

Art reviews: Unlocking the Extraordinary | Manuel Solano | Claude Cahun

An exhibition of “Art Extraordinary” collected by Joyce Laing during her career as an art therapist is both powerful and poignant, writes Susan Mansfield

Susan Mansfield – Friday, 16th September 2022



There is a different kind of triumph over adversity in the first show in Scotland by Berlin-based Mexican artist Manuel Solano at DCA. Solano was forced to transform their practice when, in 2014, they lost their sight due to an HIV-related illness. That this is mainly a show of large-scale paintings is testament to a determination to find new ways of working, with assistants supporting the artist to make work through touch. There is a clear progression, from the rougher, angrier 2014 series *Blind, Transgender with AIDS* to the more polished works of the last two years.

The show is a kind of extended exploration of the self. Paintings capture key moments on Solano’s artistic journey, like the frieze of geometric birds seen in childhood in a Mexico City shopping mall when the artist first grasped the concept of depicting three-dimensional objects in two dimensions. There are influential people, like Solano’s flamboyant great aunt Anna, and key works from popular culture: the film *Jurassic Park* and Paula Cole’s 1996 album *The Fire*. The connections are carefully explained in Solano’s text, making this exhibition one

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of the most direct and accessible contemporary shows I've seen for some time.

The most complex and intriguing works in the show explore locations and interiors which are part remembered, part invented: a poolside populated by sculpted plastic sun loungers, possibly versions of a design by Charles Zublena; a waiting space with palm fronds and black leather chairs, a hotel lobby or airport lounge, unpeopled and eerie.

There are also three films: *La Patita*, which uses clips from childhood home videos (in the kindergarten pageant, Solano manages to dance with the girls as well as the boys); *Masculina* (the feminine form of the adjective "masculine") in which the artist poses in various Miami locations, and *Portrait*, a six-minute close-up of their face. In a way, this is what the show is: a close-up consideration of what has made this particular self, poignant because, while it has been constructed in their mind's eye, the artist will never actually see it.

