

LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Leaning Into the Feeling of Being Lost

José Luis Vargas beckons us to enter his disorienting world, created “with the eyes of a child who has entered a science fiction tale.”



Tara Yarlagadda October 22, 2020



Jose Luís Vargas, “Puerto Rico (Entra)” (2020), oil and enamel on circus banner, 111 3/4 x 131 inches (all images courtesy the artist and Lowell Ryan Projects)

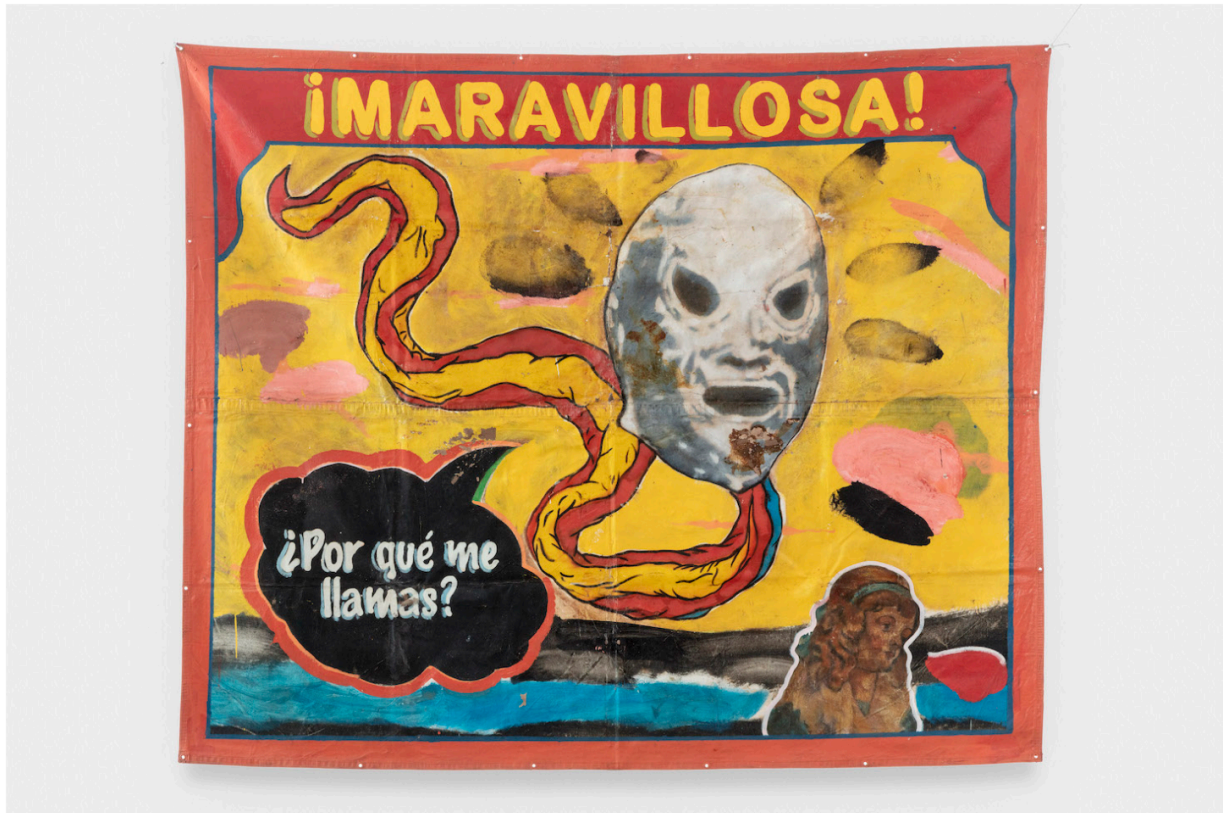
LOS ANGELES — In his solo exhibition for Lowell Ryan Projects, Puerto Rican artist José Luis Vargas tells the viewer that nine circus banners and two shopping carts represent his world, literally beckoning you to enter: *Este es mi mundo. ¡Entra!*

“The title of the exhibition is an invitation, is an open world of dramas that I have structured with the eyes of a child who has entered a science fiction tale, an amusement park ride with its dark corners and halls of mirrors,” writes Vargas in an email interview with Hyperallergic.

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We see a wizened, alien-esque man telling us “No tengas miedo” (“Don’t be afraid”). We see an empty boat adrift in a strange sea. With each passing banner, we feel more and more disoriented.

At one point, we see one of the shopping carts, led by a mannequin with a luchador mask and filled with tiny figurines that inhabit the cart as if it were their own royal chariot. As Vargas mentions, the shopping cart functions as a vehicle for perhaps the most dislocated people of all: the houseless.



Jose Luís Vargas, “Maravillosa(¿Por qué me llamaste?)” (2016), oil and enamel on canvas circus banner, 92 x 109 inches

Over the course of his 30-year career as an artist, Vargas has moved around the world, from London to New York to Mexico City. He’s also occupied fractured identities, as he flips between his primary role as an artist and his act as an alter-ego, who calls himself the El Santo de Santurce (“the Saint of Santurce”).

In an interview with Lowell Ryan Projects, Vargas describes this alter-ego, who represents another facet of his identity: “Inspired by the very famous Mexican wrestling legend, El Santo, I started wearing the mask with a silver cape in the mid-2000s and began a series of performances and apparitions.”

Throughout the exhibition, we experience a sense of dislocation — the feeling of being lost — and the emotional vulnerability that comes with it. And who among us hasn’t felt dislocated in

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time and space recently, given the challenges of 2020 that have upended life as we previously knew it?

Vargas thinks that viewers who feel lost can take away something powerful from his exhibit.

“That lost feeling should bring forth a set of emotional responses that touch the very core of our identity and personality. [It’s] like entering a tunnel, and knowing that, when we get to the end of the tunnel, we are not going to be the same people,” writes Vargas.



Installation view of *Este es mi mundo. ¡Entra!* at Lowell Ryan Projects

José Luis Vargas: *Este es mi mundo. ¡Entra!* continues at Lowell Ryan Projects (4851 W Adams Blvd, West Adams, Los Angeles) through October 31. The gallery is open by appointment. You can also see the exhibition [online](#).