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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tyler Lafreniere and Manuel Mendoza Sánchez

La última Coca-Cola del desierto
/ The last Coca-Cola in the desert

January 13 - March 4, 2023

Opening reception, Friday, January 13 from 6 - 8pm

Rachel Uffner Gallery is pleased to present *La última Coca-Cola del desierto / The last Coca-Cola in the desert*, a two-person show of new works by **Tyler Lafreniere** and **Manuel Mendoza Sánchez**. The exhibition title comes from a Spanish aphorism used to express the sentiment of “you’re not that special.” Lafreniere will exhibit graphically distinct paintings while Sánchez presents unconstrained ceramic vessels and wood sculptures. Though operating in different media, both artists incorporate recognizable imagery from popular and consumer culture, and build their compositions like vernacular sayings.

Queens based **Lafreniere** creates paintings that demonstrate a discomfort and cynicism towards societally prescribed masculinity. In this new body of work, Lafreniere employs symbols relating to political and educational institutions, surveillance and voyeurism. Placed against a stark background of color, each piece contains faithful reproductions of carefully selected images and items, such as playboy magazine covers, beer cans, outdoor sporting equipment, or photographs from bygone eras. The resulting works operate as cryptic haikus which reveal a tension between performative identity and authenticity.

Each piece in this series suggests a specific character or flawed archetype with sometimes unredeemable qualities. In *Legacy*, 2022, for example, Lafreniere considers the organization of fraternities which often perpetuate harmful behavior and protect dangerous individuals under the cloak of brotherhood and academia. In *Master of Reality*, 2022 the artist implies failure through a “final notice” letter set against a poster from a Black Sabbath album and a pot plant growing out of a coffee can. These works ultimately reflect the artist’s observations of how individuals have become disaffected over the years. Nostalgic in aesthetic, Lafreniere illuminates the possibilities of isolation for those who don’t fit the mold of social norms as well as those who follow these expectations to the extreme.

In contrast to Lafreniere’s hard edged paintings, San Juan based **Mendoza Sánchez** creates works that revel in imperfection. The artist’s ceramic vessels and wooden sculptures question power structures, social constructs and the implications of spirituality and religion in our capitalistic world. For this exhibition, Mendoza Sánchez employs recurring imagery of Coca-Cola cans, Perrier bottles, caricatures of notorious CEOs and celebrities and creatures like dragons, crows, and tigers, and found images of oases.

With each piece from this series, Mendoza Sánchez constructs a romantic and humorous imagined narrative using commerce, and the exhibition title, as



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a point of departure. In the blue and white vessel titled *Hasta el último rincón*, the artist depicts Warren Buffett delivering a case of Coca-Cola in the desert. The color and style references porcelain, a historical example of early global trade. Buffett is an unlikely savior, pictured atop a tiger drawn-cart. Mendoza Sánchez attempts to humanize the figure, using this character as a conduit for broader conversation throughout the show.

In works like *Perrier Boat (Mi Esperanza)*, the artist brings in more direct references to religion. This wooden boat filled with sparkling water is the artist's interpretation of the story of Saint Ursula of Cologne. Works like *Perrier inside Coca-Cola (Mi Nicho)* Mendoza Sánchez has created an alter to Diet Coke. In these works the ubiquitous Coca-Cola brand becomes a replacement for religion which is no longer as common in everyday life.

Both Lafreniere and Mendoza Sánchez recognize the irony in the titular saying; Comparing one's precious and unique identity to one of the most mass produced, globally recognized brands in the world. Each artist contends with this throughout the exhibition.

Tyler Lafreniere (b.1983) is a visual artist based in Queens, NY. In 2006, Lafreniere earned his BA in Fine Art from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. During his undergraduate studies, he also concentrated in Printmaking at Goldsmiths University in London. He has held solo exhibitions at Deanna Evans Projects, New York, NY; LAUNCH F18, New York, NY; and Dose Projects, Brooklyn, NY. He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions in New York including Rachel Uffner Gallery, 5-50 Gallery, Field Projects, and Sharon Arts Center as well as Big Pictures LA, Los Angeles, CA and Art Institute of New Hampshire, Manchester, NH.

Manuel Mendoza Sánchez (b. 1992, San Juan, PR). His work is developed in different media such as ceramics, collages, installations, paintings, and sound art. With a Bachelor's in Arts and Science from Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA, Mendoza explores the unnoticed -the passage of time, words, and objects with which we interact on a daily basis-, in an attempt to give life to small things that form part of society's fabric. His recent solo exhibitions include: *Common Grounds* at Embajada, San Juan; and *From Aa to Zz* at Hidrante, San Juan. Group exhibitions and art fairs during recent years include: *Nunca es suficiente*, at KM 0.2, San Juan; Liste Art Fair, Basel, CH; *Documento*, at Embajada, San Juan; Material Art Fair, México City; and MECA International Art Fair, San Juan. He has also been recipient of various residencies, such as La Práctica, Beta-Local, San Juan, PR; and La Ira de Dios, Buenos Aires, ARG.

Images: Tyler Lafreniere, *Master of Reality*, 2022, Silkscreened acrylic and flashé on wood panel, 34 x 24 in. (86.4 x 61 cm). Image courtesy of the artist.

Manuel Mendoza Sánchez, *Serenito*, 2022, ceramic, colored pencils, acrylic, printed images sealed with resin, 13 1/2 x 10 x 10 in. (34.3 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm). Image courtesy of the artist.

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