



Mariana Castillo Deball  
*Them inside the skin*  
13/10 – 16/12/2017

They arrived and the man appeared. He was a deer. He came closer and they cut up his flesh. They gathered wasps, hornets and bees and stuffed them inside the skin, [they left the skin there] and went home. When they gave the meat to their mother she said: *Have you gone crazy?* You have killed your father [...] She left and went to the mountain [...] she called and called as she stood at the foot of the mountain. No one answered. She found the stuffed skin with insects, and said to it: *What's the matter with you? Why don't you say something?* But how could he speak any more being only a skin. She took her fist and stuck the ear, and the bees, hornets and wasps broke out of the skin and stung her, [when she arrived home] her children said: *we prepared the steam bath for you to recover.* They closed the door and did not permit her to leave. She never came out but went up and turned into the spirit of the steam bath. The children left and went far away. They found a snake. They took out their eyes and they were very pretty, then they made a rope and climbed up to the sky. One of them became an eye and a half of the snake, and the other a half of the snake's eye.<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition has two main characters:  
a time-space calendar  
a shared skin

To measure – whether distance or time – is to develop a material engagement with the world that is at once practical and conceptual. The exhibition explores sculptural praxis as an expanded skin that comprises space and time.

The *tonalpohualli* is a cosmological technology for the count of time. Apart from measuring time, it is a divinatory system entangling spatial coordinates, agriculture, and ritual sacrifices. The gods, events and other elements it carried as augural messages defined the way people conducted their affairs and even what kind of people they were likely to become.<sup>2</sup>

The *tonalpohualli* is a calendar of 260 days, composed of 20-day signs and 13 numbers. Each day is a combination of a day sign and a number, and they run concurrently until all the combinations are exhausted (20x13=260). The day 1 Crocodile is always followed by 2 Wind, 3 House, 4 Lizard, and so on, until the shorter 13 number cycle ends with 13 Reed, after which it continues with 1 Jaguar, 2 Eagle and so forth.

The calendar was depicted in visual manuscripts named *tonalamatl*, from *tonal* (day) and *amatl* (paper). In these books the days were visually displayed in different permutations according to the multiple cycles of the calendar. The books also contained astronomical and medical knowledge, insights into prophecies and protocols for rituals.

The books were crafted of either deer skin or paper, mostly organized as a screen fold. Paper was an important material in the indigenous cosmogony, widely used not just for manuscripts, but also for ritual objects such as body ornaments, clothes, and offerings.

1 *Creation of the sun and the moon*, Anne Dik, *Mixtec Texts*, Norman: Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of Oklahoma Press, 1959, 10-16.

2 The first evidence of the Mesoamerican calendar dates to the VI century BC in the form of calendrical signs and numerals carved in relief on stone monuments in Oaxaca.

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Paper has a close relationship with the body, for example, paper figurines are soaked with rubber, resin, blood and then burned. In this case the paper figure takes the role of the sacrificed victim.

The connection between the body and the environment is present in the calendar, for instance, the signs of the days and the body parts maintained a correspondence. The sap of the amate tree used to make paper was blood, the smoke of fire was human breath, and the tree bark was human skin.

In the calendar, the deity *Xipe Totec* was often depicted as a man wearing the flayed skin of another on top of his own. The ceremony consisted on the sacrifice of the victim, and the transfiguration of another person through wearing the skin of the sacrificed.

The Nahua concept of *ixiptla* derives from the particle *xip*, meaning skin, coverage or shell. A natural outer layer of tissue that covers the body of a person or animal, the skin can be separated from the body to produce garments, containers for holding liquids or parchment as a writing surface. *Ixiptla* has been understood as image, delegate, character, and representative. *Ixiptla* could be a container, but also could be the actualization of power infused into an object or person. In Nahua culture, it took the form of a statue, a vision, or a victim who turned into a god destined to be sacrificed. Without having to visually appear the same, multiple *ixiptlas* of the same god could exist simultaneously.

The skin of the deer and the paper act both as support and ritual signifiers. The book of days departs from a skin and becomes a body. The page 20 of the Borgia codex shows a deer with the 20-day signs assigned to different parts of its body. A skin deer-body-calendar. The codice Tudela has a similar image of an extended deerskin with the day signs inscribed in different parts of its body.

