

ALBERTO ORTEGA

Scenes of Suburbia



A 17th century Dutch palette, novels of American small towns by Raymond Carver, John Cheever and Richard Ford; films by Steven Spielberg and the paintings of Edward Hopper all fuel the imagination of Alberto Ortega. His extraordinarily dimensional nighttime scenes of suburbia draw some in with nostalgia, others with curiosity.

In his novel *The Sportswriter*, Richard Ford wrote, “What was our life like? I almost don’t remember now. Though I remember it, the space of time it occupied. And I remember it fondly.”

Ortega’s paintings occupy a “space of time.” “Although my paintings could be seen as narrative,” he explains, “I don’t have a specific story for each of them, rather, they are open-ended scenes. They are a product of my tastes and attraction to certain situations, moods and scenery in cinema, literature, etc. I tend to set my works in the 1950s to give a more analog pre-digital feel to them and to play with the idea of nostalgia. I think there’s something unique about American suburbia that has a lot of potential for narrative and that has become universal mainly through cinema and





3



4

1
Nowhere Fast, oil on panel, 24 x 36"

2
Artist Alberto Ortega paints his dimly lit scenes from "miniature sets" of his own creation.

3
Landlord, oil on panel, 24 x 36"

4
Big City, oil on panel, 42 x 42"

television shows, to the point that it can resonate even with people that don't live in the U.S."

The scenes seem like stage sets with subtle lighting. They are, in fact, still lifes of elaborately constructed sets. "I started painting night scenes of suburbia from photographs I took. I felt limited by this process in a few ways," he explains. "Making models allows another dimension for visualizing the possibilities than my process using photography did, and I can control every aspect of a scene, from the lighting to the location of the elements, like a film director. Also, working this way has changed my approach to depicting reality, because I'm forced to create a more generic or universal world, instead of a specific place. I like the fact that I use the same cars and models for several works: it creates a sense of repetition or routine that I think is inherent to the middle working class.

"I think the subdued palette suits the mood of my paintings, which emphasizes lightness and darkness rather than color, and allows me to concentrate on exploring the range of possibilities that oil paint can offer, like opacity versus transparency, flow and different densities."

In *Nowhere Fast* he portrays the subtleties of night light—the glaring streetlight's illumination fades as the distance from it increases, the porch light illuminates the path to the door from the cars and a second floor light indicates an early riser as dawn begins to break. ●

Arcadia Contemporary 421 W. Broadway • New York, NY
(646) 861-3941 • www.arcadiacontemporary.com