

# GEORGE ADAMS GALLERY

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## **Luis Cruz Azaceta** ***Paintings and Drawings: 1984-1989***

September 13 – November 3, 2018

To start off the fall season, George Adams Gallery will present a survey of paintings and drawings by Luis Cruz Azaceta dating from 1984-89, arguably some of the artist's most forceful imagery. In the mid-'80s Azaceta developed a raw, expressionist style of painting on a huge scale, to depict the anguish and fear he observed around him. With himself as an avatar of this suffering, he touched on issues which continue to resonate today, such as repression of individual freedoms, isolation of the self as a result of dislocation, the scourge of AIDS and unchecked violence.

Born in Cuba, Azaceta immigrated to the states following the revolution at the age of 18. He went on to receive his degree from SVA and came to prominence in the late-'70s with a series of grotesque and bitterly satirical paintings that captured the New York of the time. However, it was the many self-portraits he experimented with over the next decade which lead him to a more visceral, personal expression in his paintings. In the mid-'80s, Azaceta began using a fluid painting technique, dripping paint directly onto large canvases laid on the floor to, in his words, "create utter chaos... until a cacophonous texture was achieved." From this ground would emerge a single figure, its limbs truncated or emaciated and an expression of horror or pain on its face. Azaceta has identified fear as a central preoccupation while mortality and humanistic concerns characterize his work as a whole. Specifically, it was the sense of displacement Azaceta identified as a product of his own exiled status, by which he seeks to reveal the pain felt by any person living as an outsider. The painting 'Untitled (Self-portrait)' 1987 shows the artist stick-like and laid out as if in death, bisecting the enormous 10x12 ft canvas, radiating concentric bands of muddy color. This same composition would inform his 'AIDS Count' series which followed.

In 1987, in response to the growing crisis of AIDS, Azaceta began making paintings directly addressing the senseless loss of the epidemic. Over the next few years, he completed several paintings and works on paper addressing the disease - bleakly illustrating the toll in human lives through piles of skulls, ticking clocks and an endless count of the afflicted. As one of the earliest artists to directly address AIDS in his work, Azaceta used the humanistic and sympathetic approach embodied in his paintings for the AIDS series. Where often his figures are self-portraits, by equating himself with the role of victim, his message is one of compassion.

Luis Cruz Azaceta was born in Havana, Cuba in 1942. He received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1969. His work has been widely exhibited both nationally and internationally and is featured in major public collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Monterrey, Mexico, among others. The subject of multiple lifetime retrospectives, Azaceta is also the recipient of numerous major grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts among others.

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