

if you dream of your tongue, beware

Xavier Robles de Medina

22 January — 19 February 2017

New York, January 22, 2017: If you dream of your tongue, beware is the first solo exhibition by Surinamese artist Xavier Robles de Medina at Catinca Tabacaru Gallery. The artist's practice is steeped in tradition and close observation. His images flicker like celestial bodies in the night sky. And like the night sky, Robles de Medina presents impressions of recent events – visits by artist friends – as well as historic events – those that have been documented in the media. Like early astronomical observers, Robles de Medina painstakingly records what he sees in timescales reminiscent of frozen star formations lasting millions of years, to lunar eclipses over in hours. The drawings are varied in their apparent duration, some so spontaneous that the pen strokes seem to be caught in accreting orbits while others are so expertly rendered as to be nearly photographic close up.

The title for the show is taken from an essay in Eliot Weinberger's *An Elemental Thing*. Robles de Medina mirrors Weinberger's ethno-poetic approach to non-fiction, using sourced information to carefully re-present his Surinamese compatriots in local surroundings. Collaged and/or carefully cropped, these partially obscured figures reveal a dreamlike truth more than they conceal factual information.

Sometimes fantastic, sometimes mundane, and sometimes even unidentifiable, Robles de Medina's figures are sensuous, distant, and enigmatic. The largest of the drawings in this show are of modest size. Move in close, and the reward is masterful mark-making through nearly incomprehensible degrees of gradation. But the veil of mystery never quite lifts. Like the sculptor who searches for the desired form by chipping away what isn't that form, Robles de Medina's visual taxonomy of sharks, fires, friends, people in the market, and himself, is part of a personal search for his own identity.

Postcolonial Suriname has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world, and the artist's family of origin is no different. Like many educated people from the capital, Robles de Medina speaks the official language of Dutch as well as English and Sranang Tongo. The Weinbergerian tongue – that organ for language, communication, nourishing, and giving/receiving pleasure – doesn't come without warnings—dangers embodied in Robles de Medina's knowing search.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an artist book that mirrors the artist's ideas about dreams and their structures.