

El Muro



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EL MURO Marybeth Shaw

What distinguishes people on one side of a political border from the other? How does a line drawn in the sand or a natural divide such as a river affect one's sense of self? We developed a heightened awareness of these and related questions when we met a young artist with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status. DACA is a temporary reprieve from deportation for adults who were brought to the United States when they were children. It offers two-year renewable permits to work but has many constraints on civil liberties and is not a pathway to citizenship. More than 80% of DACA recipients are Mexican; over 94% are Central and South American.

We began to pay particular attention to the work of artists and designers of Mexican and South American lineage. Mexico has a rich visual culture that has served to transmit its traditions, rhythms of life, and belief systems for thousands of years. Cosmology, the persistence of dualities, and reverence for nature and its cycles are painted in murals, woven into patterns and sculpted in an elaborate vocabulary of signs.

With a goal of celebrating patterning and murals through the medium of wallcovering, and to better understand how these artists process their lived experience, Wolf-Gordon invited seven creatives from north and south of the wall to explore issues of identity, culture and heritage.

The artists practice in diverse disciplines, from painting and conceptual art to product design, ceramics and textiles. Four individuals live and work in Guadalajara, San Cristobal de las Casas and Mexico City; and three are of Mexican or Ecuadorian heritage living and working in New York City and Denver.

South: During Mexico Design Week in October 2023, we had the opportunity to see firsthand the projects of designers participating in various programs of the festival—*Vision and Tradition and Unedited*—and artwork exhibited in museums. There was a consistent reverence for indigenous forms, motifs, materials and fabrication techniques, and several works on display were the results of partnerships between designers and artisans throughout the country. We were struck by the confident focus of the work executed in a distinctively Mexican voice.

At *Vision and Tradition*, we saw the work of Camila Apaez and Laura Noriega. Both women are founders of design practices that merge contemporary design with traditional craftsmanship.

For Wolf-Gordon, ceramicist Camila Apaez transformed the sensual, nature-inspired forms of her three-dimensional objects into a two-dimensional surface with great visual depth. As a ceramic work at its origin, *Frontiers on the Land are Bodily Frontiers* embodies the warmth and materiality of earth, particularly of local Tapalpa clays and yellow oxide that make up the engobes. Apaez's composition of winding curves can be understood at various scales and, poignantly, of a bird's eye view of a winding riverscape or natural borderland.

Trained as an industrial designer, Laura Noriega has worked in diverse media, from metal and stone to textiles and clay. In her first wallcovering design, she delves into a highly personal childhood memory recalled through the lens of a camera. *Violet Spring* is an exquisitely colored and textured depiction of jacaranda petals at a super-graphic scale.

The jacaranda tree is cultivated widely throughout the world in frost-free locations. Noriega's treatment of this flowering beauty evokes the faithful reappearance of spring and the daring suggestion of hope.

We encountered the spiritually charged work of Dyg'nojoch, aka Jorge Abel Perez, in an exhibition titled *Muralism and Resistance* at the Colegio de San Ildefonso. To our *El Muro* project, Dyg'nojoch brought his deep connection to the fauna and flora of Mayan symbolism in the form of a proud stag—revered for guidance, protection and good fortune. His work is also filtered through subcultural influences of graffiti, and refined in an illustrative style that celebrates the color of traditional festivals in his home state of Chiapas.

Rodrigo Lobato and Lilia Corona—founders of Platalea Studio—whose abstract rug design we saw at *Unedited*, work across different media and are adept in both digital and traditional modes of production. For the Wolf-Gordon project, Lobato took the lead, inspired by three major indigenous Mexican/European symbols that endure and evolve: the stars that represent the gods of the southern sky as well as on the mantle of the Virgin of Guadalupe; the feather of the Aztec mother earth goddess Coatlicue; and the rose of the Virgin Mary. Lobato created two patterns with these elements, underscoring the duality of Mexican symbolism: an ordered grid; and a “windblown” scattering and over-lapping of the symbols. Significantly, Lobato titled his patterns *Fulgor/Glare* which might signify an enlightening or blinding brightness in both languages.

