



AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ  
HOLE IN THE WALL

## ***Agustín Fernández: Hole in the Wall***

### **Opening Reception**

September 13, 2018. 6–8 PM.

Leon Tovar Gallery, 152 W 25 Street, 3rd floor.

*[My painting] represents an oneiric reality in which man is besieged by a number of forces that surround him: eroticism, mechanical civilization, the elements of war, as well as other afflicting impositions. A metaphor of belts, pieces of armor or machinery, binding strings, cutting knives, and violent actions that plague the body and mind ...*

Leon Tovar is pleased to announce the opening of *Agustín Fernández: Hole in the Wall*, the Cuban artist's debut exhibition with the Gallery. Taking as its starting point the year 1972—the date of Fernández's move to New York City—the Gallery will display selections of his technically exemplary paintings, drawings, and collages. From the often monumental oils—with their foreboding juxtapositions of soft flesh and sharply contoured metal—to the delicately rendered and sparse works on paper, Fernández's work confronts the conditions of exile while offering meditations on the erotic and the metaphysical. Surrealist tropes are appropriated and reapplied to present psychologically charged and dramatic tableaux in which seemingly opposite forms and terms coexist in tension—penetration becomes extrusion; the breast the phallus; the razor blade the serpent's scale.

Living in New York since 1972, the artist was introduced to the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in 1979, sparking a friendship that lasted until the latter's premature death in 1989. Despite a shared erotic vocabulary, Fernández would draw a line between himself and the photographer, reflecting that "...his profession and mine have nothing in common, and my aims and aspirations don't correspond to his..." Nevertheless, a forthright examination of eroticism and sexuality, pleasure and pain, steps out from the shadows in the work of both artists. Describing Mapplethorpe's famous *Self Portrait with Whip*, Fernández stated that Mapplethorpe "oblige[s] us to share in an act that should be intimate, private—in this case forbidden; to see something that may disgust us, which we are forced to witness." This forced-looking is likewise characteristic of the Cuban's artwork in which tightly framed and cropped compositions focus our vision on the realms of the lower body. Placed in the immediate foreground, ambiguous and mutable forms push forward from the picture plane, appearing at times more sculptural relief than painting. They occupy a shallow pictorial space that the artist likens to a "background wall," a comparison that gives rise to the title of the exhibition.

The motif of the "hole in the wall" operates not only as a literal description of the artist's often centripetally oriented canvases; it also calls attention to the transgressive nature of the paintings and drawings themselves. Paintings like *Untitled* (1983) and the monumental *Oculus* (1989) treat the pictorial surface as a wall in and of itself, breached and ruptured, disclosing recognizable though uncanny forms. *Agustín Fernández: Hole in the Wall* brings together two decades of the artist's paintings, drawings, and collages, an accumulation of furtive glances stolen from behind the wall of normative representation, where forms engage in restless Surrealist reversals and viewers are kept in a position of unknowing.

---

**Agustín Fernández** was born in Havana, Cuba in 1928. Upon receipt of a government-funded scholarship in 1959, Fernández left his home country for France where he exhibited at the Galerie Fürstenberg, a focal point for the Paris-based Surrealists. During this time, a somber, cold palette began to replace the vividly colored canvases that characterized his earlier paintings, which had already begun to explore a vocabulary of biomorphic abstraction. This newfound muted and dark tonality would remain a constant in his work, while evocations of the body—represented in fleshy folds, protrusions, and in pieces—would feature regularly as sites of desire and confrontation. In 1968, the artist left for Puerto Rico, where he lived until he moved to New York in 1972. Fernández continued to work until his death in 2006, and his art is held in the collections of such prestigious institutions as the Brooklyn Museum of Art (Brooklyn, NY); El Museo del Barrio (New York, NY); Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art (University of Texas, Austin); Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK); and the Yale University Art Gallery (New Haven, CT).