

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

HECTOR DIONICIO MENDOZA

Buscando Futuro / Searching for a Future

January 13 – February 17, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 13, 4 – 7 p.m.

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Luis De Jesus Los Angeles is pleased to present **Hector Dionicio Mendoza: *Buscando Futuro / Searching for a Future***, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view in Gallery 1 from January 13 through February 17, 2024. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, January 13 from 4 to 7 p.m.

Hector Dionicio Mendoza's work materializes oral histories, ancient wisdom, familial parables, and personal and communal experiences to engage the many myths and realities of migration. Combining an array of sculptural forms and materials—including assemblage, cast, and hand-sculpted techniques, along with found, salvaged and industrial materials, his works are informed and guided by his own personal experiences and the realities and politics of the U.S./Mexico border. Fluctuating between abstraction and figuration, it ignites our consciousness with narratives that embrace magical realism and Latinx/e futurism while exploring themes of migration and the environment, spirituality, as well as the geographies of place, memory, identity, and the visualization of immigrant stories that expand upon a new *latinidad*.

As a storytelling device, Mendoza's consideration of materials is not only linked to the formation of his sculptures but is also an embodiment of their story and journey, and a prescription for healing. Inspired by ethnobotany and memories of his grandfather, a fifth-generation *curandero*, or shaman-healer, Mendoza's materials embody themes and narratives expressed in the works, utilizing materials associated with place—such as earth, local flora and eucalyptus trees; materials related to labor—such as corrugated cardboard, cinderblocks, and plywood; in addition to quotidian found objects—including plastic bottles and recycled clothing along with the artist's own concoction of ethnic bread (produced from his study of global flatbreads made for travel, from the tortilla to pita, naan, matzo, and other yeast-less types). Mendoza manages a poetic flux between the often ignored familiar and the awe-inspiring mythical with his ability to evoke weight, emotion, struggle, and hope to elicit wonder and empathy.

In *Morir o Volar, Lalo (Die or Fly, Lalo)*, Mendoza weighs the figure down with cinderblocks in contrapposto, lifted by open arms that shift to a weightless spread of painted feathers and carved corrugated cardboard with the figure's head and expression, fearless, steady and focused forward. Despite the weight of the cement blocks, Mendoza captures movement and an arc of transitions, using familiar materials to translate Lalo's struggle to us, inciting empathy and a belief in the heroic figure's determination and resilience. The work is inspired by Lalo, Mendoza's childhood friend and first crush, who moved from their small town in the southern state of Michoacan to San Francisco to be free from the harassment he endured for being queer. Lalo found freedom to be himself in San Francisco yet still gave back to his hometown by sending money to open a *tiendita*, a little store.

En Mis Sueños, Yo Vuelo (When I Dream I Fly), is Mendoza's ode to the "Dreamers," the generation of the DREAM (Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act, introduced in 2001 and yet to be ratified, which would provide a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants who came to this country as children. A hoodie figure balancing on a skateboard appears to recline back in a pietà-like stance, with no Virgin to hold him, only feathers giving hope to break the fall. The dreamer's lower body has a patina of ethnic

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bread, and the upper body dons an earth-encrusted sweatshirt; inside the hoodie, a mirrored kaleidoscope with a peacock feather represents infinite outcomes and a continual search, in limbo.

The exhibition also features bas relief wall sculptures, with stencil-patterned plywood Mendoza calls "Sombras", or shadows, which often correlate to free-standing three-dimensional sculptures. *Pinche Burro, asno* (*Beast of Burden, jackass*), a silhouette of a *burro*, donkey, camouflaged by stenciled botanicals, transmutes to human limbs, feet and hands, walking and carrying an abstracted load, a heavy burden made of lumps and heaps of ethnic bread, eucalyptus bark, glass, and earth. Mendoza commemorates day laborers who are often treated as disposable, reflecting on attitudes towards labor, inhumane working conditions, class struggles, and social issues that exist on both sides of the border. The camouflage botanicals depicted here is a recurring motif in the series of *sombras* and symbolizes landscape, healing, and protection.

Buscando Futuro (*Searching for a Future*) brings a trove of stories and experiences together to address the many uncertainties and complexities of migration, including social constructs, classism, and geopolitics that can hinder the simple right to hope. Mendoza's materialization of these narratives not only brings a means for representation, but also a course for imagining alternative futures, and critical discourse for issues faced within communities including intersectional feminisms, labor, human rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights. Mendoza's use of familiar and recycled materials inspires possibilities of transforming the forgotten, pride in origins, and endurance for the search.

Hector Dionicio Mendoza (b.1969, Uruapan, Michoacan, MX) lives in Salinas, CA, and holds an MFA in Studio Art from the Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT and a BFA from California College of the Arts, Oakland, CA.

Mendoza is an artist, curator, and educator based in the agricultural community of the Salinas Valley in California. He is the recipient of the 2022 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Grant, and his work was a highlight in the California Biennial 2022 at the Orange County Museum of Art. Other awards include the Fleishhacker Foundation's Eureka Fellowship (2004), Kunst Now (2005) in Berlin, and Eco-Concierte (2007) in Mexico City. He has participated in artist-in-residence programs and exhibitions in Europe, including a six-month residency at KunstFutur in Switzerland (2000), The Bossard Project in Berlin (2001), Casa Santos in Barcelona (2002), and The Putney Arts Center in London (2003). Mendoza was awarded the prestigious Lucas Artist Residency (2015) at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, CA. In 2021, working together with the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum and the Department of Latinx Studies, Mendoza helped to create and fund the inaugural Mariposa Prize, named after his work "Mariposa/Butterfly," which entered the museum's collection the same year. He has exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, Japan, and Mexico, and is currently an Associate Professor of Sculpture and Installation in the Visual and Public Art Department at California State University Monterey Bay. Mendoza's work resides in prominent collections, including Mt. Holyoke Museum of Art, MA; The Bunker/Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, Palm Beach, FL; The Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH; and OZ Art NWA, Bentonville, AR, among others.

For further information, including images and previews, please call 213-395-0762, or email: gallery@luisdejesus.com.

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