North: Our search for artists on the American side of *el muro* involved following leads through personal connections and the internet. Again, we were impressed

by a deep understanding and respect of heritage, but also by the degree to which each of the stateside artists' work was conditioned by their social and political status.

Widely exhibited Blanka Amezkua, a Mexican-born/American artist, cultural promoter, art space catalyst and educator, has assiduously studied a precious 16th century Mexican book, the *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano*, which contains 185 illustrations of indigenous healing plants and recipes for how to apply them. As Amezkua has noted, the *Codex* is a significant work on Aztec medicine and culture, the histories of botany and of medicine. Her ongoing re-presentation of the *Codex* is a tribute to the cumulative work of the ancient healers and, perhaps, the hope that we can continue to heal ourselves today by acknowledging its value. Amezkua's composition for *El Muro* is a joyous polychromatic spectacle of botanical illustrations, from roots to flowers, defying gravity and united at its center by the Mexican aloe, or agave, a multi-use miracle plant.

Monica Curiel, educated in interior design, fashion design and fine art, was born and raised in Texas by immigrant laborers from Jalisco. Her work with media such as plaster, grout, paint and draped fabric celebrates Curiel's heritage and the sacrifices of her parents and other immigrants. Subversively, it also transposes their labor to the spaces of culture and privilege. Curiel's mural, *Barro Blanco* (“White Mud,” in English), combines Roman clay—a paint/plaster hybrid material—as an atmospheric background, with plaster sheets superposed to create a subtle but repetitive, and loosely geometric, grid. Her depiction of a wall, the most self-referential contribution to

El Muro, is opaque and demonstrative of its labor-intensive process, yet luminous and hopeful in its light, natural coloration.

Transnational artist Francisco Donoso came to the United States from Ecuador as a child and has been a DACA recipient since 2013. His reflections on his heritage and political status have informed a rich body of work that he has curated and exhibited widely. Donoso's paintings are complex compositions in which acrylic, spray paint, ink and colored pencil are applied to both sides of mylar. Mylar's translucency enables his paintings to transcend their physical limitations. In *Boundless*, Donoso uses the diamond-like apertures of chain link as devices for dreaming of the other side, in brilliant color.

The work in *El Muro* provides diverse, multi-layered content for contemplating the persistence and fluidity of cultural heritage. It is also timely for its subject matter relating to national borders and the migration of peoples worldwide. Significantly, these murals and patterns are about hope built upon a proud knowledge of the past, regardless of the artist's location south or north of *el muro*.



CAMILA APAEZ

Frontiers on the Land are Bodily Frontiers

This piece explores the internal movements that may occur when one decides to cross a frontier—whether physical or subjective—and the inner experience of crossing but, at the same time, leaving something behind. The border delimits a new area or territory and, also, traces an invisible, sinuous line that divides the “before and after.”

The piece is made with clay, oxides and wild local clay engobes, or liquified clays, and was photographed unfired to retain the original colors of the engobes.



Camila Apaez was born in Mexico City and lives in Guadalajara. She studied Arts and Cultural Management and, in parallel to her studies, worked in clay, a medium that has become her main craft. Through ceramics and primarily their manual construction, she investigates the intersection and collaboration with the natural world, while recovering and extolling ancestral feminine archetypes, their relationship with space and the human body. Apaez’s objects have utilitarian functionality while maintaining a sculptural edge. In 2018, she founded Ila Ceramics, the brand for which she creates vases, lamps, small furniture, and other objects realized through her art. Ila Ceramics seeks to return to the organic language of nature, and to the use and contemplation of objects, knitting a ritual sense into life and blurring the lines between nature, the sacred, and the everyday.

