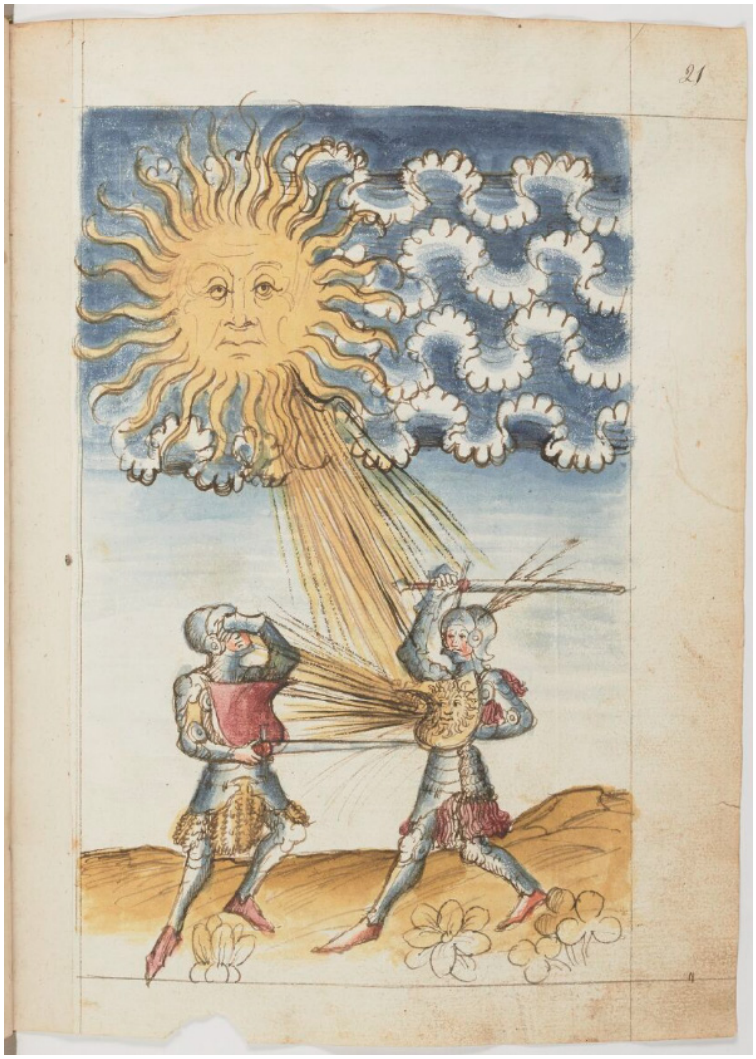
JOSÉ MONTEALEGRE
DRASTIC MEASURES

GALERIE THOMAS SCHULTE, 2 MAY 2026 TO 6 JUNE 2026



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Konrad Kyeser, *Bellifortis*

Through a close interrelation between material, craft, and corporality, José Montealegre's work probes knowledge systems and canonical histories to draw alternative narrative references out of their gaps and traces. His second solo exhibition at Galerie Thomas Schulte, *Drastic Measures*, presents sculptures and works on paper, which, through varied materials and their corresponding processes, carry remnants and insinuations of force. The works collectively reflect on historical instruments of power and authority, intervening in and destabilizing these persisting structures through the simulation and reproduction of their means.

Objects are positioned precariously, composed of fragile vestiges, or placed low to the ground, hovering slightly. The repetitions and transfers between them engage the seductive power of art, forging a connection to strategies and narratives around protection and threat. Through weaponry and armor, displays of strength or their surrounding structures, art's role in constructing spaces is called into question—both holding protective capacity, as a potential refuge, and acting in complicity by giving shape to unfolding systems of power.

