

KALEIDOSCOPE

SOL CALERO

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BY GEORGE VASEY

Melons and limes, bananas and pineapples—Sol Calero's polychromatic canvases suggest that seeing can be a form of sustenance. The Venezuelan-born, Berlin-based artist houses these paintings within extensive installations that become platforms for participatory projects. Former exhibitions have focused on cyber cafés, hairdressing salons, restaurants and a dance school. Calero is drawn towards specific social settings, and her work is often intensely collaborative. Stereotypical Latin imagery (exotic fruit, salsa dancing and palm trees) pervades the installations, articulating issues of cultural appropriation and translation. Decoration is more than just a form for Calero—it is encoded with a political value, mapping social change.

For her 2015 exhibition "La Escuela del Sur" (School of the South) at Studio Voltaire, Calero responded to the gallery's previous role in the 19th century as a mission hall and Sunday school, creating a functioning school classroom. The title of the exhibition is lifted from a text by the polymath Joaquín Torres García, who tried to articulate an autonomous Latin art movement that resisted a European cultural hegemony. Calero's installation directly references Los Rogues, a small archipelago in the Caribbean Sea. Marked by the complex history of colonialism, Calero mimics the community's hybrid architecture revealing the sedimented layers of cultural and political history. The installation was further activated by an extensive range of workshops and talks exploring the representation of Latin American art.

Calero's presentation "El Buen Vecino" at SALTS, Basel (also in 2015) took the form of a pavilion incorporating the artist's paintings and ceramics. The color scheme—mint, blood red, lemon yellow, baby pink and cerulean blue—coupled with a disparate range of stylistic approaches to heighten

Sol Calero (Venezuelan, b. 1982) is an artist who lives and works in Berlin. She is represented by Laura Bartlett Gallery, London.


In addition to a solo presentation at Art Basel Statements in June, Calero's forthcoming solo exhibitions include Laura Bartlett Gallery in September and Kunsthau Bregenz in October. She is co-director of the Berlin project space Kinderhook & Caracas.

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Untitled (Background 1), 2015
Courtesy of the artist and Laura Bartlett Gallery, London

the temporal and geographic dislocation. The title, translating as "good neighbor," refers to President Roosevelt's interwar political strategies in promoting diplomatic ties and trade links between the US and Latin America. The approach encouraged the transfer of Latin cultural traditions into the US. Like the assimilation of Japanese aesthetics in Europe following new industrial routes in the 19th century, Calero reminds us that culture remains umbilically linked to the forces of commerce.

For "Desde El Jardin," a 2016 exhibition held at David Dale in Glasgow, Calero created an opulent TV set and co-write a telenova (a short-run soap opera) with the artist Dafna Maimon. The show, exhibited on monitors in the gallery and online at conglomerate.tv, is described as "a cast of telepathic maids and the neighbor's handsome gardener becoming wrapped up in a tale of intrigue, betrayal, greed and romance." While the installation was initially impressive, the presentation was soon undermined. Like many of the artist's exhibitions, the set was pure surface, with incomplete elements puncturing the grand illusion. Calero's interest in the cosmetic draws parallels to Regency and postmodern architecture, which similarly create a stylistic and cosmetic bricolage from divergent historical and geographical sources.

Alongside her artistic practice, Calero has co-run the project space Kinderhook & Caracas in Berlin with Christopher Kline since 2011, helping to support other artists. Much more than a studio-bound painter, Calero has established a multivalent and generous practice that brings together a sophisticated range of activities. With upcoming exhibitions at Kunsthau Bregenz and a solo presentation at Art Basel Statements with Laura Bartlett later this year, it will be exciting to see where she heads next. 

STYLISTIC BRICOLAGE REVEALING THE SEDIMENTED LAYERS OF CULTURAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY

HIGHLIGHTS