

## Such cheery despair: An unsettling current surges through the portraits of Jonny Negrón



By SHARON MIZOTA AUG 18, 2018 | 7:00 AM



Detail of "Rubia" by Jonny Negrón at Chateau Shatto (full image can be seen below). (John Berens / Chateau Shatto)



Brooklyn artist Jonny Negrón paints lovely portraits inflected with a despair that contradicts their bright colors and fulsome bodies. Executed in a style that draws from comic books, Japanese woodblock prints and maybe Frida Kahlo, they depict fleshy figures struggling amid the forces of nature or isolated in sterile indoor environments.

The images on view at Chateau Shatto read as a lament to the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Negrón's native Puerto Rico. They also express a broader concern over global warming and our disconnection from nature and one another.

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"Rubia" by Jonny Negrón, 2018. (John Berens / Chateau Shatto)



"Rubia" depicts a large, blonde, pink-skinned woman, probably sunburned, wearing a snorkeling mask and a bikini top that's too small. She stands waist deep amid leafy tropical plants and a stream of trash: coffee cans, a baseball bat, plastic water bottles, a sign that reads "bar." She's clearly on vacation in some tropical clime, but the garbage suggests that no pristine getaways remain.

Underscoring this point is the adjacent "Currents," in which a man and a woman in torn clothing struggle against a debris-filled torrent. These people are not on vacation. They are swimming for their lives.

The ultimate price is paid in "Bendito," a

Pietà of sorts. A brown-skinned woman cradles an elderly man on her lap. His eyes are closed — it's unclear if he's unconscious or dead, although her pained expression suggests the latter. They perch on the remains of a stone structure nearly submerged in more debris-strewn water.



"Currents" by Jonny Negron, 2018. (John Berens / Chateau Shatto)



"Bendito" by Jonny Negron, 2018. (John Berens / Chateau Shatto)



Other images focus on lonely, weeping men. "To Live and Die in LA" brings pathos to a David Hockney-esque interior, a glittering pink bathroom. Here, a nude man, still wet from bathing, reaches for a green vine as he sheds tears. It captures perfectly the isolation and disconnection often associated with transplants to L.A.: lost in paradise, palm trees waving outside, smooth, hard surfaces glinting unsympathetically in the sunshine.



"To Live and Die in LA" by Jonny Negron, 2018. (John Berens / Chateau Shatto)



Tropical foliage plays a similar role in "Injection Site," which depicts a muscled man sitting on a workout bench and holding a barbell. His body is the stuff of superhero comics, but he is crying as he inserts a syringe into his arm. We see him from the outside, through a dirty window, where lush green plants press in, as if concerned.



"Injection Site" by Jonny Negron, 2018. (John Berens / Chateau Shatto)



These plants snake through all of Negron's images. They hold the portraits together, countering disconnection. They remind us that focusing on material things, appearances and success, at the expense of community, connection and nature, is a choice we make at our own peril.

*Chateau Shatto, 1206 S. Maple Ave., Suite 1030, L.A. Through Sept. 1; closed Sundays-Mondays. (213) 973-5327, [www.chateaushatto.com](http://www.chateaushatto.com)*

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