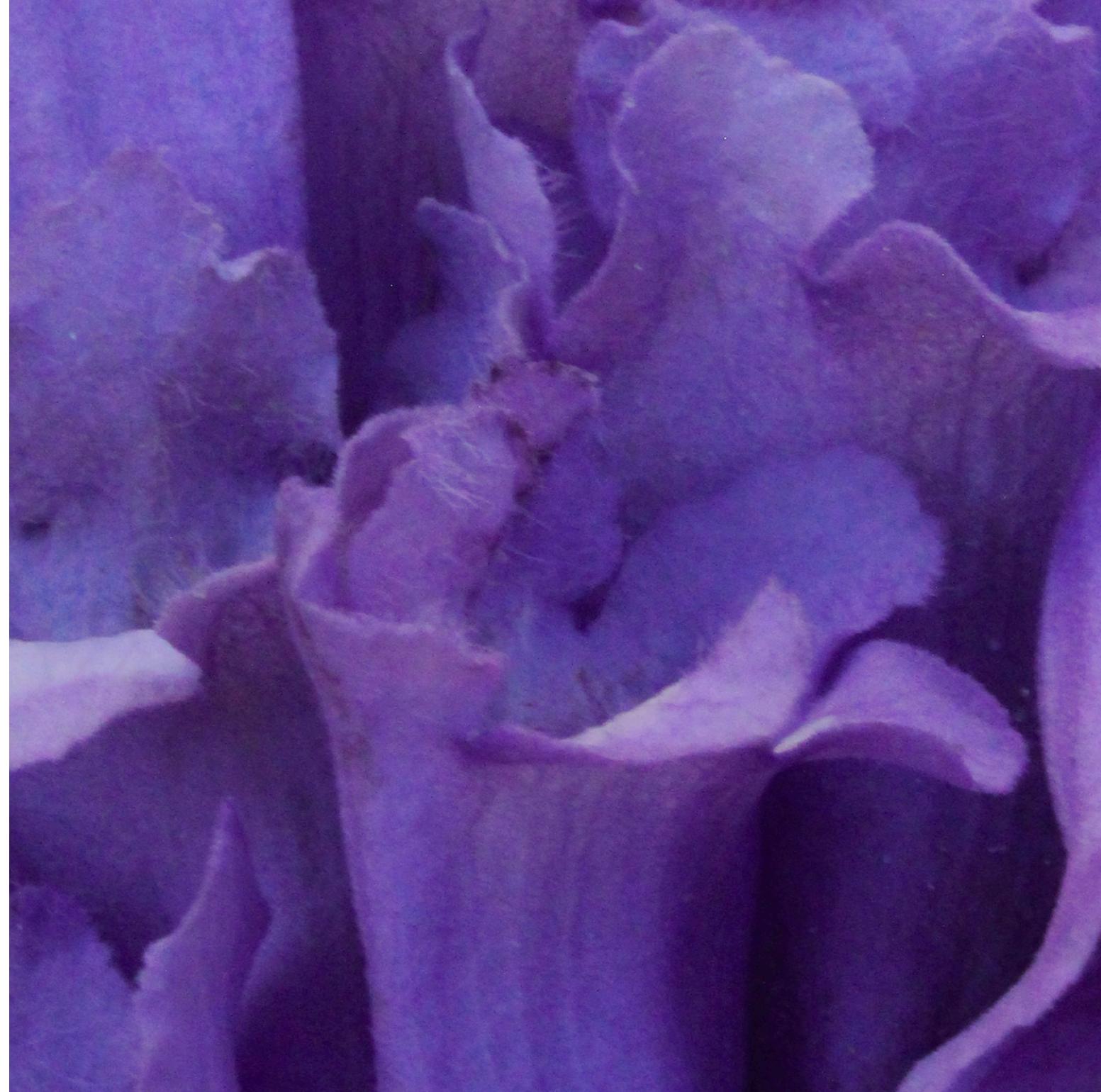


LAURA NORIEGA

Violet Spring

Laura Noriega, based in Guadalajara, Mexico, is a multidisciplinary designer passionate about working with traditional processes and experimenting with materials, primarily the cultural and material diversity of Mexico. She is the founder and creative director of the handmade design brand in Mexico: Tributo. Her professional experience with a timeless and honest vision encompasses product and interior design and research projects to comprehensively coordinate the generation of value through design. Her projects individually and collectively have been exhibited in important forums, museums, and exhibitions such as the Denver Art Museum, National Museum of Anthropology in México, Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City, Salone Satellite Milano, Tokyo Design Week, Tent London, Dubai Design Week, and Wanted Design NY, among others.

