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Prima Materia

Blanka Amezkua
Esperanza Cortés
Anthony Carlos Molden
curated by
Anabelle Rodríguez-González

Exhibition on view
November 7- January 4 | Reception and Gallery Talk
November 14, talk begins at 5:30

Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum Presents *Prima Materia*

Blanka Amezkua, Esperanza Cortés, and Anthony Carlos Molden
Curated by Anabelle Rodríguez-González

November 7, 2024 - January 4, 2025, Reception and Gallery Talk, November 14 5:00-7:00 PM (talk begins at 5:30), 301 High St W, Glassboro, NJ 08028

GLASSBORO, NJ-- In *Prima Materia*, curator Anabelle Rodríguez-González brings together three interdisciplinary artists, Blanka Amezkua (Brooklyn), Esperanza Cortés (Brooklyn), and Anthony Carlos Molden (Philadelphia) three interdisciplinary artists working across a dynamic range of expressive forms, including but not limited to sculpture, painting, ceramics, site-specific installations.

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All three artists are experienced makers actively creating provocative artworks that relate to materials and techniques associated with crafts such as embroidery, beadwork, decorative

paper folding and cutting, and elements from the scenic arts. Their efforts consistently yield marvelous results, including novel sculptural objects, sumptuously detailed and evocative two-dimensional works, and challenging mixed-media installations that appeal to the senses through their impressive individual and collective visuality. Whether anchored on the wall or displayed in the round, the works selected for *Prima Materia* generate visual and spatial synergies imbued with a powerful combination of subtle yet vibrant energies and symbolic archetypes. Not unlike living entities, these works exert their agency upon us, in a sense “arresting” our sensorial attention through their ability to convey something tangible and concrete about the ephemeral and transcendental nature of the creative impulse.

Engaging with the alchemy of creativity through expertly crafted artworks, *Prima Materia* is essentially visionary in scope. Subsumed within the effervescent flow of macro and micro historical trends that have shifted the definition and reproduction of fine art worlds into supporting the creation and display of art that can be technically described as “craft-oriented” and vice versa, *Prima Materia* contributes to ongoing discourses around creative interdisciplinarity to push and expand the collective vision of contemporary art in 2024. Each of the three artists has striven to diversify what art is and what it can be made of, into unique forms bounded by expressive materiality.

Blanka Amezkua is a fervent justice seeker, community activist, experimenter, and traveler, Amezkua’s trajectory rightfully aims for the stars. For *Prima Materia*, Amezkua has accepted a commission to create a reflective *in situ* installation in the form of a large ofrenda—an offering that honors her Mexican ancestry and expands the living vernacular tradition of altar-making that date back millennia. The origins of these ofrendas predate the arrival of Europeans, and archaeological investigations continue to reveal evidence of complex devotional practices, including sacrificial objects meant to appeal to and placate deities and ancestors, depending on the context. The dedicatory ofrenda is brightly colored by the ubiquitous presence of toys, yet its purpose is grim: it supplicates—it begs us to consider the current state of crisis and loss of innocence through the massacring of children, and the collective trauma resulting from the lack of laws supporting gun control in the United States, the only country where such events occur regularly. The bright, shiny surfaces of the toys used to construct the ofrenda pose a troubled duality: they are meant to reflect and promote innocent play, yet that same strident shine somehow manages to expose a dehumanizing support for a social crisis rooted in a lack of compassion and common sense. **Esperanza Cortés** develops multiple works in a series, moving between them over time. Depending on her evolving relationships with these works, this period can extend over years. To demonstrate this, the prolific and meticulous artist has graciously agreed to the loan of a significant number of works that represent this process. A group of smaller mixed-media works—including glass beadwork, encaustic, ceramic elements, and personal embroidery—are based on the meditative nature of repetition and a personal sense of internal rhythm, no doubt influenced by her talent for dancing. Her embodied experiences as a mother, dancer, and educator inform the lush complexity and sensuous character of her work. A triad of larger-format installations speaks to her interest in exploring the histories and devastating legacy of colonialism in the Global South, and in her native Colombia in particular (*Gold Rush & Río Rojo*). With Cortés as an active collaborator, *Prima Materia*

exhorts its audience to contemplate the rampant degradation of the environment as ecocide and to share responsibility for mitigating the loss of our Indigenous ancestry resulting from the ongoing destruction of the cultural landscape of Abya Yala. This exhibition reaches across time and space to the Italian modernists who brought the use of discarded common materials into the refined, elitist spaces of modern art. *Prima Materia* acknowledges the international legacy of the arte povera movement in the experimental character of **Anthony Carlos Molden's** lighted sculptures. Molden's body of work will forever be associated with his deep appreciation of music, including but not limited to genres with deep African American roots like jazz, funk, soul, house, and hip-hop. The material abundance provided by collecting discarded objects allows Molden to recombine their unique materialities like DNA, sampling them into novel assemblages. In this way, the sculptor has developed a sustainable artistic practice that supports his creative experimentation and practical versatility. His interest in a playful yet environmentally conscious praxis elicits a compassionate awareness that captivates the senses through enchanting and surprising permutations of light, texture, and color. While often encoding sobering themes and empowering concepts grounded in personal experience, his kinetic color assemblages delight, dazzle, and heal.

