

Ruben Ulises Rodriguez Montoya
Skinchangers: Begotten of my Flesh

Ruben Ulises Rodriguez Montoya is a scavenger, a surgeon, and an expert in assemblage. He draws upon the legacies of his predecessors, the stories of those obscured from history, and present-day moments to inscribe new meaning onto salvaged materials. Combining repurposed objects with artful writing and science fiction symbolism, Montoya speculates a world that extends beyond the Anthropocene as we know it.

The artist manifests this new world in his site-specific installation, *Skinchangers: Begotten of my Flesh*. This project expands upon the artist's 2022 exhibition, *James Webb and the Thestral Born Without a Vertebrae*, which chronicles the journey of a vampire forced to reconstitute its body from intergalactic rubble after the spaceship it once knew as home explodes. During the blast, the vampire frantically grasps the shuttle's debris as it throttles through the galaxy, merging with the wreckage and using its remains as energy to survive.

Skinchangers: Begotten of my Flesh picks up the story post-destruction, transforming moCa's Lewis Gallery into this new "vampire-vessel" hybrid. It is a living, breathing entity and we, the audience, are contained within its walls. An immersive, celestial soundtrack suggests an irregular heartbeat, a sign of life coming from and inside of the architecture. The vampiric coexists alongside mythical, shape-shifting creatures known as *Nahuales* that hatched aboard the spacecraft while in transit. Suspended from the ceiling in a state of antigravity, their eternal home serves as both captor and protector.

Montoya's sculptural beings are made from materials including golf balls deformed by desert heat; carcasses of pulverized animals; obsolete circuit boards; and scraps of found clothing, stitched together and preserved in silicone. Created from the detritus of capitalist consumption and teetering on the edge of abjection, these alchemical creatures make space for the liminal, border culture, and existence on the edge of classification. While rooted in speculative fiction, they are stand-ins for the human body, used to explore how violence mutates and eradicates communities of color. Within his work, the artist consumes and reinterprets the world around him, examining how processes of decay, regeneration, and symbiosis graft fresh meaning upon our understandings of an ecosystem and demanding us to question what it means to start anew.