This composition of violet tones consists of the superposition of layers of petals of fresh flowers of the Jacaranda tree that blooms in the months of February and March. *Violet Spring* aims to enhance the different shades of violet in the natural light of a sunset in the shadow of the same tree and to convey the texture of the petals, which seem to hug each other like soft fabrics. Noriega's fascination with Jacarandas dates back to her childhood, when she had lunch every day in the playground of her elementary school under the jacarandas, sitting on the natural violet-hued mat every spring. The image celebrates the color of Noriega's spring and the healing force of violet. She affirms, "Nature is never wrong."





DYG'NOJOCH (JORGE ABEL PEREZ)

Iconografía y Flora Animal



The Deer: many cultures adopt these creatures as spiritual guides, protectors, and conveyors of good luck. The deer was a sacred animal for the Mayans of the Yucatan Peninsula. In some codices, it is related not only to other animals but also to gods, the underworld, and meteorological phenomena, especially rain and, consequently, fertility. In his distinct illustrative and painterly style, Dyg'Nojoch incorporates the symbolic elements of this animal with the influences of textiles from the Chiapas highlands, his home region. Replete with color and flora, his work celebrates the joyful and polychromatic cultural festivals of Mexico.

Dyg'Nojoch, born in Yabteclum, Chiapas, resides in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico. A Tzotzil artist and graphic designer, he expresses spirituality, indigenous struggles, and social issues through vibrant visual arts. His work blends Mayan symbology with flora, fauna, and mythical characters in colorful murals and illustrations. Inspired by personal stories and childhood experiences, he co-founded the GAM Festival, promoting mural art to revitalize public spaces. Dyg'Nojoch has participated in national and international mural festivals, including the Colombia Biennial in 2021. His work has been featured in exhibitions worldwide, notably in the celebration of 100 years of Mexican muralism at the San Ildefonso School in 2023 and the book "De Mi Barrio a Tu Barrio: Street Art in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean" (Gudberg Verlag-Goethe Institut, 2012).

