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Gallery Girls

Studio Visit with David Antonio Cruz at Gateway Project Spaces, Newark

By Jasmin Hernandez
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Photo by Ventiko // IG: @ventiko

On the day of the Women's March in New York, I stood in solidarity for female rights for the final two hours of the march, but the earlier part of my day was spent with the wildly talented artist [David Antonio Cruz](#). Cruz, who I like to describe as "Latinx and thriving", is a painter, performance artist, sculptor, and costume designer based in New York City. I spent a few hours in his studio at the [Gateway Project Spaces](#) in Newark, run by two highly ambitious women in the art world, Jasmine Wahi and Rebecca Jampol. Cruz and I talked everything from NYC gay nightlife, to gay literary icons like Gore Vidal, James Baldwin, Oscar Wilde, who inform and inspire his work, to his intensely physical and provocative performance art. Both his paintings and performances delve into the specific histories and narratives pertaining to the queer body of color, particularly the Afro-Caribbean queer body. Born to Puerto-Rican parents in Philadelphia, Cruz has now lived in New York City for 20 years, is a graduate of both Pratt and Yale, and has actively been participating, painting, and performing at art institutions across the US and beyond.

Cruz's crew of fellow performers are an eclectic mix of theatre actors, opera singers, and classical musicians, including the stunning cellist [Daniel De Jesus](#), one of Cruz's frequent collaborators. Recent performances from 2016 include 'The Piano Piece' (2008) which

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incorporated sounds and interactions from the urban landscape performed at [MAW](#) last October, 'howtoorderachocolatecake' at [BRIC](#), where Cruz and his troupe of performers of color slathered chocolate over their bodies, illustrating the disastrous and muddled trajectory of POC in America. Last December, Cruz was invited to St. Croix to participate in 'Take 5', [a series of artist performances](#) organized by cultural producer and curator Alaina Simone. There Cruz and his peers performed 'green,howiwantyourgreen' while standing on wooden blocks in the living room of a former slave owner's plantation. The irony and the history of that moment is just way too powerful. Cruz remarked how at that very moment a white dove unexpectedly flew in, to which I replied, " well it was our slave ancestors giving you their blessing". Cruz agreed and stated his intention was "to honor our ancestors".

His paintings evoke the colors of the Caribbean, soft hues of blue, yellow, green, pink, and mauve soothingly saturate many of the canvases from 'For I Am Or I Was, thereturnofthedirtyboys'. Cruz states his paintings are like yogurt, very smooth and sensuous, the pastel shades make the sexual nature of the work easy to digest. Several pieces feature men locked in passionate positions, in the throes of sexual ecstasy, as seen in the work 'letthemeatasyumpink', surprisingly the sitters in this work are heterosexual men willingly portraying homoerotic scenes. Yet, for the most part Cruz's models are queer men. Cruz drew inspiration from the late Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (his later works) and the seminal painter Balthus. Cruz exhibited this series during his residency and solo exhibit at the [Project for Empty Space](#) in the spring of 2016 (as well as a performance of 'green,howiwantyourgreen'). Other recent exhibits have included the group show 'Look up here, I'm in heaven' alongside artists such as Yashua Klos and Tschabalala Self at [BRIC](#), and 'Figure and Form: Recent Acquisitions to the Permanent Collection' at [El Museo Del Barrio](#), which prominently featured 'Puerto Rican Pieta' (2006), a tender portrait of the artist with his mother. This piece was the anchor of the exhibit, I was there to witness it.

Upcoming shows for 2017 include a solo show titled 'thosebutterlyboysandvioletuncorns' at the [Delaware County Community College Art Gallery](#) and his 'black series' being shown in North Carolina later this fall.