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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bernadette Despujols

Exquisite Cuerpo

April 26 - June 29, 2024

Opening Reception: Friday, April 26, 6 - 8pm

Rachel Uffner Gallery is pleased to present *Exquisite Cuerpo*, Bernadette Despujols' second solo exhibition at the gallery. An intimate meditation on family, womanhood, and ecological consciousness, the exhibition draws together a body of work that is both visually and thematically interconnected, creating a poignant, immersive narrative throughout the gallery.

"Cuerpo", the Spanish word for "body", references Despujols' portraiture practice, which has long centered on the artist's close knit matriarchal family and has now taken on an even greater level of intimacy spurred by the recent birth of her daughter Coromoto. In one painting, the artist depicts her newborn playing with a conch shell and guarded lovingly by two lounging puppies. In another, she reflects on her own body and personhood during her pregnancy. The composition pays homage to *Miranda en la Carraca* by Arturo Michelena, an iconic painting of the Venezuelan revolutionary in his prison cell in Spain. Despujols depicts herself in a similar reclining pose and pensive expression against an impassive, stone wall, simultaneously evoking feelings of tranquility, confinement, and anticipation.

The other figures in the show are all members of Despujols' extended Venezuelan-American family – nieces, sisters, cousins that all live nearby one another in Miami. Her focus on depicting women immersed in nature is rooted in tenets of ecofeminism, which draws connections between the exploitation of the natural world and the oppression of women. The artist's tender portrayals of the women in her family, shown against lush foliage and blooming flowers, provocatively explore the ways through which patriarchal society exerts dominance over both women and nature. At the same time, the artist shares how the experience of giving birth made her feel greater respect towards her own body and disrupted preconceptions of the fragility of women's bodies. In Despujols' paintings and her reflections on the world around us, the parallels between the natural world and the woman's body are undeniable — both resilient, formidable, and uniquely capable of bearing life. These inherent bonds between womanhood and the environment shine through in each intimate portrayal of the artist's family members as they repose in the garden, scramble up trees, and play barefoot among the leaves.

To create her oil paintings, Despujols works from largely candid photographs she informally takes of her family and begins the compositions with faces, conceiving the lines and contours that make up her figures' emotive expressions before expanding outward to their

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limbs, poses, and settings. She constructs each portrait with heavy impasto, building paint up with frenetic brushstrokes then carving lines out to reveal the underpainting beneath. Her unstudied portraiture, combined with sculptural surfaces and vigorous mark-making, evokes the profound human interiority contained within the work of Alice Neel and Lucian Freud.

The show takes its title from *Exquisite Corpse*, a game invented by the Surrealists in which each participant takes turns drawing on a sheet of paper while seeing only what the previous contributor drew until an elaborate, often absurd, scene unfolds. Just like in the game, which Despujols loved to play as a child, all the paintings in the exhibition are visually connected, creating a fragmented panorama that extends throughout the gallery.

Bernadette Despujols (b. 1986, Barquisimeto, Venezuela) studied Architecture at the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV), where she graduated with honors in 2007. Soon after, she continued her education at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where she took classes in architecture, cultural exchange, morphology and anatomy before beginning her endeavors in art making. Despujols taught Architectonic Design at the School of Architecture at the Universidad Central de Venezuela before moving to the US to pursue her MFA in Visual Arts at the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts) in 2010. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *The Salt of Two Seas*, New Child; Antwerp, BE; *Oh Man!*, Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas, TX; *Homesick*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; *Women & Sculpture*, Spinello Projects, Miami, FL; and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY. Recent group exhibitions include *Some Dogs Go To Dallas*, Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas, TX; *Friends & Lovers*, Flag Art Foundation, New York, NY; *Inaugural Exhibition*, Marquez Art Projects, Miami, FL; *High Voltage*, Nassima Landau, Tel Aviv, Israel; *We Are Family*, curated by Peter Drake and Clifford Owens, New York Academy of Art, NY; *Shattered Glass*, Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, New York, NY; and *WE DANCE YOU MEAN*, Cerquone Projects, Madrid, Spain. Forthcoming exhibitions include a solo presentation of her work at Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY; and the Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, FL. Despujols currently lives and works between Miami, Florida and New York, NY.

Image: Bernadette Despujols, *Coromoto con perros y botuto*, 2024, oil on canvas, 70 x 50 in, 177.8 x 127 cm

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