

Las Flores... Tienen el Control

CARLOS AYALA BARRETO



The reflections in this publication represent my personal observations and are offered as an invitation to explore the symbolic language and themes present in Carlos Ayala's work.

— Carolina Santiago

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Celebrating Carlos Ayala's Latest Exhibition

At CSB Fine Arts, one of the things we enjoy most is celebrating the accomplishments of the artists we represent. These pages highlight Las Flores... Tienen el Control, Carlos Ayala's latest exhibition, currently on view at I AM ART Puerto Rico in San Juan.

Although CSB Fine Arts is not involved in organizing the exhibition, I wanted to share this important moment in Carlos's career with our community of collectors, curators, and friends.

Congratulations to Carlos Ayala, and my thanks to gallery owner Ángel Mathieu and the entire team at I AM ART Puerto Rico for bringing this exhibition to audiences in Puerto Rico.

The following pages are an invitation to spend time with Carlos's work and explore some of the symbols and ideas that appear throughout his paintings.

— *Carolina Santiago*

Sometimes I look into people's eyes, searching for the hope I can't find in my own. So, I search deep within and paint eyes hoping that when I look into them, I'll find it there.

The worlds I create rise from the deepest parts of my memory and soul, carrying pieces of me I have yet to understand. Maybe one day, I will.

— Carlos Ayala

About the exhibition

Carlos Ayala creates worlds filled with symbols inspired by personal experiences. Faces, eyes, flowers, skulls, dragons, and teddy bears appear again and again throughout his paintings, creating a visual language that is uniquely his own.

In *Las Flores... Tienen el Control*, Carlos reflects on the many voices that influence our lives. The flowers that appear throughout the exhibition can be seen as the thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and expectations that constantly surround us. Some help us grow. Others distract us or make it harder to see clearly.

Many of the recurring characters in his paintings act almost like guides. The teddy bear, for example, is deeply personal. It refers to a childhood accident that damaged Carlos's right eye and has become a symbol of memory and personal history.

The dragon represents the ego. It is that voice inside all of us that never seems to stop talking. It influences

how we see ourselves and how we respond to the world around us.

The skull reminds us that life is temporary. Rather than being something dark, it encourages us to appreciate the time we have and to live more consciously.

Carlos doesn't offer easy answers. Instead, he invites us to slow down and reflect. His paintings ask questions. How much of what we believe truly belongs to us? Which voices should we listen to? How do we tell the difference between wisdom and ego?

Whether he is working on canvas or silicone, Carlos turns personal experiences into paintings that speak to all of us. The more time you spend with them, the more connections you begin to discover.



SYMBOLIC MOTIFS

As I spent time with Carlos's paintings, I began to notice certain symbols appearing again and again. Bears, eyes, dragons, flowers, and skulls seem to move from one painting to another like familiar characters in a story.

These symbols are much more than decorative elements. They help Carlos tell stories about memory, identity, fear, healing, and the experiences that shape who we become.

Together, they form a visual language that allows him to talk about some of life's biggest questions. They connect personal experiences with feelings and struggles that many of us can relate.



Tulip Martini
2026 / Acrylic, pencil and paper on canvas / 30" X 24"

The Bear: Memory Before Words

The teddy bear is one of the most personal symbols in Carlos's work. It represents the artist himself as a child and refers to the accident that damaged his right eye.

What I find especially moving is that this event happened before Carlos was old enough to fully understand it or even put it into words.

The bear often carries scars and a button eye. It reminds us that some experiences leave their mark on us long before we understand their meaning.

Throughout Carlos's work, the bear is not simply a childhood toy. It becomes a witness to memory, survival, and the person we slowly become.

It reminds us that our experiences, especially the difficult ones, stay with us and help shape who we are.



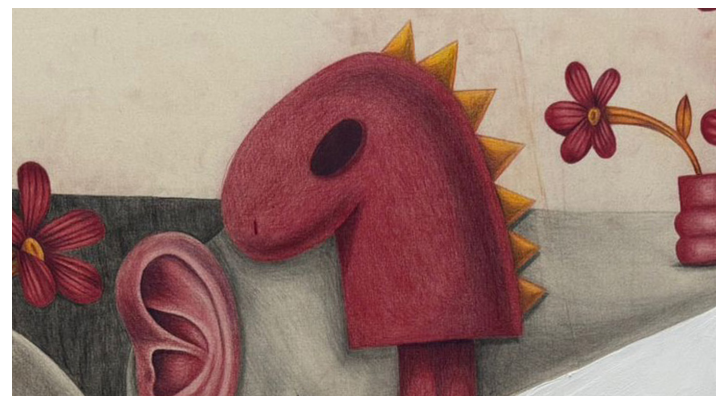
The Dragon: The Voice of the Ego

The dragon appears again and again throughout Carlos's work. In ancient mythology, dragons often represent the ego, and Carlos uses them in that way.

