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REYNIER LLANES

*passages*



MCG PHOTOGRAPHY

REYNIER LLANES  
*passages*

MAY 24 - SEPTEMBER 15, 2024

the  
Gibbes  
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Published on the occasion of the exhibition  
*Reynier Llanes: Passages*

Organized by the Gibbes Museum of Art

Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, South Carolina  
May 24 – September 15, 2024

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

5  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

6  
INTRODUCTION  
SARA C. ARNOLD

9  
PLATES

40  
ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This catalogue commemorates the exhibition *Reynier Llanes: Passages* presented at the Gibbes Museum of Art May 24 – September 15, 2024. Numerous individuals contributed to the success of this exhibition. We are especially grateful to the eighteen individuals and institutional lenders who generously shared their artworks for display in this exhibition. Special thanks are also due to the supporters of this catalogue, an initiative spearheaded by Dr. Brenda Lauderback and Dr. Boyd Wright, and fellow contributors Dr. Anthony D. Tillis, Deborah Kennedy Kennard and William E. Kennard, Wardell and Margie Morse, and Harmon-Meek Gallery. No project at the Gibbes is possible without the stalwart leadership of President and CEO Angela D. Mack, and the support of our incredibly dedicated Board of Directors led by Chair Spencer Lynch, and Vice Chair Deborah Kennedy Kennard.

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## INTRODUCTION

BY SARA C. ARNOLD

CHIEF CURATOR

*Passages* presents the vibrant narrative paintings of Cuban-born American artist Reynier Llanes. Llanes's paintings combine and contrast scenes from nature and daily life with an imaginative and magical elegance. Drawing from his own memories and experience as an artist, an émigré, and an immigrant as well as his interests in history, literature, science, and time, Llanes paints ethereal worlds. His explorations of both physical and spiritual passages sensitively communicate common threads in humanity. Whether his paintings capture the transcendent moment of cradling a new child, or imagine a future of tending a garden in outer space, Llanes's works implore viewers to consider the value of connection—our connection to each other and our connection to the natural world.

This exhibition features Llanes's recent large-scale oil paintings, including works from his *Poet*, *Keepers*, and *Tourist* series created since the COVID-19 pandemic. It also features works that characterize Llanes's early career such as his unique coffee watercolor paintings that provide insight into the artist's personal journey.

Born and raised in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, Llanes gained confidence in his artistic talent as a teen while studying in his home city's *Instructores de Arte*. Llanes experimented with different media and honed his skills trading portrait sketches with fellow art students. Further instruction under renowned Cuban realist Juan Miguel Suárez convinced Llanes to pursue an art career in earnest. In 2005 he moved to Havana, Cuba's cultural arts hub, where he continued his studies and collaborations with artists, and successfully participated in juried exhibitions. Seeking freedoms beyond those permitted under the Cuban regime, Llanes immigrated to the United States by sea in 2007. His works *Faith and Conscience*, *Little Shoes Feel Tight* and *Pilgrimage II*, were completed in Cuba and allude to his impending journey.

Llanes settled first in Naples, Florida, but relocated to Charleston in 2009 when he was awarded an artist residency at Jonathan Green Studios. Llanes immersed himself in Charleston's cultural arts scene for nearly six years. In 2015,

