Chisme, Installation View, 2022
Oil, acrylic and graphite on board,
Variable dimensions
Studio Lenca & WeCount!
Workshop images from the production of ‘Chisme’, 2022
Studio Lenca in collaboration with WeCount
Jose Campos (aka Studio Lenca) is an artist that doesn’t belong anywhere apart from the world he paints.

The artist spent his early years in a corrugated metal shelter in Santiago Nonualco, El Salvador. Unsure of his official date of birth or family history. Later he travelled illegally overland with his mother to the USA. The aim was to join his father who was later incarcerated and consequently absent during his entire life. The family lived as ‘illegal aliens’, cleaning houses and with no fixed address.

Displaced as a consequence of El Salvador’s violent civil war. Jose was one of the first wave of child migrants moving to the USA. The artist is part of a Latinx generation that is finally being heard.

Jose Campos now goes by the name Studio Lenca. ‘Studio’ refers to a space for experimentation, a laboratory for praxis; ‘Lenca’ links the artist to the Mesoamerican indigenous people of eastern El Salvador. The artist has been told his mother has Lenca heritage but family trees and formal records are the reserve of the privileged in El Salvador.

Monumental figures stare out from the canvas, holding our gaze. Sharply dressed in canary yellow, tangerine or neon pink, frozen in movement they confidently take up space. It’s unclear if these figures are dancing or running, in the formative years of Studio Lenca these were one and the same thing. Being illegal in the USA requires all the dexterity, razor sharp reflexes and timing of a corps de ballet dancer. Studio Lenca’s been both. The young artist attended free ballet classes where he learnt to escape his circumstances. The men in his paintings could easily be enthralled with the sounds of Selena Quintanilla, moving balletically through elaborate bureaucratic processes or dodging the glare of homeland security.

Studio Lenca paintings are self-assured, proud, courageous and visible. All the things that a young Studio Lenca couldn’t be. Poor, queer, displaced and ‘illegal’. His story is one of being a perpetual guest. A consequence of geopolitics entangled with a legacy of colonial violence meant his father was of light skinned Chalatenango origin. Not quite brown or white enough to fit into any of the usual categories.

Studio Lenca paints through the problems of his own sense of belonging to defy the narrative surrounding his Latinx community. The artist manipulates visibly Latinx cues which he recalibrates, creating a joyful world for an imagined flourishing. Collaged sopresa wrappers, colones, cargo sacks and indigo paste are used as triggers for collective re-imagining. Studio Lenca crafts a world where Latinx figures have dignity. Crowned with extravagant hats and bold colours, an altogether different sensibility to a childhood of forced assimilation and secrecy.

Studio Lenca is unapologetically honest, paints out of proportion and plays by his own rules. His technique sitting slightly astray from any ‘western’ canon. We witness the artist exploring an estranged cultural heritage. Through engaging with his work, we are invited on a journey to transgress the immigrant label. Alongside the figures in his paintings, Studio Lenca creates a world where Latinx people are empowered to take up space and tell their own stories.
Studio Lenca
B.1986 La Paz, El Salvador
Lives and works in the UK

Collections:
Studio Lenca is part of the collection at the MER Foundation

Education:
MA Arts & Learning 2019 Goldsmiths University of London
Art & Design PGCE 2015 Goldsmiths University of London
MA Contemporary Dance 2013 London Contemporary Dance School

2022
Solo Exhibitions:
Ni de aquí, ni de allá, Untitled Art Fair, Miami
A Losing Game, Soho Revue, London
The Journey Becomes You, Artual Gallery, Beirut
I’m working on leaving, Tang Contemporary, Seoul
When Home Won’t Let You Stay, Berlin Art Weekend, Berlin
The Dreamers, Foundry, Dubai
The Invisibles, Sierra Metro, Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh
Ninos, Artistella, London
Studio Jadaf, Dubai

Group Exhibitions:
Like there is hope and I can dream of another world, Hospital Rooms X Hauser & Wirth, Hauser & Wirth, London
Hometown Sessions 1, Edji Gallery, Paris
FreshPaint London, Noho Showroom, London
Orsini Palace, Studio 11, Rome

Adult by Nature, Quench Gallery, Margate
A Shadow Across A Line, Hatch Art Project, Singapore
Como la flor, Y.E.S Contemporary, Museum of Art, El Salvador
Polychromy, Artual Gallery, Beirut
Summer exhibition, Gallery Red, Palma
Pavilions, M.A.H Gallery, London
POW festival, Turner Contemporary, Margate
URVANIETY, Arniches Gallery, Prize Winner (Fundacion MER), Madrid
Identity, Artistella, London

