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EXHIBITION

## Roberto Cortázar | "Marcheur"

by ART MATTER EDITORIAL on JUNE 6, 2015

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Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

12th - 27th of June 2015

2015 is The Year of Mexico in the UK and the UK in Mexico; the two countries are closer today than they have been for many years. More and more people are choosing to live, study, work in or visit each others' countries - or just enjoy the best that our cultures have to offer. South London's Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery will be showing the well-established and respected Mexican artist Roberto Cortázar from June 12th (PV 11th).

Marcheur

They float on a deep blue plane, delicate, shimmering and alien-like, like echoes of an image, separated from you by a vast distance, vague memories, that somehow manage to also be right in front of you - they are shape shifting, swimming, wafting. Yet, if you reached out to grab them, they would disappear into thin air. Faces drift in space like mirages, a delicate eye socket, nose or mouth the only indicator that these are, in fact, people. Each face is stretched out, distorted like ragged sound, existing on multiple planes, like travelers of worm holes through the cosmos, extended through space and time. Here, in Marcheur at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (12th - 27th of June 2015), celebrated Mexican artist Roberto Cortázar presents a series of new works that is the culmination of decades of tireless research into the many complex folds of art history and a keen interest in astrophysics and space time. Bringing together these divergent fields, the artist uses their complexities as a lens through which he documents and depicts internal states of mind.

Eight blue, striking, distorted portraits fill the gallery. They are, in part, the result of a lifetime of study, but more specifically, a technique he has been refining over the past decade. Indeed, it is crucial to note that Cortázar does not so much distort the image itself as he does the space that it occupies, and therefore our perception of it. For the artist, the complex networks that comprise the human psyche are akin to the intricate webs and hypotheses that comprise string theory - the notion that there exist multiple dimensions that we perceive as various forms of matter and energy, and, in a sort of 'theory of everything', that all things in the universe are interlinked. Cortázar uses this to enhance his own understanding of space and the human figure.

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Indeed, like Picasso and his studio models before him, and even the more elaborate theatre of Velasquez's Las Meninas, the rich art historical tradition of the artist as self-portrait in his studio seeps into Cortázar's oeuvre. He manages to imbue his own thoughts, states of being and intricate emotions into each work, mirroring the fragility of the human condition in the ethereal nature of the figure he is painting. Using corrugated panels, he paints in oil and silver point, working both manually on the surface of the work as well as using lenses and digital graphic design programmes that allow him to experiment and manipulate his images at previously unattainable levels of speed and deftness. It is this combination of technological and scientific advancement with what he describes as a "rigorous and classical" art education that forms the core of Cortázar's practice.

"My formation in Mexico combined the grand Masters of the past with the methodological improvisational stringency of Modernism," he explains. The chance to view da Vinci's Burlington House Cartoon during its restoration at the National Gallery in London in the mid-1990s allowed Cortázar a previously unavailable chance to see the composition and technique of one of these Masters first-hand. For the next ten years he dedicated himself to understanding and experimenting with the technical painting development of da Vinci to see how he could refine his own technique and push even further what da Vinci had achieved. "At a superficial glance this may have seemed like repetition, but it was not," he explains. "If we see a circle from above, its centrifugal energy is like a spiral, moving ever upwards or downwards – I was fascinated by this idea of studying something to find out its possibilities." Ultimately frustrated by the limitations of two-dimensional space, it was not until Cortázar studied the works of Cézanne that he had a revelation. "I discovered that, very likely, the point was not form (because form and shape depend on the – sometimes limited – imagination of the author), but space," he says. It was at this point that Cortázar's interests turned to String Theory. "Inside the endless principles that comprise this theory, there is the common denominator of the possible existence of endless dimensions: Is our universe one of many, of multiple universes, floating in time and space? If so, are these universes like brains or membranes, connected by an intricate network, synapses pulsing along its branches? This is what my work is like – it is the disturbance caused by two worlds speaking to each other; it is two aesthetic universes making contact."

