

Rafael Trelles, Caliban XII, 2026. Oil on linen, 50.8 x 76.2 cm.

Rafael Trelles: Caliban

26th November, 2026 – 16th January, 2027

October Gallery presents *Caliban*, a second solo exhibition by Puerto Rican artist **Rafael Trelles**, in which the artist transforms one of Shakespeare's most questionable and contested of characters into a powerful symbol of indigenous resistance to colonial domination.

Known for their artful mastery, Trelles' paintings depict magico-mythical realms conjured from overlapping layers that play with fantastical effects of light and shade. This latest series of paintings focuses on the character of Caliban, the sole inhabitant of the mysterious island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* on which the exiled Duke Prospero and his retinue have been shipwrecked. While Shakespeare's tale recounts how Prospero used his magical powers to subjugate the 'savage' Caliban, control his captive spirits and dominate the unfolding narrative, Trelles entirely reverses that perspective to paint *his* Caliban figure as an archetype of the colonised subject. In this alternative magical-realist version, Caliban is endowed with symbolic attributes of dignity and resilience while his intuitive understanding of the complexities of the local fauna and flora suggest his inner determination to restore the lost freedoms of his occupied island home. Trelles' *re-visions* draw upon the writings of the influential Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar, who proposed that the name 'Caliban' acts as an anagram of 'cannibal', itself etymologically associated with the word *Caribe*, referring to all the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean island chain. For Trelles, this linguistic and historical connection becomes deeply personal, leading him to state, 'In this precise sense, I *am* Caliban.'

Within the succession of ethereal canvases, Caliban is shown existing in harmony with his environment, a creature entirely at home in his dreamlike native state. By contrast, the interloper, Prospero, epitomises the western objectifying viewpoint, seeking to separate entities into categories that can be ordered and dominated using colonial systems of control. Trelles' paintings portray the natural world neither as a passive backdrop nor as a commodity ripe for exploitation, but, instead, as an active space of symbiosis and

interconnectivity. By bringing to the surface hidden links between literary figures and historical realities, Trelles connects the colonial history of the Caribbean with contemporary experiences of migration, racism and cultural displacement, while simultaneously revealing how the tales we tell ourselves might unconsciously condition the worlds we inhabit.

The magical island depicted by Trelles can be understood simultaneously as landscape, memory and cultural territory. It evokes a way of being in which the natural world is encountered through passive integration rather than active possession. This becomes significant in relation to the colonial history of the Caribbean islands. Colonialism not only displaced peoples and redefined their cultures; it also transformed land into territory to be mapped, owned and exploited. Trelles's imagery proposes a very different relationship: one in which the human figure rather than dominating the landscape recognises their position as an integral part of it. Trelles ultimately proposes Caliban's reclamation of identity as being local to a known environment: the transformation of a figure historically deprived of agency who asserts their right to define themselves as a being inseparable from the natural world that nurtures them.

About Rafael Trelles
Born, 1957, Santurce, Puerto Rico. Lives and works in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Rafael Trelles began studying painting at the age of eleven, under the guidance of Spanish painter Julio Yort. In 1980, Trelles did postgraduate studies at the University of Mexico, Mexico City. In 1985, he moved to the Canary Islands in Spain and began to explore alchemy, mysticism and magic. He developed the technique of combining naturalistic drawings of flora and fauna in ways that suggest overtones of ethereal significance. His paintings are suffused with hints of hidden insight and awareness. He first showed with October Gallery in 2018, as part of the exhibition *Portal* with a series of works called *Flora*, in which he invited the viewer to participate in a naturalist trance.

Trelles has been exhibited internationally including, Elite Fine Arts Gallery, Florida; Queens Museum of Art, New York, USA; the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts (CMCArts), Frederiksted, Saint Croix, US Virgin Islands; and Galería de Arte del Complejo Cultural BUAP, Puebla, Mexico. In 2018, a major exhibition *Santurce, un libro mural,* was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico. His work is in many collections including: Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico, Santurce, Puerto Rico; Ramapo College Museum, New Jersey, Rollins Museum, Orlando Florida; Library of Congress, Washington, USA; and University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia.

In 2018, works by Trelles were part of the group exhibition *Portal*, at October Gallery. In 2021 Museo de las Américas, Puerto Rico, presented a solo show of Trelles' work, entitled *The Imagined Word,* the exhibition was inspired by the artist's readings of works by writers including Lewis Carroll, Gabriel García Márquez and Franz Kafka. In the same year he presented *Axis Mundi,* his first solo exhibition at October Gallery, London.

For more information contact Alana Pryce Tojcic alana@octobergallery.co.uk and for press images and please click the Dropbox here:

A Private View will take place on Wednesday 25th November, at 6 pm – 8.30 pm at October Gallery. RSVP to alana@octobergallery.co.uk or book your place on Eventbrite.

Gallery Talk: *Rafael Trelles in Conversation with Gerard Houghton.*
Saturday, 25th November | 3 pm – 4.30 pm | Entry Free.

October Gallery is pleased to present a talk between artist Rafael Trelles and Gerard Houghton, the Gallery's Director of Special Projects, held in conjunction with the exhibition *Rafael Trelles: Caliban.*

The discussion offers insights into Trelles' distinctive artistic practice and the ideas informing his paintings. Drawing on works featured in the exhibition, Trelles will explore the Caribbean culture that shapes his work, alongside the inspirations and concerns which underpin his current practice. The talk connects Caribbean colonial history with contemporary questions of identity, migration, racism and cultural displacement, offering a poetic meditation on land, memory and the right to define one's own story.

Book your place on Eventbrite here or RSVP alana@octobergallery.co.uk
The conversation will take place on the ground floor of October Gallery.

Exhibition:	*Rafael Trelles: Caliban*
Dates:	26th November – 16th January, 2027
Private View:	Wednesday, 25th November, 2026
Venue:	October Gallery 24 Old Gloucester Street London WC1N 3AL
Telephone:	020 7242 7367
Opening hours:	Tuesday – Saturday 12.30 - 5.30 pm
Admission:	Free
Website:	www.octobergallery.co.uk
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Nearest tubes:	Holborn/Russell Square

The exhibition and October Gallery is supported by

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