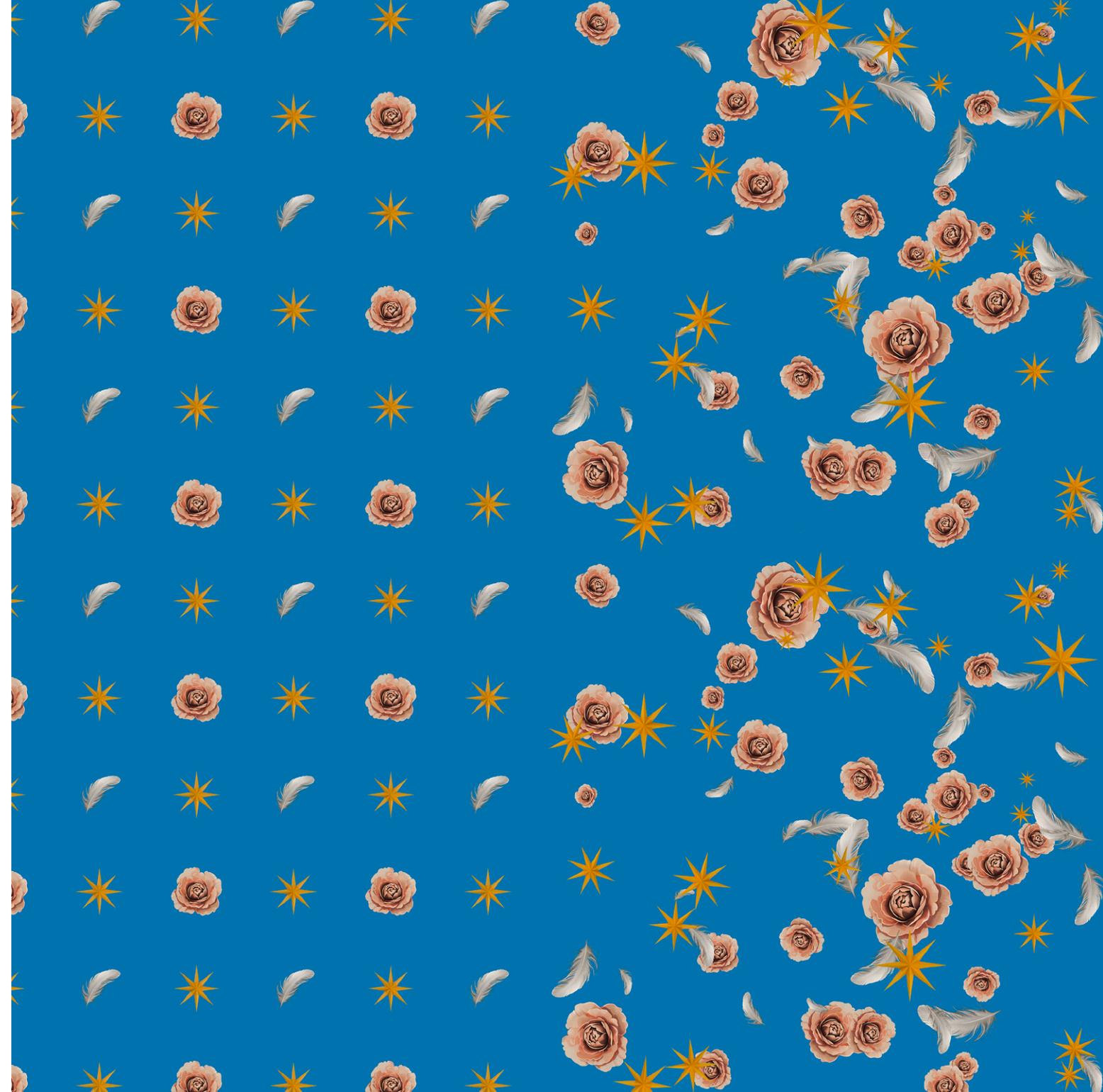
RODRIGO LOBATO, PLATALEA STUDIO

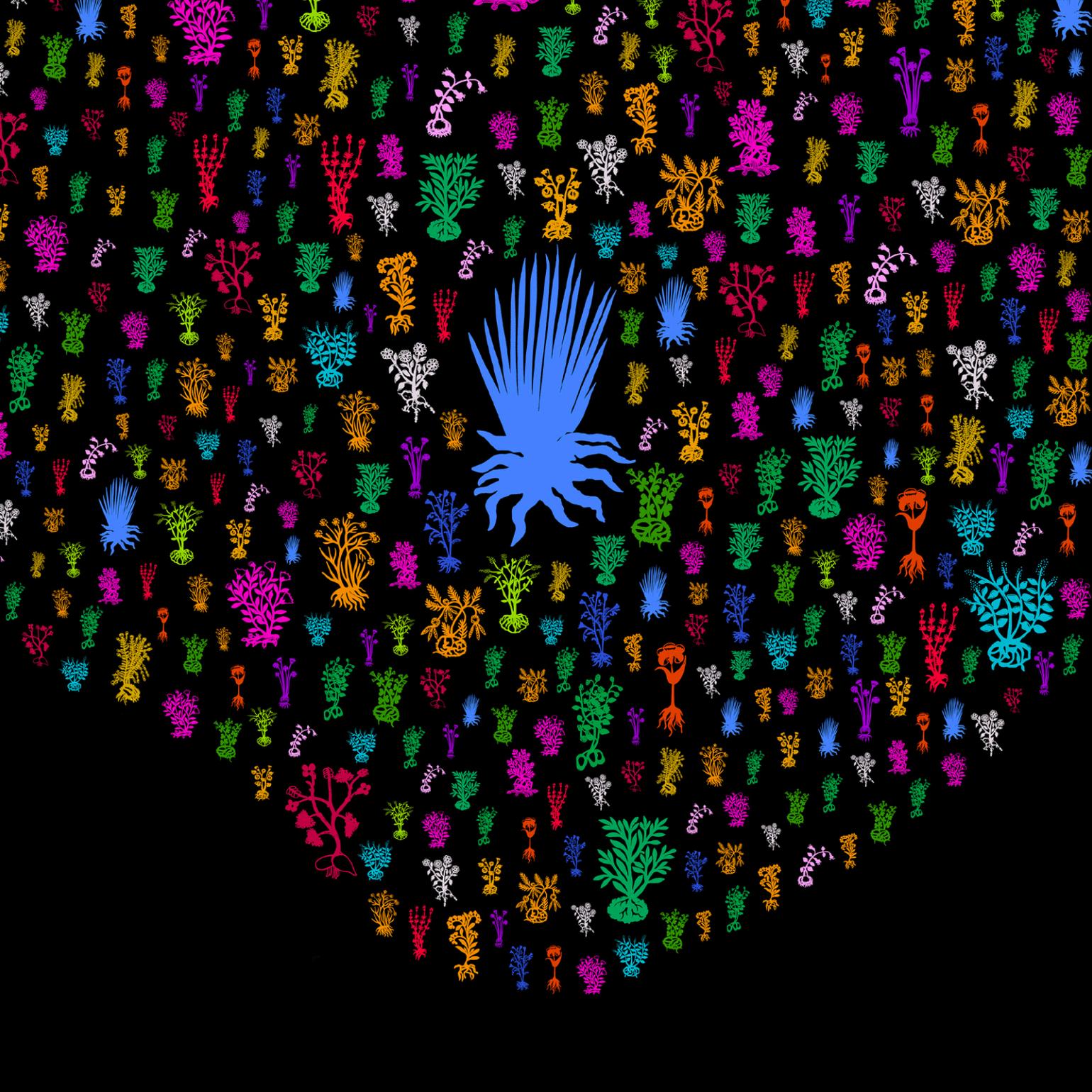
Fulgor/Glare



Rodrigo Lobato, an artist and designer with a degree in Industrial Design from Universidad Iberoamericana, co-founded Platalea Studio with Lilia Corona in 2017. His work blends contemporary design with traditional craftsmanship and digital manufacturing. He has refined a unique style that shapes much of Platalea's work today. Having moved frequently during his childhood, Lobato's deep connection to Mexico's diverse landscapes and towns greatly influences his designs, drawing from their shapes, colors, and mythologies. His design approach emphasizes geometry and the innovative use of materials, aiming to transform everyday expectations through his work. Lobato finds inspiration in cinema, mythologies, and culinary arts, relishing the complexity and immersive qualities of aesthetic experiences. A natural storyteller, he delights in uncovering beauty in the mundane, weaving deeper narratives into the fabric of everyday life.

Fulgor/Glare examines the evolution of symbols in Mexico, highlighting their power, resilience, and adaptability in the face of social, temporal, and historical changes. Focusing on elements such as the star, the feather, and the rose, the design integrates indigenous Mexican and European symbols and encourages a reflection on identity, memory, and historical-cultural development. The star represents the Centzonhuītznāhua—the gods of the southern stars—symbolically merging with the stars on the mantle of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The feather is connected to Coatlicue—the Aztec mother goddess—symbol of the earth as both creator and destroyer, and has fundamental aspects for understanding the universe of Mexico's indigenous peoples. Coatlicue is the mother of Huitzilopochtli, the patron god of the Aztecs and their capital, Tenochtitlan. The rose, a vital element in Catholic iconography associated with the Virgin Mary, symbolizes purity, divine love, and grace.





