

## José Luis Vargas

Este es mi mundo. ¡Entra!  
September 12 - October 31, 2020

Lowell Ryan Projects is pleased to present *Este es mi mundo. ¡Entra!* (*This is My World. Come in!*), a solo-exhibition by the Puerto Rican artist José Luis Vargas (b. 1965, Puerto Rico). The show will feature nine of his large-scale free hanging, hand-painted circus



banners (painted over in mixed media) as well as two of his shopping cart assemblages. Centering his practice on found objects, Vargas plays off of the physicality, legacy, and symbolism of artifacts to create what the artist himself calls a “constellation for mythmaking.” With these materials he has constructed a familiar yet strange realm; his work manifests the kind of part historical, part fictive universe for which only the imagination can play host.

Though for Vargas, the line between history and fiction is not so clear. He roots his artistic approach in a humanistic belief system—one that creates room for and gives credence to alternative narratives. Taking the world as a point of reference (from his time living in locations such as New York, London, Mexico City, Spain and Switzerland) has laid bare the constructedness of culture and history. That kind of thinking can be a form of

creative empowerment; it relegates every story (even one as seemingly objective as history) into the realm of the subjective, thereby leaving open the possibility for each of us to write our own personal histories.

All that is certain, in other words, is myth. And Vargas' play out in a kind of junkyard universe—on retired circus banners and in cluttered shopping carts. Like the artist himself, these objects have travelled. The banners show the creases of their countless folds. The carts and the objects within have nicks, dents, and stains. In part, wear and tear is what lends the works a strange, spiritual quality: these discarded ephemera—transient things intended to have a short life span—have been reimagined, reincarnated into monuments of mythological proportion.

Yet the other-worldliness also comes from the marks Vargas has contributed: the barren desert scenes he has painted over the banners and the sculptures he has assembled inside the carts. These are landscapes of isolation, of nomadism, with lonely figures (such as the artist's luchador-masked alter ego El Santo de Santurce) and supernatural elements that call to mind Odyssean wanderings updated for our material age.

Lost, is perhaps, as universal a feeling as love nowadays—so many people have been physically, geographically, economically, temporally, or existentially disoriented. How do we find our way when we cannot retrace our steps? In *Este es mi mundo. ¡Entra!*, we are presented with a first step: an invitation to embrace the unknown and enter into the unfamiliar, which is in fact the only place where true discovery can occur.

**Jose Luís Vargas** (b. 1965 Santurce, Puerto Rico, lives and works in San Juan, Puerto Rico) is a visual and performance artist, teacher, community coordinator, and radio producer whose work takes history and culture as points of departure for creating personal mythologies that celebrate the eccentricities of humanity and potentialities of the imagination. Over the course of his over thirty year career during which he has lived in New York, London, Mexico City, Spain and Switzerland, he has focused on various collaborative artistic endeavors and in that same vein founded the Museum of Supernatural History – a collective project bringing together visual artists, performers, tattoo artists, filmmakers, musicians, photographers, and sound artists for events highlighting marginalized aspects of culture.

Vargas received his BFA from Pratt Institute, New York in 1988 and studied at The Skowhegan School of Painting and sculpture in Maine in 1991. In 1994 he received his MFA in painting from the Royal College of Art in London. Vargas also studied art education at Kensington and Chelsea College in London, and has taught art courses and workshops in Puerto Rico, New York, and England for over 20 years. Vargas has exhibited at galleries including Bill Brady Gallery, Miami, FL; 198 Gallery, London, UK; Roberto Paradise, San Juan, Puerto Rico; The Hole, New York, NY; Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY; Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY; and Embajada, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and at museums including Museo de Arte, Caguas, Puerto Rico; Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New York, NY; and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, San Juan, Puerto Rico.