

CECILIA BEAVEN



Piece of Consciousness

September 6–October 28, 2022



Golem I, 2021, acrylic on paper mâché

Cecilia Beaven: Piece of Consciousness

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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.

Glass Curtain Gallery

1104 S Wabash Ave, 1st Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

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Reflections and dreams

In *Piece of Consciousness*, Cecilia Beaven poses questions about historic narratives and myths through dominantly gestural and humorous situations—some are playful while others are a comedy of errors. In her constructed narratives, she causes us to pause and consider multiple questions, prompting us to reexamine what's real versus what's constructed. Upon reflection, we can see that our perspective is formed by a complicated mixture of objective facts, and subjective thoughts and feelings. By doing this we can project ourselves into the characters, and intimately relate to the world Beaven presents us with.

Mexico City, the artist's hometown, has birthed a reverence for certain animals through the chronicling of Aztec myths and symbolism. Regional folk artists have long found inspiration in these stories that have been passed down throughout the generations and represented through art and folk-art using papier-mâché, ceramic, painting, and mural traditions. Beaven uses these various media, and more, to illustrate her narratives; modernizing Mexican folklore through her own voice and experience.

Beaven creates a world where she claims a narrative and becomes the all-knowing goddess of creation herself. The artist presents animal and human-animal hybrids to play upon mythological narratives, including the myth of creation and stories of spirit animals, great warriors, and gods. Numerous artworks include animals, animal heads, or masks that conjure the characteristics of a particular animal. In that way we can see how an animal known for protecting can leave the viewer feeling protected; or if an animal is known for being gentle, the viewer can forge a stronger connection with their kindness.

The works *Cipactli*, *Biting Self*, and *Cipactli's Head* feature elements of a crocodile and a human form. *Cipactli* consists of four ceramic tiles that have an animal-human hybrid with the head of a crocodile and the body of a human. Here each tile functions as a panel for a comic. Each panel features a singular figure; one is twisted and contorted, while another is playful and flirty. The most visually jarring one is the one that features the figure upside down with the jaw of the crocodile head on the floor completely open. There are lines around the figure, we can virtually hear a thud, or the squeaking out of an oof. We are witnessing a misstep, a fall, an imperfection, and this deeply resonates with a profound feeling of failure with a nod to the ridiculous.

It is interesting that the significance of the crocodile is associated with the Aztec story of the beginning, the creation story. *Biting Self* and *Cipactli's Head* both feature the human body with a crocodile mask. By wearing the mask of an animal one is conjuring their characteristics, so when the human wears the mask of Cipactli they are connecting with the power of the creator.

The series of four ceramic tiles entitled *Fit In* connects to other works in the exhibition. One of the tiles features a female figure bowing with the word Sprout in a text bubble. This figure is very small, and it is calling for growth, it is calling on nature to bring forth new life. As we consider nature, we can think of nature as god. Simultaneously, we can acknowledge that Beaven reaffirms her power as creator, and storyteller.

The architectural scale mural *Sprout* features a huge figure that uses the motif of the crouching figure. It would likely be about 80' tall if it stood up straight, so the scale shift points to great power and strength. Growing out of the back of this figure is a small flower, we can see how the rounded back can seem like it is a globe, and how this figure bears a universal life force within it.

We see the motif of the female nude figure, and in particular the crouching figure. This form of could also be interpreted as bowing. Who is the figure bowing to? Is it the viewer that is being bowed to, as the gesture is directed at them?

Most of the figures have no clothes, no armor, rather they are presented as a raw figure that are unprotected and vulnerable. Can we consider vulnerability a strength? In *Sprout* the nude female bowing figure is presented with a wide span of shifts in scale, from a figure that is a few inches tall to an architectural scale figure. We can relate to the figures and their various emotional states, displays of body language, and to their potential to break boundaries and claim their power.

In this exhibition what can be viewed as potential weakness is actually embodied strength and a site for both literal and figurative growth. *Piece of Consciousness* provides models of creation and invention for us to consider. It is entertaining, it is humorous, and it is poignant. It lets us call upon the strengths that these animals have, whether that is needing asking for help, practicing kindness, or laughing lightheartedly at the absurdity of our situation.

