

## BORTOLAMI

55 Walker

**Nicolás Guagnini**

***Heads and Torsos***

Bortolami is pleased to present *Heads / Torsos*, Nicolas Guagnini's fourth solo show with the gallery and his first at 55 Walker. The exhibition consists of two series of small oil paintings; one of hyper-stylized heads and another of torsos. These new works spring from psychedelic drawings Guagnini produced over the last 18 months, before translating the motifs into oil paint on canvas.<sup>1</sup>

Guagnini's *Heads* paintings are suspended between symbol and illusion. From Mesoamerican glyphs to commercial illustration, surrealism and graffiti, the *Heads*, as in all the artist's work, allude to a layered set of visual references. High and low, flatness and illusionary depth, cohere seductively in the paintings. Particular allusions are made to artist and writer Asger Jorn's seminal essay "What Is an Ornament" (1948), which argues the ornamental as, and derived from, nature's formal language. Guagnini's figures are a byproduct of dynamic ornamentation, in which the figure dissolves into ornament itself, with each swirling arabesque resolving in a human profile. Set against smooth gradients and set upon a horizon line, the heads appear monolithic despite their diminutive scale; Guagnini's dynamic ornamentation proposes a monumental object.

Guagnini's *Torso* series, heavily influenced by *Thangka*, Tibetan anatomical medical paintings, proposes a correspondence between interior and exterior, organizing color within swirling, organic motifs. The pictorial idioms of post-impressionism and early Dubuffet dovetail with his surface treatments—he daubed, scraped, and combed oil paint to create impastoed, textured surfaces. Free of the gradient environments of the *Heads* paintings, the *Torsos* appear disembodied. While operating separately, the *Heads* and *Torsos* can't help but write a thorough line, generating a visual narrative of organic processes inside the body. Though disassociated, the mind and body echo one another. The ambiguous snaking line of, or within, or on, the body.

**Nicolás Guagnini** (b. in 1966 in Buenos Aires, Argentina) has lived and worked in New York since 1998. Guagnini's video and performance work will be the subject of a forthcoming solo exhibition at Mishkin Gallery at CUNY Baruch in New York. Next year, he will have one-person shows at MACRO Rome and FRAC Grand Large – Hauts-de-France, Dunkirk. Recent solo exhibitions include *Twilight of the Idols*, Tarble Art Center, Charleston, IL; *The Walrus*, 3A Gallery, New York; *Union Gaucha Productions*, Artists Space, New York. Recent group exhibitions include *Therapy*, MALBA, Buenos Aires; *100 Drawings from Now*, The Drawing Center, New York; *Publishing as Artistic Toolbox: 1989-2017*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; *Sinister Feminism: A.I.R. Gallery's 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Exhibition*, curated by Piper Marshall, New York; *Bread and Roses*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; *Dancing Museum*, Museum of Modern Art, Sao Paulo; *Descartes' Daughter*, Swiss Institute, New York; *A Drawing Show Curated by Dan Graham*, Micheline Swajcer, Antwerp; and *Notations: The Cage Effect Today*, Hunter College Art Gallery, New York. He was a founder of Orchard Gallery (2005-2008), the film collective *Union Gaucha Productions*, and his writings have been published in *October*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and the recent catalogue for *Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts*. He also designed DICKFACE, a typography available at [dickface.me](http://dickface.me)

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<sup>1</sup> The original drawings can be accessed [here](#)