

Tomás Díaz Cedeño

PEANA

Tomás Díaz Cedeño (b. 1983, Mexico City) lives and works in Mexico City. His artistic production delves into the interplay between the natural and the artificial, resulting in unique syncretic and liminal encounters where landscape, materials, and the body converge. Díaz Cedeño utilizes natural and found pigments, clay, and metal in his creative process, often incorporating performative solo rituals and interaction with technology. This approach yields alternative representations of the body and organic structures found in nature.

Díaz Cedeño's recent individual and group shows have taken place at Silke Lindner, New York, US; Museo MARCO, Monterrey, MX; Fundación Casa de México en España, Madrid, SP; François Ghebaly in Los Angeles, US; Galerie Nordenhake in Mexico City, MX; Frieze London, UK; LISTE Basel, CH; Blain Southern in London, UK; Museo de Arte Carillo Gil, Mexico City, MX; Museo del Chopo, Mexico City, MX; and PEANA Monterrey, MX. He was part of the New Museum Triennial in 2021 in New York, US. Recent residency programs completed by the artist include LaCasaPark Artist Residency in New York, US; and Casa Wabi in Puerto Escondido, MX.





LIVES AND WORKS

CDMX, MX.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2023** Humming Songs, Silke Lindner; New York, US.
- 2019** Usando este cuerpo, pensando en la fuente, PEANA; Monterrey, MX.
- 2018** Vessels, BWSMX Gallery; CDMX, MX.
- 2015** Wetworks, Yautepec; CDMX, MX.
- 2014** Dispossessed Souls, No Man Was My Brother, Parallel; Oaxaca, MX.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024** Casa Ideal, curated by Enrique Giner, Proyectos Multipropósito; CDMX, MX.
- 2023** Equis, I Griega, Zeta, Anonymous Gallery, New York, US.
- 2022** Todos me amarán: arte de México hoy, Fundación Casa de México en España; Madrid, ES.
 - Durian on the Skin, François Ghebaly; Los Ángeles, US.
 - El ensamble del ocaso, Museo MARCO; Monterrey, MX.
 - The Beyond, curated by Samantha Ozer; Los Ángeles, US.
 - Por debajo del árbol, PRAXIS estudio del arquitecto Agustín Hernández Navarro, PEANA Off-site; CDMX, MX.
- 2021** Un Lago de Jade Verde, Institute of Post Natural Studies; Madrid, SP.
 - Soft Water, Warm Stone, New Museum Triennial; New York, US.
 - 666, Galerie Nordenhake; CDMX, MX.
- 2020** La memoria que no recordamos, PEANA & LABOR; Monterrey, MX.
 - Museo Autoservicio, Off-site curated by Daniel Garza-Usabiaga; CDMX, MX.
- 2019** Cold Pleasure, Warm Touch, PEANA; Monterrey, MX.
 - Approaching Abstraction; Blain Southern; London, UK.
- 2018** Prima Materia, PEANA Off-site; New York, US.
 - Pintura Reactiva, Museo Carrillo Gil; CDMX, MX.
- 2017** The Space Between Us, Torres Gutierrez; Los Ángeles, US.
- 2016** This Psychodrama, SME Gallery; San Diego, US.
- 2015** Hotel Londres, Dark Arts International; CDMX MX.
 - Under a Thawing Lake, Dark Arts International; CDMX, MX.
- 2014** USBs, Lodos; CDMX MX.
 - Stimulations, GRAVA; CDMX, MX.
- 2013** Tráfico, Otras Obras; Tijuana, MX.
 - Dancing in Circles, NO Space; CDMX, MX.

RESIDENCIES

- 2021** La Casa Park, Gardiner; New York, US.
- 2020** Casa Wabi; Oaxaca, MX.
- 2018** Residency Unlimited; New York, US.

Selected Projects

Humming Songs

Silke Lindner; New York, US. 2023

Wishing well, dream of permanence I

Fountain installation. 2022

El Ensemble del Ocaso

MARCO; Monterrey, MX. 2022

Por Debajo del Árbol

PRAXIS Studio of Architect Agustín Hernández Navarro;
PEANA Off-site, CDMX, MX. 2022

Soft Water, Warm Stone

New Museum Triennial; New York, US. 2021- 2022

Background Foreground

Casa Wabi, Oaxaca, MX. 2020

Sobre Tierra Roja

CDMX, MX. 2020

Vessels

BWSMX; CDMX, MX. 2018



Humming Songs

Silke Lindner; New York, US. 2023

Tomás Díaz Cedeño's practice develops in the interaction between the natural and the artificial, producing objects in which landscape, materials, and the body converge. His first U.S. solo exhibition is comprised of seven mosaic works – bas-reliefs rendered on glazed wild clay and framed in steel – and a motorized cast aluminum rattlesnake floor installation, activated by the visitor's movement.

