

# ABATTOIR

## *Ocultos*: Paintings by Herman Aguirre

On View April 2<sup>nd</sup> – May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021

Opens Friday April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 12-6 pm

Abattoir Gallery is pleased to present our first solo exhibition; ***Ocultos, Paintings by Herman Aguirre***. Stemming from his experience as a first generation Mexican- American living on the south side of Chicago, Aguirre takes on the enormous issues of gang violence, here and in Mexico. The exhibition title, *Ocultos*, “what is hidden or unseen,” points to the artist’s interest in exposing traumatic events that have affected him, his family and community at large. The subjects explored are deeply-rooted in Mexico’s war on drugs and Chicago’s inner-city violence.

Herman Aguirre paints what he knows. A life-long resident of Chicago, with deep familial ties to the capital city of Durango in the northwest of Mexico, Aguirre has developed a unique painterly language to bear witness to injustices enacted by drug and gang violence in his world. His impasto oil painting techniques exude turmoil; a cathartic receptacle for generations of pain. Yet he deftly orchestrates his material to deliver nuanced emotional background to each composition. Indeed, Aguirre has long studied masters of history painting in the modern tradition, from Francisco Goya, to Edouard Manet, Francis Bacon, and Leon Golub. In these paintings made over the last five years, Aguirre builds an arsenal of stories that memorialize, rather than document events. Some paintings include references from an archival collection of violent events occurring in Mexico, including images of victims, objects, and locations, as well as his own family photographs. The images toggle back and forth between Mexico and Chicago, in pictures of places that themselves become memorials to community members lost to violence.

An ambitious painter still early in his career, Aguirre courts dramatic physicality in his technique, a style that draws upon the monumental later 20<sup>th</sup> century history paintings of the East German artist, Anselm Kiefer. Like Kiefer, Aguirre buries narrative signifiers within the paint, builds up his surfaces, and even applies acrylic paint skins to the surface in thick accumulations that project off the panel, extending over the edges of the support. For the artist, these impasto passages *“give value to the image and also allow for its proper burial, functioning as a seductive yet distancing materiality.”*

Herman Aguirre is a Mexican-American artist, born and raised on the Southside of Chicago. He received his BFA and MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and was awarded the Lenore Annenberg Fellowship for Visual Art. He was a fellow and taught at the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown MA. He is preparing for a solo show in Fort Wayne, Indiana, this summer. He is represented by Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago and Portrait Society of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.