

Calderón Ruiz

Jaime Muñoz & Esteban Ramón Pérez *Eagle and Serpent*

September 7 – October 9, 2021
106 South Street, New York



Esteban Ramón Pérez, *El Gallo Grita en la Madrugada and El Gallo Canta a Medianoche*, 2021 (left)
Jaime Muñoz, *Time Clock*, 2021 (right)

Calderón Ruiz is pleased to present its inaugural exhibition *Eagle and Serpent*, a two-person exhibition featuring artists Esteban Ramón Pérez and Jaime Muñoz. With recent works, Pérez and Muñoz both explore the diverse yet complex aspects of Mexican American identity. The title of the exhibition, *Eagle and Serpent*, underscores the historical legacies of Mexico: the eagle, a representation of the Indigenous sun god Huitzilopochtli and the snake, evocative of the colonial thought of evil and sin. The title suggests, both artists delve into the history that makes up the Mexican diaspora, a mixture of colonial iconography and Mesoamerican symbolism.

Both artists elevate quotidian objects and iconography that hold profound relevance in their communities, utilizing a distinct visual vocabulary that stems from a rasquache aesthetic—a working-class sensibility is rooted in a lived reality. Kitsch elements such as workload trucks, religious iconography, lowrider steering wheels, and silver-laid *pitedado* all exist together to visually assert an attitude cultivated by West Coast Chicanos and Latinxs. The use of discarded or upcycled materials in canvases, leather works, and sculptures speaks to the resilience of these communities.

Within the exhibition, Pérez presents a series of new leather works and sculptures. Pérez continues his exploration of drawing, poking, scarring, and embroidering his leather with a tattoo needle in his new works. The labor-intensive process of rendering vignettes of well-known Mexican boxers, jaguars taken from the Mexican codex, phrases, and animals can only be seen through close inspection. A secondary image appears on the reverse of many of these works, emphasizing the artist's interest in mirroring and duality. In other works, such as *Caballo Loco*, 2021, Pérez utilizes additional found materials. Blending lowrider bike elements and silver leaf with the visage of a horse, Pérez combines the legacies of vaquero and lowrider culture, both of which have deep roots in Mexican American lifestyle. For the artist, horses

and lowriders are inextricably linked, where machines and animals are trained to dance in a similar fashion during competitions.

Pérez's suspended leather works and feathered sculptures draw inspiration from an upbringing with threads, needles, natural fibers, and ranchos. Working for many years with his father at his upholstery business, Pérez learned to work with leather as a primary medium, discarding the stretcher bars and traditional canvases to make his compositions. Scraps and unfinished, natural edges sewed together are of Pérez's favorite materials to use. Pérez's feathered works also reflect his upbringing, with bird hunting with his father. The feather sculptures, *El Gallo Grita en la Madrugada*, *El Gallo Canta a Medianoche*, 2021, feature boxing gloves and natural feathers. Initially hanging in the artist's studio above a doorway, the sculptures could serve as a totem, where the objects suggest a sense of protection. And yet, the gloves themselves also evoke a fighting spirit, a tenacity and resiliency that is often necessary to embody as people of color.

Muñoz's project also unfolds as a reflection of personal history and community. With a background in construction and graphic design, Muñoz renders his compositions with an exactitude that favors the elaborate over the humble, the baroque over the plain, all while imbuing colonial and Indigenous images with a working-class aesthetic. Muñoz makes evident themes of labor, industry, and visibility within his three meticulously laid-out canvases and accompanying drawings in the exhibition.

In *Self Portrait*, 2021, Muñoz uses what he calls "Toyoteria," an aesthetic that brings to bear the economic necessity surrounding the R-series Toyota mini work trucks. The central image is a work truck moving its way across the canvas. Rendered in a sepia tone, Muñoz evokes aging and decline. In the upper register of the canvas, a dove swoops downward with striations emanating from its body, suggests divinity. Glittered tears fall from an eye just off to the right of the canvas—underscoring perhaps the awe-inspiring divine event happening in the central area. In the lower register, a series of seven symbols, oscillating from Indigenous to more contemporary, fill the space.

An underlying theme in Muñoz's work is the concept of time, reflecting on and provoking questions surrounding the Brown body throughout history. In so doing, Muñoz often juxtaposes contrasting iconography to examine our relationship to our bodies and the mechanical world. In *Time Clock*, 2021, Muñoz depicts a mechanized hourglass that features glimpses of abstracted industrial pieces. The large hourglass is a blunt visual reminder of the expiration of time. Off to the side of the canvas, a wild horse gallops forward. The horse itself represents exertion, a "beast of burden" that underscores the theme of labor. On top of the running horse, the artist paints three squares in the canvas's upper, middle, and lower registers, all connected through a glittered line. Each box contains either a figure or a symbol: the top includes an image of a contemporary worker, the middle perhaps a relic, the bottom, an abstracted form. Muñoz thus asserts a sense of time, persuading us to understand that we are connected to our distant and cultural past.

Muñoz continues his exploration of time in *Blood Memory In The Domestic Space*, 2021. Time is represented physically through the calendar in the upper right corner of the workshop the artist renders,

stuck forever on the year 2001. However, for Muñoz, the concept of time is also understood through ancestral wisdom, or blood memory, per the title. The ancestral is represented here by the two converging colonial and Indigenous cultures seen in the Aztec warrior part of the calendar off to the right and the crucifix off to the left of the canvas. And yet, the scene itself, depicted within a family workshop, speaks to the importance of familial memory. In this way, all the paintings and drawings in the exhibition present an intermingling of past and present in order to better understand our contemporary moment and the future.

In *Eagle and Serpent*, both artists seamlessly traverse subject matter that ranges from religion and ceremony to labor and history to create dynamic works that embody the complexity of our identity. Within their works, both artists position themselves as cultural historians, where both chronicle family and community through different mediums. Taken as a whole, the exhibition serves as a visual record: of time, history, and place.

—Alana Hernandez, Executive Director & Curator, CALA Alliance

Esteban Ramón Pérez received his BFA in Art from the California Institute of the Arts in 2017, his MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale University School of Art in 2019, and was recently a Studio Fellow at NXTHVN.

Jaime Muñoz received a B.A. in Fine Art from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2016. Recently, his work was featured in “Shattered Glass” at Jeffery Deitch’s gallery in Los Angeles, curated by Mehlan Frierson and AJ Girard. In 2020, he was a participating artist featuring a solo exhibition, in “Focus LA” curated by Rita Gonzalez and Pilar Tomkins Rivas at Frieze, Los Angeles. His work was also featured in the scholarly initiative Pacific Standard Time as part of the exhibition “How to Read El Pato Pascual: Disney’s Latin America & Latin America’s Disney” in 2017. Museum collections include the Pérez Art Museum Miami; the University of Utah; and the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas.

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