Díaz Cedeño's practice is first ignited with stories, it then crystallizes through drawing, a bit of digital editing and sculpture to become objects that intricately bind together the experiences and fictions of everything and everyone that touched them in between. Since 2019, Díaz Cedeño has been working on Background/Foreground, a series of works created in bas-relief imprinted on wild clay. The title – taken from cinematographic lexicon and alluding to the instant where the background comes into focus centering foreground– indicates his intentions: he creates portraits of the landscape and its relationship with the people who inhabit it. In them, he focuses on the landscape as protagonist of the many microhistories that blossom within it, the small but significant transformations that constantly redefine it along with the hands and spirits that come in contact with it.

At the center of his works lies the relationship between body, labor and material and its endless creative potential. Through his use of wild clay and his manipulating it in the same way that bricks have been manufactured in different areas of the world for millennia, he seeks to unearth the fiction-making powers of that process. As portraits, they contain the histories of the people who transform and are transformed by the landscape: the brick makers extracting clay from the land, the domestic stories of people leaving and returning there, the small talk about weather patterns, the legend-like behavior of the nature surrounding them, the superstitions that arise from the dangers of engaging with fire everyday, the sometimes random but always poetic ways in which they transmit their knowledge through time – knowledge that coalesces into the mysticism of a specific type of labor that has long been a staple of humanity.

It's in that mythological magnitudes that human storytelling achieves that Díaz Cedeño locates his objects. The serpent appears as a stand-in for knowledge, specifically the small knowledges that have been ruled out as unimportant, often because they are subversive in the face of our larger order of truth – because in the dynamics between body, labor and material also reside the essential components of what we call technology, and the ruling systems of production and consumption in which we are all involved.

Gaby Cepeda





Installation view
Humming Songs
Silke Lindner, New York, US. 2023

Wishing well, dream of permanence I

Fountain installation, 2022

Making a wish is the fantasy of control over the uncontrollable. Control over nature, over bodies, over the elements, over the future. We tell each other stories and invent rituals. We project desire and colonize the future, the myth of reason is on our side.

Make a wish fountains are part of popular culture. A cultural vestige symbolizing offering or payment to the gods for the enormous privilege of finding drinking water. In the future, water used for entertainment or decoration will probably be seen as a characteristic waste of the brutality, ostentation, and savagery of a previous time.

The fountain installation that comprises this presentation is made up of several bronze sculptures: butterflies, moths, axolotls, and snakes. Animals and insects that share physical characteristics of transformation or metamorphosis. These sculptures are found around, and inside reutilized plastic industrial containers filled with water. Some of the sculptures release water by being connected to pumps inside the plastic tanks. These pumps are also plugged into the electrical current through a sculpture that works as an electrical multi-plug outlet mounted on the wall. On the walls, there are some reliefs in cast aluminum recovered from stolen auto parts and abandoned buildings—such ways of obtaining materials are characteristic of the artist's material environment. For Diaz Cedeño, these processes represent contemporary dynamics that define the relationship between labor, body, and landscape.







El Ensemble del Ocaso

MARCO – Contemporary Art Museum of Monterrey; Monterrey, MX. 2022

“Because of the wide sky and lack of tall objects, I become quickly aware of any visitors in the Yard. I spot their figures even if they are far in the distance and only small shapes moving among the rows. But visitors aren’t frequent, and when I hear human voices, they most often belong to the yardmen calling each other.”

Klara and The Sun, Kazuo Ishiguro

El ensamble del ocaso [The Sunset Ensemble] is an exhibition organized by Ana Pérez Escoto and PEANA for the Sculpture Patio at MARCO. The show places the work of artists Ana Mazzei, Berenice Olmedo, ektor garcia, Federico Pérez Villoro, Gordon Hall, Rodrigo Hernández, Sites, Tezontle, and Tomás Díaz Cedeño at a crossroad of common temporal and spatial conditions. Enclosed by the museum’s outer walls and allocated under open skies over the Patio’s stone carpets, this exhibition summons a grid of signs related to the landscape’s structures, as well as to the position and balance of the discrete energies traversing it. These directions activate and deactivate through fields, or stations—places not exactly inhabited, but not impersonal either, that we will use to encounter each artist and their subtle or sharp material transformations for this particular region of the museum.

