

Danielle De Jesus

Street Kind

February 18 - March 25, 2023



François Ghebaly is pleased to present *Street Kind*, Danielle De Jesus' first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Dually artist and activist, Danielle De Jesus has cultivated a practice dedicated to issues of cultural identity, urban space, and economic inequality. Focusing intimately on the distinct experiences of Puerto Rican and other Latin American communities living in New York City, her paintings represent the political and historical ramifications of gentrification and displacement unto working-class and low-income residents. Her work often examines social and political equity in the face of an ongoing influx of affluent city dwellers, businesses, and real estate development.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, De Jesus identifies as 'Nuyorican,' coined as a combination of the terms 'New York' and 'Puerto Rican' and that refers to both individuals and the culture of Puerto Ricans located in or around New York City. The gentrification of Nuyorican neighborhoods has become a particular source of controversy and activism, echoing local Angeleno conversations surrounding the demographic changes in Boyle Heights and Echo Park. With *Street Kind*,

De Jesus focuses her lens on street vendors, raising questions about cultural preservation, economic justice, and the politics of representation.

Street Kind commemorates the experiences and perspectives of street vendors, who are often overlooked and underrepresented in mainstream narratives. Featuring vibrant scenes of exchanges between vendors and customers, De Jesus' works incorporate paint, thread, and textile elements like vinyl tablecloths that swirl around her figures. The relationships De Jesus fosters with the people in her community are central to her practice; each work presents an aura of interiority to the people she depicts. In her collage currency series, for which De Jesus formats small-scale paintings on dollar bills, intricate patterns and embroidery cover the first president of the United States, foregrounding instead the people who constitute new chapters of contemporary America. In each work, the vendor's faces are blurry or partially concealed, placing focus on the fresh foods and other products in the street carts. 'Chicharrones de Harina,' flower bouquets, fruits, and snow cones invite viewers outdoors, where sights and smells are feasts for the senses.

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Exhibited alongside De Jesus' works on dollar bills, is a work on canvas, *Los churros de Maria*. Street signs and a subway overpass situate the sugar dusted, freshly fried dough as it dots a brown paper bag. 'Maria's churros' are held up in glory, emphasizing the prized possession that they are.

Challenging the notion that street vending is merely a form of informal commerce, De Jesus highlights the importance of these activities in supporting families, building communities, and preserving local cultures. In her portrayals of city life, where the cultural identities of residents are constantly in flux, De Jesus celebrates these moments of exchange.

Danielle De Jesus (b. 1987 in Brooklyn, NY) is a Nuyorican painter and photographer born and raised in Bushwick, Brooklyn, whose works tell the story of growing up in New York City amidst gentrification and displacement. She draws from her experience growing up in the diaspora as a native of Bushwick, New York to document her home neighborhood while creating narratives that uplift the lives and stories of the multi diverse residents she grew up with. De Jesus' background is in photography and she utilizes her photographs of the people native to Bushwick as a reference to tell the story of Bushwick's displaced residents. Her paintings makes us rethink the significance of the image and the politics of representation involving the largely low-income people of color depicted in her works. They push us to think critically about the larger economies of urban America, but also about matters of intimacy and the interior lives of local residents. Ultimately, Danielle's works make viewers think about the effects of capitalism, and the urban settler colonial histories impacting the Puerto Rican diaspora communities in Brooklyn, Puerto Rico and beyond. In addition to painting and photography, Danielle uses multimedia objects such as dollar bills and common household items such as tablecloths to create texture stories of everyday life and resilience.