

The Sun

ARTS & LETTERS GALLERY – GOING

By **DAVID COHEN**

The CUE Art Foundation gives artists chosen by guest curators their debut solo exhibition in New York. Under these auspices, the poet, translator, and art critic Vincent Katz has selected Juan Gomez, a Colombian born in 1970 who has lived in America since he was 20. His figure paintings have a sophisticated goofiness: They are subtle and crude at the same time, with one characteristic feeding the other.

Mr. Gomez paints stick figures in a cartoony way, with caricatured emphasis on erogenous zones: breasts, buttocks, sexual organs, lips. The limbs are extended beyond anatomical credibility, reading like sausages or blown-up balloons. Yet in iconography and form, they connect beyond cartoons, recalling such sources as pre-Columbian sculpture, German Expressionism (the sylvan bathers of Otto Mueller, for instance), and, in their tubularity, Léger.

Naturally, with sexuality and distortion in the mix, Surrealism is a touchstone, too, but there is an absence of violence or a need to shock in Mr. Gomez's figuration. Despite the seeming misogyny of his absurdist accentuations, these images exude a tender humor, a genuinely lyrical sensuality. You sense a lust for life in the way figures are conceived and executed.

Mr. Gomez's palette, touch, and humor are blessed with warm brightness. He delights in voluptuous brushstrokes that define light on flesh. His oil paint manages at once fleshly succulence and a watercolor-like transparency. The figures are splayed on a neutral ground, partially cropped, but generally filling the available frame. "100382" (2004) for instance, has the distended buttocks and oversized foot defining the left and bottom edges, the head cropped at the eyes on the top, and only the right edge clear of the figure and her gangly limbs. While flatness gives emphasis to artifice, the figures are purposefully modeled. The ability to work like actual flesh and convey credible movement despite the extremity of their elongation brings to mind an artist of very different sensibility – Giacometti.

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Juan Gomez, *100376*, 2004
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