

Press Release

## Angel Otero. That First Rain in May

29 May – 24 August 2024  
Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood



**Los Angeles...**Magical realism and abstraction converge in the work of artist Angel Otero, whose first Los Angeles exhibition with Hauser & Wirth will be on view at the gallery's West Hollywood location beginning 29 May. Otero's personal recollections of his upbringing in Puerto Rico are woven throughout a group of new paintings and sculptures in which technical innovation becomes the means for conveying memory through materiality. In surreal and fragmentary scenes, Otero mines his own history to make sense of the current moment, animating everyday objects and environments that are loosely based on the domestic spaces of his youth.

The exhibition's title draws from a popular saying in Spanish, 'La Primera Lluvia de Mayo,' that stirred Otero's imagination in childhood. Local lore held that the first rain in May brings luck to those drenched by it; children and adults alike bathed in these inaugural downpours, a ritual in which natural forces conjured seemingly magical ones. The presence of water pervades Otero's work, symbolic of the artist's psychological and material explorations: self-reflection and a synthesis of ideas flow through his paintings like currents that the viewer can feel. Otero's signature mode of visual storytelling is exemplified in such vibrant paintings as 'River Mouth' (2024), where a red chair, bucket of water and bathtub embark on a voyage down a choppy stream. A jalousie window shutter (horizontally slatted) floats against an indistinct background, hovering like a low-lying sun over the scene.

Otero's labor-intensive process of oil painting allows for an active exchange with the medium, inviting chance into his practice. He begins each new work by painting the foreground scene on plexiglass first and then working backward in layers, so the background is painted last. Building in a layer of fabric to hold the entire structure together, he then scrapes off the resulting paint 'skin' and fixes it onto canvas. Afterward, Otero continues to add to the surface, collaging images of items like window shutters, folded paper airplanes and boats from a repository of previously made works to create an entirely new, multilayered composition. These resulting works possess a theatrical quality, with quotidian objects assuming the role of protagonists in elaborate painted settings.

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The recurring objects in Otero's art serve as psychological anchors for his forays into the realm of the ambiguous and magical. Often proxies for the people who raised him, they replace human figures while nevertheless suggesting the reverberating effects of human experience: memories. Through his skilled merging of fragments from different sources, Otero effectively emulates the ways in which our recollections of the past, imprecise and frequently distorted, converge to shape our present.

The exhibition at Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood also marks Otero's return to sculpture. In 'Rayuela (Hopscotch)' (2024), he combines the disparate elements of ceramics and welded metal, directly referencing the decorative wrought iron gates from his childhood home in Puerto Rico. Like the jalousie window shutters that recur in his work, these permanent yet permeable fixtures protect the home while allowing the elements to flow freely. Wind, air, light, sounds and smells travel through them, creating an ever-changing dynamic between interior and exterior. Complementing this sculpture's ornate iron geometry is a glazed and painted hopscotch grid. Together, these components braid concepts of safety, beauty and play into the work. 'Rayuela (Hopscotch)' is the title of a novel by Argentine writer Julio Cortazar that has served as a key source of inspiration for Otero, who finds deep kinship in Cortazar's experimental storytelling, formal innovations, and playful pursuit of life's relentless and beautiful mysteries.

### About the artist

Angel Otero was born in 1981 in Santurce, Puerto Rico, where he resided until moving in 2004 to obtain his BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He currently splits his time between New York and Puerto Rico. Otero was the subject of major solo exhibitions in 2017 at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY, and in 2016 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. In 2009, Otero was included in the exhibition 'Constellations' at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, shortly after receiving his MFA. Otero's work is in numerous public and private collections including The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx NY; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago IL; Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, Turkey; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City MO; Long Museum, Shanghai, China; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago IL; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh NC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York NY; Speed Art Museum, Louisville KY; and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond VA.

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Gallery hours:  
Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm

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### Caption and courtesy information:

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Neverland  
2024  
Oil paint and fabric collaged on canvas  
242.9 x 242.9 x 3.8 cm / 95 5/8 x 95 5/8 x 1 1/2 in

River Mouth  
2024  
Oil paint and fabric collaged on canvas  
242.9 x 242.9 x 3.8 cm / 95 5/8 x 95 5/8 x 1 1/2 in

The Runway  
2024  
Oil paint and fabric collaged on canvas  
242.9 x 242.9 x 3.8 cm / 95 5/8 x 95 5/8 x 1 1/2 in

Caribe Bingo  
2024  
Oil paint and fabric collaged on canvas  
184.5 x 242.6 x 3.8 cm / 72 5/8 x 95 1/2 x 1 1/2 in