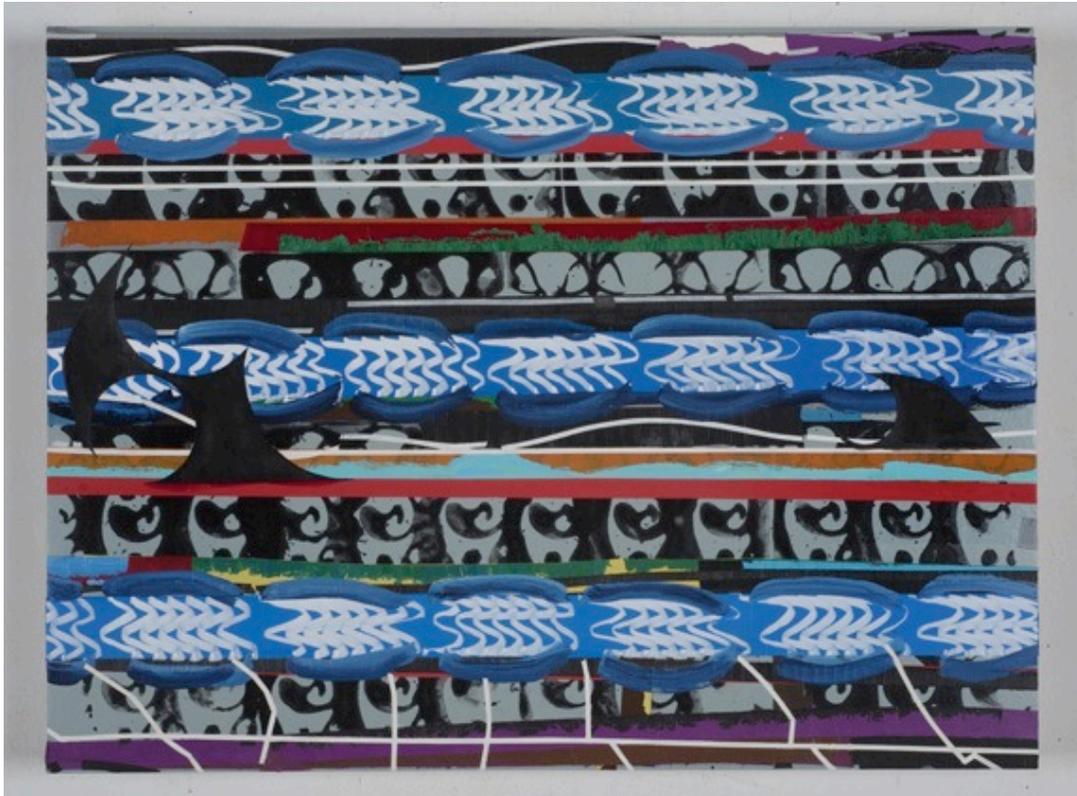


HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

The Gentle Tension of Abstraction

by Carren Jao on June 20, 2013



Juan Uslé, "Tejido de Aventuras" (2013) (all images courtesy of LA Louver)

LOS ANGELES — Time slows within the work of Spanish painter Juan Uslé. Though he fits stylistically within the realm of Abstract Expressionism, he shows us again that not all brush strokes need to jump off the canvas, as if caught in a nervous seizure, that there is something to be said for pace, time, and pausing to hear one's own rhythm.



Juan Uslé, "In Kayak (Lindaraja)" (2013)

On May 30th, [LA Louver](#), a Los Angeles gallery that sits right by Venice Beach opened "[Entre Dos Lunas](#)," showcasing over 20 new pieces by Uslé, each not exceeding 80 by 108 inches. The exhibition title translates to "between two moons," in homage to the painter's experience gazing at two moons while standing on the Williamsburg Bridge, a structure itself straddling Manhattan and Brooklyn.

"I felt good there, between the two moons, and the bridge was perhaps a metaphor, a 'non-place,' a waystation that explained quite well how I was feeling," writes the artist in his statement.

In-betweenness is a state Uslé is intimately familiar with, having divvied up his time from New York's frenetic pace and northern Spain's leisure.



Juan Uslé, “Sombra y Viajero” (2013)

This focus on capturing the feel of this “non-place” is what I found most compelling in Uslé’s work. In each of his works, the painter showcases layers upon layers of color and texture, something that an inspection of his brushwork, reveals his slow, even pace. It is that layering over time that is echoed in reality as immigrants — those who wrestle between one world and the next — struggle to marry their old world with their new world, in the process creating something wholly new.

Sometimes, there is a tension in Uslé’s work. In “Sombra y Viajero,” Uslé divides the canvas in half, filling the top with curvaceous lines layered over waves of color. At the bottom, his work becomes denser, with horizontal lines that suddenly dip and recover are layered over blue lines that form ever larger arcs. A solid line emerges from the top right toward the bottom section, bold and unwavering, as if in perpetual reach for the other side. It is an abstract journey from one state to another. We see the same solid line repeated, this time as if reaching toward the polka dot sky in *Ageda’s dream*. He again echoes the same

straining impulse in his largest work, “644 Desplazado,” where we see a dot tethered to something small stretching out toward a larger organism.



Juan Uslé, “DESPLAZADO (Las moscas)” (2013)

Throughout each one of his 20 new paintings, Uslé invites visitors to contemplate the work, but also by simple breaks of his stroke makes viewers aware of the painter’s hand. By layering one stroke over another, changing directions, making underlying patterns visible, Uslé introduces the element of time in his work.

One of his densest works is “Tejido de Aventuras,” translated as Tissue of Adventures. From afar, it almost looks like a tightly woven Mexican rug. Upon closer inspection, its layers unravel itself into discrete patterns that somehow have come together to form a whole. The base pattern appears to be a curvy, flowery silhouette. Then he adds on a bright blue stream with white strokes across. Then again, solid bands of orange cut unhesitatingly across the canvas. It is a work that reminds me of the many ways travel associates itself with adventure, of seeing something new transposed over something familiar.

Much of Uslé’s work is serene, but there are those that confuse like “1987 Tompkins Square” and “Siete Suelos.” The artist’s rather organized approach seem to have erupted in a cacophony, which I don’t particularly appreciate, but

perhaps that is the same confusion and disorientation one inevitably finds in the midst of transition.

It is his *Kayak* series that really calls to me, simply because of his mesmerizing brushwork. Over and over, his strokes take form over the canvas, becoming more compelling because of its repetition. Usle paints them according to the rhythm of his heart, says a gallery representative. Somehow, it shows. Despite being the same stroke made again and again, Usle adds nuance by changing the depth or shade or density of his color. Stripes of color cut across the canvas and stands apart from the interminable gray and black. Here, at last, is something reliable set apart from Usle's other works ebb and flow toward some other state. There could be many interpretations of Usle's work, but as one who straddles multiple worlds myself, his investigation of "in-between," strikes a chord. His paintings may not present representational specifics, but they do embody the continuous, lifelong merging of one reality to another that every immigrant faces.

[Juan Usle: Entre Dos Lunas](#) runs through July 6 at LA Louver (45 North Venice Boulevard, Venice, California).