

YOSSI MILO

HAROLD MENDEZ



Working with photography and sculpture, **Harold Mendez** (American, b. 1977) weaves constellatory narratives that investigate the complexities of identity as it relates to geography. Mendez's artistic process involves the transformation of found photographs using a meticulous and laborious manual transfer technique, reminiscent of lithography. Employing charcoal or graphite, he carefully builds the surface of the image, simultaneously tracing and erasing archival imagery. This intricate method allows Mendez to infuse the original photographs with specific sociocultural or art historical allusions, creating enigmatic and ethereal new visuals giving them an otherworldly quality.

In addition to his captivating two-dimensional works, Mendez also produces sculptures, incorporating found objects, industrial goods, or symbolic organic matter, such as eucalyptus bark, bone, or cochineal pigment. By employing these diverse materials, Mendez explores the notions of identity and place, prompting viewers to question their own understanding of self and their connection to the world around them. Mendez not only experiments with dramatic shifts in scale and unorthodox materials but also adopts an excavatory approach to production. His creative process can be likened to an act of unearthing and transforming, as he seeks to unveil hidden histories and challenge the dominant narratives. By juxtaposing diverse elements, Mendez encourages viewers to reflect on the intricate and tenuous relationship between history and its representation.

Harold Mendez has mounted solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, FL; Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, VA; the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago, IL; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, among others. Mendez has participated in group exhibitions, including at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana, Cuba; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Works by Mendez are in the permanent collections of institutions such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX; the Chicago Transit Authority, IL; and the Colección Diéresis, Guadalajara, Mexico, among others. Harold Mendez graduated from the University of Science and Technology, School of Art and Design, Ghana, and received a BFA from Columbia College Chicago, IL, and an MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago, IL. The artist was born in Chicago, IL, and lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

ARTFORUM

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REVIEWS



Harold Mendez, *The years now* (detail), 2020, mixed media, dimensions variable.

CHICAGO

Harold Mendez

LOGAN CENTER EXHIBITIONS
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

A mass of snarled tree roots girdles the middle stretch of a long, galvanized-steel fence post in Harold Mendez's *but I sound better since you cut my throat*, 2017. Juxtapositions of organic materials with "artifacts" culled from different contexts characterized the artist's sparse and contemplative installation spanning two modestly sized adjoining galleries at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts. The subtly bent and twisted pole, wedged at a forty-five-

degree angle between the floor and the ceiling, crosscut the white cube's volume and evoked the iconic architectural interventions of Minimalists such as Fred Sandback and Richard Serra, but the naturally occurring wooden accretion transformed the manufactured post into something more like a ready-made metaphor for the relationship between nature and culture, or between point and line.

"The years now" was the title of both the exhibition and the newly commissioned sculpture that occupied the center of the main gallery, beyond the aforementioned assemblage. The primary features of the newer piece were eight fiberglass grates, each coated with silver enamel and placed in a grid on the floor to suggest a single large industrial plane, recalling Carl Andre's floor-hugging expanses of metal plates. Yet instead of allowing visitors to traverse the work's surface, as Andre did, Mendez chose to cover his grille relief with Lilliputian white carnation petals as a funereal proxy for a living body. Another vanitas-like element occupied the matrix, too: a gnarly tree stump, oriented upside down so that the chunky roots reached into the air like short, dead branches. Given a burnished black surface treatment, this organic element echoed the woody growth on the fence post in the adjacent gallery.

The other two elements of the work were a sound component that filled the gallery space and a small 3D-printed replica (with modifications) of a Chimu funerary pot from Peru's Moche Valley. The pot called one's attention to the role of the human in Mendez's work: Conjured via trace or surrogate, the physical body is never pictured but is always present. The sonic landscape, which primarily featured a male voice, followed this logic. The exhibition essay, penned by Katja Rivera (who curated the show with Alyssa Brubaker), lucidly describes the piece: "Beginning in a steadfast cadence, a measure of self-doubt creeps into the narrator's speech. 'Who am I?' he asks, answering himself moments later,

‘The louder I ask, the louder becomes the silence of no answer, until it seems the silence is saying, by saying nothing, you ain’t nothing.’” Yet in the space itself, the multichannel installation at times played at a volume too faint to allow comprehension, transforming the narrative of self-doubt into a gentle murmur of abstract speech, something like a prayer. The physical elements that made up this “memorial field” (as Rivera described it) summoned cultural memories from across time and space; combined with the installation’s lack of represented bodies, these objects more pointedly alluded to eradication and discrimination campaigns against the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

The original pre-Columbian Chimú vessel, which is held by the Field Museum in Chicago, is in the form of a symmetrically stylized fruit with a handle and a spout, ornamented with a row of seeds and the small playful figure of a monkey, which clasps the base of its opening. Mendez’s digitally printed facsimile simulates the patina of the ancient ceramic piece but is altered and scaled up, in part for display and in part to host one of the speakers projecting the audio component of the work. While the artist’s act of reproducing a historical artifact falls in line with other critical practices that dispute originality and authorship, Mendez’s implementation of the dichotomy between real and replica—along with those between life and death, growth and decay, horizontal and vertical—felt unresolved and precarious. More impactful and poetic were the smaller gestures, such as the repeated scattering of fresh petals on the heavy grate.