2021
Arniches 26 Gallery, Madrid
Turner Open, Turner Contemporary, Margate
MAH, London Design Festival, London
Convergent acts, Bubble and Squeak, Brussels
Ni de aqui ni de alla Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles
The Pattern of patience at Marc Straus Gallery, New York
Los Historiantes, Nominated for Prix Pictet

2020
SWAB BARCELONA, Solo Exhibition, La Unica Galeria, El Salvador
Los Historiantes, Winner of the Open Solo exhibition Photofringe, Brighton
Unknown Learning, Northdown Studios, Margate
Peckham Pride Mural Culture Seeds, London
Queer’ing the art curriculum lecture University of Arts London
2019
Mile of String, Horniman Museum, London
Los Historiantes, ‘La Horchata’ Publication, Washington DC
Los Historiantes, VIA Arts Prize Embassy of El Salvador, London
Peoples Voices for Tony Cokes Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London
Los Historiantes, Margate NOW Festival, Margate
Doing and Undoing St James Gallery, Goldsmiths University, London

2018
Critical Pedagogy in Contested Spaces, Tate Modern, London
The Artist Teacher, 288 New Cross Rd, London

2017
Rural Painting School, La Paz, El Salvador

2016
Artist in Residence Under the Same Sun, South London Gallery, London

2015
Kill Kill Kill Parasol Unit Gallery, London

2014
Navigating dance with my fat body, 288 New Cross, London
Passport Please, 310 Gallery, London

2013
The Wave, Trinity Laban, London
The Wave, National Portrait Gallery, London

2012
Local Group Resolutions I, The Place, London

2011
Choreographic Scores at Trisha Brown Barbican Art Gallery, London

Visiting Lecturer
Goldsmiths CCA Assistant curator
Freelands Foundation
Unknown Learning Northdown studios
University of the Arts London
Embassy of El Salvador
VIA Arts Prize
University College London
University of Leeds
Trinity Laban
Chisme, 2022
Oil, acrylic and graphite on board,
Variable dimensions
Studio Lenca & WeCount!

Chisme is an installation of 15 figures by Studio Lenca in collaboration with WeCount!, a member led organisation of low wage workers. The works comprise of hand painted wooden cut outs ‘taking up space’ within the Parrish Art Museum.
The installation shows a moment a group of Latinx figures walk into the gallery.

One can imagine the group loudly chatting, joyously having a conversation amongst themselves, defying the usual tacit knowledge expected in a museum or gallery space. The work comes from the artist’s experiences of transgressing boundaries and invites viewers who feel they don’t belong into the space to do the same. It’s about breaking the unwritten rules and refusing to assimilate.

Studio Lenca grew up undocumented in a low income household. The installation is called ‘Chisme’ which is Spanish slang for gossip. This work gives a voice to those that are silenced by the US immigration system and addresses the prejudiced ‘gossip’ of the common narrative around immigration.

One side of the cut outs are are painted in the artists characteristic vibrant, bold style. These are proud charismatic Latinx immigrants, proudly wearing hats echoing nobility. The other side of the installation shows the raw wooden construction of the figures with drawings of plants, trees and seeds from low wage immigrant workers. This illustrates the banner slogan ‘They tried to bury us, they didn’t know we were seeds’ popularised during the 2018 protests against the Trump administration family separation policies. These defiant drawings cover the back of the work, further exploring the invisibility of these workers in American society.
THUMBNAIL IMAGES OF WORKS

Chisme, Installation view, 2022
Oil, acrylic and graphite on board,
Variable dimensions
Studio Lenca & WeCount!
DETAILS OF INDIVIDUAL WOKS

Each work has variable dimensions detailed on the following pages. Each work is attached to a stand with the following dimensions 24 x 48 x 4 inches.
Figure 1: 88 x 34 x 2 inches
Figure 3: 85 x 41 x 2 inches
Figure 5: 88 x 34 x 2 inches
Figure 6: 85 x 37 x 2 inches
Figure 8: 86 x 40 x 2 inches
Figure 9: 86 x 40 x 2 inches
Figure 10: 88 x 34 x 2 inches
Figure 12: 79 x 48 x 2 inches
Figure 13: 81 x 48 x 2 inches
Figure 14: 79 x 48 x 2 inches
Figure 15: 77 x 47 x 2 inches