

Chaveli Sifre
Soft Portals
February 4–April 8, 2023

Embajada is pleased to announce its first solo exhibition with Puerto Rican artist, Chaveli Sifre. Sifre's work centers healing practices, the sense of smell, botany, and the belief systems constructed around them. Interested in intersensorial entanglement as knowledge production, she creates installations, scents, paintings, and performative rituals that recover the long-lost intersections between science, spirituality, smell, medicine, and care.

The works on view explore multiple esoteric practices, such as aura sensing, smoke cleansing, and divination. Symbols have power. Esoteric beliefs rise in times of economic uncertainty, these are criticized as heretical by religious organisms or irrational by scientific bodies, but magical thinking has accompanied artistic expression ever since the first humans entered a cave to paint (I like to think about the act of producing/enjoying these cave paintings as the first immersive experiences, temples). One may also understand mystical thought not as an explanatory category, but as a transcultural force akin to curiosity and intuition, whether one believes in these things or not is inconsequential. Sculpting with smoke, scent, or light, painting with air, the mediums are entangled, an invitation to consider sensorial perception as a symbiotic ecosystem as opposed to a static hierarchy, as a generative tool for empathy and disorienting. They often rely on sensory activation as a generative force capable of producing these portals, inviting us to reconnect with our intersensorial capacities as a form of spiritual medicine, contemplating the tangled history between the senses, health, and belief. Each sense is a portal.

A world's sensual hierarchy speaks to how this particular world is built and how it functions, but it also imprints itself in said world, generating it. This symbiotic relationship between the world and our senses pushes history forward. I consider multisensorial, intermedia works of art as acts of soft power because they resist ocular directness, they propose another way of existing beyond the visual realm. Practices that consciously address the senses shift our perception, provoking new ways of seeing and understanding the world—and inviting us into other worlds. These “lesser” senses are vehicles for knowledge. Acknowledging the power of the senses grants us a sort of power (what the Chicana poet, writer, and feminist theorist, Anzaldua, calls the split awareness) that has been carefully and skillfully anesthetized by decades of ocularcentrism. Silvia Federici coined an ideal term to help us navigate this relationship: "mechanization of the body." the process by which capitalist societies make us perceive bodies as production machines. Liberation from the eye-mind-production chains reminds us of our potential to fully live beyond the grasp of an exploitative system. –Chaveli Sifre

Chaveli Sifre (b. 1987 Würzburg, Germany) received her MA from Museumskunde, HTW, Berlin, Germany (2021) and her BFA from the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico in San Juan (2010). She has been exhibiting internationally with solo exhibitions at El Sitio, Barcelona, Spain (2022), El Lobi, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2019) Mana Contemporary, Chicago (2017), La Estación Espacial, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2016), Roberto Paradise, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2013, 2011). Sifre has participated in numerous institutional groups shows including in TBA21's Meandering, Cordova (2022); Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan (2021), Botanisches Garten, Berlin (2020); Salon Sophie Charlotte, Berlin (2020); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, San Juan (2020); Martin Gropius Bau (2018); Hamburger Bahnhof (2017); Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Habana, Cuba (2017), and LACE, Los Angeles (2016) among others. In December 2022, Sifre mounted a project at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), San Juan, curated by Marina Reyes Franco entitled AEROSOL, infusing the museum's courtyard with a fine mist of scents.