

HUMANE ECOLOGY

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Eight Positions

The artists featured in this exhibition explore the inseparability of the natural and social. Each represents a distinct approach and place, or position, but all think in ecological terms—that is, about the complex relationships between living things and their environments. In doing so, they challenge ideas of “nature” as something separate from humans. They also center humans who have often been marginalized in discussions of the environment. Through sculpture, video, sound installation, and plantings, these artists illuminate patterns of cultivation and care, migration and adaptation, extraction and exploitation that span geographical, historical, and species lines.

This gallery, and the freestanding wall outside it, display *Power to Nurture*, an installation by the Colombian artist Carolina Caycedo. The works here speak to what the artist calls “the feminine and feminist labor of care at the center of environmentalism.” Caycedo rejects the landscape genre for its suggestion of a window onto the land, and thus a separation from it, and instead prefers portraiture—of both people and plants. The portraits here derive from the artist’s engaged, place-based research, which she calls “spiritual fieldwork.”

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Carolina Caycedo

b. 1978, London; lives and works in Los Angeles

In Yarrow We Trust 2023

Acrylic on canvas

Maternidad 2023

Acrylic on canvas

The yarrow plant has long been used as an abortifacient, a substance that terminates pregnancy. In this mural, the plant embellishes a stylized representation of a uterus under the words “in yarrow we trust.” Carolina Caycedo suggests that, absent legal access to abortion, one can rely on plants. The mural on the opposite side reads “la maternidad será deseada o no será” (motherhood will be desired or will not be)—a slogan popular within the Marea Verde (Green Wave) movement that spans Latin America and advocates for women’s reproductive rights. Caycedo’s feminism and environmentalism are deeply intertwined, both centered on care and aligned against patriarchal interference.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York; painted by Katie Polebaum

Carolina Caycedo

b. 1978, London; lives and works in Los Angeles

Mamma Nettle Wheel 2023

Acrylic mural

The four quadrants of the Native American medicine wheel variously represent cardinal directions, ceremonial plants, life stages, or seasons, as well as the cyclical connections between them. In homage to the Mohican people, who are native to this land, Carolina Caycedo depicts the wheel and adorns it with a common nettle plant. Nettle is used in Native medicine traditions as a tonic both during and after pregnancy. As also depicted in the mural featuring a yarrow plant outside this gallery, the artist considers plants to be natural allies of humans.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York; produced with the assistance of Williams
College students Kimberlean Donis, Gelila Kassa, Lucia
Sher, and Lulu Whitmore

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MI CUERPO, MI TERRITORIO 2023

Corrugated plastic, wood poles, yarn, ribbon

The phrase “MI CUERPO, MI TERRITORIO,” spelled out in Spanish across the facade of the building, translates as “my body, my land,” an assertion of possession and sovereignty against patriarchal interference and extraction of resources or labor. The large, transparent letters modulate views onto the landscape beyond. Each is mounted to a pole inspired by a *bastón de mando*—a staff that grants moral authority within Indigenous cultures across Latin America. The ribbons and yarn that decorate the staffs are purple, a color historically associated with feminist movements, and green, for the Marea Verde (Green Wave) movement in Latin America, which defends women’s reproductive rights.

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*Cada sorbo de café será una
bendición para ti (Tinti) 2023*

From the series *We Save Our Seed
for the Following Season*

Jacquard weaving, UV acrylic-printed cotton
twill, paper coffee flowers, wood

“Every sip of coffee will be a blessing to you,” reads the inscription accompanying this portrait of Faustina “Tinti” Deyá Díaz (1940–2021), an organizer and environmental defender active in the mountains of south-central Puerto Rico. Díaz cofounded the organization Casa Pueblo in 1980 as part of a successful bid to stop a multinational open-pit mining project. Since then, Casa Pueblo has built local solar energy capacity, maintained a butterfly reserve, and founded Café Madra Isla, a sustainable coffee enterprise designed to secure the area’s economic independence. Díaz’s portrait here is superimposed on a Puerto Rican flag and decorated with coffee flowers and butterflies.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York