-Cecilia L. Vargas

Reflejos y sueños

En *Piece of Consciousness (Pedazo de conciencia)*, Cecilia Beaven usa situaciones predominantemente gestuales y humorísticas—algunas lúdicas y, otras, una comedia de errores—para plantear preguntas acerca de mitos y narrativas históricas. En sus narrativas fabricadas, Beaven nos hace frenar y considerar múltiples preguntas, incitándonos a reexaminar qué es real y qué es fabricado. Al reflexionar podemos ver que nuestra perspectiva se conforma de una complicada mezcla de hechos objetivos con pensamientos y sentimientos subjetivos. Así, podemos proyectarnos en los personajes y relacionarnos íntimamente con el mundo que Beaven nos presenta.

La Ciudad de México, ciudad natal de la artista, a través de la memoria de los mitos y simbolismo aztecas, ha cultivado reverencia por ciertos animales. Por mucho tiempo, los artistas y artesanos locales se han inspirado en estas historias, pasadas por generaciones y representadas en arte y artesanías con papel maché, cerámica, pintura y muralismo. Beaven usa estos medios, y más, para ilustrar sus narrativas; modernizando el folclor mexicano a través la voz y experiencia propias.

Beaven crea un mundo en el que reclama una narrativa y se convierte a ella misma en una diosa creadora omnisciente. Presentando animales e híbridos de humano-animales, la artista juega con narrativas mitológicas, incluyendo el mito de creación e historias de espíritus animales, guerreros y dioses. Numerosas obras de arte incluyen animales, cabezas de animales o máscaras que evocan las características de un animal en específico. De esta forma, podemos observar cómo un animal conocido por ser protector, puede hacer sentir protección al espectador; o si el animal es conocido por ser manso, el espectador puede forjar una conexión más fuerte con su amabilidad.

Las piezas *Cipactli*, *Biting Self* y *Cipactli's Head* presentan elementos de cocodrilo y figura humana. *Cipactli* consiste en cuatro azulejos de cerámica con una forma híbrida humano-animal con cabeza de cocodrilo y cuerpo de humano. Aquí, cada azulejo funciona como una viñeta de comic. Cada viñeta presenta una figura; una está retorcida y contorsionada, mientras que otra es juguetona y seductora. La más impactante muestra una figura parada de cabeza con la mandíbula del cocodrilo completamente abierta. Hay líneas alrededor de la figura y virtualmente podemos escuchar un ruido sordo, o el chirrido de un uf. Estamos presenciando un paso en falso, una caída, una imperfección, y esto resuena profundamente en un sentimiento de fracaso con guiño al ridículo.

Es interesante que la importancia del cocodrilo está relacionada con la historia del comienzo, el mito de creación azteca. Tanto *Biting Self* como *Cipactli's Head* muestran un cuerpo humano con máscara de cocodrilo. Al usar la máscara de un animal, uno conjura las características de éste, así que cuando el humano usa la máscara de *Cipactli*, se está conectando en el poder creador.

La serie de cuatro azulejos titulada *Fit In* se conecta con otras piezas en la exhibición. Uno de los azulejos muestra una figura femenina haciendo reverencia, con la palabra *Sprout* (Brote, o Brotar) en un globo de texto. Es una figura pequeña, pidiendo crecer, llamando a la naturaleza para producir nueva vida. Considerando la naturaleza, podemos pensar en naturaleza como dios. Al mismo tiempo, podemos reconocer que Beaven reafirma su poder como creadora y narradora.

La escala arquitectónica del mural *Sprout* muestra una enorme figura que usa la pose de la figura encogida. Si se parara erguida, probablemente mediría 80 pies de alto, por lo que el cambio de escala habla de gran fuerza y poder. Una pequeña flor crece de la espalda de esta figura, podemos ver cómo la espalda arqueada parece un mundo, y cómo esta figura carga una fuerza de vida universal en su interior.

Vemos el motivo de una figura femenina desnuda y en particular la figura encogida. Esta forma también puede interpretarse como reverencia. ¿A quién le hace reverencia la figura? ¿Es al espectador, ya que el gesto está dirigido hacia él?