We all have that voice inside our heads. It wants attention. It wants control. Sometimes it gives us confidence, and other times it fills us with fear and doubt. The dragon becomes the face of that voice.

Although it often looks playful, its meaning runs much deeper. It reflects the constant struggle between instinct and reason, confidence and insecurity, wisdom and ego.

The dragon reminds us that there is always a voice inside us telling stories, and those stories can shape the way we experience life.



The Skull: Remembering that Life is Temporary

The skull is one of the clearest symbols in Carlos's work.

For many people, skulls are associated with fear. Carlos uses them as a reminder that life doesn't last forever. We often move through life as if we have endless time, and the skull reminds us that our time here is limited.

Placed beside flowers and symbols of childhood, the skull creates an interesting balance. It reminds us that life is always changing and that growth and loss are part of the same journey.

Rather than focusing on death, Carlos uses the skull to encourage us to appreciate life.



The Eye: Perception and Identity

The eye is one of the most important symbols in Carlos's work.

More than simply representing sight, the eye speaks about the way we understand ourselves and the world around us.

Eyes appear everywhere in his paintings. Sometimes they are separate from the body. Sometimes they become part of another figure. No matter where they appear, they remind us that we all see life through our own experiences.

The eye is also very personal. It refers back to the childhood accident that affected Carlos's right eye. Because of that, the eye becomes much more than a symbol of vision. It speaks about awareness, vulnerability, and self-understanding.



Reflections on Selected Works

Reflections on Selected Works

Understanding the Visual Language of Carlos Ayala

As I have spent time with Carlos Ayala's paintings, I have noticed something that keeps appearing again and again. Although each painting tells its own story, many of them seem to explore the same questions about life.

His paintings often begin with difficult things. Loss. Fear. Sacrifice. Doubt. Mortality. But they rarely end there.

Again and again, I find myself seeing hope, healing, understanding, and transformation.

The teddy bear, flowers, eyes, skulls, dragons, clouds, and fragmented figures are not random. They are characters that return from one painting to another, carrying meanings that continue to grow and change.

The more I look at Carlos's work, the more I feel that he is telling a bigger story. A story about how we carry our wounds, struggle with our fears, learn from our experiences, and continue moving forward.

To me, his paintings are not about perfection. They are about becoming.

The following pages are simply my personal reflections on four paintings from *Las Flores... Tienen el Control*. They are not meant to provide answers, but rather to invite viewers to slow down, look closely, and discover their own meanings.

Un Día Entendí

(One Day I Understood)

The realization that hope and pain can exist together. Sometimes wisdom comes when we stop fighting life's contradictions and begin to accept them.

El Dragón me Susurra

(The Dragon Whispers to me)

The constant conversation between wisdom and ego. The stories we tell ourselves shape the way we experience life.

Perdí mis Brazos por Tantos Abrazos

(I Lost My Arms from Giving Too Many Hugs)

The wounds left by generosity can also become places where healing and beauty grow.

El Girasol Encontró la Luz

(The Sunflower Found the Light)

Healing often begins before we even recognize it.

Un Día Entendí / (One Day I Understood)



Un Día Entendí

2026 / Acrylic, pencil and paper on canvas / 30" X 24"

Un Día Entendí is one of the paintings that stayed with me longest.

The more I looked at it, the more I felt there was something deeper happening beneath the surface.

One of the first things that caught my attention was the head contained within an architectural structure. Maybe it suggests that some of the most important changes in our lives happen inside us. Understanding is not something we find somewhere else. It is something we slowly build within ourselves.

The skull reminds us that life is temporary.

What I find especially interesting is the contrast between the two eyes. One eye is dulled while the other feels full of life. One sheds a black tear while the other is bright and clear looking toward the flower.

One seems to focus on sorrow. The other looks toward hope.

Together, they suggest that understanding comes from accepting that sadness and hope can coexist. The toy bear reminds us to nurture the child within.

Throughout the painting, symbols of memory, imagination, mortality, and renewal exist side by side. Instead of fighting each other, they seem to work together to tell a larger story about the complexity of being human.

Green dominates the painting, bringing with it a feeling of growth and renewal. Even in the presence of loss and vulnerability, hope remains.

To me, *Un Día Entendí* is not a painting about despair. It is a painting about awakening.

Like much of Carlos's work, this painting does not reveal everything at once. It asks us to slow down, think, and allow the meaning to appear little by little.

El Dragón me Susurra (The Dragon Whispers to me)



El Dragón me Susurra
2026 / Acrylic, pencil and paper on canvas 50" X 79"

What fascinates me most about this painting is how the body itself becomes a collection of symbols.

- The eye observes.
- The ear listens.
- The dragon whispers.
- The skull reminds.

And the body carries everything forward.

The flowers and the dragon share the same red tones. I find that especially interesting because they may not be opposites at all. Perhaps they represent two different responses to the same experiences. Perhaps those experiences carry the same weight.

