Kukuli Velarde

CORPUS
The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art along with the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College and the Southwest School of Art, is pleased to present CORPUS, featuring work by Kukuli Velarde. Velarde’s CORPUS series has been in development for almost a decade and will be presented in a tour debuting January 2022 for the first time in its complete and fully realized iteration. We are proud to share that this project is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.

CORPUS is comprised of 15 large ceramic sculptures, to be displayed on 15 individual tables. These sculptures represent effigies revered in the annual procession that winds through the streets of Cusco, Perú in the Catholic celebration of Corpus Christi. Each of the sculptures is accompanied by an embroidered fabric banner handmade by artisans in Velarde’s hometown of Cusco. The sculptures are impressively large in scale, averaging around three feet in height and are intricately decorated in vibrant paint and gold leaf. These sculptures will be displayed on individual red tables in a presentation that emulates the real-life sacred ritual.

CORPUS engages with and confronts Perú’s colonial past, which reverberates in the construction and expression of indigenous cultural identity. Velarde presents this identity, subjected to centuries of violent political oppression and religious conversion, as surviving behind the facade of 15 Catholic saints.

Syncretic imagery blends European Catholic iconographies with pre-Columbian symbols and form as a Moche-inspired figure laughs under the face of San Sebastián and a deity astride a Tiwanaku-style vessel peers from behind a mask of Patrón Santiago. CORPUS asserts that these pre-Columbian deities and the worldview they inhabit were not vanquished by Spanish conquerors, but instead cleverly blended with their Catholic counterparts, ensuring their survival.

The enigmatic sculptures will be displayed within a newly conceived installation component that is intended to make visitors to the exhibition feel exposed and on display just as the sculptures are. In this way, Velarde raises fascinating questions about the inner life of art objects, as well as the exotic “Othering” of sacred rituals like Corpus Christi that now also serve as tourist attractions for visitors to Perú. In this complete realization, CORPUS explores issues of colonialism, cultural identity, aesthetics, and the performance of self.

These indigenous deities represented in CORPUS are alive and well despite centuries of captivity. So too, have the diverse peoples of Perú and greater Latin America formed and reformed political, religious, and cultural identity in the shadow of centuries-long oppression. Velarde’s series asks viewers to consider this resilience via her stunningly detailed and humorously thought-provoking work. We hope you will consider joining us to make this project as fully realized as it has long deserved to be.
**Artist Project Statement**

I am a Peruvian-American artist. My work, which revolves around the consequences of colonization in Latin American contemporary culture, is a visual investigation about aesthetics, cultural survival, and inheritance. I focus on Latin American history, particularly that of Perú, because it is the reality with which I am familiar. I do so, convinced that its complexity has universal characteristics and any conclusion can be understood beyond the frame of its uniqueness.

CORPUS consists of ceramic sculptures based on Catholic icons used in a festivity known as Corpus Christi in Cusco, Perú. CORPUS narrates the history of my country of origin, incorporating pre-Columbian and Colonial sensibilities by visually mimicking syncretism within a contemporary narrative. My concern with this issue coincides with the aesthetic and cultural decolonizing actions that are taking place now around the world.

Colonization and coloniality have for centuries forced populations to dismiss, among other things, their regional aesthetics, including their understanding of personal beauty. The consequence is the belief that a universal aesthetic exists, though it is actually rooted in European canons of beauty. What overwhelms public advertisement and TV programming in Perú are people who have non-prominent indigenous features, and thus do not reflect most of their audience.

I am aware I am Western, but I feel that populations who are like me are mostly observers and usually followers. Unable to find themselves in today’s “universal” aesthetics, many are either creating alternatives that suit their taste or ones that respond to their ancestral history. It is a search for dignity, the one lost through centuries of imposition and disdain. Pre-Columbian art is my most genuine aesthetic inheritance. It is what people who look like me created in their likeness, long ago, when they were the center of their own universe.

**About the Artist**

Kukuli Velarde is a Peruvian-American artist based in Philadelphia. Velarde is a multi-talented artist, working in ceramic, painting, drawing, and installations. Much of her work draws on pre-Columbian traditional forms and iconographies, highlighting colonized and syncretic identities and aesthetic systems.