La mayoría de las figuras no tienen ropa ni armadura, sino que se presentan como figuras en bruto, sin protección y vulnerables. ¿Podemos entender la vulnerabilidad como una fuerza? En *Sprout*, la figura femenina haciendo reverencia está presentada en múltiples cambios de escala, desde una figura de pocas pulgas de altura hasta una figura de escala arquitectónica. Podemos identificarnos con las figuras y sus varios estados emocionales, usos de lenguaje corporal y con su potencial para romper barreras y reclamar su poder.

En esta exhibición, lo que podría ser visto como potencial debilidad es en realidad fuerza encarnada y una oportunidad para crecimiento literal y figurativo. *Piece of Consciousness* nos da modelos de creación y comunicación a considerar. Es entretenida, humorística y conmovedora. Nos deja apelar a la fortaleza que tienen estos animales, ya sea pidiendo ayuda, practicando la amabilidad, o riéndonos con ligereza ante el absurdo de nuestra situación.

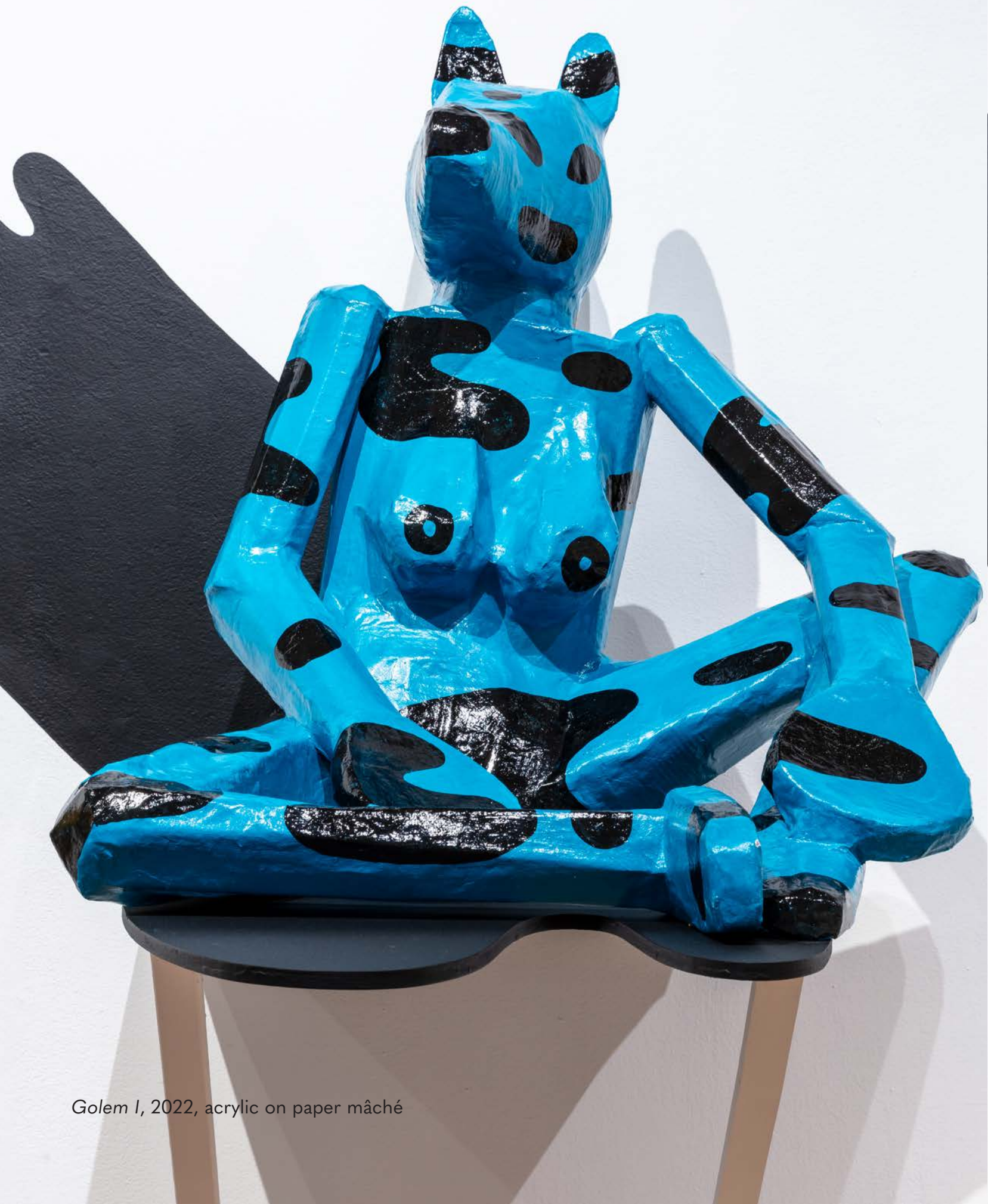
-Cecilia L. Vargas



Piece of Consciousness installation view



Piece of Consciousness installation view



Golem I, 2022, acrylic on paper mâché



Golem II, 2022, acrylic on paper mâché



Piece of Consciousness I-III, 2022, acrylic on canvas



Piece of Consciousness installation view



Piece of Consciousness Installation View



Sprout, 2022, acrylic enamel on wall



Piece of Consciousness Installation View



Piece of Consciousness Installation View



Piece of Consciousness Installation View



Encounter, 2021, high-temperature ceramic, (series of 4)

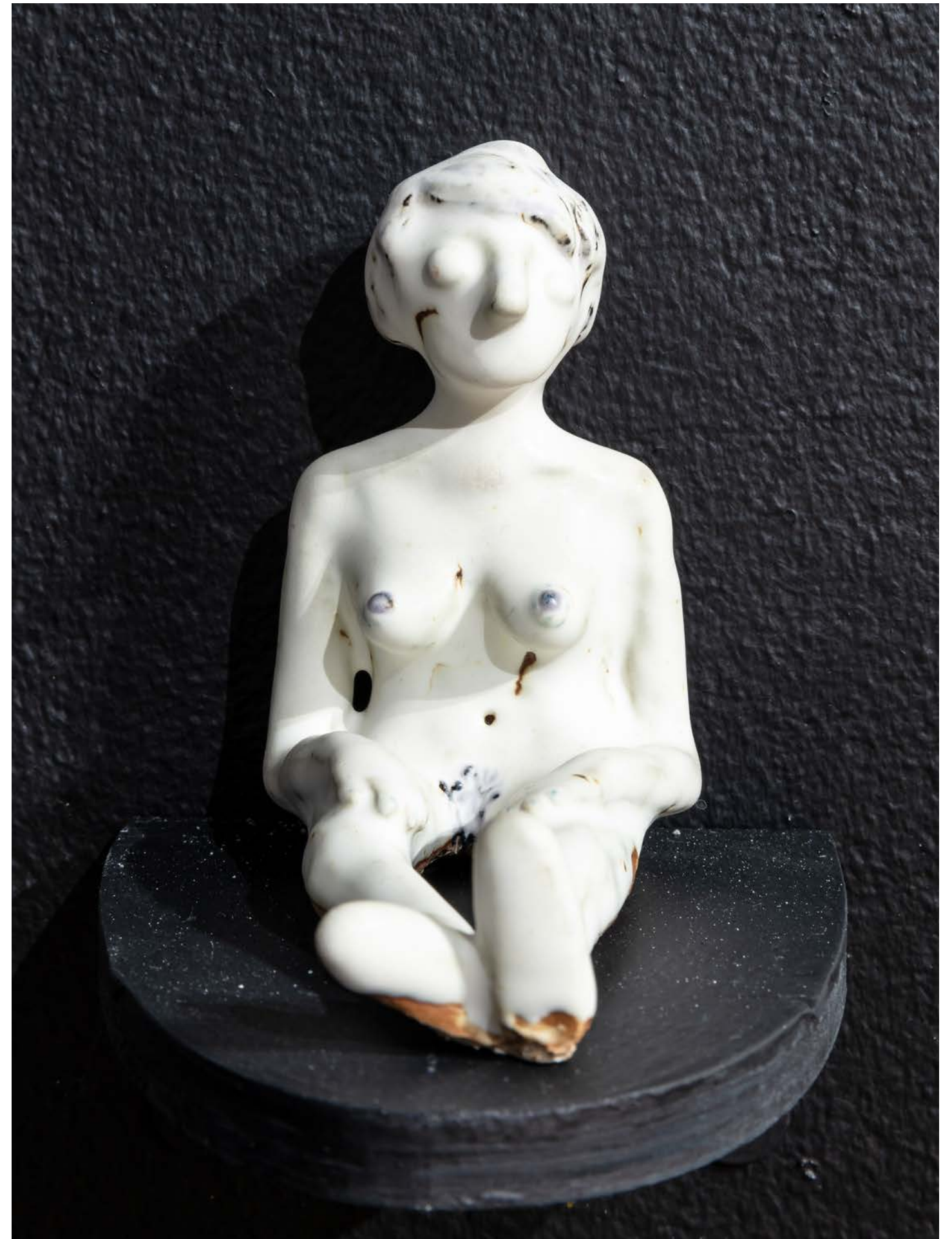
Cipactli, 2021, high-temperature ceramic, (series of 4)