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*When You Take from Mother Earth
You Can Give Back by Sprinkling
Tobacco (Ella) 2023*

From the series *We Save Our Seed
for the Following Season*

Jacquard weaving, UV acrylic-printed cotton
twill, wood, loose tobacco

The inscription on this work represents a lesson from Ella Besaw (1902–1990), a medicine woman of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians. The Mohicans are native to the land in and around the Berkshires (where the Clark is located) and currently reside in Wisconsin. Besaw is represented here with wild bergamot, one of her preferred plant medicines, and this installation includes loose tobacco—a sacred plant for many Native peoples. In an interview with Carolina Caycedo, Besaw’s daughter Betty described how the traditions of Mohican herbalism have remained in the family over multiple generations.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York

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*Guardamos nuestra semilla para
la próxima siembra (Caro) 2023*

From the series *We Save Our Seed
for the Following Season*

Jacquard weaving and UV acrylic-printed
cotton twill

The artist explains: “I made a self-portrait from my home garden in the El Sereno neighborhood of East Los Angeles. Behind me are the garden beds I built during the pandemic with my family. We moved into the house at the beginning of the pandemic, ripped out the lawn, and built the beds. Since then, we have grown and shared tomatoes, beets, corn, beans, squash, cucumbers, lettuce, chard, melon, celery, carrots, radishes, and medicinal herbs. Here I am pregnant with my second child, who is now two-and-a-half years old. The first batch of vegetables and herbs we planted grew at the same time as he was growing inside my womb.” The title of this work lends the series its title.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York

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En función de la vida sabrosa
(ABIF) 2023

From the series *We Save Our Seed*
for the Following Season

Jacquard weaving and UV acrylic-printed
cotton twill

A good (literally “tasty”) life is the promise of an ABIF, an acronym that stands for Agroecosistemas Biodiversos Familiares (family biodiverse agroecosystems)—a type of family-run farm developed in Cordoba, Colombia. The ABIF system maximizes biodiversity in the selection of crops and enhances yield through efficient spatial organization. It also borrows from ancestral knowledge, such as the irrigation technology of the Zenú people, native to the region, who made the terraces and ridges in the land that are visible in the aerial photograph here. Carolina Caycedo photographed several of the handmade signs that families made to identify their ABIFs during her fieldwork in Cordoba.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York

Carolina Caycedo

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*Our Culture Is Based on Relationships
with All Our Relatives (Meda)* 2023

From the series *We Save Our Seed
for the Following Season*

Jacquard weaving, UV acrylic-printed cotton
twill, paper crowberries, wood

Meda DeWitt is a healer of the Tlingit, a people native to southeast Alaska, whom Carolina Caycedo met while researching the area. She is represented here with her daughter gathering crowberries, a relative of the blueberry that is part of Native foodways. DeWitt asked people living in the city of Anchorage to collect berries in support of St. Paul, a small island in the Bering Sea that had experienced a climate-related collapse of its crop. Together they harvested several gallons of crowberries so that Native children in St. Paul could take classes and learn the traditional recipes and preservation methods. The title of this tapestry is a quote from DeWitt.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York

Carolina Caycedo

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Blooming (Akiko and Yuko) 2023

From the series *We Save Our Seed
for the Following Season*

Jacquard weavings

Japanese families confined by the United States in internment camps during World War II often planted gardens of ornamental and edible plants. The gardens and rocambole (wild onion) blossom depicted on these tapestries are joined by haikus written by women living in the camps. As Carolina Caycedo notes, these gardens reflect the importance “of plant-human relationships . . . as a way not only to survive but to thrive during periods of oppression, and as a way to elevate economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions.” The tapestry collages a photograph by Dorothea Lange, in the foreground, with a painting by Kango Takamura in the background.

Courtesy of the artist and Instituto de Visión, Bogotá/
New York