

# Wonderland.

**Emerging: Farley Aguilar**

**By Heike Dempster**

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It's almost Halloween and Farley Aguilar's self-taught art is sending a chill down our spine. Born in Ecuador and raised in Miami, Aguilar's disquietingly creepy paintings play off the idea of mob mentality and fizz with barely-concealed violence and dread.



**Your latest solo exhibition, “Americana”, explored American culture and society. Where were you going with this idea?**

Americana is an offspring of a series called Dogville which is based on Lars Van Trier's film of the same name. I was working on pieces for the Dogville series for about a year and I made the Nuclear Family piece. It got me thinking that since I have a solo show coming up I can transition into something else. All the issues that I was working on Dogville could easily be focused into an American context. What really interests me about the works is the complex nature of violence, how habituation and socialization are forms of violence and how this can lead an individual to also be violent.

**What sparked your interest in social structures, individual identity and the relationship between the two?**

Ever since I can remember I was defensive and sensitive to the idea of an individual's identity and the possible coercion of social structures. Reading Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground" when I was younger had a real life changing impact, I couldn't believe how close I felt to this story. Dostoevsky's story is all about an individual struggling against the idea of a perfect society of reason and beauty, symbolized by the Crystal Palace. Something within me gravitates to this struggle everyone goes through, I don't exactly know why.



**Why the focus on anxiety and violence, then?**

No matter what subject I set out to portray it ends up having a sense of violence and anxiety within it. I think that deep down I don't trust people and I certainly don't trust groups. Apart from anything personal, violence is fascinating because, like humor, it's a transcendental part of society that expresses a lot about the darker more irrational aspects of society itself.

**So that sense of danger in your paintings is deliberate?**

Yes, there is usually danger just lurking around the corner. One of the first paintings I ever showed was a group of boys around a fire. A very typical Boy Scout camp fire, but I turned it into a potentially threatening ritual in which the group sacrifices one of its members. I definitely don't plan adding lurking danger in my images but it's something that is natural about what I make art about.

**In your recent work you use Xs to mark people's faces. Could you elaborate?**

The first time I found myself using an X in an image, it was purely an act of aggression or disgust for what I was seeing in the image. After this I started realizing the amazing implications of a mark like an X. The X is usually used as a symbol of negation or death. Lots of times it's also a state of mind in my pictures. Often the central characters in the pictures have some sort of mind or perception control over the other characters and there is an interplay of symbols on the characters' hands, faces and foreheads.

**Have you made any new observations on American culture that you're planning to explore?**

I'm very interested in the detachment that comes along with technology in society. Even though we can connect with one another in all sorts of new and faster ways, people are more lonely and detached than ever.