— Michelle Grabner



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Harold Mendez: 'I feel like I'm communing with the past'

The Los Angeles-based artist on Columbus's secret religion, Rauschenberg's scrapyard—and the hunt for Belkis Ayón's grave



In 2017, the artist Harold Mendez travelled from Los Angeles, where he lives, to Havana. He was searching for the grave of the Cuban artist Belkis Ayón, who died in 1999. Mendez was born in 1977 in Chicago to Mexican and Colombian parents. Over the past decade, his work in sculpture, photography, printmaking and installation has touched on ideas of cultural memory, transnationalism, land, ritual and ancient histories.

His exhibition *And, perhaps, here, between* has just opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Miami, curated by Gean Moreno. Conceptualised as a memorial to Ayón, it includes modified photographs, found objects, cast iron sculptures, and a one-ton counterweight from a scrapyards in Captiva, Florida. The show follows *Let us gather in a flourishing way*, Mendez's survey that opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 2020, and travelled to the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, in 2021.

We met him at his studio in Downtown Los Angeles.

The Art Newspaper: Could you tell me about your history with Belkis Ayón, and her significance for your work?

Harold Mendez: I studied printmaking and photography. Belkis worked primarily with collagraphs, building up the image with all kinds of textures and surfaces. I'm also interested in mediating my images. In 2016, a touring retrospective of her work at the Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, really reinvigorated my interest in her work.

A year later you went to Havana. How did that come about?

The National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago received a grant through the MacArthur Foundation called the International Connections Fund. Instead of an exhibition, they proposed an initiative where six artists from Chicago would go to Havana for two weeks there and interact with six Cuban artists.

Did you go with the specific intention of looking for Ayón's grave site?

I did. I didn't necessarily expect to make work in Cuba. But one of the things I wanted to do was to look for her grave. And the other thing I did, which I always do when I travel, was spend time at libraries and photo archives.

You never found the grave. But tell me about the cemetery where you shot the photographs for *The days of yesterday are all numbered in sum* (2019), showing a sacrificed chicken surrounded by petals.

It's called La Necrópolis de Cristóbal Colón, named for Christopher Columbus. It's one of the oldest cemeteries in Latin America. There's a section in the far edge of the cemetery for people who practised this secret religion called Abakuá, related to Santería, that Belkis made work about.

Can you describe your treatment of photographic prints?

Parts of the images will get covered with all this powder—graphite and powdered charcoal and pigment—which I blend in, then dust off or erase. By doing that multiple times, I'm building up a kind of atmospheric veil.

I think of ideas of mobility and immobility in relation to your work: things that can be handled or removed, and things you would or could never touch.

A lot of my work is sourced in different places, and then comes together very slowly in the studio. I might use a slab of marble on the floor, with a copper vessel that gets water poured into it, or flower petals, these kinds of things. There's an accumulation that requires that kind of mobility. But it's important that my practice is not solely related to being in the studio; it's about engaging in the world.



Afterwards, we shall read your bones (For Belkis Ayón), 2019, Mendez's collaged photograph of a massive counterweight that looks like a tombstone

Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery

How did the one-ton counterweight come to be included in this exhibition?

In 2016 I was in residence at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in Captiva. I went to the scrapyards where Rauschenberg collected a lot of his materials, and I came across this counterweight. I photographed it—it looks like a yellow tombstone. I didn't have a studio at the time, so I was like, "How the hell am I going to get this one-ton object to Los Angeles?" But I have been thinking about it ever since. I went back there in July. It was gone, but I found something similar.

A major part of your work seems to be about not only death, but memorialisation.

Some pieces have been specifically about family members that recently passed. But the whole ICA exhibition is a kind of memorial for Belkis Ayón. My work is often about the notion of being in-between, having a connection to other histories. The importance of remembering. In some works, I feel like I'm communing with the past.

Do you also identify a redemptive or optimistic aspect to your practice?

I think a lot of the work is pretty optimistic. It might not always appear that way. But to engage with something from the past is to have a kind of optimism, a way to keep it moving forward and to keep a connection to it. There is a kind of reverence that, for me, is about mending or caring for something.

• *Harold Mendez: And, perhaps, here, between,* [ICA](#) Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, until 1 May 2022

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/11/30/harold-mendez-i-feel-like-im-communing-with-the-past>

YOSSI MILO

HAROLD MENDEZ

b. Chicago, 1977, Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

EDUCATION

- 2007 MFA, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 2000 BA, Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 1999 University of Science and Technology, School of Art and Design, Ghana, West Africa