In two series of works mounted to the wall, such duality is brought to the fore through the act of dismantling embedded in their creation. With the titles *Shatterfields* and *Break Lattices,* Montealegre introduces two words into his artistic vocabulary: a break and a shatter. A break is the intentional separation of material—by scoring and then snapping glass sheets, the material is coaxed into breaking in a specific way. On the other hand, a shatter is a material separation along its own internal fault lines. The two diverge in the specific gesture of infliction and the shape of its impact. The square ceramic tiles in *Shatterfields* are broken and rearranged through a spontaneous act, like a sudden drop, differing in each instance but always generating unpredictable, irregular cracks. The pieces are then reassembled onto a rectangular ground, but do not fit back together. A wholly new order is formed of overlaps, gaps, and jagged edges. *Break Lattices* undergo a highly controlled process of precisely measured motions that push the material of glass to its limits. The translucent sheets retain their original shape, size, and composition, even as methodically drawn cuts reconstitute them as grids. Imposed fault lines are negotiated against the natural structure of the material, ensuring that it doesn't fully splinter into unwieldy shards. Breaking is systematic—an exertion of pressure that allows fissure, but only to an enforceable extent.

Finely controlled lines produced by force and repetitive motion recur in the works on paper. Montealegre uses a technique of projection—a process of transferring drawings to the wall in preparation for fresco painting. Here, the drawings are encased in glass with molten tin edges, contained, while giving the impression of being part of the wall, leaving traces and shadows. The technique involves hammering powdered pigment through a stencil, composing images in tentative

dotted lines, like perforations—as though ready to be torn. Among the repeating and melding motifs are illustrations from historical manuscripts, including plants, or military technology from *Bellifortis (Strong in War)*—an early manual on the art of war—alongside images of the artist's own invention. One small image depicts a pattern of geometric forms that fan outward like a flower, or a pinwheel, the dotted lines sharpening its blades into a serrated edge.

A subtle visual connection materializes in the sharp edges of another work: a bust of armor. The hammered steel sheets, measured to the artist's own body, suggest a potentially dangerous confinement. Hollowed out, it is left headless as it assumes an empty posture—arms raised, holding a flute as though to play it, a flail hanging from its tip. It recalls the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who, upon the town's refusal to pay for his musical services as promised, used his magical pipe to lure away its children. Dating back to the medieval period, what has become a widespread legend and reference point in art and literature, is thought to harbor truths of an actual historical event—possibly a metaphor for death or an allusion to colonization. Here, the flute is rendered powerless, a simulacrum, whose futility is compounded by the figure's absence of a head, at the same time as it enacts a kind of material seduction. In another work, a faint procession of small skeletal figures, dried white clay shaped to their wire frames, seems to march along to this imperceptible tune.

Montealegre frequently interjects fictionalized stories to undermine the authority of those that have been prescribed or instilled with authenticity, including his own. Here, he destroys tiles from his past sculptural installations, reusing and transforming their fragments in altered patterns and spatial orientations. Elsewhere, a historical military instrument of corporal punishment, a cat o' nine tails, takes shape from materials and elements typically found in his studio. A 15th-century-style copper armor, again approximating the dimensions of his body, lies horizontally, close to the ground. Heart-shaped locks holding some of the armor's plates together add to a sense of claustrophobic constriction, while amplifying its decorative or symbolic presence. Now only a shell, cast off, it is held together by remnants of another story. What is left is a ghostly ruin, or, perhaps, a counter proposal—a structure still to be fleshed out.

Text by Julianne Cordray

José Montealegre (born 1992 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras) lives and works in Berlin. He studied philosophy and literature at the Universidad Centroamericana de Managua, Nicaragua, and with Willem de Rooij at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2022), Klosterruine in Berlin, Mountains in Berlin (both 2021), Convent Art Space in Ghent (2019), and in group exhibitions at Dortmunder Kunstverein (2022), Lantz'scher Skulpturenpark Lohausen in Düsseldorf (2021), Städelmuseum in Frankfurt am Main, Natalia Hug in Cologne (both 2019), Futura Gallery in Prague, Gillmeier Rech in Berlin (both 2018), and Kunsthalle Darmstadt (2017, 2014), among others.