Piece of Consciousness Installation View



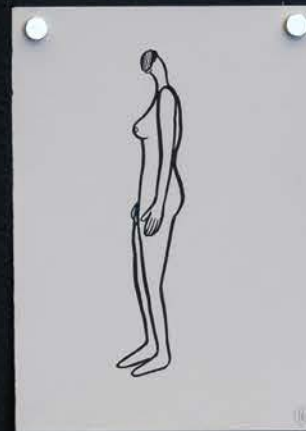
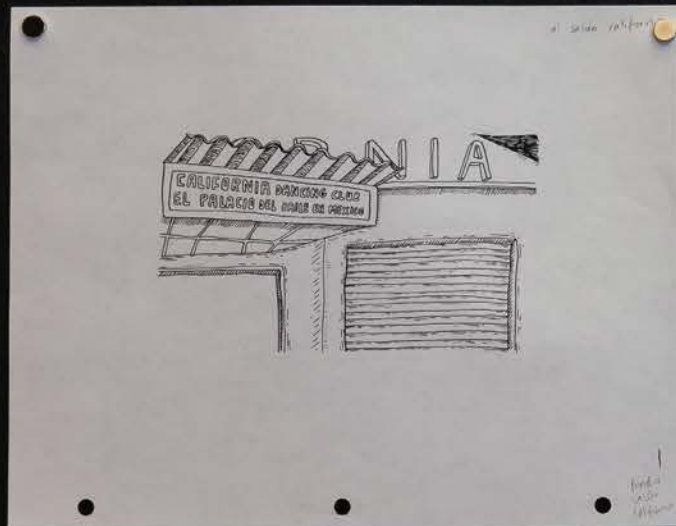
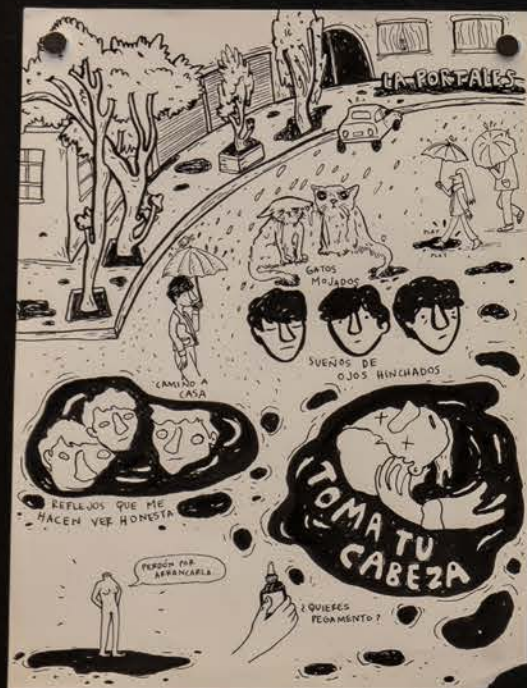
Teporingo, 2021, high temperature ceramic



Ghost self, 2021, high temperature ceramic



Not Me, 2022, acrylic on canvas (series of 5)