BLANKA AMEZKUA

*Echoes of the Codex de la Cruz-Badiano:
A Floating Tapestry of Indigenous Medicinal Wisdom*

Echoes of the Codex de la Cruz-Badiano honors the invaluable knowledge of indigenous peoples, particularly regarding medicinal plants and their uses. Depicted through illustrations from the “Codex de la Cruz-Badiano”, the first book of indigenous botanical wisdom crafted in the Americas, Amezkua highlights the importance of preserving traditional healing practices and gives visibility to indigenous cultures’ contributions to science, medicine, and art. The mural recognizes the advanced knowledge of indigenous civilizations, both before colonization and in contemporary times, challenging prevailing historical narratives that have frequently marginalized or disregarded their accomplishments.



Blanka Amezkua is a Mexican-born/Latinx American immigrant interdisciplinary artist, cultural promoter, educator, and project creator based in New York City. She has exhibited at MoMA/P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Queens Museum, El Museo del Barrio, El Taller Boricua, the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, San Diego Art Institute, Wave Hill Public Garden & Cultural Center, among others, and her work has been published internationally. Amezkua’s practice is greatly influenced by folk art and popular culture, and in 2008 she began an artist-run project in her bedroom called the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project (BBBP), which ran from 2008–2010. Blanka currently operates AAA3A (Alexander Avenue Apartment 3A) an alternative artist-run space which offers food, dialogue, workshops, and art in her living room. She is an active member of Running for Ayotzinapa 43, an international community of runners based in NYC that promotes dialogue and consciousness concerning human rights violations worldwide.