As a result of its exterior condition, the exhibition is put into proximity with the central blocks of the city of Monterrey and, to the east, under the lines of one of the city’s most important mountains and natural monuments. El ensamble del ocaso [The Sunset Ensemble] shares its phenomena with this same eastern sun and its movement as the day passes, sharpening the architectural shadows that resonate through several works. This magnetic environment has also facilitated the infiltration of a context and a life for these structures. Indications of materials and societies whose operations take place in diverse temporalities: structures for stillness and repose, but also for memory and storytelling: structures that emit signals and symbols, but also those that accept the body, making it go through histories that are both intimately personal and anonymously institutional. El ensamble del ocaso [The Sunset Ensemble] appraises these structures and their functions in a shared territory. Appearing as a river whose bed has dried, the Sculpture Patio reveals to us instruments, vessels, and emitters that are now visible: works that speculate with an energy whose availability is uncertain but capable of influencing, from a deliberately ambiguous moment in time, the imagination of our surroundings.

Christian Camacho





Installation view
El Ensamble del Ocaso
MARCO - Contemporary Art Museum of Monterrey, Monterrey, MX, 2022

Por Debajo del Árbol

PRAXIS Studio of Architect Agustín Hernández Navarro,
PEANA Off-site, CDMX, MX. 2022

PRAXIS Taller de Arquitectura Agustín Hernández opens its doors for the first time to the public with the exhibition *Por debajo del árbol* (What Lies Under the Tree); a project presented by PEANA and curated by Ana Pérez Escoto and Carlota Pérez-Jofre, bringing together contemporary works of fifteen artists in dialogue with Agustín Hernández's universe.

Our evolutionary nature has forced us to seek a psychological sense of security and protection -and to build spaces that allow it- in order to put aside our vigilant instinct and reach deep states of sleep. Built from a set of prisms and pyramids that seem impenetrable, Agustín Hernández's workshop, known as PRAXIS (1975), floats among the trees at a height of forty meters. With steel roots that go underground and replicating the principles of compression and tension of the branches of the ocotes, the Mexican architect built the perfect sanctuary to be able to "dream his research out loud". Given the opportunity to observe his private world, his discordant ideas become heartfelt confessions. Monumentality breaks down into vulnerabilities. What universes unfold behind these secret passageways? What creatures inhabit this unique tree house? How has the passage of time revealed certain flaws in the matrix? matrix? It is here that reality becomes dreamlike.

In dialogue with the traces left behind in Agustín's workshop at Praxis, *What Lies Under the Tree*, begins with sculptures that draw lines with architectural representation, approaching the model as a field of speculation. The pieces by Carlos H. Matos, Pedro Reyes and Agustín Hernández himself, despite their diverse references and techniques, find common ground in the use of pre- Hispanic language as the foundation of modern identity in Mexico. Rodrigo Hernández sets aside earthly heaviness with the sculpture *¿Qué escucho cuando escucho el discurrir del tiempo?* (2019), which from the visual synthesis makes an invitation to play, imagination and explore the most private corners of the house-studio. François Halard presents a series of photographs taken in 2020, as an intimate glimpse into the studio when it was still in use. Ryan Lowry's photographs capture spontaneous moments he shared with Agustín recently, though their retro look lends them the same nostalgic air as the accompanying images of the architect as a child, as well as the blueprints and models of projects that, unfortunately, were never constructed.

One floor up, Mario García Torres presents a series of bronze sculptures that replicate pieces of parquet rescued from the Meditation Center that Hernández made for his sister, Amalia, in 1984; today a ruin. *Space and Thought: New Perspectives on the Tree House* (2022) is a phenomenological project by Lucas Cantú that seeks to dialogue and overlap with the architect's archive, as well as to question the possibilities of inhabiting the uninhabitable: camping in mid air, suspended from a concrete tree to visualize the world through a disconnected retreat. Tania Pérez Córdova's work is based on everyday objects and explores the implicit narratives of her materials; her series *Contenidos de bolsillo* (2021) is an attempt to recover vanished moments, while *Escena para un baño* (2022) responds to the space itself as if it were a theatrical set, designed to tell stories. *Clocks* (2022) by Ghislaine Leung and *Pieza mural* (*Hoy si hubo, mañana quien sabe*) (2022) by **Tomás Díaz Cedeño**, operate as interventions in a system that goes beyond the immediate space: Leung's piece makes each electrical outlet visible, shining a subtle light on details that would otherwise go unnoticed, while Díaz Cedeño replaces the electrical switches with small pieces that put into perspective the concept of the mural in relation to monumentality. *All at Once* (2021) by Lila de Magalhaes uses as medium scraps of dyed bed sheets to immerse us in a world as delicate as it is psychedelic, where a pair strange insects smile tenderly.

