

## Frank Diaz Escalet

kaufmann repetto is pleased to announce a solo exhibition with Frank Diaz Escalet, the first with the gallery, to be held in our venue in Milan from April 13 to May 28. The project has been conceived in collaboration with the New York based galleries Anton Kern and Andrew Kreps. As part of this conjunct program, a solo show of Diaz Escalet will be presented by Anton Kern gallery from May 6 through June 18.

Frank Diaz Escalet (1930 - 2012) was born in Puerto Rico; early in his life, at the age of four, his family was part of a wave of Puerto Ricans who emigrated to New York City in the midst of the Great Depression. Growing up in a poor, immigrant family in Spanish Harlem and then Greenwich Village, he started working in his teenage years to help support his family, taking on hard-labor jobs until he joined the US Air Force in 1947 (where he eventually fought in the Korean War). When he returned to New York in the 1950s, he took work in a wide variety of jobs working with his hands, and in 1958 his family opened a leathercraft shop in Greenwich Village where he honed his skills. Named "The House of Escalet", the extravagant leather garments produced by the family business soon attracted a celebrity clientele, among them musicians like Aretha Franklin and The Rolling Stones.

A self-taught artist surrounded by the ubiquitous and vibrant artistic Renaissance of Post-war New York, Diaz Escalet started making his own artistic compositions with leather in the early 1970s. While he made painting and furniture as well, his most recognized works are developed from a technique of inlaid leather, simple and stylized with expansive fields of bold colors, and a union between figuration and abstraction.

While reminiscent of early avant-garde techniques such as woodcut and collage, the super-flatness of his cartoonish compositions situate Diaz Escalet more in the realm of Pop art, relating to contemporaneous figures such as John Wesley, and to the post-surrealism of William N. Copley.

Despite the parody-infused vision of the banal (a common characteristic of Pop), inherent to Diaz Escalet's work is also a musicality and fluidity of form that speaks to his Afro-Caribbean background and heritage. Drawing on memories and personal experiences, he created challenging and innovative works that speak to the joys and hardships of ordinary people and immigrants, celebrating the dignity and determination of laborers, ironworkers, fishmongers, jazz musicians, street hawkers and common folk. In addition to surveying those in the urban streets around him, imagery and symbolism also emerge from his island origins, which is evident in his bright and vivid palette paired with marine scenery and shapes that -although abstract- are reminiscent of waves or marine creatures. The mostly "Untitled" works tell the stories of his life and the lives of those around him and reflect the experiences of immigrants, Latin Americans, and people of color.