

PRESS RELEASE

## **KICHE, Callan Grecia Solo Exhibition *Absolute Lightspeed***

On view August 30 – September 24, 2022



Exhibition view of *Absolute Lightspeed* at KICHE, Seoul  
(Image courtesy of KICHE and Callan Grecia)

KICHE is pleased to announce Callan Grecia's solo show *Absolute Lightspeed* to be held from August 30 to September 24, 2022. In this new body of works created for the show, Callan Grecia projects himself and us on alien figures. He explores the way and the speed in which we see the world – as well as the presence and absence of time and space surrounding it.

### **KICHE**

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Today, images are consumed constantly and instantly through omnipresent screens. As Paul Virillio described, we've reached an 'absolute speed' in which things are immediately accessible. Physical distance, arrival and departure have become irrelevant, for which, naturally, we hardly experience time anymore. In those screens, we encounter images of historical classics just before we scroll down to find a fancy meal of a stranger living halfway across the globe. Yet, somehow, they seem to resemble the works of the artist.

The artist adopts references varying from Caravaggio to Tal R and bricks as well as logos of popular brands. For example, brick is a motif deeply embedded in the history of South Africa which also used to be one of the markers of one's social status. In his works, it often becomes the background or a frame for different figures and scenes. As the artist puts, this is not merely an exercise in fusing history with the contemporary but an infusion of his own heritage, culture, and scope of interest being raised in a "post-apartheid" South Africa. Portals that sporadically appear throughout the exhibition seem to be inviting us to look from a distance the trippy world captured in the artist's works.

"Flattening," either ideological or perceptive, is one of the essential features Callan Grecia uses to describe the modern image economy. The hierarchy of importance or categories of art, advertisement, journalism and surveillance are flattened. Creating an assemblage of iconography that spans broadly, his work is also a flattening of such multifarious and with an alien as the main character-slash-observer, added are the dimensions of time, space and speed.



Callan Grecia  
Space Vase  
2022  
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas  
40 x 30 cm

### **About Callan Grecia**

Callan Grecia was born in Durban, South Africa in 1991, and currently lives and works in George, South Africa. In 2017 he completed his Master of Fine Art degree in painting at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. Grecia presented solo shows at SMAC (2022, Stellenbosch); SMAC (2021, Cape Town); Rhodes University Somerset Gallery (2017, Grahamstown), and The Albany Natural Science Museum in Grahamstown (2014, Grahamstown). He has also presented group exhibitions at Paris Fashion Week Men FW19 (2019, Paris); RK Contemporary (2019, Cape Town); KZNSA Gallery (2019, Durban); and The Cosmopolitan (2019, Johannesburg) among many.



Callan Grecia\_ Eternal Return, 2022, Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 120 x 100 cm



Callan Grecia\_ Floaters 1a, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 50 cm



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Callan Grecia\_ We Don't Come In Peace, We Just Hate Photos, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 100 cm  
Courtesy of KICHE x SMAC © Callan Grecia



Callan Grecia  
The Observable and Unobservable Universe  
2022, Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 60 cm



Callan Grecia  
The Observable and Unobservable Universe  
2022, Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 60 cm

***Absolute Lightspeed***

Callan Grecia cannot approach the canvas without prior immersion in the media from which he derives his themes and ideas. Scrolling, reading and viewing are the primary inputs that fuel his imagination.

Grecia regards himself as a draughtsman first and a painter second, so conceptualisation begins with a Lyra 6B pencil and sketchbook. Only the strongest ideas are selected for expansion and colourisation on canvas.

Colour adds dimensionality but Grecia is at pains to explain how he translates monochromatic pencil tones into the vivid, unadulterated hues of Absolute Lightspeed. The process is intuitive but the brightness deliberate, as Grecia takes advantage of his eye for contrast, honed in the tropical environment of Durban.

It has taken Grecia three years to adjust from the oils in which he trained to acrylics. This relatively new journey has necessitated changes in style that have proved to be enjoyable for the artist. One technique he has developed to boost viscosity is the application of a base-coat. This initial step lets Grecia's brush glide familiarly over the canvas.

As a South African artist descended from the diasporic Indian community of Durban – the largest in the world outside of India – Grecia's oeuvre has had to resist the imposition that it comment on Indian positionality in a country obsessed with black-white relations. It is easy to read the alien motif ubiquitous in Absolute Lightspeed as the marker of an outsider in racial terms, but it is simultaneously more and less than this interpretation. The alien iconography is representative of a personal aesthetics, influenced by the artist's immersion in the popular imaginary of the 90s. Films like Independence Day (1996) and television programmes such as The Outer Limits (1995) centred extraterrestrials in the public consciousness, providing Grecia with an easily recognisable reference for feelings of isolation and rebellion.



