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## Artist Francisco Moreno Is Showing in Oak Cliff Before He Becomes a Dallas Export

The Dallas artist has been hailed by museums and galleries across the country.

By Scott Tucker

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Catch Francisco Moreno's newest exhibition while you can. The artist is about to become another Dallas export. **Kevin Todora**

Some of the most successful creatives in Dallas reside in the Exposition Park neighborhood. The 4000 block of Commerce Street is home to loft studios, a boutique coffee shop, several world class-musicians and artists of all types. One of them is Dallas-based painter Francisco Moreno.

Over the past decade, Moreno has made a name for himself as both a collected artist and

an educator. Some of his most recent works are featured in the exhibition *Eugenics in the Garden*, running through Aug. 26 at Oak Cliff's new art gallery, Tureen (901 W. Jefferson Blvd.).

Born in 1986 and originally from Mexico City, Moreno spent his formative years growing up in Arlington. After graduating with an art degree from The University of Texas at Arlington, Moreno attended the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design and graduated in 2012 with a master of fine arts degree.

Upon returning to Dallas to kickstart his art career, the artist showed at several high-profile and experimental art spaces including F6, Oliver Francis Gallery and Circuit 12 Contemporary, among others. After securing a grant from The Dallas Museum of Art for inclusion in Soluna, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's first international music and arts festival in 2015, Moreno constructed a large-scale installation called "WCD Project," involving a 1975 Datsun 240Z outfitted in art imitating classic British WW2 naval camouflage.

The ambitious and highly detailed work was a nod to the classic painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware" by Emanuel Leutze and proved Moreno was capable of creating such a technically accomplished work.

"At the root of all of my work, I am interested in works that are slow and consume oneself," Moreno says. "I almost feel like I want to give more than what is asked of me because that's the work I like seeing myself."

In 2019, the DMA acquired Moreno's next major piece, "Chapel," through Erin Cluley Gallery, for its permanent collection. The large-scale walk-in chapel was on display as part of the exhibition *For a Dreamer of Houses* due to open in March of 2020 and presenting works by Alex Da Corte and Olivia Erlanger, among others. Although COVID delayed the opening by five months, the exhibition ran virtually online while the DMA was closed to the public. The exhibition still managed to attract national and international attention, further contributing to Moreno's reputation.

"I'm very grateful for Erin Cluley Gallery," Moreno says. "We did some great things together. She saw I wanted to make very ambitious projects, and it's always great to have support for my crazy ideas."

After showing "Chapel," Moreno's work was starting to take shape in new directions the artist was not anticipating. Having grown weary of completing such large projects, he was now becoming more interested in finding a different approach to his practice. A trip overseas to Italy redirected his efforts.

"I went to Italy for the first time and had been working predominantly in black and white," Moreno says. "After going to Rome and seeing all the frescoes of the Renaissance, I wanted to paint in color. I also wanted to start painting mythological

narrative paintings, or history paintings.”

He was also interested in simplifying his work by limiting himself to canvas and paint. As a self-described maximalist painter, the artist challenged himself to make the most of minimal space, distilling his ideas to their purest form. The European masters' works he encountered on his trip inspired this shift. Famous painters such as Peter Paul Rubens and Sandro Botticelli played a part in this transition.

“The great thing about a painting is that it’s my vision through and through, delivered to the gallery uninhibited by unaccountable elements. It’s also a practice in restriction,” Moreno says. “How do I make a painting that is all me? Simplifying my vision to a rectangle is the hardest challenge as a maximalist.”

This transition caught the attention of Houston-based art consultant and gallerist Cody Fitzsimmons and his partner Chris Scott. When deciding to open a gallery called Tureen in Oak Cliff, Moreno was their first choice to feature in a predominantly national roster for the gallery’s inaugural exhibition. For their initial opening, *Eugenics in the Garden*, Moreno contributed two paintings, including a large new acrylic painting titled “Melancholia II.”

“I think it’s cool when galleries bring artists from other places, but you can’t really foster a community that way,” Fitzsimmons says. “We first saw his work at *A Dreamer of Houses* and then fast-forward many months and a client based in Dallas sent me his work. I chose Francisco because his work fit the idea of the show, and I just got lucky.”

*Eugenics in the Garden* is a lifted title from a book of architectural criticism by Fabiola López-Durán, referring to the transatlantic movement of Western ideas of eugenics from Europe to South America. It deals with how public spaces should serve marginalized societies and about their effect on population.

“I wanted to show artists appropriating Western aesthetic ideals and how they are using them for their own end,” Fitzsimmons says. “For Francisco, so much of what he is interested in, including absurdist humor and art history, makes it a perfect fit because he’s paying homage to the historical art canon while also marrying absurdity to Western art history. This show walks that tight rope.”

Tureen serves as a much needed breath of fresh air in the Dallas contemporary art scene, as most of the innovative and experimental spaces that existed in the 2010s have shut their doors for good, leaving little in their wake except commercial art spaces specializing in art for hotels at best. It was the grittier experimental spaces that helped propel Moreno to the stature he enjoys today. Tureen co-owner Chris Scott says he couldn’t be more excited about the artist’s inclusion in the new gallery’s roster.

“More than anything we have a gallery because we want to do something timely and provoke what work can be shown in a Dallas gallery,” Scott says. “We are really going for

nuance, and I'm really glad to have him in the show."

For Moreno, the past decade's upward trajectory has been par for the course. After wrapping up the group exhibition at Tureen, the artist will enjoy the rare privilege of becoming a Dallas art export. The San Francisco-based COL Gallery, opened in Ghirardelli Square by Callie Jones and Julia Li, has scheduled Moreno's next solo exhibition for Jan. 12. Jones says Moreno's San Francisco debut is both welcomed and much deserved.

"Francisco's paintings are about the history of painting," Jones says. "They are as personal as they are fantastical and accept technology tentatively, while fearing its constant encroachment. They are beautiful explorations of cultural hybridity, and while they blend genres and time periods, they are ultimately about the communities we build."

For the solo exhibition, Moreno will once again create an entirely new body of work. His dedication, work ethic and vision make him one of the most prolific and successful artists living in Dallas.

"I've known Francisco for many years and always knew I wanted to work with him," Jones says. "He is one of the most disciplined, passionate, professional artists I've had the pleasure of knowing. His work struck me immediately and we are honored to have the opportunity to present a new body of his works in January."

Although Moreno has proved his talents to both himself and the art world time and time again, the artist is just now becoming comfortable listening to his inner voice, trusting his instincts and letting his creativity lead the way for his life.

"I've realized that the most important thing for me is focusing on the work, and allowing myself to make the paintings I want to make," he says. "I'm not sure if that's practical, but I'm making painting now for me and I'm excited to do it. I've really learned to love that and trust my vision."