

JAMES HARRIS GALLERY
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PRESS RELEASE



“Ghost Stories: Ronald Hall and Freddy Ortega”

May 16 to June 27, 2026

Gallery Hours: Thu to Sat 12:00-5:00PM

and by appointment

Reception: May 16th, 4-7PM

Left: Ronald Hall “Virtual Assimilation” 2026

Acrylic on linen 25” x 20”

James Harris Gallery is pleased to present *Ghost Stories*, a two-person exhibition featuring the work of Brooklyn-based artist Ronald Hall and El Paso-based artist Freddy Ortega. Through richly layered narrative paintings, both artists construct otherworldly spaces where figures grapple with the complexities of past, present, and future. The exhibition explores how personal and collective histories shape contemporary identity, revealing how echoes of the past continue to haunt and reverberate in the present.

Ghost Stories highlights each artist’s engagement with historical memory, drawing attention to the tension embedded within the historical record. Hall and Ortega create unsettling juxtapositions that invite viewers into complex visual narratives, where moments of dislocation and ambiguity give rise to deeper reflection. In many ways, their work recalls the tradition of Romantic “history painting,” yet replaces classical subject matter with urgent contemporary concerns.

Over the past year, Freddy Ortega has deepened his exploration of Pre-Columbian art alongside his Mexican heritage. His paintings merge personal mythology with elements of fantasy, offering symbolic cues that prompt imaginative interpretation. In *Sueño Roto / Broken Dream*, Ortega presents a migration narrative through the unlikely convergence of the Humpty Dumpty fable and Aztec mythology. The work reflects the emotional and physical challenges of leaving one’s home in search of opportunity, while also addressing the enduring impacts of colonialism as well as current U.S. border policies.

Ronald Hall’s *Virtual Assimilation* exemplifies his signature surrealist approach to narrating Black history and contemporary experience. A hybrid musical instrument—part banjo, part fiddle—references the ingenuity and craftsmanship of enslaved Africans, as well as the foundational role of Black culture in American music. A central figure wearing a VR headset evokes a 19th-century image of an enslaved person seeking freedom via the Underground Railroad. Hall’s vivid palette and dreamlike compositions intertwine historical references with speculative imagery, encouraging viewers to engage with the work through open interpretation.

Through carefully constructed visual cues, both artists guide viewers to question what is visible, what is absent, and what remains unheard. Each painting unfolds gradually, revealing layered narratives that reward close looking. In *Ghost Stories*, shadowy remnants of the past emerge as persistent, often uneasy presences, prompting confrontation with difficult realities. At once disorienting and evocative, *Ghost Stories* challenges assumptions while underscoring the fluid nature of identity and history. The exhibition ultimately reminds us that while the past may linger, it is not fixed—change, reflection, and evolution remain possible.