

# John Rivas

## *Que Haces Vos? Yo Pinto*

January 13 – February 17, 2024



François Ghebaly is proud to present John Rivas's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, *Que Haces Vos? Yo Pinto*. The exhibition opens with a public reception on January 13 and remains on view at the gallery's Downtown Los Angeles location through February 17.

John Rivas creates images deeply woven with his cultural identity as a first generation Salvadoran American. Navigating the hybrid cultural context of his rootedness in El Salvador and his place within contemporary American painting, Rivas's canvases use multiple painting languages, symbolically loaded materials, and a raw, genuine approach to figuration. Rivas makes visible the process of creation, layering materials as diverse as construction material, heirlooms, embroidery, gold leaf, beans, and glass. *El Rey de La Ciudad* (2023) is emblematic—the portrait of Rivas's father, a construction worker, shows him on a suspended scaffolding many stories over the city streets, posing and looking proudly at the viewer. The work includes traditional media like acrylic, oil pastel and graphite, alongside stucco in reference to his father's tradecraft.

This material resourcefulness is the cornerstone of Rivas's creative process. His early experimentation with repurposed materials was born out of necessity, as he transformed construction scraps from his father's worksites into expressive portraits of the people around him. This practice evolved to include fabrics from thrift stores and streets, as well as stitching—a skill honed during the pandemic and inspired by the textile traditions of El Salvador and the craft of his grandmothers. This redemptive use of materials is not just an artistic choice but an homage to his heritage and a celebration of sustainable creativity.

Rivas derives his imagery from the people around him. Some are family photos, while some are pictures taken by Rivas of his family members who volunteer to be the subjects of his work, such as *El Primo* (2023), a view of the artist's cousin. Others are images that celebrate Salvadoran culture, either in El Salvador or in the diaspora; *Me da una Minuta por favor* (2023), for example, depicts a woman serving minutas, a Salvadoran shaved ice. "I want to celebrate our culture, our food, our music, the way we dress, how we hustle, how

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we work,” Rivas noted. “I’m trying to push the essence of how I grew up and the people and ways of life around me.” Throughout the exhibition, Rivas translates between multiple registers, striking a balance between his American milieu and his Salvadoran heritage and bridging disparate worlds.

**John Rivas** (b. 1997, Newark, New Jersey) earned his BFA from the School of Visual Arts and holds an MFA from Columbia University. He has been included in exhibitions at El Museo Del Barrio, New York; Queens Museum, Queens; Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York; Anthony Gallery, Chicago; and UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles. His work is held in the public collection of the Perez Art Museum, Miami. *Que Haces Vos? Yo Pinto* is his first solo exhibition in Los Angeles. He lives and works in Newark, New Jersey.