

# PERES PROJECTS

## BURNAWAY

Chakaia Booker and Dalton Gata at ICA Miami

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Perhaps it is the coastal waters, the smooth streets and possibility of year-round biking, or the vibrant contemporary art scene that urges travelers to fill the beaches and hotels of Miami during the winter season. My late October trip south from Atlanta offered all such possibilities. Including a journey to ICA Miami for a look at Dalton Gata's first solo museum show, *Dalton Gata: The Way We'll Be*, and a three-decade survey of Chakaia Booker's abstracted sculptures and paintings, *Chakaia Booker: The Observance*. ICA's Artistic Director, Alex Gartenfield is responsible for curating both shows with the help of Curator Stephanie Seidel for the latter exhibition.

Dalton Gata created a whole new body of work for his solo debut at ICA Miami. The Cuban-born, Dominican Republic educated, and Puerto Rico based artist presents his fantasy for the future in *Dalton Gata: The Way We'll Be*. Gata's five new works fill the Ray Ellen and Allan Yarkin Gallery of the museum's sun-filled ground floor. The fashion-forward Instagram generation, where everyone can be a star, meet on Gata's canvas through his vibrant, Surrealist and Afro-Caribbean influenced portraiture. Their presence offer a display of becoming, an interrogation of self-fashioning, pride, joy, and freedom.

Gata's graphically precise style was developed out of his former career in fashion and design. Viewers can approach the artworks like a lookbook, for his articulation of contemporary fashion design is as rich in the museum as it is on the runway. Thigh-high gold boots, crop tops, and cut-off shorts, fur coats, and pleaser platform shoes are just some of the fashions his subjects don. Gata collects inspiration on social media,

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building an archive of striking faces, styles, textures, and references. Some of his sources are friends or lovers, but Gata's rendering through preliminary drawings and the final paintings transform these subjects from their known public personalities into extensions of the artist's imagination. Interviewed in 2020, Gata stated, "In a way, they're all me. All alter-egos. All self-portraits."

The artist's fantasy world-building highlights the romantic ideals of real hardships. The large-scale diptych *Next In Line* shows an eccentric group of individuals and friends. Each of the seven figures representing a historically oppressed, questioned or rejected identity stands, squat, and creatively pose in the essence that they embody a genuine self-performance. The line forms with a femme presenting figure with voluminous golden hair, a face painted white with thin brows, a bold geometric eye, and a red lip. Below the neck, they are clad in a full zebra print, wearing a skintight suit finished with matching heels. The animalistic is not only seen in clothes but also in Gata's exploration of the mythic and monstrous which comment on humans' desire to be and become something else. Including a cow/dog hybrid companion and a centaur at the end of the line – the face of a black woman with bushy brows, glossed lips, and a gap-tooth smile blends into the body of a horse. The cast of characters is backed by a mountain range landscape, fluffy clouds, tropical foliage, and a sweet sunset. There is a purposeful act in dressing up; Gata's subjects are shameless and assume their true power through self-expression. A play between what is beautiful or ugly, Gata's figures balance the line of vitality.

The centaur form is also explored through steel in a sculpture titled *Criatura De Acero* (Steel Creature), which is the exhibition's centerpiece. The wire lines form a clear profile of the creature with windswept hair and, supported by wood, creates a delicate shadow on the gallery floor. The thin lines of the sculpture mark precise bends of transformation from human to horse, and this development of change is amplified when looking through the negative space of the artwork to peer at the paintings on the wall. Gata creates precise portals to consider change. The acrylic painting, *Adornos De Ventana* (Window Adornments) comments on the yearning of the emigrant. The still-life window tableau is placed high on the wall transforming the gallery architecture into a threshold for contemplation. The window seal is dotted with personal artifacts, such as "the faceless doll," a Dominican handicraft, and a miniature framed family portrait. The window opens to a view of mountains, clear skies, and jewel blue waters.

