

REYNIER LLANES:
BREWING MEMORIES INTO
TRANSCENDENCE.

Natural inks—coffee, tea, and wine—are woven into the very fabric of our existence, whispering stories that span centuries. These organic pigments have a sympathetic vibe that synthetic hues cannot echo; they create textures that breathe with life. Their essence, tied to the rhythms of daily existence, nourish not only the body but also the soul, imbuing the spiritual glow that illuminates our most intimate moments. In this playful balance between nature and creativity, Cuban American artist Reynier Llanes (b. Pinar del Rio, 1985) emerges as a masterful storyteller, using coffee ink to weave together memory and human experience.

The journey of natural inks begins in ancient lands, where skilled hands pressed plants into rich pigments. In the quietude of Chinese and Indian workshops, artisans crafted vibrant colors for calligraphy, while fifteenth-century Sufi monks used coffee as a propitious medium to connect with the divine. Their coffee rituals were infused with spirituality and contemplation. Their roles as influential traders contributed to the global appreciation and spread of this precious bean, a trend which would ripple across the globe. Today, every sip of coffee carries with it echoes of these ancient practices. In our fast-paced world, many people find solace in their daily coffee rituals, taking a moment to pause, savor, and connect with themselves or others. Enjoying a cup of coffee in the quiet of the morning can foster personal introspection and mindfulness, while sharing coffee with friends strengthens social bonds and deepens appreciation of the present moment. In either case, the contemporary act of drinking coffee transforms a simple beverage into an opportunity for mindfulness and reflection.

“*Brewing Expression: Coffee, Paintings, and Poetry*” is a holistic exploration of a humanistic vision where personal history, daily life, myth, memory, and sustainability blend seamlessly. Llanes’ coffee ink paintings create a vivid, dreamlike world where spirituality and the rhythms of daily life

intertwine, forming a new mythology. Each viewer’s personal experience plays an active role in shaping the final interpretation of these unique pieces, as individual reminiscences become integral to the artwork. This holistic approach fosters a complex notion of spiritual reconnection, emphasized through the dialogue with poetry and language, creating a profound sense of *religare*.

Extracted from brewed coffee, coffee ink offers a unique, soft, organic medium that flows with gentle textures and fluidity, much like watercolor. The rich browns, when diluted, create lighter, more translucent washes that evoke a sepia glow. This hue brings a sense of time suspended, a nostalgic breath that lingers like the scent of freshly brewed coffee, calling forth memories that seem almost touchable.

In Reynier Llanes’ hands, these warm washes bloom into sensual, unpredictable forms. Gradations of light and shadow allow for both intricate detail and spontaneity. The delicate harmony of fading, almost forgotten moments is transmuted into touching presence. With every stroke, Llanes conjures a timeless quality. The themes of ephemerality and time are intricately woven into both the technique and the conceptual core of his works. His use of coffee ink as a natural medium not only evokes nostalgia and memory but also embodies the transient, ever-changing nature of existence. Coffee, with its inherent unpredictability, becomes a metaphor for the fleeting moments of life, underscoring Llanes’ exploration of time and impermanence.

In “*Brewing Expression: Coffee, Paintings, and Poetry*”, the passage of time becomes an active component of the paintings that are not finished pieces but evolving entities. Coffee ink interacts over time with the canvas. When exposed to moisture or humidity, a coffee stain may bleed or spread, creating fluid, soft edges that drift beyond their original form. This uncontrolled evolution of the stain mirrors the unpredictability of life, a

spontaneous flow that Llanes embraces in his art. The technique evokes dynamism and movement, a visual reminder that time, like the coffee stain, never stands still. This sense of unpredictability aligns with the artist's humanistic approach, reflecting the organic, fluid experiences that shape our existence.

The fragility of time is also captured through the physical qualities of the medium. With its natural oils, coffee creates subtle textures as it dries, shrinking and interacting with the surface in ways that leave behind a tactile memory of the liquid's presence. In thicker applications, the coffee stain may even crack or flake, suggesting a deeper layer of impermanence—an acknowledgment that all things, like memories, eventually break down and fade. This fragility becomes a poignant metaphor for the decay and impermanence of life, reinforcing the transient beauty of his subjects and the ever-changing nature of life itself.

In pieces like "It's for You Sweetheart," Llanes crafts a multi-dimensional experience where washes of coffee mingle with textures, coffee grounds, and collage. The tactile quality of the work invites viewers to engage physically. This tactile sensation used by Llanes transmutes memories and reminiscence into tangible presence. This playful alternation between the tangible and the intangible is also present in the artist's personal imagery—which features a bestiary of farm animals, including cows, sheep, pigs, and roosters. Bathed in light that imbues them with a sense of the divine, the animals take on a magical quality. In these whimsical compositions, the mundane transforms into the extraordinary, celebrating the beauty and magic of everyday life.