The association between man and deer appear in several narrations, including the story related at the beginning of this text. The deer is the sacrifice offering per excellence, and also a creature that can transmute in something else. Again, it is a game of substitutions and transmutations that depart from the skin and its materiality. In the indigenous cosmogony, the material gives shape, identity, materializes, but also substitutes and personifies, not only by visual analogies but also by subtle material relations.

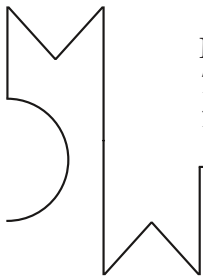
Skin and paper seem to share the same nature, as the wrapping or envelope of plants, humans and animals. These are the material and symbolic supports of the *tonamalatl* calendar known until today.

The body of works in this exhibition share the same skin, a skin for thought. It is not a contained skin, but a skin that can be shared, acting as an extended tissue between different bodies.

Mariana Castillo Deball was born in Mexico City, in 1975, and lives and works in Berlin. Her most recent exhibitions include *The History of Infamy*, LACMA, Los Angeles (2017); Sharjah Biennial 13 Tamawuj (2017); *Feathered Changes, Serpent Disappearances*, San Francisco Art Institute (2016); *Cronotropo*, Musée Régional D'art Contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon, Sérignan (2015); *Parergon*, Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2014); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (2012); *Between you and the image of you that reaches me, Kaleidoscopic Eye*, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (2010).

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*Tonalpohualli*

2017

aluminum, wood, bronze

variable dimensions



*Pedernal II*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm

13.9 × 8.4 in



*What's the matter with you?*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm

13.9 × 8.4 in



*Why don't you say something?*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm

13.9 × 8.4 in



*Xipe Tetrahedron II*

2017

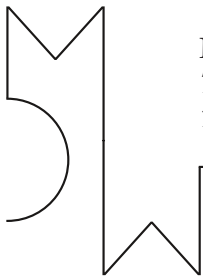
pigmented plaster and hemp rope

180 × 70 cm

70.8 × 27.5 in

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*Xipe Tetrabedron I*

2017

pigmented plaster and hemp rope

280 × 180 cm  
110.2 × 70.8 in

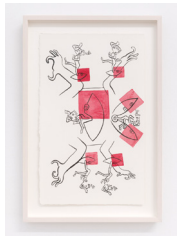


*Xipe couple*

2017

pigmented plaster

47 × 46 × 50 cm  
18.5 × 18.1 × 19.6 in



*An eye and a half*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm  
13.9 × 8.4 in



*Tonalamatl II*

2017

watercolor on paper

36 × 36 cm  
14.17 × 14.17 in



*Pedernal I*

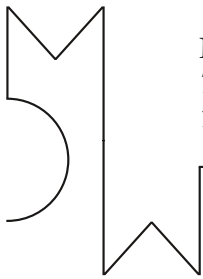
2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm  
13.9 × 8.4 in

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*Ixiptla I*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm

13.9 × 8.4 in



*Ixiptla II*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm

13.9 × 8.4 in



*Tonalamatl I*

2017

watercolor on paper

36 × 36 cm

14.17 × 14.17 in



*A half of an eye*

2017

watercolor on paper

35,5 × 21,5 cm

13.9 × 8.4 in



*Petate, Xipe, Turquesa, Xipe, Petate*

2017

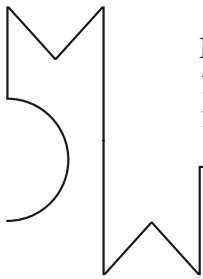
colored concrete tiles with relief

158 × 114 cm

59.05 × 44.88 in

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*Icosabedron*

2017

pigmented plaster, hemp rope and colored concrete tiles  
with relief

265 × 205 cm, 104.33 × 80.70 in



*Petate, Xipe, Turquesa*

2017

colored concrete tiles with relief

97 × 114 cm,

38.18 × 44.88 in



*Xipe Octahedron*

2017

pigmented plaster, hemp rope and colored concrete tiles  
with relief

210 × 130 cm, 82.67 × 51.18 in



*Xipe Tetrahedron III*

2017

pigmented plaster and hemp rope

37 × 27 × 24 cm

14.5 × 10.6 × 9.4 in

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