



REVIEWS

GALLERY
ROUNDS:
CAROLYN
CASTAÑO

Walter Maciel Gallery

BY WILLIAM MORENO | APR 18, 2024



Carolyn Castaño *Cumanday-Beautiful Mountain (Nevado del Ruiz)*, 2023. Courtesy of Walter Maciel Gallery.

Carolyn Castaño's "Otros Seres" (Other Beings) exhibition at Walter Maciel Gallery is an exhilarating eyeful of stealth environmental disaster. Castaño, of Colombian-American heritage, is well-known for her early extravagant and provocative *Garden Heads* (narco-referenced portrait) and lush landscapes. That hallmark is continued in her current works, but there is a timely shift afoot with her treatise on environmental malfeasance.

The show is organized in three galleries as a kind of mini-retrospective, with the most recent works taking center stage. The larger of the spaces is beautifully ambitious—galvanized by a monumental, glazed terracotta sculpture, *Madre Monte- Reina de los Jardines* (2023), depicting a reclining goddess of Columbian folklore—both a symbol of and foil to the environmental despoilation of the natural world—protecting her native lands. Along the walls are a series of poignant watercolors titled *This is dedicated to the one I love*, which depict, and individually identify, mountain ranges impacted by glacial melting. A large mixed media, gauche, and collage work, *Cumanday- Beautiful Mountain (Nevado del Ruiz)* is a tour de force of materiality and form. At 90 x 144," it's an immersive, de facto "altar" with indigenous referenced materials lining the perimeter of the work—a powerful proscenium for the theater of the natural world. It is difficult to reconcile the destruction at hand with Castaño's brilliant and exuberant palettes. Slow and insidious, climate impacts are both visible and alarming, and, while Colombia is not a major carbon emitter, it is particularly vulnerable and Castaño takes this situation to

heart. Perhaps that’s the point; her work insistently advocates for us to think planetarily.

The adjacent galleries contain Castaño’s older, and vibrant signature works. Unabashedly celebratory is the piece *Shirley*, (2007) a portrait of an acquaintance composed of acrylic, glitter, flocking and mirrors on a grid-like background in a striking homage to women. *Alvaro* (2007), using much of the same materials is surrounded by a neon halo of abstracted forms which could easily be disconcerting, but in this case, functions as a kind of animated ersatz frame. *Monster* (2001) a watercolor of an indeterminate, birdlike creature, seems a precursor for her current works deploying a plethora of gestures using numerous materials, including glitter and rhinestones as an exploration of female subjectivity.

It’s clear Castaño has mastered both materiality and form through which she deploys beautifully rendered commentaries on both the social and environmental issues of the day—to great effect.

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