Frames and process drawings for *Here's Your Head*, 2017, ink on paper

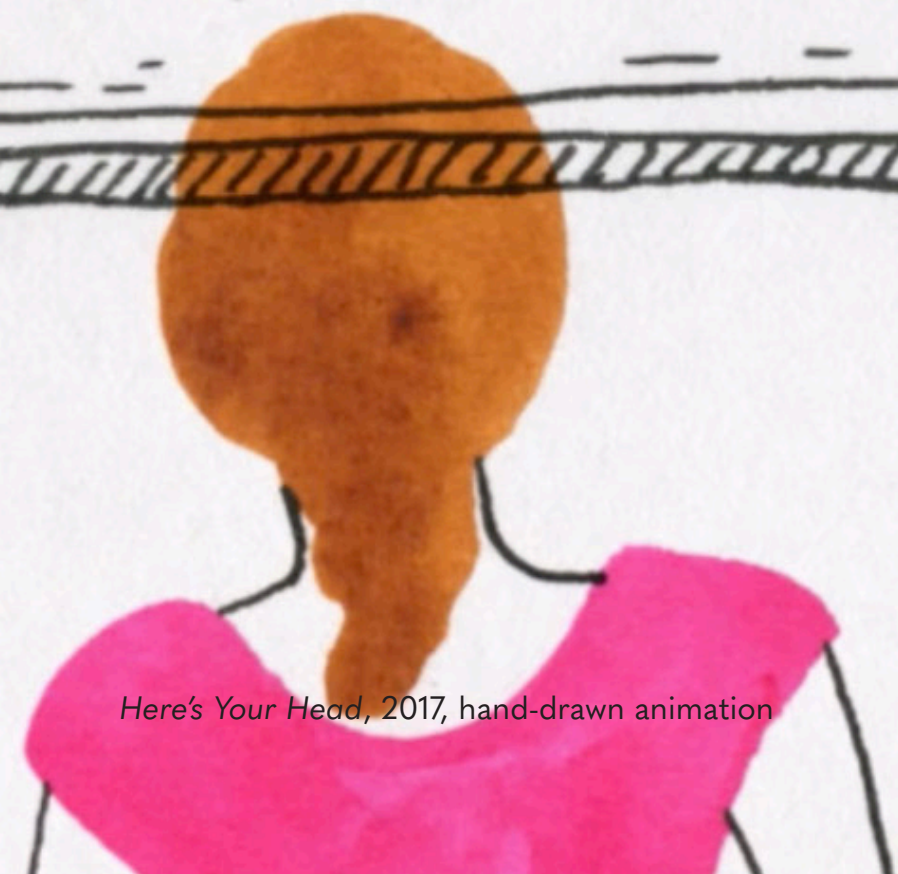


Here's Your Head, 2017, hand-drawn animation



Here's Your Head, 2017, hand-drawn animation

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Here's Your Head, 2017, hand-drawn animation