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 one way to transform and two and three, Curated by Kelly Kivland, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio
A sentence, or a spell, Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, CA
- 2021 And, perhaps, here, between, Curated by Gean Moreno, Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL
- 2020 Let us gather in a flourishing way, Curated by Jamillah James, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; and The Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, VA
The years now, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, The University of Chicago, IL
- 2019 Field (Encounter) Moody Center for the Arts, Rice Public Art, The Raymond and Susan Brochstein Pavilion, Houston, TX
For other days, Patron Gallery, Chicago, IL
The days of yesterday are all numbered in sum, The Van Every/Smith Galleries, Davidson College, NC
- 2016 At night we walk in circles, Patron Gallery, Chicago, IL
Dayward, Round 45: Curated by Ryan Dennis, Project Row Houses, Houston, TX
- 2014 but I sound better since you cut my throat, Three Walls, Chicago, IL
- 2008 UBS 12 X 12: NEW ARTISTS / NEW WORK, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Advertisements for Myself, Contemporary Art Workshop, Chicago, IL

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 Crusading The Specter, Yossi Milo, New York, NY
- 2022 Drum Listens to Heart, The Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA
Open Structure, Curated by Grace Deveney, School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada
How to Get Free of the Rectangle, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, NY
Entre Centre et Absence, Curated by Olivia Shao, Loong Mah, New York, NY
- 2021 Grain of a Hand: Drawings with Graphite, Curated by Isabel Casso, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Senses of Brown, Curated by César García-Alvarez, The Armory Show, New York, NY
Time Takes a Cigarette, Josh Lilley Gallery, London, UK
LatinXAmerican, Curated by Julie Rodrigues Widholm, DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL
- 2020 To Bough and To Bend, Bridge Projects, Los Angeles, CA
Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales / John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation International Connections, Havana, Cuba
- 2019 Cross Currents, Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, IL
Doubles, Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2018 Being: New Photography 2018, Curated by Lucy Gallun, Museum of Modern Art, NY
- 2017 WHITNEY BIENNIAL, Curated by Mia Locks and Christopher Y. Lew, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
Territorial, Bass Museum, Public Sector Art Basel, Miami, FL
RECONSTITUTION, LAXART, Los Angeles, CA
Sunlight arrives only at its proper hour, 356 Mission, Los Angeles, CA
Traduttore, Traditore, Curated by Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL

YOSSI MILO

- DID YOU EVER SEE SUCH A THING AS A DRAWING OF A MUCHNESS?, Artpace, San Antonio, TX
Monarchs: Brown and Native Contemporary Artists in the Path of the Butterfly, The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; and The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS
ONE: Curated by Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels, We Buy Gold, Brooklyn, NY
Tiffany & Co. Salon di Mobile, Milan, Italy
- 2016 Present Standard, Curated by Edra Soto and Josue Pellot, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL
Subduction, Curated by Rodrigo Valenzuela for Upfor Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2015 Black: Color, Material, Concept, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
Traces in the Dark, Curated by Liz Park, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA
Name It by Trying to Name It, Curated by Lisa Sigal and Nova Benway, The Drawing Center, NYC
Drawings in Context / Field, Queens Museum, NY
Specter Field Harold Mendez & Ronny Quevedo, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
Open Sessions 6, The Drawing Center, NY
Lineas de la Mano, Sicardi Gallery, Houston, TX
Core Program Exhibition, Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- 2014 Phantoms in the Dirt, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL
Core Program Exhibition, Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Moving, Not Moving, The McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, TX
- 2013 A blurred and generalized projection of you and me, perFOREmance, Studio Museum, Harlem, NY
Four Fragments, The Bindery Projects, St. Paul, MN
- 2012 Fore, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
Several Silences, Knoxville Museum of Art / Renaissance Society, Knoxville, TN
Home: Public or Private, 6018 North, Curated by Tricia Van Eck
Chicago + Detroit, Curated by Tricia Van Eck, Künstlerhaus Speckstrasse, Amerikazentrum, Hamburg, Germany
- 2011 September 11, Museum of Modern Art / PS1, New York, NY
- 2009 Several Silences, Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL
Hide and Seek, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Zombie: A Mindless Affair, Antena, Chicago, IL
Fast Forward, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL
- 2008 So long as we can say this is the worst, this is not the worst, Outer Ear Festival, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
Eros, c'est la vie, London Biennale (organized by David Medalla), London, UK
Latino Nation, USA, Curated by Encarnacion Tereul, University Museum, Carbondale, IL

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2023 Center for Contemporary Ceramics at California State University, Long Beach, CA
2021 John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Arts/Industry Residency, Sheboygan, WI
2020 Light Work Artist-in-Residence, Syracuse, NY
2018 Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM
2017 Cross Currents Artist Exchange, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation International Connections Initiative, Havana, Cuba
2016 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's Rauschenberg Residency, Captiva, FL
2014 Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship
Headlands Center for the Arts, Alumni New Works / Artist-in-Residence, San Francisco, CA
Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- 2013 Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Madison, ME

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- Efroymsen Contemporary Arts Fellowship
The Lighthouse Works, Fisher's Island, NY
- 2012 3Arts Award
Headlands Center for the Arts, Artist-in-Residence, San Francisco, CA
- 2008 Experimental Sound Studio, Artists Residency Program, Chicago, IL
- 2001 Ox-Bow Residency, Saugatuck, MI

COLLECTIONS

- Chicago Transit Authority
- Colección Diéresis, Guadalajara, Mexico
- DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL
- J.P. Morgan Chase Collection
- Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
- Soho House, Chicago, IL
- Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
- Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN