

Press Release

Luis Caballero

A deliberate defiance

Curated by Daniel Malarkey

9 January 2024 - 9 February 2024



Luis Caballero, Untitled, 1989

Cecilia Brunson Projects is pleased to present *A deliberate defiance*, the first posthumous solo exhibition of works by the Colombian artist Luis Caballero (1943-1995) in Britain, introducing the artist's drawing practice of the last 15 years of his life. Curated by Daniel Malarkey in collaboration with Cecilia Brunson Projects, the exhibition showcases not only the mastery of the artist's line and draughtsmanship, but also his unparalleled ambition in creating his own visual language.

Caballero's paintings are an epitome of living. For the artist, the body alone could carry the weight of all the emotions and struggles that the human soul experiences. The male body is to Caballero what words and sentences are to a poet – it is his preferred language, as it is the body that he worships, that he believes in, that he wants to communicate with and understand.

The artist does not make a distinction between a body that is his own and the one that belongs to another. When we look at his works, we are not looking at separate figures coming together in a carnal embrace or in strife. We are almost inspecting one and the same body over and over – the body of the artist and the body of his lover, the body of Christ, the body of every viewer who has ever succumbed to the agony of love. Caballero's bodies rarely have faces – they are the artist's reflection in the mirror and they are also ours.

And yet, discomfort is there. Just like in the monumental canvases of Francis Bacon, whose work Caballero became drawn to very early in his life, the urge to look confronts the desire to avert the gaze. A break from the traditional male gaze into a fearless, openly queer viewpoint starts a conversation about what is allowed and what is not, what is intimidating and what is not, what is comfortable because it is set within an expected and agreed cultural framework and what is not.

Born and raised in Colombia – in a society he himself called ‘fanatical’ and ‘violent’ – Caballero grew up being surrounded with a paradoxical abundance of the visual representation of male nude as an instrument of the Church, yet in an environment that cultivates contempt and shame for the naked human body.

Caballero’s works in mixed media bring a sense of poetry of High Renaissance together with the open sexuality of Mannerism. Although he never touched a chisel, Caballero’s drawings contain the angst of Bernini’s Proserpina and the tenderness of Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (1498). Through precise lines and soft shadows, he brings out the plasticity of the form, while the dissection of the bodies by the edges of the paper allows him to escape certainty in favour of abstraction. In his own words, Caballero strives “to draw an emotion, not an image of an emotion; to achieve an image where pain, beauty, pleasure and horror coexist; to create an image that is real without being descriptive; to reach the divine without losing humanity”.

From 1968 to his untimely death from AIDS in 1995, Caballero lived and worked in Paris for more than 25 years. He was one of the few Latin American artists of the time to be open about his sexuality, both before and after his relocation to France. The epidemic was particularly severe in France in comparison to other European countries, and living through the severity of it, being part of the community permanently reshaped by its calamity, required the kind of courage and sincerity that allowed the artist to imbue his paintings with so much life. Caballero’s depiction of the triumph of survival, of love and defiance leaves the viewer with their own courage to feel in the most genuine way and to allow themselves to be lost within his world.

- Bella Kesoyan

Event:

9 January, 2024
Private View: 6pm
Dinner: 8pm

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