MONICA CURIEL

Barro Blanco

Monica Curiel is a first-generation Mexican American born in Texas to immigrant parents, who work as laborers, from Jalisco, México. As a child, she accompanied her parents to work, spending time with her father on construction sites, and helping her mother clean homes. These early experiences were instrumental in shaping her artistic practice, exposing her to the raw materials that form the foundation of her artistic palette, such as plaster, house paint, and grouting tools. By basing her creative practice around labor materials, each piece becomes a celebration of her heritage and a way to honor the sacrifices that her parents and countless immigrants have made. Her work is influenced both by her culture and by her interdisciplinary education in interior design, fashion design, and fine art. The installation of Curiel's art in spaces where Mexican immigrants are often stereotypically confined to roles such as cleaning or gardening, is a transcendent act and reflects the American dream.

In each of Curiel's original artworks, she thoroughly demonstrates the step-by-step labor involved in their creation. In so doing, she draws attention to the countless acts of work that are often overlooked. The background of *Barro Blanco* is created by applying Roman clay to achieve a subtle textural movement. In the foreground, plaster sheets are formed and arranged into repetitive shapes. The piece is then painted and sealed. Curiel embraces the maker's handprint, allowing viewers to appreciate imperfection as evidence of its artisanal origin.





FRANCISCO DONOSO

Boundless



Boundless is developed from a larger work from 2022 titled "Boundless Futurity," painted with acrylic, spray paint, ink, and colored pencil on Mylar® sheets, working on both sides of the semi-translucent sheets. The work features Donoso's signature chain-link fence gesturally situated within a field of color, pattern, and movement, which elicits references to both water and the celestial. The star-like patterns made within the negative spaces of the chain-link fence function as psychedelic portals that reveal star-shaped forms, inviting the viewer to imagine the possibilities that exist beyond borders, limitations, and structures of confinement.

Francisco Donoso is a transnational artist and curator based in NYC. He is currently at the LMCC Workspace Residency and is a member and co-director of TSA NY. Originally from Ecuador, and raised in Miami, FL, he's been a recipient of DACA since 2013. Donoso received his BFA from Purchase College and has participated in fellowships and residencies at Wave Hill as a Van Lier Fellow, Stony Brook University, and The Bronx Museum Artist in the Marketplace, among others. He has participated in solo and group exhibitions throughout the US, notably at El Museo del Barrio, The Bronx Museum of Arts, Children's Museum of Manhattan, Wave Hill, NADA House, Kates-Ferri Projects, Field Projects, Second Street Gallery, Baik+Khnessyer, and SPRING/BREAK LA. He was awarded an Artist Corp Grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts and a Cultural Solidarity Fund Grant. His work is in many corporate and private collections, including Capital One and the Memorial Sloan Kettering Collection. Donoso's work has been written about in Art & Object, Hyperallergic, The Latinx Project Interventions, and The Financial Times, among others.

Wolf-Gordon is an American design company dedicated to inspiring the creation of outstanding interiors. Founded in 1967 as a commercial wallcovering resource, our high-performing product line has expanded to include PVC-free and natural wallcoverings, RAMPART® wall protection, upholstery textiles, Scuffmaster® paint, Wink® dry-erase surfaces, digitally printed materials, and GATHER® Acoustical. We develop products that are provocative and of our time. WG Design Studio regularly collaborates with leading international designers to bring fresh perspectives to our A&D clients. Our growing portfolio includes designs by Laurinda Spear, Karim Rashid, Petra Blaisse, Grethe Sørensen, Kevin Walz, Boym Partners, Frank Tjepkema, Mae Engelgeer, Alike van der Kruijs, and V Starr/Venus Williams. We focus on the aesthetic, technical, and sustainability issues essential to being a trusted supplier to the commercial design industry. WG Customs Lab works closely with clients to design and produce custom and digital print concepts for signature, site-specific environments. Wolf-Gordon account executives are based in all major markets in the United States.