The highest part of the tree serves as both a lookout and a lighthouse, illuminating through a skylight the three internal levels of the house-studio. Already in this alternate reality, *El niño y la serpiente* (2020) and *Vampiro frente al espejo* (2020) by the artistic duo ASMA, explore transformation as a place of endless possibilities. Stella Zhong's *satellite* presents itself as a failed attempt to connect us with the infinite, with that world of ghostly appearances that glimmers in Santiago Licata's series images on graphite. And, on that plane where incoherence reigns, Louis Eisner pays homage to the collective psychosis with a portrait of a tormented baboon.

At first glance, Agustín Hernández could be placed in the cult-like category of "men who fell to Earth", his work seemed alien, always breaking with the norm; materializations of the utopian. However, reviewing in detail his almost one hundred years of life—his emotional architecture, his poetry, his drawings, his memories and his unrealized projects—it becomes clear that his sensibility could not be from another world. His tireless pursuit for novelty, always based on historical and scientific knowledge, is reflected in the spaces he has built, which to this day are meeting points and intergenerational references. *What Lies Under the Tree* is but one example of the multiple worlds that can exist within the universe of Agustín Hernández.

Aída Cantú Artigas





Soft Water, Warm Stone

New Museum Triennial, New York, US. 2021-2022

The title of the 2021 Triennial, “Soft Water Hard Stone,” is taken from a Brazilian proverb, versions of which are found across cultures: *Água mole em pedra dura, tanto bate até que fura* (Soft water on hard stone hits until it bores a hole).

The proverb can be said to have two meanings: if one persists long enough, the desired effect can eventually be achieved; and time can destroy even the most perceptibly solid materials. The title speaks to ideas of resilience and perseverance, and the impact that an insistent yet discrete gesture can have in time. It also provides a metaphor for resistance, as water—a constantly flowing and transient material—is capable of eventually dissolving stone—a substance associated with permanence, but also composed of tiny particles that can collapse under pressure.

In this moment of profound change, where structures that were once thought to be stable are disintegrating or on the edge of collapse, the 2021 Triennial recognizes artists re-envisioning traditional models, materials, and techniques beyond established paradigms. Their works exalt states of transformation, calling attention to the malleability of structures, porous and unstable surfaces, and the fluid and adaptable potential of both technological and organic mediums. Throughout the exhibition, artists address the regenerative potential of the natural world and our inseparable relationship to it, and grapple with entrenched legacies of colonialism, displacement, and violence. Their works look back at overlooked histories and artistic traditions, while at the same time look forward toward the creative potential that might give dysfunctional or discarded remains new life. It is through their reconfigurations and reimaginings that we are reminded of not only our temporality, but also our adaptability—fundamental characteristics we share, and that keep us human.

“Soft Water Hard Stone” is curated by Margot Norton, Allen and Lola Goldring Curator at the New Museum, and Jamillah James, Senior Curator, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA), with Jeanette Bisschops, Curatorial Fellow, and Bernardo Mosqueira, ISLAA Curatorial Fellow.







Installation view
Soft Water, Warm Stone
New Museum 2021 Triennial, New York, US. 2021-2022

