

CECILIA BEAVEN

PIECE OF CONSCIOUSNESS



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

September 6–October 28, 2022

Piece of Consciousness

In *Piece of Consciousness*, Cecilia Beaven thoroughly investigates the imagination, absurd humor, and the cartoonish playfulness that are characteristic of her work. Consisting of paintings, comics, animation, ceramics, and sculpture, she uses fictional storytelling with a stylized graphic visual language to reference pre-Columbian iconography and mythical realms. The promotional image* for this exhibition, entitled *Biting Self*, is emblematic of the fanciful imagery Beaven uses to direct her narratives. Beaven taps into Aztec cultural symbols often referencing folkloric animals and human animal hybrids, to play with narratives including those of creation, God, warriors, and spirit animals.

Beaven's practice is one of observation and representation of the self and its vulnerability. She exposes a humanly shared nature and consciousness while holding on to the understanding that facts are complicated, and that history and mythology are routinely intertwined—in fact the word for history and story are the same word in Spanish (*historia*). Imbued with empathy and curiosity, Beaven's work connects with the viewer to form a collective sympathy through a self-ethnographic narrative. As a result, we navigate the journey of being a woman within Beaven's world—whether that be one we also experience, or an imaginary one the artist has created.

*Cecilia Beaven, *Biting Self*, 2021, ink on paper, 17" x 11"

CECILIA BEAVEN

Cecilia Beaven is a multidisciplinary artist from Mexico City based in Chicago. Through her art, which includes painting, drawing, comics, animation, and sculpture, Beaven explores cultural identity as a mutating narrative, rather than a fixed attribute. The artist affirms her active participation in the making of culture by modifying existing tales and mythology, and seamlessly adding personal anecdotes. Beaven's mythological, ethnographic, and introspective explorations create a narrative in which intriguing mythical creatures and landscapes stage a monstrous, fragile and introspective setting. Beaven's juxtaposition of culture and fiction brings a unique perspective on Mexican identity that goes beyond folklore and mainstream ideas of Mexico.

Cecilia Beaven is a visual artist from Mexico City based in Chicago. Beaven holds an MFA in Studio Art from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago which she attended as a Fulbright scholar and a BFA with honors from ENPEG La Esmeralda in Mexico City. Her multidisciplinary artwork—which includes murals, painting, drawing, animation, comics, and sculpture—has been shown in solo shows in Mexico City, Houston, and Chicago, and in group exhibitions in Mexico, the United States, Colombia, Sweden, Italy, and Japan. Beaven has painted murals in several cities (such as Hiketa, Japan; Paris; Houston; Chicago; and in Mexico in Oaxaca, Pachuca, Tepoztlan, Tijuana, and Mexico City) where she was commissioned to paint a segment of the border wall between Mexico and the US. She has been awarded distinctions such as the Fulbright Scholarship, the Leroy Neiman Foundation Fellowship at Ox-Bow School of Art, and the Radicle Studio Residency at Hyde Park Art Center.

Website: ceciliabeaven.com

Instagram: @samuraiceci



Inflorescence, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 72"



Dancing Tulip, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 66" x 54"



Bulb, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 66" x 54"



Inside, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18"



Piece of Consciousness I, Piece of Consciousness II, Piece of Consciousness III, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 54" x 66" (each)



Installation view of *Sprout in Piece of Consciousness* at Glass Curtain Gallery
acrylic enamel on wall, 2022



Tile from the series *Trying*, 2021, high-temperature porcelain, 6" x 6" each (series of 6)



Golem I, Golem II, Golem III, 2021–2022, acrylic on papier-mâché, 20" x 18" x 55" each

INTERVIEW WITH CECILIA BEAVEN

Conducted by Mariana Belaval

Mariana Belaval: *Piece of Consciousness* is a show that features multiple mediums. In utilizing different material methods are you attempting to represent the totality of your mind or only the sections you can grasp?

Cecilia Beaven: My artwork is multidisciplinary because when I'm creating my mind explores one concept from many different angles. This ludic spirit makes me approach one idea with material fluidity. A drawing can start to feel sculptural and make me want to do a ceramic piece. The ceramic piece might need movement and I'll animate it. The animation will start to tell a story that I want to write as a poem... Materials and forms are tools in my visual vocabulary. I enjoy making my vocabulary richer and to articulate ideas in ways that feel original and true to myself.

MB: Can you talk about the Aztec symbology that informs the works in this exhibition?

CB: I'm interested in mythology because it sets a narrative ground for a specific culture and place. I'm from Mexico City and it's important for me to acknowledge that the first stories and explanations of reality of my city were the Aztec ones. All the other stories and myths of Mexico City are layered on top of that base. I find it meaningful to reference this ground base in my work, which deals with narrative and mythological aspects.

The references are somewhat obscured through imagination. My intention is to create a blurred line between history, mythology, self-ethnography, and fiction. Some of the symbols might be explicit, like the Aztec representation of a flower that appears in *Piece of Consciousness III*, but only if you're familiar with Aztec's images. Some recurrent figures are direct references from Aztec myths, like the alligator, which references the myth

of creation, in which an alligator-like monster was killed to create the world. In this case, the alligator is modified, repeated, and explored in different scales, so it becomes mine, although I keep referencing its name through titles. There are many pieces of mine that include the word Cipactli, the primordial alligator/monster/mother.

MB: How has mythology survived in the modern age?

CB: Mythology is the way in which we explain the world to ourselves. The need to create mythological systems did not end with ancient cultures, it's always been present, and it is, of course, present today; it is an essential part of humanity. Our explanations of the world and our origins, even if they look scientific and objective, are part of a mythology. We see the world through the ideas of our time; we inhabit our beliefs.

MB: The exhibition contains a lot of history, not only yours but your countries. Do you think your history is mutually exclusive with that of where you come from (México)? What's the relationship between historia and Historia?

CB: You know the symbol in the middle of the Mexican flag? There's an eagle fighting a snake, they're both on top of a cactus and the cactus is on a lake. You could say it's the coat of arms of Mexico, it's on the flag and in every official document. The symbol's origin is the Aztec myth of the foundation of Mexico City. A god instructed the Aztecs to leave their home, Aztlan, and look for a new one, where they would establish a powerful city. The god said they had to travel until they found the signal: an eagle fighting a snake on top of a cactus. The Aztecs wandered until they found this scene, and it happened to be in the middle of a lake. They could not contradict their god, so

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

they built Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) right there, in a terrain that was clearly not meant to be a city.

When you're a kid growing up in Mexico, you learn this myth in school, it's part of the history books! There's not a historical account that explains the foundation of Mexico City much better than the myth. I think this fact tells me so much about my country, my culture, and myself; history and myth are deeply intertwined. Fiction is crucial and always welcome.

MB: The human condition is very evoked throughout the exhibition; do you think this maintains a connection between you and your ancestors?

CB: I don't know... Hopefully the exhibition maintains a connection with people who wonder what they're doing here and now, who feel the pain of existing and loosing, but also see beauty in the strangeness and absurdity of it all.

MB: What are you working on next?

CB: I want to keep working on the idea of a speculative mythology and combine it with ethnographic research more specific to my family history. In this vein, I've been working on narrative drawings and comics for a while, and I aim to create a compilation with them.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Mariana Belaval. Graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gray Beyer. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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Glass Curtain Gallery: 1104 S Wabash Ave, First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Wednesday, Friday–Saturday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday 9 a.m.–7 p.m.