

Magical Tropical Garden Thrives Near NYCPM



"Planet" (2021) by Alexis Duque.

Among the many murals that currently decorate the construction fence east of NYCPM (thanks to Uptown Grand Central), is a stand-out for its approach, its rich and often-humorous detail, and subject matter.

The mural closest to the 57 East 124th Street entrance is the work of Colombian-born artist Alexis Duque, who now lives and works in New York City, is a round work (please see photo) that seems to depict a lovely, magical, tropical garden. Completed over three days, the mural is a marvel of tiny details that add up to an improbable, kaleidoscopic array of images that work together to produce an almost infinite whole: a faucet protruding from a tree waters the whole garden, but flows into a bathtub with a tiny figure perched on the side, while a swan-necked bird wades in one of the pools created and a man steers a boat through one of the rivers that flow throughout. Skyscrapers sprout from one of the flowers on the left, while a taxi – both driver and passenger masked – steers through the foliage atop one of the dense trees on the upper right. Flowers, trees, leaves, birds, animals abound. According to the artist, "This mural in Harlem features the image of a planet that is also an oasis of life, alluding to the renewal cycle and healing powers of nature and art."

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In a brief interview, Mr. Duque said:

"I create paintings of lush nature and improbable situations stacked and densely conglomerated into trippy, absurd landscapes filled with imaginary beings and worlds. My compositions are detailed, meticulously depicted and baroque. I use perspectival tricks and surrealistic overlapping to render uncanny imagery within a single form, portrait, landscape or world.

Inspired by Colombian, Latin American and European surrealists, such as Botero, Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Bosch and Leonora Carrington, I employ similar strategies and playful juxtaposition of images to depict portraits and landscapes with post-apocalyptic visions and utopian narratives questioning our present and future world.

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Through the drawing of precise lines and intricate compositions, I aim at depicting elements that inhabit clustered spaces, where nature repossesses and reclaims human places, sometimes as post-apocalyptic visions or utopian narratives."

For those interested in his method, Mr. Duque primed the wood with a water-based acrylic paint, so he could have the support of a "solid and hard surface. Then I start by sketching with an ink marker. I draw with sharp lines to define the entire structure of the work, then I proceed to paint many smooth layers of acrylic paint, using mostly very small brushes."