Velarde received a BFA from Hunter College in New York City. She is the recipient of such awards as the Jon Simon Guggenheim Fellowship (2015), Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant (2012), and Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant (1997). Her work can be found in the collections of Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Lima, Lima, Perú; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, among many others.
Catalogue
The Halsey Institute is producing a comprehensive exhibition catalogue, the first major museum publication of Kukuli Velarde’s work. It will feature images of the artist’s work accompanied by essays that explore the themes in CORPUS, as well as a special component of the exhibition – a letter to the artist from her mother, who inspired the creation of CORPUS.

Film
The Halsey Institute will commission a short documentary film to investigate Velarde’s practice and the exhibition’s themes. This component is COVID-19 dependent.

About Us
The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

For more information, please visit us online at halsey.cofc.edu
The Halsey Institute has partnered with the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College and the Southwest School of Art to produce *Kukuli Velarde: CORPUS*. Partnering allows each of our institutions to join forces and create a large scale project that might otherwise not have been possible.

Halsey Institute Director Katie Hirsch has co-curated the exhibition with Polly Nordstrand, Curator of Southwest Art at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. This collaboration has made the project stronger and richer, with multiple voices and talents coming together to present Kukuli Velarde’s CORPUS series as the artist has always envisioned it.

Due to changing schedules during the COVID-19 pandemic, CORPUS will open first at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in January 2022. The Halsey Institute will exhibit the project in May 2022, opening just before Spoleto Festival USA and Piccolo Spoleto kick off.

Kukuli Velarde’s work continues to gain more and more recognition. Multiple pieces of her work have recently been acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Museum. There has been interest in extending the CORPUS tour beyond the partners, so stay tuned!

**Tour schedule**

**Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center**
Colorado Springs, CO
January 15 - April 9, 2022

**Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art**
Charleston, SC
May 13 - July 16, 2022

**Southwest School of Art**
San Antonio, TX
August - November 2022
A project of this scale has many moving parts. In addition to the exhibition catalogue and video, the logistics of exhibiting massive and elaborate ceramic sculptures is quite an undertaking. Each sculpture needs to be protected with a custom crate to ensure safe transport across the country. One of the 15 sculptures is in a private collection in Lima, Perú and will be imported for the exhibition to display the series in its complete iteration. Individual tables will be constructed to display each of the sculptures in line with Velarde’s vision.

This is what the Halsey Institute does best – acts as space for exploration and offers opportunities to artists that they would not have elsewhere. We are proud to be exhibiting Kukuli Velarde’s CORPUS as she has always intended. If you are inspired by Velarde’s work like we are, we ask that you consider supporting the project to ensure that all components are executed to their fullest. Below, please find suggested levels of support and the benefits that we are pleased to offer you as an expression of our gratitude. Thank you for helping make the Halsey ... the Halsey!

**$500 of support**
- Invitation to exclusive gathering with the artist
- A copy of the exhibition catalogue signed by the artist
- Recognition on the exhibition website

**$1,000 of support**
- All of the above, plus:
- Two copies of the exhibition catalogue signed by the artist
- Recognition on the gallery wall during the exhibition, as well as in the Halsey Institute’s spring 2022 program calendar (benefit available with commitment prior to November 30, 2021)

**$2,500 of support**
- All of the above, plus:
- Four copies of the exhibition catalogue signed by the artist
- Invitation to dinner with Kukuli Velarde and the Halsey Institute Director
- Recognition in the catalogue (benefit available with commitment prior to September 20, 2021)

Donations may be made online at [friendsof.cofc.edu/halsey/donate](http://friendsof.cofc.edu/halsey/donate), "CORPUS" in the comment box.

Checks should be made out to the Halsey Institute, "CORPUS" on the memo line. Please mail to:
Lizz Biswell
Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art
161 Calhoun Street, Suite 117
Charleston, SC 29424

Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law. Please contact Lizz Biswell, Associate Director, at 843.953.5659 or [BiswellL@cofc.edu](mailto:BiswellL@cofc.edu) with questions about support.