Myths are Holograms, 2022, 2 channel projection of digital 3D animation stills

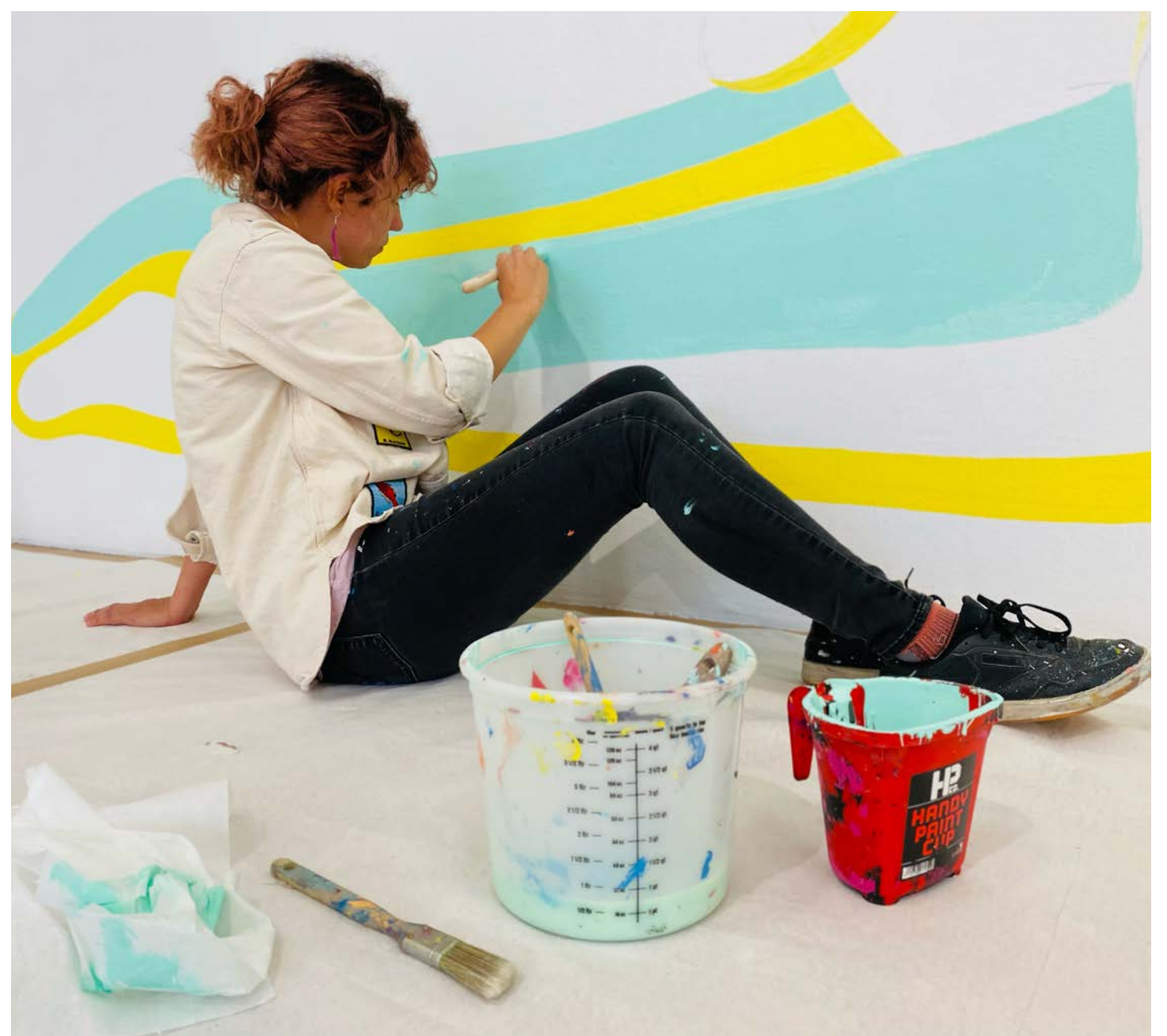


Myths are Holograms, 2022, 2 channel projection of digital 3D animation stills

Exhibition Production



Artist painting Sprout mural





Piece of Consciousness

Exhibition Checklist

Golem I, 2021
acrylic on paper mâché
20" x 18" x 55"

Golem II, 2022
acrylic on paper mâché
20" x 18" x 55"

Golem III, 2022
acrylic on paper mâché
20" x 18" x 55"

Piece of Consciousness I, 2022
acrylic on canvas
54" x 66"

Piece of Consciousness II, 2022
acrylic on canvas
54" x 66"

Piece of Consciousness III, 2022
acrylic on canvas
54" x 66"

Trying, 2021
high-temperature porcelain
6" x 6" each (series of 6)

Daimon I, 2021
acrylic and oil on canvas
72" x 48"

Daimon II, 2021
acrylic and oil on canvas
72" x 48"

Daimon III, 2021
acrylic and oil on canvas
72" x 48"

Sprout, 2022
acrylic enamel on wall
13' x 22'

Myths are Holograms, 2022
2 channel projection of digital 3D animations

Encounter, 2021
high-temperature ceramic
4 1/2" x 4 1/2" each (series of 4)

Cipactli, 2021
high-temperature ceramic
6" x 6" each (series of 4)

Fit In, 2021
high-temperature ceramic
4" x 4" each (series of 4)

Waiting, 2021
ink on paper
17" x 11"

Ghost self, 2021
high temperature ceramic
6" x 3" x 5"

Soul Mates, 2021
ink on paper
17" x 11"

Cipactli Babies, 2021
high temperature ceramic
5" x 5" x 1"

Ouroboros, 2021
ink on paper
17" x 11"

Scaled Mammal, 2021
high temperature ceramic
7" x 4" x 3"

Bait, 2021
ink on paper
17" x 11"

Ocelotl, 2021
high temperature ceramic
6" x 4" x 9"

Biting Self, 2021
ink on paper
17" x 11"

Cipactli Head, 2021
high temperature ceramic
4" x 4" x 5"

