

LUIS CRUZ AZACETA
Loose Screws: 1974-1989

June 6 – August 9, 2024

George Adams Gallery is pleased to present *Loose Screws: 1974-1989* a survey of works on paper and paintings by Luis Cruz Azaceta, on view from June 6 through August 9, 2024. This is Azaceta's seventeenth exhibition with the gallery. George Adams will host an opening reception for the artist on Thursday, June 6, from 6 to 8 PM.

Luis Cruz Azaceta (b. 1942) was born in Havana, Cuba, and experienced the violence of the Cuban revolution before emigrating to New York at 18 in 1959. He worked odd jobs and studied, earning a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1969. Azaceta's early work, characterized by cartoon-like caricatures, addressed the moral and ethical issues of the time, focusing on urban violence with the intention of inspiring empathy: "The vehicle for compassion is the aesthetic that draws one into looking closely at what are, perhaps, sometimes horrific subjects and embracing them." He used humor to mask the atrocities he witnessed in New York.

In 1975, Azaceta debuted with his "Subway Series" at Allan Frumkin Gallery in "New Talent", depicting the New York City subway and its passengers as animal-like creatures shaped by an unsympathetic environment. His colorful palette almost distracts from the grim subjects, such as dismembered limbs in a hotdog box in *Ji Ji Ji Express* (1974-75) or the figures hanging from nooses in *No Parking Any Time* (1978), creating a "tragi-comic outcry at Man's Condition." Azaceta's work, influenced by both his experiences in Cuba and New York, was violent and rough, often compared critically to Goya and Daumier, coming out of a tradition of cartoon-like social commentary. His 1979 solo debut with Allan Frumkin focused on the brutality of city life, leading the New York Post to title their review "Canvas filled with terror."

Throughout the 1980s, Azaceta's work continued to tackle the dark realities of inner-city life, emphasizing the experiences of marginalized people. He developed a raw, expressionistic style of painting on a massive scale to channel the anguish and fear around him. 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 works directly addressing the disease - bleakly illustrating the toll in human lives through piles of skulls and ticking clocks seen in *The Plague: Aids Epidemic* (1987). He utilized a humanistic and sympathetic approach, where often his figures are self-portraits. By equating himself with those affected, his message is one of empathy.

Luis Cruz Azaceta currently lives and works in New Orleans. Azaceta has exhibited internationally and was the subject of a career retrospective organized by the American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora, Miami in 2016. He has been the recipient of several major grants and awards including a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Grant in 1985, a Mid-Atlantic Grant for special projects in 1989, and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in 2009. His work is included in major public collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin; El Museo del Barrio, New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC; the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento; and the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Monterrey, Mexico, among others.