

HELLEN
ASCOLI

**CIEN
TIERRAS**

April 9–September 19, 2021

Cien Tierras

Hellen Ascoli's multidisciplinary approach to art making derives from an active engagement with weaving, movement, listening, and writing, which she applies to an exploration of the political relationship between body, object, and environment. Working primarily with the backstrap loom — a tool that attaches to the body of its user and to the space in which they are working — Ascoli generates ideas and experiences that are rooted in place, and which are therefore contextual and relational. “Each weave is intimately related to the body it harnesses,” she writes. “Its warp is the width of my hips, its length mirrors my height, its designs are spaced by the threads I can hold in my hand... It carries memory through touch, a proximity sense. I choose to use materials that reveal vestiges of bodies that were once there.”

For her first solo museum exhibition, Ascoli presents several new works including a large-scale textile installation in the CAC's lobby, a site-responsive kinetic wall sculpture, text-based weavings, videos displayed in custom-built furniture, photographs, and sound works. These are exhibited alongside salvaged and constructed objects—a mattress frame, brick molds, combs—that reference ideas of the body, memory, and home. Many of the works investigate translation—literal and metaphorical—as an entry point for destabilizing Western-centric modes of understanding and communicating. They demonstrate Ascoli's interest in reflecting on personal and collective experiences of trauma, and on the potential for change embodied in ordinary actions.

The exhibition's title, *Cien Tierras*, which is shared by two bodies of work included therein, is derived from a Spanish expression meaning “one hundred earths” (though *tierra* can also signify “land,” “ground,” and “world”). Here, “cien tierras” evokes the multiplicities that underpin the practice of weaving and connect it to other forms of recorded knowledge. Reflecting Ascoli's collaborative process, the exhibition features contributions by writer Laura August, poet and weaver Negma Coy, painter Jorge de León, sound artist and musician Sofia Jade Tanski, and designer Karl Williamson.

*Organized by Amara Antilla, Senior Curator,
Contemporary Arts Center.*

Hellen Ascoli (b. 1984, Guatemala City) received her BFA in sculpture from Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX (2006); and her MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago (2012). Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including the Bienal de Artes Visuales del Istmo Centroamericano (2014); *Bienal de Arte Paiz*, Museo de Correos, Guatemala City (2014, 2018, 2020); *My Body is Here*, Concepción 41, Antigua, Guatemala (2016); *One Stone and the Rain*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston; *Guatemala from 33,000 km: Contemporary Art 1960–present*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara (both 2017); *To Weave Blue: Poema al tejido*, University of Memphis; *Stone's Throw: Arte de Sanación, Arte de Resistencia*, The Anderson and Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA (both 2020). Currently, she lives and works in Madison, WI.

Ask Yourself

- 1 Think about the word *weave*. How have you used this word in conversation or in a class? How does Ascoli reference its various meanings?

- 2 Textiles have often been called “women’s work,” a term used to categorize them as a craft rather than “fine art.” But in Mayan languages, for example, this distinction doesn’t exist. Feminist artists in the 1960s and ’70s made pointed use of such “women’s work.” What lessons do you think Ascoli learned from these artists? What do you think she hopes to convey?

- 3 Many components of Ascoli’s exhibition — weavings, mattress frames, brick molds, family photos — communicate feelings of familiarity, domesticity, even intimacy. What artworks resonate with your experiences of friends and family? How does Ascoli’s work offer a sense of place? Where is that place?

- 4 The body is an important subject of Ascoli’s work. Think of an activity you do with your body — knitting, running, washing dishes — and the next time you’re doing that activity, be *mindful* of it. Concentrate solely on that activity. Close your eyes and think about the motions, sounds, and tactile experiences. What happens when you take these steps? Does it make you more aware of your body and the space it occupies?



Hellen Ascoli: Cien Tierras is supported by the Kaplan Lobby Fund.
Additional support is provided by the generous contributors to the
CAC Exhibition Fund.



Hellen Ascoli (b. 1984, Guatemala City), *Cien Tierras (One Hundred Earths)*, 2020–21 (detail).
Cotton and wool, backstrap and foot loom woven, 62 × 80 inches (157.48 × 203.2 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City.