

ABOUT KUKULI VELARDE

Kukuli Velarde is a Peruvian American artist based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Velarde is a multi-talented artist, working in ceramic, painting, drawing, and installation. 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 John 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 Contemporáneo de Lima, Lima, Perú; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, among many others.



KUKULI VELARDE

CORPUS

PUBLICATION

The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art has produced an exhibition catalogue to accompany *CORPUS*. The publication features detailed photographs of the *CORPUS* sculptures, along with an introduction by Tey Marianna Nunn and essays by Katie Hirsch and the artist's mother, Alfonsina Barrionuevo.

Kukuli Velarde: *CORPUS* is organized by the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, College of Charleston School of the Arts; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College; and the Southwest School of Art at University of Texas at San Antonio.

Exhibition schedule:

Colorado Springs Fine Art Center
Colorado College
Colorado Springs, Colorado
January 14 - April 9, 2022

Southwest School of Art
University of Texas at San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas
September 9 - November 5, 2022

Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art
College of Charleston
Charleston, South Carolina
May 13 - July 16, 2022

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Hidden in Plain Sight

Resistance and Survival in Kukuli Velarde's *CORPUS*

by Katie Hirsch

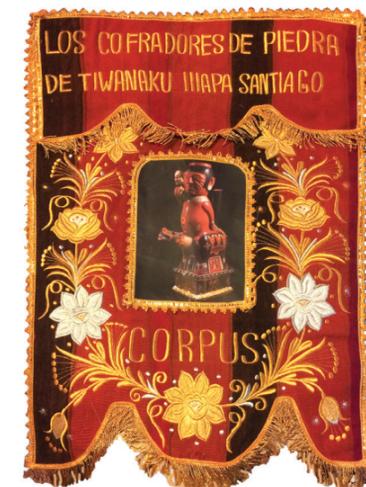
A Moche-inspired figure chuckles beneath the face of San Sebastián. Another figure, astride a Tiwanaku-style vessel, peers from behind a mask of Patrón Santiago. These intricate sculptures, rendered in clay and decorated in vibrant underglazes, paints, and gold leaf, deliver a powerful message beneath their playful humor. The fifteen figures in Kukuli Velarde's *CORPUS* are indigenous entities who have survived for centuries beneath the guise of Spanish Catholic saints and virgins. More specifically, these saints and virgins are those represented in the annual celebration of Corpus Christi in Velarde's hometown of Cusco, Perú.

Kukuli Velarde's interpretation of the effigies paraded in the streets during Corpus Christi is a multifaceted exploration of the construction and expression of mestizo identity in Perú. The Spanish celebration of Corpus Christi has been held in Cusco, Perú from at least 1572, the closing year of a four-decades-long campaign for conquest. As the former capital and spiritual center of the Inka empire, Cusco was considered the perfect staging ground for conversion to Christianity. Long after borders are rewritten and new systems of power are established, the consequences of colonialism's methodical destruction of indigenous memory and identity remain. It is within this context that Velarde calls upon the viewer to question issues of survival and inheritance within the long continuum of the history of Perú.

With increasing tourism in Central and South America, contemporary indigenous identity is caught between the push for modernization and the demand for "authentic" ethnicity. Peruvian Inka culture has been a central point of economic activity due to this rise in ethno-tourism. Tourists line

the streets of Cusco each June for a glimpse of the *real* Perú during Corpus Christi. Indeed, Corpus Christi is the real Perú, but the procession is poised at a unique intersection of past and present, center and periphery, and sacred and public. Peruvian identity is engaged both genuinely and self-consciously in this moment, where economic successes can be had through the performance of self.

In *Kukuli Velarde: CORPUS*, Velarde explores this objectification of self via an installation that seeks to make viewers feel on display just as Velarde's sculptures, the effigies in the Corpus Christi procession, and the indigenous peoples of Perú are all on display. Flashing lights and the sound of camera shutters provoke feelings of exposure and invasion in the viewer. With this component, Velarde not only draws attention to the casual tourism of Otherness present in Perú but also collapses time and space to raise fascinating questions about the inner life of objects and the nature of our interactions with them.



The fifteen members of *CORPUS*, posed on individual red tables, wind through the exhibition space, mimicking the procession and resting of effigies in Corpus Christi. The red tables reference structures carried by Cusco youths for the effigies to rest on when not in motion. To accompany the sculptures, Velarde commissioned banners created by the same Peruvian artisans who create the traditional processional banners used during Corpus Christi. The banners name the indigenous cultures that inspired each sculpture. Moche, Tiwanaku, Nazca, Cupisnique, Recuay, Wari, Inka, Chimú, Chancay, Caral: *CORPUS* is a love letter to these former empires and cultural centers that built the foundation of present-day Perú.

Velarde is not the first to imply that Peruvian Catholic effigies are not what they seem, as syncretic imagery has a long history in Spanish Colonial territories. The sacred beings in *CORPUS* made a conscious decision to hide behind the velvet robes of their oppressors to ensure their survival and are only now peeking out to laugh at the colonizers' expense. Velarde's decision to mimic the forms, color palette, and iconography of pre-Columbian ceramic vessels asserts that this aesthetic should be reclaimed by contemporary Peruvians as their revered heritage. Velarde's face and those of her loved ones are also featured in many of the figures, intimately tying the work to the artist's own lived experience.

Assembled in this exhibition in its complete iteration for the first time, *CORPUS* reclaims the indigenous aesthetics of Velarde's home country of Perú. No longer dismissed or fetishized, the pre-Columbian entities and the worldviews they occupy are liberated to exist freely among us. They flaunt their power, caress their children, smile at our good intentions. They exist for themselves, for the forgotten artists who created the forms that they originally inhabited, and for the people of Perú who have long been told to accept and adhere to Western notions of beauty and power. *Kukuli Velarde: CORPUS* puts the act of looking on display, asking the viewer to consider the wider contexts in which their looking takes place.

Katie Hirsch is Director of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

IMAGE CREDITS:
 This side, top left: *San Cristóbal* [detail], 2012. Low fire clay, underglazes, casein paint, gold leaf, gold luster. 32 x 17.35 in.; center: *San Sebastián*, 2012. Low fire clay, underglazes, gold leaf, wood. 38 x 18 x 18 in.; above: *Banner de San Sebastián and Banner de Santiago*, 2012-2021. Textile, embroidery, and cardboard. Each 39 x 28 in.
 Reverse side, bottom left: *Virgen de Belén* [detail], 2015/16. Low fire clay, underglazes, casein paint, plasticized fabric. 30 x 29 x 26 in.; center: *San Antonio Abad* [detail], 2016/17. Low fire clay, underglazes, oil paint, gold leaf. 27 x 22 x 14 in.; cover panel: *San José y El Niño*, 2017. Low fire clay, underglazes, casein paint, gold leaf. 27 x 22 1/4 in.