

JUAN ARANGO PALACIOS

ALTA MONTAÑA

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GAA GALLERY NEW YORK

Gaa is pleased to present *Alta Montaña*, a solo exhibition with Chicago-based artist Juan Arango Palacios. In a new body of work pairing weaving and painting, Arango Palacios explores the archetype of the mountain. Creating a contemporary hybrid of magical realism, autobiography, and folklore, the work in *Alta Montaña* explores the interactions of identity, diaspora, queer culture, and craft. *Alta Montaña* will be Arango Palacios' first solo exhibition with the gallery and in New York City.

In *Alta Montaña*, Arango Palacios continues to examine narrative and identity, particularly as they relate to sexuality, gender, post-colonial, diasporic, and migratory contexts. Expanding and creating a more expansive vocabulary for gender, their work challenges notions of masculinity, sexuality, and gender normativity. While the artist's celebratory depictions of lovers and friends remains a central presence in these new works, the imagery has moved from the enclosed spaces of the home, nightclubs, and lush jungle ecosystems into vast and sky-filled mountainous landscapes. As an archetype, mountains often represent a sacred space—a place of desire, hope, aspiration, creation, and the home of deities. In *Alta Montaña* the mountain is both the landscape as well as a living and dynamic entity itself. Materially, the work brings together drawing, painting, traditional craft techniques, and contemporary technology. At the foundation of Arango Palacios' work is a love of drawing and storytelling.

The paintings possess a directness and immediacy, a clarity that carries over to the woven works. Using drawings and paintings that have been digitized and further developed virtually, the final woven works are embellished and joined together with beading, stitching, and embroidery. Through weaving, digital and analog processes are connected; each mark becomes a pixel, and each pixel a stitch. The resultant works produce images that have gone through a metamorphic process. The handmade becomes digital and then handmade again.

As with their past work, Arango Palacios highlights the experiences of people within queer communities and communities formed by migration and diaspora. Centered on uplifting people and creating images of celebration and resilience, their work seeks to expand language and ways of seeing the world. Drawing from their own community, friends, and family as well as queer fashion, internet, and tattoo culture, Arango Palacios examines their experiences growing up in Colombia and later in the United States. Raised in a traditional Catholic community in Colombia, Arango Palacios and their family arrived in the American South after a series of migrations, landing in Louisiana, Texas, and then later Chicago. In synthesizing these experiences through a process of imaginative world-building, Arango Palacios mines the autobiographical and, within it, finds and weaves together folklore, myth, and history.

Similar to a range of mountains bridging the space between earth and sky, the work in *Alta Montaña* builds connections. Within the imagery of vibrantly rendered figures in states of joy, tension, loss, and desire, ties form between bodies in space. Individuals come together as a group to dance. Two figures support each other, joining their hands and feet to form a circle with their bodies. A tattooed torso links a visual narrative to the body. Rivers and roads provide geographical connection between locations. The past is entwined with the present. Blurring the lines of these dichotomies - the past vs future, fantasy vs reality, history vs myth, earthly vs celestial - Arango Palacios' world-building looks closely at dualities and finds within them an inherent plurality.

Juan Arango Palacios (b. 1997, Pereira, Colombia) is an artist whose vibrant visual narratives build a world of sanctuary and celebration. Highlighting the experience of marginalized communities, the artist's works are centered on uplifting the queer experience - while also exploring the artist's experiences growing up in a post-colonial context in Colombia and the United States. Raised in a traditional Catholic community in Colombia, a series of migrations brought Arango Palacios and their family to the American South in search of a better life. Moving through Louisiana and Texas, their sense of identity and belonging began to be skewed by their lack of knowledge of the English language, their unfamiliarity with American culture, and their internal struggle with a queer identity. Arango Palacios graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2020 and has developed an interdisciplinary artistic practice exploring drawing, painting, textile-making, and ceramic sculpture. Arango Palacios' work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions at Gaa Gallery, New York, NY; Spinello Projects, Miami, FL; Selenas Mountain, Queens, NY; and New Image Art, Los Angeles, CA. They have participated in artist residencies at The Macedonia Institute in Chatham, NY; the Bed Stuy Art Residency in Brooklyn, NY; and the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art Residency at Yale University in Norfolk, CT. Arango Palacios lives and works in Chicago, IL.