

ORDOVAS

PRESS RELEASE
9AM, 6 JUNE 2019

25 Savile Row
London W1S 2ER
T. +44 (0)20 7287 5013

Gallery Hours:
Tue-Fri: 10:00-18:00
Sat: 11:00-15:00



ALWAYS DRAWING

JOSÉ ANTONIO SUÁREZ LONDOÑO
WORKS ON PAPER 1997—2018

7 June – 3 August 2019

"I was born with a pencil in my hand..." José Antonio Suárez Londoño, May 2019

Colombian artist José Antonio Suárez Londoño (or JASL as the artist also calls himself) has devoted four decades to drawing. Through this disciplined, daily practice he has developed a vast repertoire of small scale drawings. *Always Drawing: José Antonio Suárez Londoño, Works on Paper, 1997-2018*, is an exhibition of one hundred drawings and fifty etchings, chosen by the artist from two decades of work. On display from 7 June until 3 August at Ordovas, London, the exhibition is the gallery's third to be entirely dedicated to the work of a single living artist and the first presentation of JASL to a UK audience.

"Every exhibition that we stage is the result of academic engagement and personal connection with an artist, a subject or a historical period which I feel deserves to be looked at in greater detail," says Pilar Ordovas. *"I first encountered Suárez Londoño's work at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. I was immediately drawn to the work by his almost meditative process and the beauty of his meticulous, delicate drawings. My aim is to bring wider attention to his oeuvre in Europe with this first retrospective of his drawings."*

JASL was born in the Colombian city of Medellín in 1955, and is today one of the country's most revered living artists, celebrated in particular for his dedication to the mediums of drawing and printmaking. Having studied Biology at the Universidad de Antioquia before going on to study art at the École Supérieure d'Art Visuel in Geneva, it was during the 1990s that JASL developed the meticulous and disciplined daily drawing practice he has pursued tirelessly ever since.

Taking his inspiration from a dazzling variety of visual and textual sources, from illustrations, paper scraps and photographs (JASL does not own a computer) to classical texts and pop songs, the artist synthesises these with a methodology born of his scientific training, and his childhood obsession with an illustrated Larousse encyclopaedic dictionary. An encyclopaedic flavour is also visible in the drawings' delicacy of line (reminiscent of botanical or anatomical diagrams) with many elements labelled with letters or numbers, as if illustrations to a text to which we are only occasionally given the key. The eclectic drawings of objects, landscapes, portraits, textile patterns, reproductions of Old Master paintings, and colour studies, reference wide-ranging literary sources including the diaries of Eugène Delacroix, Franz Kafka (which were exhibited at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013), and Paul Klee; Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*; W.G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*; and the poems of Blaise Cendrars, Arthur Rimbaud and Patti Smith.

In both drawing and etching JASL is highly attentive to the particular qualities of his materials – whether the

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velvety fuzziness of charcoal, blooming across subtle washes of watercolour or tea stains, or the delicacy of his etched line. He is equally alert to the specific qualities of papers – for example, picking out a reversed *BFK Rives* watermark so it becomes a formal element in the work O30, or his use of the raw edges of handmade papers, different sheets joined together, or layering with translucent envelopes. The formal properties of text – hinted at in the numbering and labelling of elements as if they were specimens – are continually explored. Weaving, and the drawing together of threads or lines, is another subject that the artist often returns to; drawn weavings (O54), webs (O50), embroidered lines of sight (O85) and even the threads of teabags (O83 and O84) are recurring motifs. William Morris is an acknowledged source of inspiration for JASL: “my father worked in the textile industry, and because of that I feel a connection to Morris and his patterns. I learned from him,” he explained to Mercedes Cebrián in May 2018.

In its expansive means and duration, JASL’s drawing practice is elastic enough to embrace the multiplicity of things that he chooses to incorporate. Yet the formal strictures of his daily practice are also rigorous enough to construct a supporting framework for these ideas to co-inhabit, a fine net in which to catch the elusive ephemera of the everyday. The selection of works on display at Ordovas will provide an introduction to the artist and an outlet for the collective imagination.

While duly celebrated in his homeland, and hugely influential on a younger generation of Colombian artists, including Johanna Calle, Mateo Lopez, Nicolás Paris and Bernardo Ortiz, JASL’s work has only relatively recently gained international recognition. His early solo exhibitions during the 1970s and 80s were held in Medellín at the Galería de la Oficina and the artist still has a strong connection with his home city: for the last fifteen years, he has run a weekly portrait-drawing group there, and he prints his etchings at a local print workshop. In the 90s and early 2000s, JASL began showing at galleries in Buenos Aires and Bogotá, as well as in Germany, Italy, Spain and in San Francisco and Washington in the U.S.A. Important international exhibitions include *The Modern Myth: Drawing Mythologies in Modern Times* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010, and *José Antonio Suárez Londoño: The Yearbooks* at The Drawing Center, New York, 2012. JASL was included in the exhibition, *The Encyclopedic Palace*, at the 2013 Venice Biennale and his works have also been shown at the XXIV and XXXII Bienal São Paulo, Brazil.

Editors’ Notes

1. The catalogue to accompany the exhibition will include contributions from Dr Ketty Gottardo, Martin Halusa Curator of Drawings at The Courtauld, and Isabel Seligman, Print Curator: Bridget Riley Art Foundation, at the British Museum