

A Blind Artist Finds New Ways of Seeing

After Manuel Solano's vision deteriorated because of an H.I.V.-related infection, the painter had to rethink everything.

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Manuel Solano's earliest paintings were all about subtle gradient and tone; photo-realistic objects emerged from mist or disappeared in receding space. But in early 2014, the Mexico City-based painter started to go blind as a result of an H.I.V.-related infection. Working with limited eyesight, Solano began creating colorful work that burst off the walls. Celebrities became expressionist portraits, and darkly humorous text-based works raised questions about gender identity and the source of an H.I.V.-positive artist's value in the money-mad art world.

Since then, Solano's blindness has become complete. It has also become a new way of seeing. In the last four years, Solano has developed techniques for navigating blindness through each new series of paintings, including five large-scale works displayed at this year's New Museum Triennial. Now the artist uses pins, string, tape and pipe cleaners to outline different areas of canvases, and relies on other people's eyes as guidance. Solano's subject matter has shifted to pulling from memory - family portraits, scenes from beloved films and pop cultural moments we've collectively experienced. The resulting tableaus are warmer and more generous, full of love for a disappearing world rather than anger at its loss.