- **Anabelle Rodríguez-González, 2024**

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Blanka Amezkua is an interdisciplinary artist, cultural promoter, educator, and project creator. Amezkua was born in Mexico City and earned her B.A. from California State University at Fresno. Amezkua's art focuses on identity, and she draws heavily for her background as a Mexican-American artist. Themes that pop up frequently in her work include gender, race, power, and privilege. Space also plays an important role in her art; she has created several spaces to display art, including her own bedroom and living room. While navigating a difficult period in her life, including the loss of her 9-year-old nephew Sebastian, Amezkua traveled frequently between New York City and Athens, Greece. During this period, Amezkua initiated an artist-run space in Athens named Fokianou 24/7, now Fokianou Art Space. Amezkua has been featured in many exhibits including MoMA/P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Queens Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, San Diego Art Institute, Wave Hill Public Garden & Cultural Center, the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, Art Base, Brussels among others. She currently resides and works in New York City where she continues to work towards reshaping the ways museums and artists interact with another, and how artists can re-indiginize their practices. She is an active member of Running for Ayotzinapa 43.

Esperanza Cortés is a Colombian-born multidisciplinary artist based in New York City. Cortés' inspiration for her art comes from the ebbs and flows of America and the American population, which encompasses traditional American folk tales as well as the transcultural experiences shared by minorities and immigrants. Cortés' works encourage viewers to reconsider traditional narratives, especially when considering colonialism and its lasting effects, and to openly grapple with critical questions about the politics of erasure and exclusion. Her art has been featured in

exhibits across New York and abroad, including the Bronx Museum of Art, Queens Museum, El Museo del Barrio, MoMA PS1 and Socrates Sculpture Park in NYC. National exhibitions include Albright-Knox Gallery, Ogden Contemporary Arts, Turchin Center for The Visual Arts, Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Neuberger Museum of Art, and the Cleveland Art Museum. She has received numerous awards and fellowships, including the New York State Council on the Arts Project Grant, Shortlist 2022 Creative Capital, John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, Hispanic Society Museum and Library Artist Research Fellowship, BRIC Media Arts Fellowship, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Grant, Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, Puffin Foundation Grant, New York State Biennial, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts and the Sustained Achievement in the Visual Arts Award.

Anthony Carlos Molden is a Philadelphia based, mixed-media painter/sculptor and has studied at the Pasadena College of Art & Design and the University of Iowa. Anthony has been drawing since age three and vigorously painting with acrylic and oil since age twelve. In his twenties, he started working as a scenic designer on movie, video and theater sets. While living in New York City for 25yrs, Anthony has also had a career in construction as well as creation/restoration of decorative architecture. All of the aforementioned experiences lent to the development of Anthony's current painting style. Anthony's work is a mix of sculptural relief with a repurposing of found objects and recycled materials. All his paintings are made with 90-100% recycled materials, including paint and surfaces. Anthony's twenty-year goal was to, "make something of value out of the piles of refuse around us every day." Anthony's work has been exhibited at reputable galleries such as Kenny Schacter Contemporary, La Mama La Galleria both in New York City as well as Philadelphia Galleries: the Painted Bride Art Center, Tiberino Museum and Rush Arts Gallery. Mr. Molden has also become a master at live painting and has done it several times...from the renowned Leaf Art & Music Festival in Asheville, NC to the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. Anthony's works are currently on exhibit at The Painted Bride Art Center, and he is presently preparing for a full solo show at Rush Arts Gallery, Philadelphia.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Anabelle Rodríguez-González is an arts practitioner, anthropologist, and educator from Puerto Rico based in Philadelphia. Her formal education includes dual undergraduate degrees in the visual arts and the history of art and architecture from Brown in consortium with RISD. After kicking off a peripatetic career as the inaugural director of the Museo de Arte de Ponce's education programs and curator of exhibitions for cultural institutions in Philadelphia and New York City, she also completed additional master's degrees in visual anthropology and the history of art and architecture focused on critical heritage studies. Her artwork has been exhibited in Austin, Philadelphia, Puerto Rico, and New York City, and "Globenesia" – a 2022-23 site-specific mixed-media installation dedicated to climate change – was recently featured in PBS.org. Anabelle's curatorial praxis is constituted as a collaborative extension of her creative work, with dozens of exhibitions staged between the East Coast and Europe. Her most recent curatorial collaboration is *Desde San Juan Bautista...*, an official collateral event in this year's 60th Venice Art Biennial and the first exhibition of contemporary art from Puerto Rico in the history of *La Biennale* as the oldest and most prestigious event of its kind in the world.

Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum serves as a vibrant cultural destination for South Jersey, the Rowan community, and the surrounding region. We are committed to cultivating an inclusive, accessible, and just environment that encourages dialogue and collaboration between exhibiting artists, students, faculty, the general public, and other cultural institutions through the presentation of interdisciplinary art exhibitions, artist talks, and other public programming. For more information, visit: rowan.edu/artgallery/

High resolution images are available upon request

Blanka Amezkua



Representative image of a site specific installation.

Esperanza Cortés



Title - *Gold Rush*

Date - 2024

Materials - Civil War era chair, found metal, metal ball beads, necklace, ball chain, handmade ceramic eyes, bull hide, mule leather, gold paint

Size - 60" h x 26" w x 30" d

Anthony Carlos Molden



Title - *Lovelight in Flight*
Materials - repurposed found
materials
Size - variable