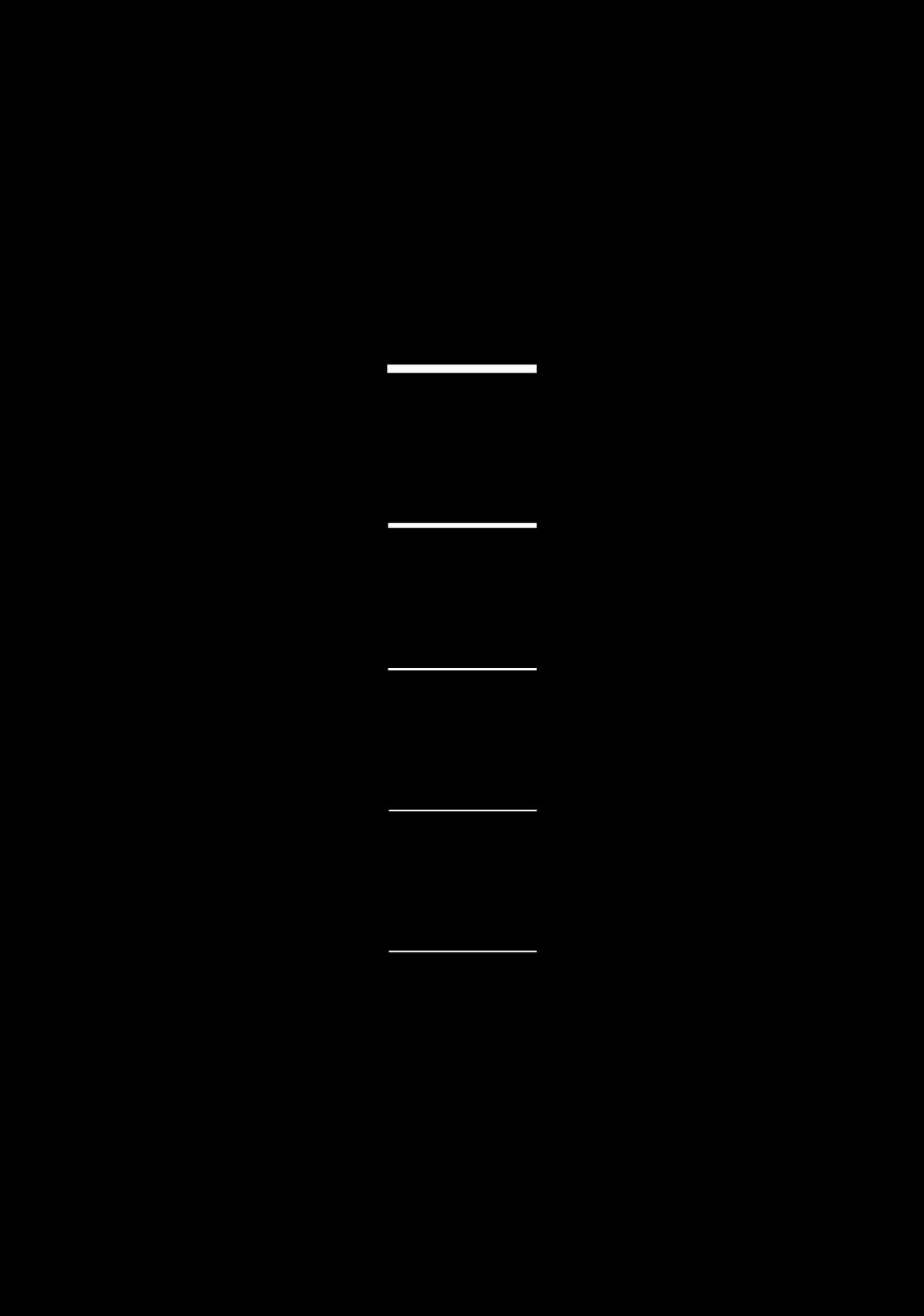




NOME

OF DAUGHTERS AND DREAMS
PRISCILLA DOBLER DZUL



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25 JUNE – 27 JULY, 2022

N O M E G A L L E R Y . C O M

Potsdamer Str. 72 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

“THE MAYANIST: THE ART OF PRISCILLA DOBLER DZUL”