Even the experiences that feed the ego can become opportunities for growth. It all depends on how we respond to them.

What I find striking is that the different elements never

seem completely connected. The figure appears fragmented, as if it is being shaped by many voices at once.

Maybe that is true for all of us.

External expectations, personal experiences, fears, memories, and the stories we tell ourselves all influence the way we understand our surroundings.

To me, this painting speaks about the ongoing conversation between wisdom and ego. And perhaps one of the hardest things in life is learning which voice deserves our attention.

The dragon reminds us that the stories we tell ourselves have consequences. How we choose to feed our thoughts — with fear, with doubt, or with intention — is ultimately what shapes who we become.

Perdí mis Brazos por Tantos Abrazos (I Lost My Arms from Giving Too Many Hugs)

The title alone immediately caught my attention. There is something beautiful and heartbreaking about it.

The figure has lost its arms from giving too many hugs. To me, it speaks about the emotional cost of loving and caring deeply for others.

What I find most interesting is that emptiness does not take the place of the missing arm. A flower grows there instead. Loss and growth share the same space but growth feels stronger.

The teddy bear, with its button eye and visible scars, carries memories of childhood wounds. By placing the bear on top of a classical figure, Carlos seems to suggest that our wounds do not exist outside of us. They become part of who we are.

The large green eye brings another feeling into the painting. Green often speaks about growth, hope and renewal.

It almost feels as though the painting is asking us to see beyond what has been lost and recognize what continues to grow. Because this painting is not only about sacrifice. It is also about what remains.

The figure carries scars, but life continues to emerge from those wounds.



Perdí mis Brazos por Tantos Abrazos,
2026 / Acrylic, pencil and paper on canvas / 66" X 30"

The missing arm reminds us that giving too much may leave marks, but the flower reminds us that those same experiences can also become the source of beauty, compassion, and renewal.

The loss is obvious. But the gift remains.



El Girasol Encontró la Luz
2026 / Acrylic, pencil and paper on canvas / 24" X 48"

El Girasol Encontró la Luz ***(The Sunflower Found the Light)***

Although the figure appears fragmented, it does not feel broken. The green tones suggest that something is already growing.

Sunflowers emerge from the figure, and one even replaces the face with a smile.

The eyes, although different in size, look in the same direction. Nothing seems to be pulling the figure apart. Instead, everything appears to be moving toward the same understanding.

What I find most beautiful is that the sunflower becomes the true subject of the painting. The figure does not find the light. Something growing inside the figure finds the light. Sometimes healing begins before we realize it.

Part of us starts moving toward hope and understanding while another part still carries fear, uncertainty, and old memories.

Carlos reminds us that transformation is not a destination. It is a process. Renewal begins long before we have all the answers.

Sometimes all it takes is for something within us to begin turning toward the light.

Artist Biography

Carlos Ayala Barreto (b. 1988, New York City) is a Puerto Rican contemporary artist whose work explores identity, memory, perception, and self-awareness through a highly personal visual language. Over the years, he has developed a distinctive symbolic universe where recurring figures such as the bear, eye, dragon, flower, and skull reappear throughout his work, each carrying meanings that continue to evolve over time.

He studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de Bayamón and the Liga de Arte de San Juan before earning a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from the University of Puerto Rico School of Fine Arts.

Ayala has exhibited throughout Puerto Rico and the United States, including presentations at Art on Paper (New York), Art Fair 14C (New Jersey), and The Arts Center at Governors Island (New York). His work spans painting, drawing, and tattoo-based artworks on silicone, where he transforms the language of permanent marking into works that explore how we see ourselves, remember our experiences, and make sense of the world around us.

He lives and works in Bayamón, Puerto Rico.



A Personal Note

I am Carolina Santiago, founder and director of CSB Fine Arts and the author of this publication.

For the past four years, I have had the privilege of working with Carlos Ayala and watching him grow as an artist. I have always loved his character, Mr. Button, but what continues to draw me to his work is its surrealism and the depth behind every painting. The more time I spend with his work, the more I discover.

I believe it is important to celebrate every accomplishment of the artists I represent. I am grateful that Carlos has allowed me to be part of his journey and to share his work with new audiences.

Running an independent gallery in New York comes with many challenges. I have learned to see every obstacle as a stepping stone because I believe deeply in my mission: creating opportunities for Puerto Rican artists and bringing their work to collectors and audiences who might not otherwise discover them.

My goal is not simply to run a gallery. It is to build a cultural institution where Puerto Rican artists can share their art, their stories, their hopes, and their vision with the world while receiving the recognition they deserve.





*Despite the harshness of life, I
continue to believe that a better world
is always possible, even if it exists first
through the language of imagination*

— Carlos Ayala

Visualization of Selected Works




Digital visualization of selected works installed in a contemporary gallery environment.





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