In Llanes' coffee series, the medium itself becomes a dialogue with time. The sepia tones, which evoke a vintage, antique quality, mirror the patina of old photographs and aged artifacts. These visual connections tap into themes of personal and collective memory, creating a resonance with the past while simultaneously speaking to the fragility of the present. Like the act of brewing coffee, which is both ritualistic

and ephemeral, Llanes' work captures the fleeting nature of moments, suspending them briefly before they dissolve into history, and oblivion.

Yet, the story of coffee is not solely one of warmth and connection; it also carries the weight of colonial history and exploitation. As coffee journeyed from Ethiopia to the Arab world and then to European shores, it became entwined with complex power dynamics. In the 16th and 17th centuries, coffeehouses emerged as vibrant hubs of intellectual discourse, where figures like Voltaire and Diderot shaped the very fabric of Western thought. However, this blossoming appreciation came at a cost. The insatiable demand for coffee led to the establishment of plantations in colonized lands, where local laborers often toiled under oppressive conditions, becoming a symbol and symptom of the complex dynamics of power and colonialism. As demand for coffee surged, plantations sprang up in colonized regions of Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean, profoundly impacting local economies and communities.

"Brewing Espresso: Coffee, Paintings, and Poetry" is a rich tapestry, where the use of coffee ink transcends mere nostalgia. It serves as a commentary on coffee's historical significance and its cultural implications. By employing coffee as a medium, Llanes engages with a legacy steeped in complexity, transforming the act of painting into a meditation on history and global interconnectedness. His works resonate deeply with his Cuban identity, a cultural lens that shapes his artistic expression.

The history of Cuban coffee stretches back to the mid-1700s, when José Antonio Gelabert established the island's first coffee plantation. As expertise flowed in from fleeing French farmers during the Haitian Revolution, Cuba blossomed into a key player in the global coffee trade. By the early 1900s, coffee eclipsed sugar in profitability and anchored the island's economy. However, the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s marked a turning point. With the government seizure of production and distribution, this favorite beverage became a scarce commodity. Cuban coffee is celebrated not only for its bold flavor but

also for its historical significance, with UNESCO recognizing the island's first coffee-growing sites as World Heritage sites, highlighting the enduring legacy of Cuban coffee culture. The "cafecito," as most Cubans affectionately call that small shot of sweet, rich coffee, has become a powerful symbol of identity and resistance, both on and off the island.

In the midst of this rich history, Llanes' work emerges as both a celebration and a critique. His artistic journey also introduces the term "Espressionism," a fusion of personal identity and creative expression through the medium of espresso. This technique transforms coffee into a watercolor-like dye, creating compositions that exude both warmth and mystery. Through Espressionism, Llanes crafts atmospheric works that resonate with themes of nature, memory, history, identity, and imagination, inviting viewers to explore the depths of their own experiences.

Llanes' Espressionism is not just a visual experience; it embodies the ritualistic nature of art-making. The daily act of brewing coffee becomes a sacred ritual, intertwining the mundane with the mystical. As he infuses his works with espresso, Llanes connects the humble act of coffee preparation to a deeper spiritual dimension, celebrating the everyday as a vessel for creativity and reflection.

Moreover, *"Brewing Espresso: Coffee, Paintings, and Poetry"* speaks to sustainability. By choosing coffee ink—an eco-friendly alternative to synthetic materials—Llanes symbolizes a return to the earth, aligning his practice with environmental consciousness. His works elevate the rituals of everyday life to something extraordinary, offering a meditation on our deep connection to nature and the delicate balance that sustains it.

In Llanes' coffee series, the medium itself becomes a dialogue with time and space. These visual connections tap into themes of personal and collective memory, creating a resonance with the past while simultaneously speaking to the fragility of the present. Like the act of brewing

coffee, which is both ritualistic and fleeting, Llanes' work captures the ephemeral, suspending them briefly before they dissolve into history. By using coffee ink, a material that fades, cracks, and changes over time, Llanes not only engages with the concept of impermanence but also creates an art form that is alive, evolving, and deeply tied to the essence of time itself. His works are not static; they breathe with the passage of time. The fragility of the present allows the medium to speak of the delicate balance between beauty and decay, permanence and ephemerality, in a world constantly in flux. Through coffee, Llanes paints not just images but the very essence of time, memory, and the human experience.

Reynier Llanes' exploration of coffee as a medium transcends mere artistic endeavor; it encapsulates the essence of our shared human experience—one rich with complexity, warmth, and the inevitable passage of time. Through coffee, he paints not just images but the very essence of memory, identity, and the delicate balance between impermanence and transcendence. In this fusion of art and life, Llanes reminds us that every sip, every brushstroke, is a celebration of the ephemeral beauty that defines our existence. Like Faust's plea for time to halt, Llanes' works seem to grasp at beauty, capturing fleeting impressions of life, where past and the present merge into one.

"Brewing Espresso: Coffee, Paintings, and Poetry" invites us to explore the interplay between history, memory, and identity, in an ascendent spiral trip where the mundane transforms into the transcendent. The delicate traces of the coffee ink reflect not only the passage of time but also the stories embedded within each stain. They beckon us to delve into the depths of our shared history, where personal and collective narratives converge in a meaningful, poetic brew.

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