

## ***Aliens with Extraordinary Abilities***

Multimedia artist José Carlos Casado's *Aliens with Extraordinary Abilities* series positions us within the borders of a deliberately conflicted landscape. Casado presents a world in which digital video and 3D animations merge in a series that explores the discomfort of one's own nature; a world that is infatuated with the duality of disaffection; a world that challenges notions of assumed reality. Casado's title, which most certainly refers to laws regarding non-immigrant Visas for non-citizens seeking work in their desired fields within the United States, guides these negotiations and prepares us for an experience of reimagining an existence beyond some privileged realm of any given. Casado's vision operates within a set of prearranged rules, but they are in opposition to a previously agreed upon reality. An elephant could belong in front of a river in one of Casado's frames, but—having been re-imagined by Casado's particular sensibilities, having been slowed and relegated to repetitive languid movements—it undoubtedly doesn't belong. We cannot help but surmise this as representative of Casado's own conflicted tensions: between an assumptive certainty and personal truth, between an advantaged notion of belonging and a reality of alienation.

Casado explores these themes on both an intimate and vast, more complex scale. In a scene possessing at least four layers of action, we are given much more to consider. An ostrich, enacting its own slowed, repetitive performance, forces its legs, scoops back dirt that explodes, across the frame, a fast release, like a bullet.

Casado's ostrich is a tease. Its mouth is open; the slow speed of its legs is nearly painful. And so we find ourselves once again inextricable from the piece, we begin to feel ourselves needing the syncopated blast of dust and earth clods when they come, across the frame, off beat, almost too late. This looped blast becomes the action we can count on. It soothes us and assists us in our compulsion to decipher just what Casado wants us to see.

If Casado is the elephant and the ostrich, then this second segment reveals alienation on a larger scale. If the elephant segment was intimate, the ostrich allows us to experience a more external tension, one that positions the self against city, others, the world.

In another segment, insects are sped up and frenetic. This time there are two creatures moving. The two insects might or might not touch, but still, we can't help feel ourselves quicken, aroused.

They are, again, manipulated live beings, moving as no real life creature is able—over and over, exactly the same, never diverging. Perhaps this is what Casado needs under the circumstances. Perhaps this segment is a gesture to what he envisions as possible within the confines of an external set of realities he must operate within. In this way, the contrast in the previous pieces—the individual creatures so obviously controlled, roboticized, slowed down in an effort to stratify the self from the environment, the real from the unreal—is inverted, yet somehow closer to being reconciled. The space between the real and unreal feels less expansive.

In what seems to be a different series, but still under the same title and concept, there is a nude male figure, being shattered with bullets, accepting wounds to the back with seemingly little consequence. After the first hit, the figure evens straightens his posture in a subtle gesture that implies he is ready, willing, and able to stand firm and unscathed in spite of the onslaught.

The figure's physical reactions, two hands reaching around to knead the unharmed flesh around the abrasions indicate a sense of self-soothing resistance—the figure acknowledges the assault but sits firm. In this way, while the nudity represents vulnerability, the hands moving over flesh communicate strength, a strength infused with self-possession and a sense of poised eroticism. In the end the figure rises up from his perch unscathed, his wounds released from his back and traveled up to a white wall. In this way, an assault on flesh bypasses its intended target and becomes art. Again Casado's tongue teases us from the flesh of his cheek. The sheer ridiculousness of it all becomes tangible, perceptible, and undeniable.

A headless figure knocking its way about a studio personifies this experience. Yet, the figure is not a victim. Because, Casado is never didactic. In fact, we are never encouraged to sympathize with his world or, even, to have compassion. We are purely invited into a process, a consideration, and an experience. Casado is unabashed, even playful, both qualities of which are alive in the title of the piece and within the movement itself.

One feels him struggling, but with an acute self-assuredness, strapped with a well-defined language, to lumber through what all great artists attempt: a lucid representation of what is personal and what is human, what is privilege and what is reality, and what happens when each element conflates.

**Ona Mirkinson**