## TO SEE BEYOND

## Firelei Báez

After spending her childhood in the rich, unwieldy kaleidoscope of ethnicity and culture of the Dominican Republic, artist Firelei Báez was troubled by the blunt racial categories that awaited her upon immigrating to the United States at the age of nine. In her words, "There's a fluidity of color, of race, in the Caribbean... In America, you're black." To restore and reactivate the beautiful complexity of being Afro-Latina as both personal catharsis and political rallying cry, she creates baroque paintings that brim with amorphous figures, ornate patterning and charged symbolism. Locating her work as both harbinger and champion of more multi-racial societies the world over, where "skin tone is no longer a sufficient signifier," Báez expands our perception of the human landscape via mythical worlds of "characters that refuse definition." These allegorical agents are purposefully and predominantly female in a provocative state of becoming, where voluptuous forms, piercing eyes, fabled ancestors

and elemental metamorphosis swirl into what she calls, "propositions meant to create alternate pasts and potential futures." To See Beyond focuses upon this painterly language of hybridity as spoken through the centuries-old tradition of portraiture – reformulating its history of archiving people into periods and places to trace the trajectory of Báez's bodies and faces as they push beyond familiar contours. In the ensuing tapestry of African, Caribbean, and Latino folklore, icons of religion and revolution, and the land as a keeper of memory, we enter an evolving frontier where, for her, "the layered histories that make up individuals, and all the alternative possible selves...can emerge."

Firelei Báez: *To See Beyond* is organized by CAC Curator Steven Matijcio, and runs until August 19, 2018. This is the artist's first solo exhibition in Ohio and is generously supported by Stephen and Sandra Joffe, Jimmy and Lauren Miller, the WOMXN, Linda and Jim Miller, Maria Kalomenidou and Yannis Skoufalos, Sue Friedlander, and Artswave Corporate Partner: The Kroger Co. Special thanks to Wendi Norris, Gabrielle Haugen, Kavi Gupta and Rachel Gonzalez for their valuable assistance in the organization of the exhibition.