



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Richard Alvarez | *A Feeling as Well as a Look*

May 12 – July 16, 2022

Opening extravaganza:
Thursday, May 12, 2022
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

ClampArt is pleased to present “Richard Alvarez | A Feeling as Well as a Look”—the artist’s first solo show with the gallery.

Raised in the Bronx, Richard Alvarez entered Manhattan nightlife as a teenager in the 1980s. Dressing up and sneaking out of his parents’ home late at night, he soon found himself part of club culture where gay, straight, hip hop, punk, and the ball scene all intersected. Alvarez eventually went on to join New York’s downtown art scene, first as a fashion stylist and later as a painter. Employing a self-taught layering technique with binder and glitter, Alvarez’s work references iconography from the Yoruba and Catholic religions that surrounded him as a child. ClampArt’s exhibition features the artist’s newest works, a series of painted portraits of the luminaries he encountered and embraced during his earliest adventures in the city, including many of the ball children he befriended.



“Crystal LaBeija” (illustrated here) was the Founding House Mother of the House of LaBeija. She and Lottie LaBeija established the House in 1972 in response to the drag pageant system of the 1960s which was racially oppressive. Their first event, “Crystal and Lottie LaBeija present the first annual House of LaBeija Ball at Up the Downstairs Case on West 115th Street & 5th Avenue,” is regarded to be the birth of house culture within the ballroom scene. Houses serve as alternative families for nurturing primarily gay, gender-nonconforming, and transgender youth who are often rejected by mainstream society. Other members of the House of LaBeija painted by Alvarez for the exhibition include Pepper LaBeija and Portia LaBeija. (Pepper LaBeija took over from Crystal LaBeija as Mother around 1981 and reigned for 20 years.)

Additional people of the era whom Alvarez met (or who inspired or influenced him) and he painted for the show include David Ian Extravaganza of the House of Extravaganza founded in 1982; dancer and choreographer Willi Ninja, best-known as the “Grandfather of Vogue”; Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, activists who co-founded

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the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in 1970; the flamboyant and androgynous singer-songwriter Sylvester; doorman and later model Connie Girl (Connie Fleming); Grace Jones's film double, Angelo Colon; and Keith Haring's lover DJ Juan DuBose. Notable is the number of Alvarez's subjects who passed away prematurely due to complications associated with HIV/AIDS.

Depicting his subjects as modern day saints, Alvarez explores the intersection of the mortal and the divine through disparate styles of Renaissance painting, the 1980s Manhattan underground, and the religious imagery of his youth.

The title of the exhibition derives from a passage in an artwork by Lorraine O'Grady from her series "Cutting Out The New York Times (CONYT)." Alvarez saw an exhibition of the artist's work in 2018 and was inspired by O'Grady's found poetry.

For more information and images please contact Brian Paul Clamp, Director, or see www.clampart.com. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Image: © Richard Alvarez, "Crystal LaBeija," 2021, Binder and glitter on acrylic, 28.75 x 26.5 inches.