Like a juggernaut, he threw himself into exploring the ways in which he could distort space, hybridising classical painting with transcendental theories of spacetime. "When space is modified, as long as they have volume, original forms are distorted in a way that I find infinitely fascinating," Cortázar says. "They are distorted not just in space, but in time as well – they encompass several wonders of perception." For many years his works had a tribal element to them – classical Renaissance imagery metamorphosed through bold lines and distorted forms. However, with the advent of new technology, Cortázar was able to take his exploration of spacetime to a new level. He is now able to create quick, spontaneous 'sketches' on the computer with a digital pencil and tablet, to be analysed and tweaked later on, before being used as a model from which to physically paint the work itself. "My hands are in one place and the painting appears at a different place – on the screen – and, at the same time, the movement of my fingers is so fine and they move in such a small area, that I have brutal spontaneity, which would be impossible in a large painting." As such, the process of creating the work harks to the very theories that he is trying to depict – a process in perfect harmony with his concept.

"I depict the human form, but I'm interested in it more abstractly, and in the idea that we're not 'human' because we have bodies but because we are conscious of ourselves," Cortázar has said, and it is precisely this which he seeks to explore. Within his vivid works, the inner and outer worlds of one's psyche and one's existence fuse – like a Mobius strip, we are confronted with many planes at once, ever moving, ever linked. *Marcheur* encompasses this, the endless drive to march ever onwards. "Within one's headspace, many other heads or faces unfold, and thoughts and events take place," he muses. "It is this dynamic, of thoughts moving non-stop which shapes the distorted head."

'Marcheur' runs from 12th – 27th of June 2015  
at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London

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### Roberto Cortázar

Roberto Cortázar (b. 1962, Mexico City) commenced his academic training in 1976 at the National School of Arts and continued his academic studies at the National School of Painting and Sculpture with a grant from the National Institute of Fine Arts in Mexico. He then went on to collaborate with numerous academic institutions giving lectures, conferences, seminars and advisory covering historic, philosophical and theoretical aspects of art, including work as a key contributor to the renewal of the academic plan for the Mexican National School of Fine Arts. From 1989 to 1993, he was a founding member of the Consultative Council for the Mexican National Foundation for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA). During these years, he was juror for the National Plan for Creators and the National Fund for Plastic Arts. Recent exhibitions include a collaboration with Derrick Cartwright for the Robert and Karen Hoehn Family Galleries of the University of San Diego (2015), *The Silver Paintings*, *Bolsa Mexicana de Valores*, Mexico, DF and *Art Taipei*, Hong Kong (both 2013). Group exhibitions include *Vinculos Expuestos*, *Galeria Ethra*, Mexico, DF (2013) and *Pintura Mexicana de la posguerra al fin de siglo*, Shanghai Art Museum, China (2006). In 2009, his works were also exhibited at the National Museum of Arts (MUNAL), Mexico City.



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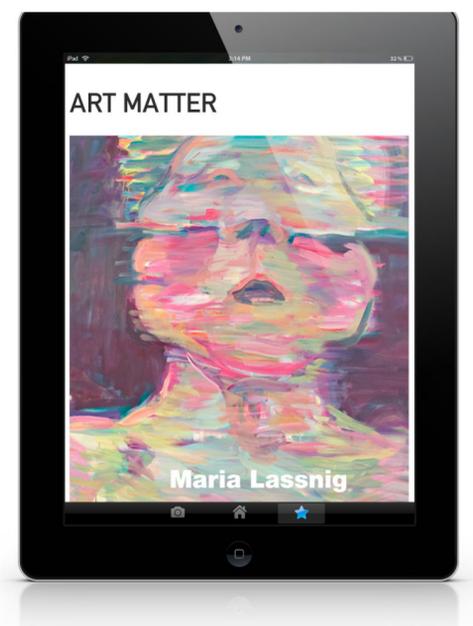


