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The Coolest Girl In America: Boy Paintings

AN EXHIBITION BY ALEX CHAVES



Text by Jared Yamanuha | Images by John Hook

Stepping inside SPF Projects, greeted by a series of bold, colorful paintings and sculptures by multi-disciplinary artist Alex Chaves, is like receiving a great big hug from someone you've just met. These playful pictures, at once intellectual and entertaining, brainy and beautiful, offer a unique view of Hawai'i as seen through the eyes of the New Jersey-born, Los Angeles-based artist.

For his first solo show in Hawai'i, *The Coolest Girl in America: Boy Paintings*, Chaves dishes up large and small oil paintings that utilize both traditional techniques and not-so-typical methods, like using pastry piping bags to dispense thin dollops of paint on to the surfaces of his canvases. Another application involves thick globs of paint used to border a small canvas, creating a de facto frame made of paint.



How this West Coast painter ended up in the middle of the Pacific—a place he had never visited until this year—can be attributed to Drew Broderick, owner of SPF Projects. The two came to know each other through a mutual friend in college, and Broderick, fascinated by Chaves' youthful and indulgent style, approached him with the idea of doing a residency in Hawai'i.

“Part of the reason why I was interested in doing this project was because Hawai'i was so enigmatic to me,” says Chaves. “I really didn't know anything about this place, and upon arrival, I truly felt like I was in a foreign place, that Hawai'i was outside my idea of America.” In his paintings, Chaves references everything from Hello Kitty to fruit to tennis, but the work is far from strictly representational. Although the imagery is, at times, recognizable, Chaves seeks to create a body of work that isn't easily digestible. “I'm trying to create a sort of language of its own, in which you're forced to consider associations that you might not otherwise,” he says. Images clash; visual mash-ups occur; the canvases hopscotch between abstraction and figuration.

Thanks to Broderick, Chaves has immersed himself in local culture for the past few months. “Drew has been really supportive and helpful with every aspect of me being here, from understanding the culture and the city to giving a second eye to some of the things that I'm doing.” The

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resulting work deals with a fractured spiritual self in a realm of pulsating leisure and natural beauty.

It's clear that SPF Projects is spearheading an eclectic program, declaring itself an experimental art laboratory where diversity trumps any singular aesthetic. "It's a fascinating project," says Chaves. "He's considering a ton of different perspectives that I think will continue to surprise people."

In the end, Chaves says, "I want to pay homage to Hawai'i, and present my perspective of what it was like being here."