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Hector Dionicio Mendoza
Buscando Futuro/Searching for a Future
Stories of Hope, Dreams and Loss
Luis de Jesus Los Angeles
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by Jody Zellen



In *Buscando Futuro / Searching for a Future*, Hector Dionicio Mendoza presents mixed media floor and wall-based sculptures. The overarching theme of migration and the various ways both people and animals move from place to place is both subtly and overtly communicated. Through the individual works, the installation itself becomes a journey of discovery, place and sense of self as articulated through the sensual assembling of unusual yet commonplace materials.

It is impossible not to be immediately drawn to *Leaning, Holding, Pushing* (2020-2023) a gigantic figure and its shadow sculpted from among other materials, tree bark, wood and cardboard. The oversized man leans against a gallery wall, his arms extended to support his body in a position of submission that resembles someone being arrested. To the right and slightly below the sculpted figure is his flattened silhouette painted with stenciled abstract lines and floral shapes that is flush with the wall. The three-dimensional body was created by assembling numerous pieces of bark and cardboard and appears surreal and mechanical, alien and definitely not human, yet sympathetic rather than threatening.

Many of the works derive from Mendoza's experiences of the border between the United States and Mexico, as well as the politics and narratives intertwined with borders and border crossing. This is most evident in *Familia Universal / Universal Family*, (2021) a spray paint on wood panel wall work that depicts five abstracted figural silhouettes presenting people of different ages and genders on the move. The leader is a woman, followed by a man with a baseball hat facing backwards who is supporting a one-legged man also wearing a baseball hat. Last in the sequence is a pregnant woman holding hands with a young girl who carries a backpack. The work references the generic immigrant crossing highway signs, yet is much more nuanced and evocative.

While sculptures alluding to individuals with their implied stories dominate the exhibition, Mendoza also includes numerous images of animals such as *Perros Callejeros / Street Dogs*, (2024) and *Beast of burden, jackass / Pinche burro, asno*, (2023-2024). *Beast of burden, jackass / Pinche burro, asno*, features an incredibly heavy load piled high on an almost life-size silhouette of a donkey. Towering up the wall, it is an obvious burden to an animal whose lower legs and feet have been transformed into human body parts. Mendoza seamlessly juxtaposes two- and three-dimensional aspects to give the flattened animal both physical and psychological depth.

A more whimsical piece — *When I dream, I fly / En mis sueños, yo vuelo*, (2023-2024) is situated in the center of the gallery. Here, a figure wearing a ratty olive green "hoodie" arches

his back on a home-made skateboard with bright blue wheels. The feet-less rider's legs are attached to the skateboard and he has long blue feathers instead of hands. In addition, feathers also hang below his outstretched arms. His face is comprised of mirrors and glass and is nested inside the tightly drawn hood. The sculpture references "dreamers": those undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children and whose immigration status remains in limbo.

In his pieces, Mendoza incorporates found materials, as well as his own concoction of "ethnic bread" — a melange derived from his study of global flatbreads that he molds into different shapes and body parts. While the finished sculptures have an ad hoc look, they are also precisely crafted to carefully integrate abstract and representational elements. The works in the exhibition allude to unbalance and uncertainty. While hopeful and majestic, Mendoza has created a suite of sculptures that suggest stories about hopes and dreams and loss and the myriad issues facing migrants and refugees in all parts of the world.

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