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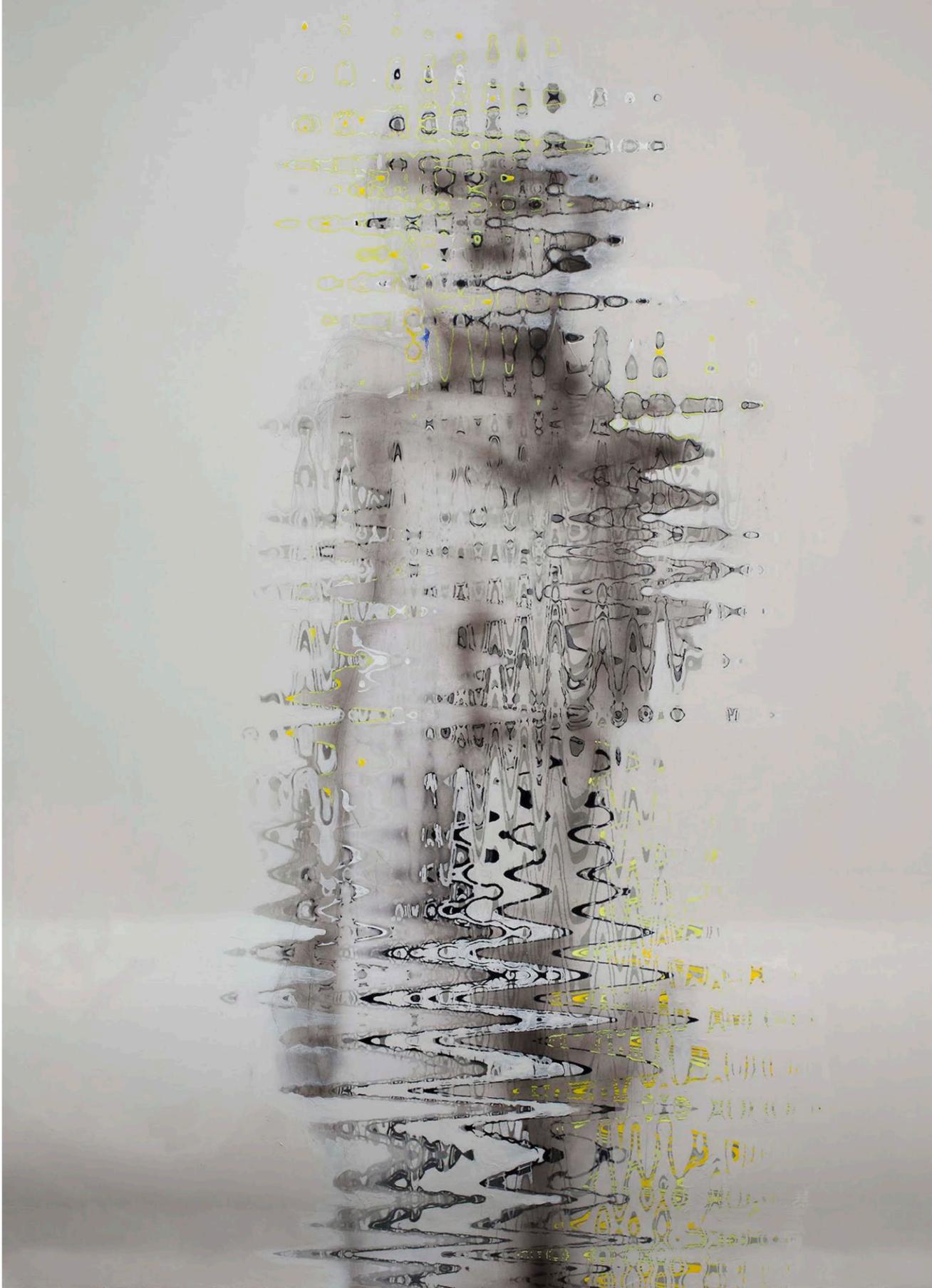
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### Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

Kristin Hjellegjerde opened her gallery in south west London in June 2012 following her move from New York. The gallery showcases cutting-edge contemporary art from emerging and established international artists, with the central concern being to create an intimate space in which artists can present a coherent body of work within a focused environment. Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to discover and develop new talents by creating a platform through which they can be introduced to local and international audiences while allowing for artistic exchange. Kristin Hjellegjerde also acts as an art advisor for both emerging private and corporate collectors.

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