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10 New Museum Triennial Artists in 10 Days: Manuel Solano

GARAGE's penultimate selection from the New Museum's 2018 roundup of the best in international young art is a painter who, having lost his sight, draws extensively on visual memory.

By PAUL LASTER | Feb 22 2018



Since Younger than Jesus, its 2009 first installment, the New Museum Triennial has been a key date on the New York art-world calendar. As the city's only recurring show devoted to international emerging artists, it provides an indispensable first look at the people and practices who will help define the field in years to come. 2018's event, subtitled Songs for Sabotage, gathers thirty artists and collectives linked by their interest in disrupting the hierarchies of propaganda, power, control that shape our lives and cultures.

After losing his sight to a bacterial infection when he was just 26, Manuel Solano had to relearn art making. Encouraged by his friends to keep painting, the Mexican artist began drawing on memory to produce autobiographical works infused with pop-cultural reference. "Since the time of his blindness, which was due to negligent medical care of his HIV, Solano has had to redefine his practice," Triennial co-curator Alex Gartenfeld confirmed to GARAGE. "Oftentimes the topics of his paintings are allegorical and personal, and based on memory."

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In one painting, Solano has applied paint with his fingers to memorialize his rosy-cheeked great aunt while a self-portrait recalls the time he dressed up as Milla Jovovich's character from *The Fifth Element* for Halloween. *I'm Flying* portrays Fairuza Balk's character from another movie, *The Craft*, strapped to a bed—a metaphor for Solano's feelings of restraint—while another canvas captures a free-spirited Michael Jackson in Herb Ritts' video for "In the Closet."

"My work has always been about myself. When I first started making art I thought it was about pop culture, humanity, and love," Solano said. "I'm clearer now that what I am doing is putting myself out there through my work. I now understand that's what I've been trying to do all of my life."

2018 Triennial: *Songs for Sabotage* is on view at the New Museum, New York, through May 27.

