021. Each choker is gendered, the smaller one for a female, entitled *Thorax*, and the masculine *Crowd Control*, which also includes a leash. While the works function as jewelry, they resist being worn due to their shape and length, and instead embody an awareness of discomfort, suffocation, and debasement.

The War Machine is not an examination of war within a political discourse, but rather a social one. It is a pointed statement about war as an inevitable outcome within a social construct. In comparison to the emotionality and grief depicted in canonical works about war, such as Picasso's *Guernica*, or the targeted political satire in the photomontages of Hannah Höch, these works provide an unflinchingly direct statement on the universality of war, regardless of time, place, or politics.

Both *The Measure of Man* and *The War Machine* bring together an artist's dedicated approach to her craft. The works weave together Garcia-Lee's facilities with painting, composition, sculpture, and installation. Her meticulous approach to composition and materials in painting, or manipulating found objects, creates works that are at once complex and accessible. She invites the viewer to examine their humanity and position within these larger social constructs. Regardless of her materials, Garcia-Lee's works always contain a multitude of conceptual entry points and possibilities. In this exhibition, Garcia-Lee has managed to bring all these practices, references, and history into her work while creating a unique lexicon that is her own.

Melissa Diaz is the Chief Curator and Museum Manager for the Deering Estate. Melissa is an Art Historian with a focus in Post-war Italian art, and contemporary art theory and practices. She received a Master of Arts in Art History from the University of South Florida and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Miami. Diaz was first recipient of the Liesbeth Bollen Award from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy.



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Grid, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Gag, 2022

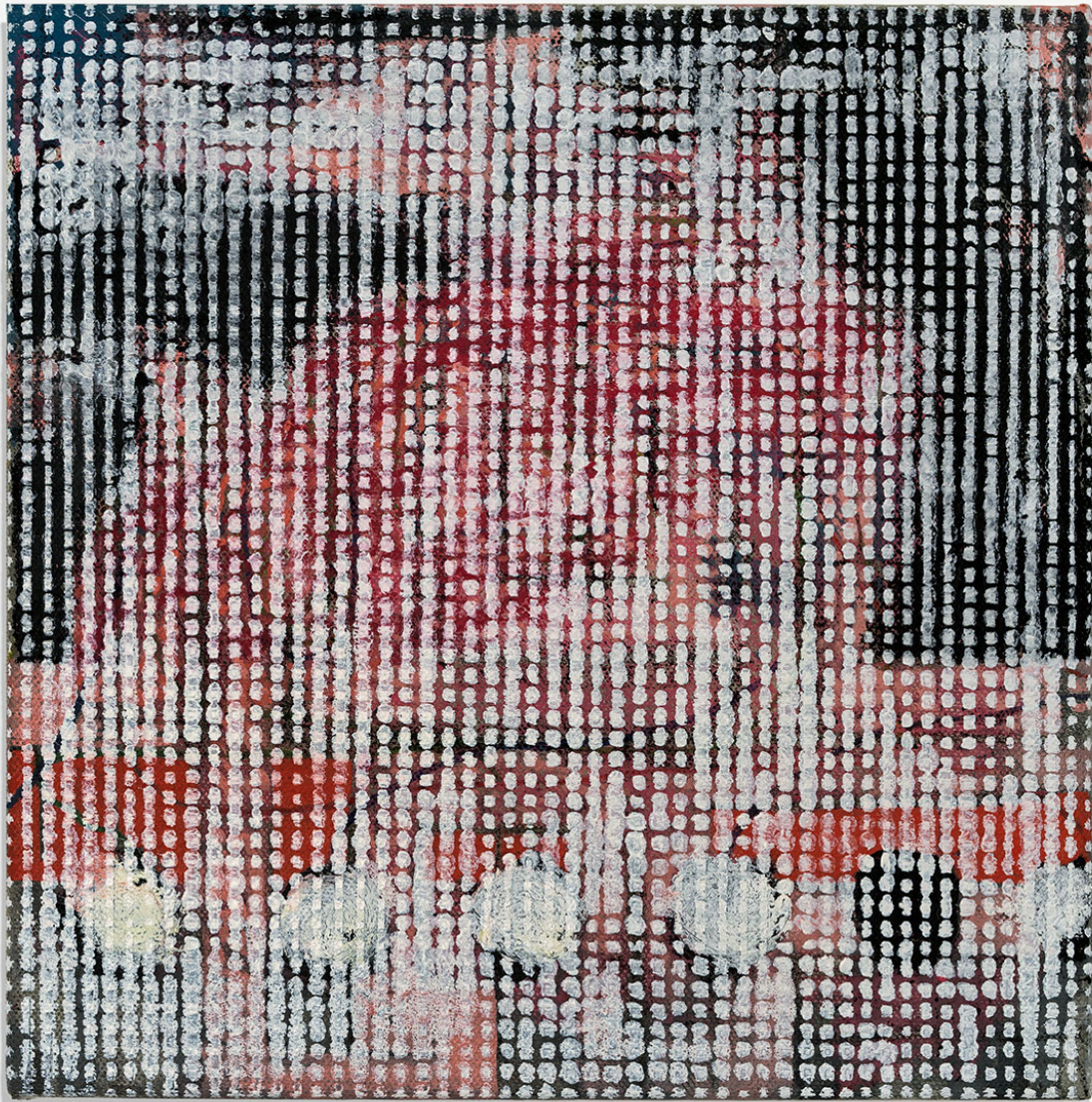
oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD

LnS GALLERY



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Group Think, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Hive Mind, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD

LnS GALLERY



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Entry Point, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD

LN S GALLERY



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Radial, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Gather, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Solution, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD

LNS GALLERY



Natalia Garcia-Lee

Maze, 2022

oil on canvas

12 x 12 inches

30.48 x 30.48 cm

\$1,500.00 USD

LN5 GALLERY

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Natalia Garcia-Lee



Born in
Madrid, Spain, 1971
Resides and works
in Miami, Florida

"My artwork interpretively illustrates the constructs of human behavior, decoding the 'how' and 'why' of what we do as a species. We have organized areas of thought into categories such as science, mathematics, and architecture, and have elevated them to a degree of excellence. We cannot forget that they all stem from our most primitive minds, rooted in our survival instincts. My artwork dissects the trajectory of this path along with its consequences, reducing our ability to think to the layers of symbols and images found within my work. I find this method to be the most effective way to dialogue with this innate conflict. Hyper-modernization has transformed the world we live in morphing our sense of environment, sense of self, and ultimately providing new problems for our species that find solutions in primal behaviors disguised as advancement."

EDUCATION

1995 BFA in Sculpture, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2020 *Monkey Mind*, Deering Estate, Miami, FL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021 *The Artful Book*, Daytona Museum of Arts & Sciences, Daytona Beach, FL

2020 *The Summer Collective: A Group Exhibition of 20+ Artists*, LnS Gallery, Miami, FL

2019 *Winter Highlights*, LnS Gallery, Miami, FL

2019 *The Artful Book*, LnS Gallery, Miami, FL

SELECTED PRESS

Natalia Garcia-Lee: Monkey Mind at Deering Estate,

Video by: Deering Estate, June 30, 2020

ARTISTS GO LIVE EPISODE 3: NATALIA GARCIA-LEE, Studio Tour and Live Q&A,

Featured in LnS Gallery IGTV, by: LnS Gallery, April 18, 2020

Meet Natalia Garcia-Lee, featured in *VoyageMIA*, October 25, 2019