Background Foreground

Casa Wabi, Oaxaca, MX. 2020

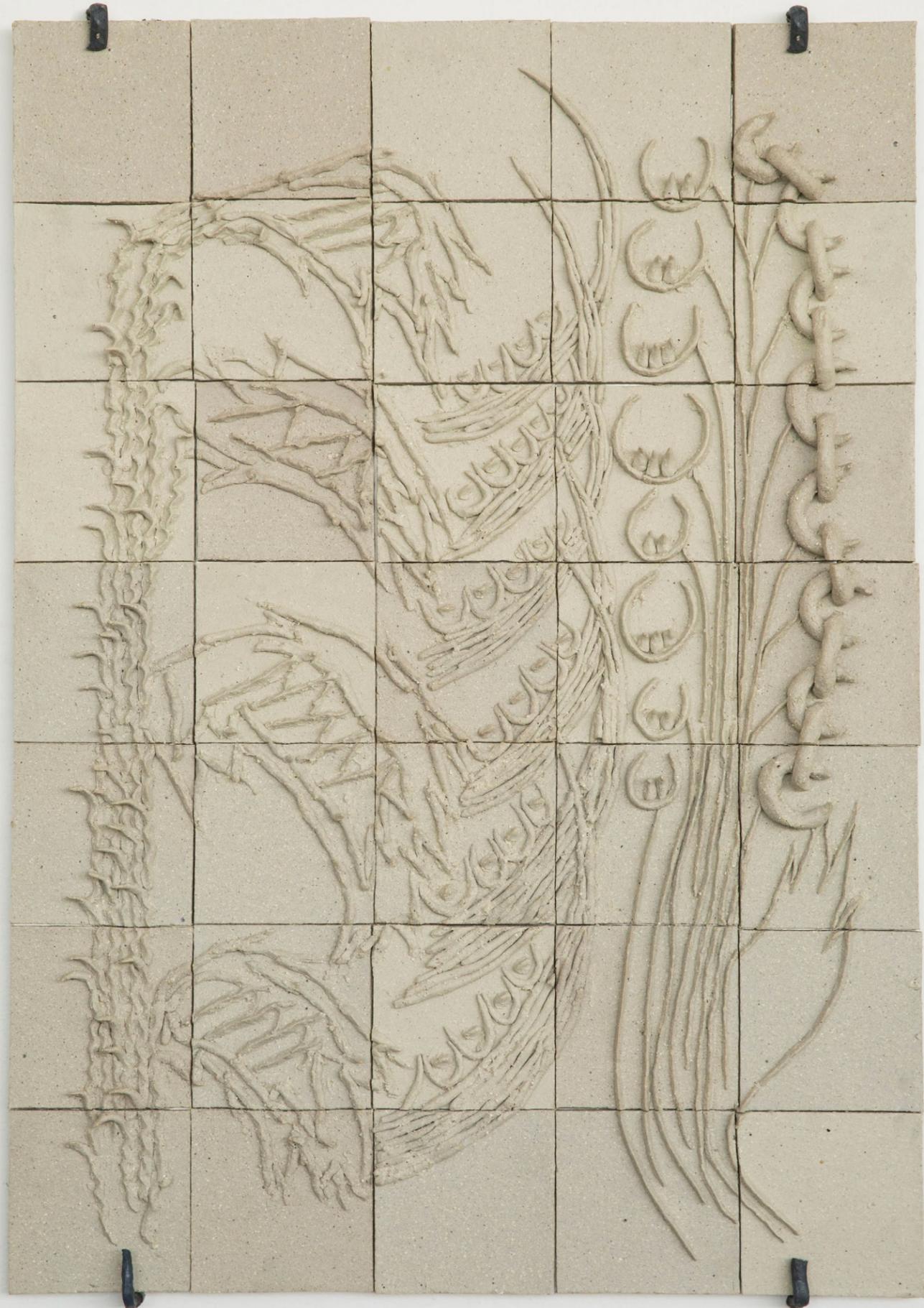
The project “Background/Foreground” is a collaborative effort by Tomás Díaz Cedeño, who works with clay primarily sourced from Michoacán. The project consists of different mosaics that come together to form a bas-relief figure, which explores the relationship between the human body and the natural world and landscape. The organic forms depicted in the mosaics are indistinguishable and evoke imagery of flora, fauna, and human shapes. Díaz Cedeño is interested in the concept of an object becoming a parasitic element integrated into the architecture, reimagining the representation of nature and landscape as not external or alien to the human body, but rather as an intrinsic and interdependent system.

Each piece in this series is composed of mosaics that form a shape, reminiscent of a landscape influenced by the immediate context, the artist’s imagination, and the human body, all intertwined in a syncretic relationship. However, the environment or landscape is not merely a passive backdrop for human exploitation or activity. Instead, it is a dynamic force that shapes and defines our experiences. It is not only a physical entity, but also an entity with agency, as defined by Bruno Latour or Jane Bennett.