Callan Grecia\_ Fast Vase, 2022,  
Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 60 cm

The artist conceals his true nature behind a mask, and hints at this coping mechanism by depicting alien facades as disembodied, floating, two-dimensional headwear that could be applied to the face by a palm of the hand. Sometimes Grecia includes a green three-fingered salute to claim possession of a hidden self, ward off unwanted attention, or recognise those engaged in similar politics of the self.

Painting allows Grecia to build a world for a self in need of representation. In an industry where taste-making has been the preserve of white painters from wealthy families with artistic pedigree, the artist of colour at work on an autobiographical symbology must guard against an inferiority complex. Grecia bestows upon himself the permission to turn 90s pop-culture references such as the Nike swoosh or the E30 BMW 325is, into codes that not only edify but signify homage and aspiration.

In the Durban-based Indian community, the belief is that only those who have succeeded can afford face-brick homes. So



Grecia tips his hat to this marker of class mobility by including brickwork in the background and edges of his frames. When the artist was growing up, his family was obsessed with the attainment of a particular type of vase that would communicate their taste and status to visitors. As a result, vases proliferate *Absolute Lightspeed*, signalling – tongue in cheek – the artist’s attainment of a certain prominence. The vases also hark back to a time when Grecia was cutting his teeth drawing still-lives, thereby tracing the journey from relative anonymity to solo exhibitions. As *memento mori*, the flower housing is a reminder to smell the roses before they are cast on the casket.

That being said, *Absolute Lightspeed* is not overly concerned with mortality, though the temptation exists to impose a preoccupation with death on the portals propagating the series. Through them Grecia doffs a cap at one of his favourite paintings: Peter Doig’s *Tunnel Painting (Country-rock)* of the year 2000. It is the open-endedness of divine pathways, teleportation, and the third-eye that appeals to Grecia. The humble smartphone, too, functions as a transportative device, though one leading not, necessarily, to the palace of wisdom. The search for answers has taken Grecia to the writings of the cultural theorist and aesthetic philosopher Paul Virilio.

The urbanist, whose final project involved building the first Museum of the Accident, is the only philosopher Grecia reads. Virilio believed that technology cannot exist without the potential for accidents. Technology – epitomised by television in Virilio’s time – separates us from the events of real space and time. It causes us to lose sight of the immediate horizon and resort to the indirect horizon of the dissimulated environment. The Accident, then, functions as a fractal meteorite hailing from a propitious darkness concealing future collisions. It is a comet hurtling through the open-endedness of Grecia’s portals, to shock the viewer back into corporeal embeddedness.

Upon engagement with Grecia’s collection, the viewer will have to teleport or pass through at *Absolute Lightspeed* and salute the human faces behind alien masks; navigate 90s folklore through Grecia’s emblematic retelling; take in the knick-knacks that found their way to the artist’s childhood home and adult work; and reconcile all of the above with the Einstein reference that gives Grecia’s second solo show of the year the title of *Absolute Lightspeed*.

**Lumumba Mthembu**

Arts Reviewer



Exhibition view of *Absolute Lightspeed* at KICHE, Seoul  
(Image courtesy of KICHE and Callan Grecia)

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Callan Grecia\_ Fishing For Compliments, 2022, Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 120 x 100 cm  
Courtesy of KICHE x SMAC © Callan Grecia





Exhibition view of *Absolute Lightspeed* at KICHE, Seoul  
(Image courtesy of KICHE and Callan Grecia)

### **About Lumumba Mthembu**

Lumumba Mthembu is an art reviewer based in Durban, South Africa. He completed an MA in English Literature at Rhodes University, Grahamstown in 2016 and a PhD in 2019. In 2015, Lumumba was selected in the Mandela Rhodes Foundation's 2015 cohort of scholars, one of the prestigious scholarships in South Africa. His reviews and short stories have appeared in ArtThrob, Mail & Guardian, The Journalist, Ja. Magazine, Jiggered, Durban is Yours, and Itch.

### **About KICHE**

Based in Seoul, KICHE aims to present the works of both local and international contemporary artists, building an alternative platform for communication, cooperation and partnership within and outside of the art scene. The gallery continues to pursue its vision of experimentation by closely collaborating with a range of experts and institutions, establishing itself as a creative and engaging gallery. The gallery works to support its artists' unique practices and to expand their opportunities and recognition.

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