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Artist Alina Perez Reconsiders Her Audience

By Isabel Flower | December 7, 2020



Photography by Danielle De Jesus

“Sometimes I feel sad or weird and I realize I haven’t been in the studio. It’s like feeling dehydrated then realizing you haven’t had any water,” Alina Perez tells me over the phone. It was 2018, at Deli Gallery in New York, when I first encountered the artist’s extraordinary drawings, which appear painterly from a distance or through the screen but are in fact rendered in transfixing detail with charcoal and pastel. In one that I remember clearly, a shirtless man with a tank top tan and Adidas basketball shorts sits on a chair, one foot lifted as he paints his toes with clear Revlon nail enamel.

All this time, I’ve wondered if Perez has a photographic memory; when I finally get to ask, the Miami native confirms, “All my memories are images in my mind, but now I’m using them to create my own. Can the images I make be as important, as real?” Perez’s considerations tend to deal with the way our perception of the past affects how we respond to the world. “I used to describe my work as being about identity, family and how who I am today comes out of my experiences when I was really young—a lot about how life experiences inform intimacy,” she recalls. But, for the last two years, in which time Perez has also started her MFA, the artist has begun asserting a different kind of narrative authority that pushes past dutiful renditions of the past. “Sometimes you can feel

like you have to make a certain thing,” she explains. “But, actually, you don’t have to regurgitate what happened to you on a piece of paper. What if you could draw a memory that you wish you had?”

Newer compositions express this sense of possibility quite literally—with looser shapes, fluid lines and more speculative subject matter— and Perez is ever-curious about the variation in interpretations of her work, as viewers project their own experiences, fears and hopes, which often diverge from her own. “At one time, I thought my work was for people like me. Now I’m realizing I want everyone to see it. I think anyone can understand something in their own way.”