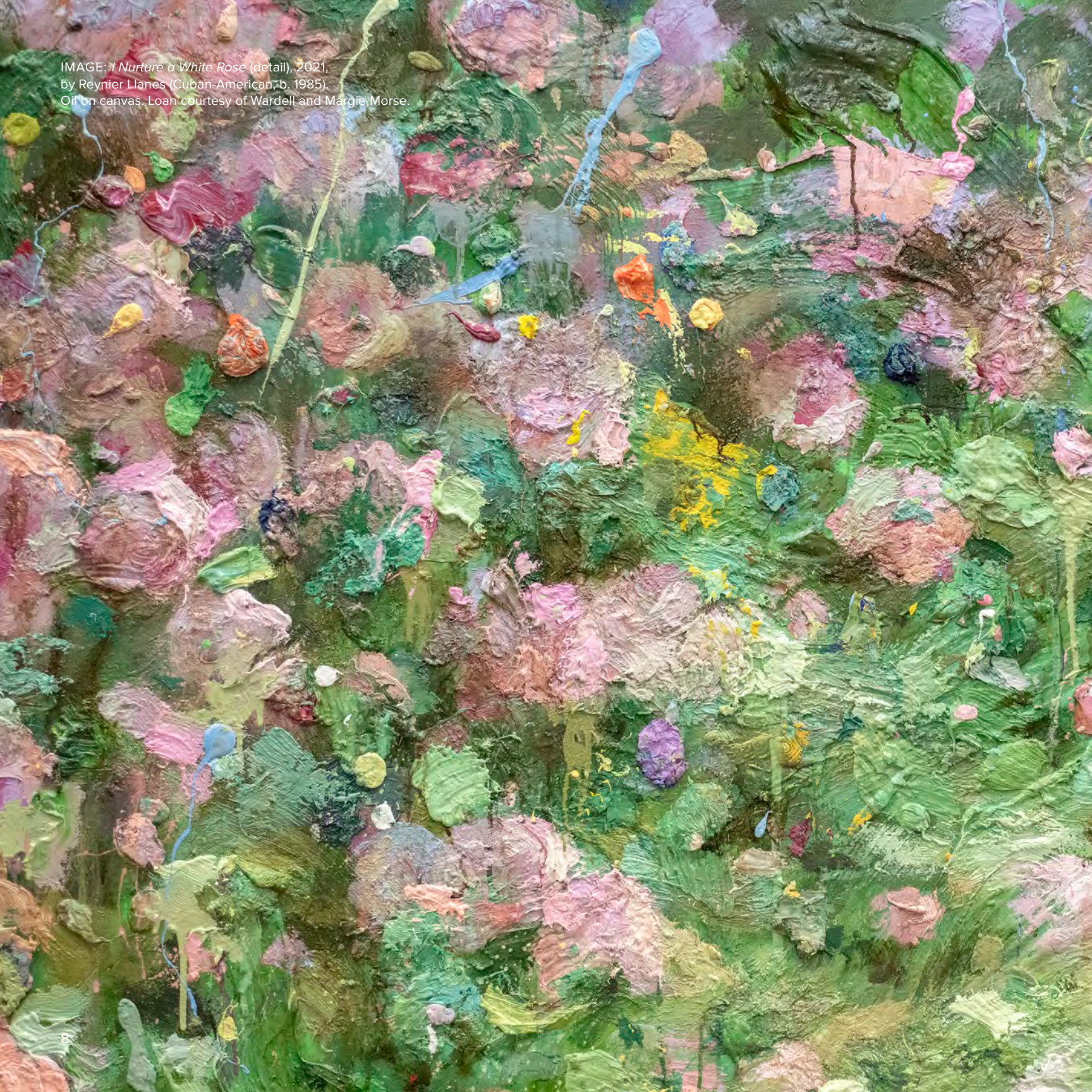


he returned to Florida where his studio is now based in Miami. His dynamic coffee paintings *SOS for a Shipwreck at Sea*, *The Thinker's Utopia*, and *Espresso Courtship* created during his Charleston residency explore the difficult balancing acts that follow cultural transitions—from honoring and preserving one's heritage to embracing new lands. Llanes's more recent large-scale, heavily textured oil paintings, such as *Dear Dad*, *Letters from Home*, and *New Sun*, similarly consider the significance of connections and communications across time and space. These paintings from Llanes's *Poet* series, often inspired by his love of literature, feature ethereal figures and evoke the timeless power of the written word.

Llanes's use of ambiguous figures continues in his thought-provoking paintings created for his *Keepers* and *Tourist* series, which contemplate both earthly and celestial transformations arising from technological innovations and climate change. His painting *Heartbeat Signal* envisions a couple cloaked in bee suits fastidiously tending to a pot of flowers in outer space. Are they astronauts, beekeepers, gardeners? What is their message to us? In *Festive on to Spring*, Llanes portrays a skier on unusual terrain. The portal-like view offers a joyous escape into nature, while also alluding to the fragility of the moment and changes that may lie ahead.

Llanes, like many artists, turned to his work to process the challenges of a life-threatening global pandemic, and the societal and political upheaval in countries around the world that erupted in its wake. In his paintings *I Can Breathe*, a tribute to George Floyd, *I Nurture a White Rose*, painted in response to the nationwide protests by the citizens of Cuba on July 11, 2021, and *You Are Here* created soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Llanes imagines parallel worlds for his subjects. These worlds offer safe passage away from the trauma of racial injustice, the suppression of a political regime, and the chaos of war. His vulnerable subjects are cradled by protective parents, supported by spiritual levity, and enveloped in nature. "The powerful emotions I felt daily led me to imagine a better world for future generations." Llanes's paintings ask us to imagine this too.

IMAGE: *I Nurture a White Rose* (detail), 2021,  
by Reynier Llanes (Cuban-American, b. 1985).  
Oil on canvas. Loan courtesy of Wardell and Margie Morse.



REYNIER LLANES  
*passages*

PLATES