

Richard Castellana *Gaia Grieves* at Blue Mountain Gallery through September 30

547 West 27th Street, Suite 200, Chelsea, Manhattan

By Pamela Tucker

When expressionistic painter Richard Castellana began his painting series 3 years ago, he couldn't have known that his exhibition dealing with climate change would coincide with mass protests outside the United Nations. As it turns out, his timing was perfect. While this is Castellana's 18th solo show it is the first to be devoted to a single theme, the climate crisis. His paintings explore both public environmental protests and tragedies unfolding in faraway lands. And while the topic is a currently hotly debated, he avoids polemic by the strength of delightfully imagined compositions, humor, and rich painterly surfaces.

With his mostly imaginary paintings of fires, floods, hurricanes and drought, climate crisis is explored through the genre tradition of "Totentanz." The Totentanz, or dance Macabre, expresses the idea that death is always present. Skeletons, dancing, nurturing, ruminating, at the ocean or jungle are an ambiguous presence throughout the work.

In "Migrants", an embankment of human faces is mixed in with numerous skulls. The group looks out to an ocean where both a red sun and crescent moon hover in a green sky. Clouds skitter across the horizon while a distant land form raises the question of whether that shore can actually offer a place of safety. The impasto paint application combined with the deep blue and green night sky are a romantic setting for this uneasy scene.

In the Totantanz series, Castellana paints animals blissfully playing while skeletons join in their fun. The paintings, all about 36" x 48", have a Goya like charm with Castellana's whimsical figures and settings. In the Totantanz series, as well as throughout the show, the work has a seductive appeal that invites us to engage with the difficult subject.

Richard Castellana - *Gaia Grieves* continues at Blue Mountain Gallery (547 West 27th Street Suite 200, Chelsea, Manhattan) through September 30.



Migrants, oil on linen 36x48" 2022



Totentanz for Alpine Parrot oil on canvas 36x48" 2020