This project was also explored during the artist’s residency at Casa Wabi, where Díaz Cedeño worked with soil from the local area to produce a new body of work that was deeply connected to the context in which he was working. Each piece in this series is infused with the essence of its environment, reflecting the imprint of the artist’s imagination through its shape and materiality.







Sobre Tierra Roja

CDMX, MX, 2020

In his latest body of work titled "Sobre tierra roja", Tomás Díaz Cedeño continues to explore his interest in navigating the relationships between the natural and the artificial, landscape and architecture, resorting to his distinctive and idiosyncratic formal vocabulary. Comprised of sculptures executed in clay and steel, this body of work evokes an inherent mysticism characteristic of the artist's interest in peripheral belief systems whose syncretism intertwines and incorporates vegetal, animal and anthropogenic motifs. Echoing this notion of a totality composed of a multiplicity of elements, the artist formally constructs the pieces as structures made up of a number high-temperature glazed clay units stacked vertically. In both cases, a metallic "skeleton" makes possible the conjunction of the individual elements, thereby rendering them into a single "body".

As a whole, the works present imagery that is at once familiar and strange: the evocative organic forms present themselves to the viewer with a multi-directional ambiguity that simultaneously references vertebrae, flowers, spikes, branches, thorns, claws, jewelry, or bodily extremities, without allowing for their precise identification. This perceptual shift of the elements that make up Díaz Cedeño's works inevitably results in an invitation to contemplate the vegetal, animal, and human worlds as inextricably linked, with the corresponding mystical, political, and ecological connotations that this entails.





Vessels

BWSMX; CDMX, MX, 2018

Tomás Díaz Cedeño has a fixed set of concerns. Through his work as an artist has asked how the body is or can be represented; he has probed the limit between objecthood and humankind; and he has examined the expressive range material objects can embody when forced into previously unknown relationships in an obsessive artistic encounter. He examines these questions through a delicate, tenuous—even grotesque—visual language rooted in a committed, intimate dialogue with the materials he uses.

In *Dispossessed souls, no man was my brother* (2013), his sculptures took on an overt eroticism; splayed and penetrated, they hung on whip-like structures, exposed as they crumbled to the floor. In *Wetworks* (2015), Díaz Cedeño restricted his sculptures to a more established form of restraint: the frame. However, the works were equally rebellious. Removing the frames from the wall and standing them around the gallery floor, in a more confrontational relationship with the viewer, Díaz Cedeño imbued his nearly two-dimensional sculptures with a third dimension. Their backsides exposed, Díaz Cedeño's works ignited in the show's visitors the feeling of doing something illicit.

In *Vessels*, Díaz Cedeño leaves behind a more intellectual relationship with abstraction—in which his works defied concrete objectivity through their monochromatic, iterative language—and instead embraces a vocabulary rooted in daily Mexican life. Monstrous, uncouth, beastly, the “amulets,” as Díaz Cedeño describes them, replicate popular, peripheral systems of belief.

In what he calls a “morphological remodeling,” Díaz Cedeño's sculptures have taken on the material and symbolic language of witchcraft. Mounted on the wall, the protective, mystical structures encase organic and inorganic materials representative of popular ritual—objects one finds wandering the markets of Mexico City. By repurposing his treatment of materials like gesso and plaster applied now to natural materials like vegetable fiber or organic fabric, Díaz Cedeño reinvigorates the unique approach to materials he has mastered in previous works. The result is a sort of uncanny synthetic skin that envelops each sculpture's precarious, ritualistic landscape: a jagged support, coarsely stitched, that wavers between organic and inorganic consistencies.

Sculptures that once dwelled on an otherworldly coming-to-life of objects, conjured by an intimate relationship between object and body, now incorporate a visual idiolect with superstitious, salvific characteristics typical of Mexico City, where Díaz Cedeño is from and continues to work.

A nail, a crown of thorns, seeds, skins, furs. In *Vessels*, these materials are suffused with a sense of urgency—the result of an individualistic spiritual aspiration and the associated anxiety, of a yearning for contentment. This form of object-driven occultism—what Díaz Cedeño has characterized as a material-based questioning of the object as a representation of the body's inherent mysticism—obtains a newfound complexity. The sculptures in *Vessels* reframe Díaz Cedeño's examination of fragility, weakness, desire, and representation, within the social and economic structures that govern the contradictory and bizarre business of salvation.

Nika Simone Chilewich



Installation view
Vessels
BWSMX; CDMX, MX. 2018





Installation view
Vessels
BWSMX; CDMX, MX. 2018

PEANA

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