

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa: *Asymmetries*

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Curator: Lauren Barnes

Assistant Curator: Justine Kohleal

“A narrative, when analyzed, can quickly fall apart.”

- Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, 2018

Canadian-Guatemalan artist Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa makes works in sculpture, performance and painting that draw on literature, Latin American history, folklore, contemporary conspiracy theories and childhood memories. Referring to traumatic or tragic events – in particular Guatemala’s civil war (1960–96), which forced Ramírez-Figueroa and his family to immigrate to Vancouver as refugees in the 1980s – his works are imbued with a playful, sometimes dream-like quality. Using both sculptural objects and his own body, Ramírez-Figueroa creates scenarios and installations that bring to light asymmetrical power relationships in the history of Guatemala and beyond.

Asymmetries encompasses works from the past decade in addition to three new commissions. Two new sculptures are inspired by objects associated with acts of carrying and containment that, furthermore, represent various forms of colonial domination and control. One of these makes reference to a Wardian case, an early terrarium invented in 19th-century England and used for removing newly discovered plant species from their native lands. The other is a cast-aluminum *cacaxte*, a ladder-like carrier common among Indigenous populations of Latin America, who, under colonialism, were forced to physically carry explorers and their plunder using this tool. Ramírez-Figueroa reimagines the Wardian case and *cacaxte* in light of his own history, investigating the ways in which personal and cultural identities might expand and evolve over time, particularly as they move from one place to another.

Heart of the Scarecrow is a newly commissioned performance video looking back at the staging of a play of the same name by Guatemalan playwright Hugo Carrillo (1929–1994). Upon learning that a version involving Ramírez-Figueroa’s uncle was violently censored by the Guatemalan government in 1975, the artist became interested in its anti-establishment message, reimagining it several times in different media and locales. For the iteration at The Power Plant, Ramírez-Figueroa restages the production at the Universidad Popular in Guatemala City, the original site of the censorship.

The artist’s reimagining of these objects and stories calls to attention what has been lost, manipulated or left out of the record. At the same time, Ramírez-Figueroa’s artworks evoke the burdens that we carry—collectively and individually, physically and psychologically—and underline the importance of the imagination in overcoming them.