

# Brewing Expression: *Coffee, Paintings, and Poetry.*

Olga M. & Carlos A. Saladrigas Art Gallery  
Belen Jesuit Preparatory School

October to December 2024

Texts: John Witty, PhD, Janet Batet

Curator: Patricia Diaz

Design: Charlie Calderin

Printing: Robert Ley, Sir Speedy

In collaboration with: Ediciones Furtivas

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## INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Materiality” is a term that designates a popular approach in academic art historical studies of the last fifteen years. It is a wide-ranging term that describes any interpretive approach emphasizing the role of the artist’s chosen materials in creating the work’s meaning. Medieval Europe includes many examples of how the material of a work of art can contribute to its meaning. The backgrounds of icon paintings, for example, were covered with a layer of burnished gold to reflect the light of flickering candles in church interiors. The gold backgrounds surrounded the depicted saints with a glittering aura, even suggesting the heavenly space that devotees could hope to access with the help of the saints’ intercession. Another example can be found with the exotic material of ivory. Like the gold used for icons, ivory was brought to medieval Europe from Africa via trans-Saharan trade routes. The smooth surface and uniform white color of ivory made it an ideal medium to represent the purity of the Virgin Mary in devotional sculptures.

Through his original choice of espresso coffee as a medium, Reynier Llanes’s paintings can be involved in the ongoing art historical discourse about the potential meanings of materials in works of art. As Janet Batet has explored with the insightful and lyrical essay that she contributed to this volume, coffee is filled with symbolic associations that speak to both personal experiences and broad cultural applications. The rich range of sepia tones that results from Llanes’s use of coffee strengthens his works’ connections with art history and encourages viewing the exhibition through a nostalgic lens. The figure studies in particular would be at home in a collection of Old Master Drawings.

Belen Jesuit Preparatory School is pleased to offer the community of Miami-Dade County the opportunity to experience the paintings of this Cuban-American artist who has recently been honored with inclusion in museum collections across the United States. It is well-known to any Miamian that “un cafecito” is an essential part of Cuban culture. We celebrate this heritage by displaying Llanes’s creative engagement with

*café espresso* as an artistic medium. Patricia Diaz, Llanes’s studio manager, is responsible for the ambitious curatorial vision that gives visitors to the exhibition an overview of the artist’s accomplishments to date.

Lastly, a touching aspect of the exhibition must be celebrated. Collaborating with local literary press Ediciones Furtivas, Llanes and Diaz have worked together to pair every painting in the exhibition with a contribution from a contemporary poet. The poems displayed alongside the paintings give a point of access to Llanes’s whimsical and sometimes enigmatic imagery, which reflects the artist’s endeavor to process his own experiences of memory, immigration, loss, and nostalgia. For both the artist and the viewer, the creative act and contemplative viewing ultimately leads to healing and growth.

We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the success of the exhibition, especially those who have lent works from their personal and institutional collections. The exhibition would not have been possible without the leadership and support of Father Guillermo Garcia Tuñón, S.J. ’87. Charlie Calderin, ’90 provided excellent graphic design for the wall text and catalog. Transportation of the works and installation would not have been possible without Camilo Vazquez, Leandro Vazquez, and Phil Karp. Thank you to Roman Martinez, the Belen facilities team, and Vicki Castro from housekeeping for their diligent work. Thank you also to Richard Moncada and Sage Dining for their expertise in organizing a wonderful reception to celebrate the exhibition.

*John Witty, Ph.D.*

Olga M. & Carlos A. Saladrigas Art Gallery Director