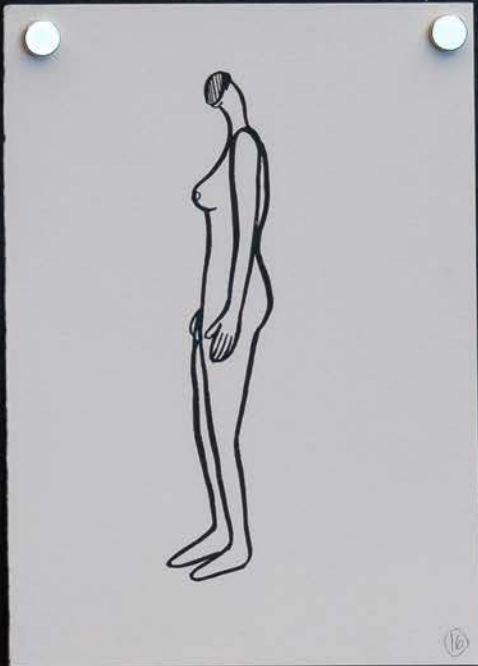
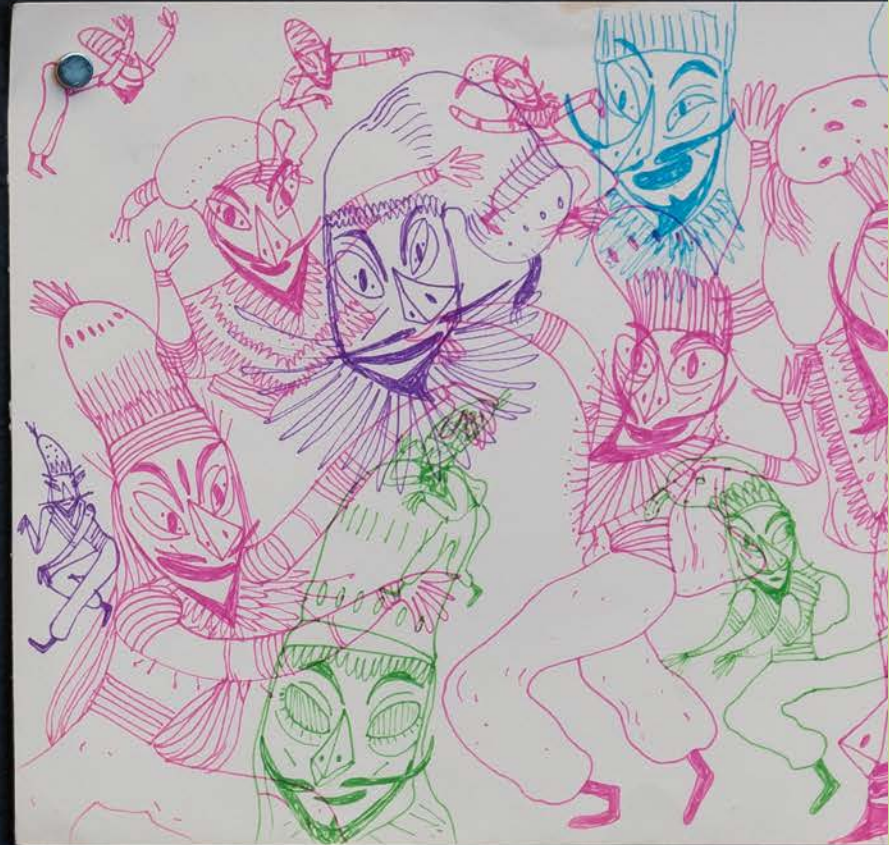
Within, 2021
ink on paper
17" x 11"

Teporingo, 2021
high temperature ceramic
5" x 5" x 6"

Not Me, 2022
acrylic on canvas
12" x 12" each (series of 5)

Here's Your Head, 2017
hand-drawn animation

Frames and process drawings for *Here's Your Head*, 2017
ink on paper, dimensions variable



Biographies

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, 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.

Cecilia Leonora Vargas is the Director of Exhibitions in the Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces at Columbia College Chicago. She is a Chicago-based arts professional that offers curatorial and project management to collectors, artists, and organizations. Her passion for making contemporary art accessible drives the work she does. She earned a dual M.A. in Art History, Theory and Criticism, as well as in Arts Administration and Policy from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC); and a B.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University.



Acknowledgments

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