Much of what we imagine of the Mayan civilization is based on glyphs, abandoned pyramids in Mesoamerica, and fresco paintings of plumed and godly personas. We imagine a colorful world thriving centuries ago before colonization. Much of what we learn from this Mayan culture is through stagnant mediums: historical books written by white authors, museum collections curated by Western curators, academic courses taught in lecture settings. We peer from a distance and back into time. But Mayan civilization is still alive and still thriving. What is missed is that although huge empires have been replaced by modern cities, the Mayan people are bound by their culture and customs, many of which had to endure violence, oppression, and erasure at the hands of European colonizers, Catholic and Christian conversion in Mexico, and through time — migration, displacement, poverty, and the struggle to maintain their indigenous practices.

When you enter NOME and the exhibit of artist Priscilla Dobler Dzul, you are confronting an ancient culture that is still very much alive, active, evolving, grounded in their traditions, and generating new ones. As an interdisciplinary artist born in Merida, Mexico and raised in the United States, Dobler Dzul is perfectly situated to probe how identity is constructed in a globalized society and to challenge gender roles and cultural structures. The show vibrantly displays Dobler Dzul’s penchant for craft and fine art by blurring the lines between the two. She is upholding her deep Mexican heritage and casting light on mediums that aren’t always placed on pedestals.

For this exhibit, Dobler Dzul has created a contemporary Mayan codex through painting, sculpture, and textile works. What you see in the work *Of Daughters and Dreams* is a deep veneration in origin making and a commentary on cultural erasure. Dobler Dzul’s work is not necessarily autobiographical but the works build upon the personal in body politics, sexual identity, gender representation, and

cultural hierarchies. Through the notion of conception, she is birthing new characters and narratives as an indigenous and queer Latinx artist. She writes, "I create hybrid mythological artwork to address socio-political issues in a playful, feminine, sexual way while reshaping and disrupting structures of misogyny, whiteness, indigeneity, and labor."

In her works, she focuses on how objects came to be and are used. She works to establish a reciprocal relationship to the earth and the many modes of artistry she takes on. The materials she selects are important to her practice, the colors and how they came to be developed over time have agency, and the personas she crafts come to her through oral stories from her community in the Yucatan or through dreamstates. As part of her practice, the artist asks questions to move the themes in her work forward. In this way, the works move beyond the personal and become societal probes. In the creation of objects as representation, Dobler Dzul questions the intentionality of making for consumption. Her making is ritualized and a practice of spirituality and upholding family legacies.

Dobler Dzul references the atrocities made by the Spanish bishop Diego de Landa against the Mayan religion and civilization in the Yucatan as a motivation to make new Mayan works. Around 1562, he burned most of the Mayan manuscripts that served to mark the Mayan history and culture. In turn, he became the singular author on the Mayan civilization, writing the only reference book on what we know of the Mayas. This body of work is a direct response to that loss and erasure. How would Mayan culture be experienced differently if those codices and idols hadn't been destroyed? How might we experience Mayan culture differently if those codices endured and weren't replaced by a colonial lens and written from a male gaze? Diego de Landa infantilized the Mayan practices and deemed them as evil. What if they survived and the Mayan gods that took on the properties of animals still existed to demarcate power, poise, and grace?

As a Mexican-American, the artworks of Dobler Dzul allow for me to imagine a world where our indigenous histories can



co-exist alongside our European roots. And they not only exist but are measured and valued by the same merits. Through her practice and through her own mixed-identity, she poignantly draws just as easily from Renaissance paintings as Mayan stelae from Scottish folklore to Mexican artesanía. Rather than focus on oppression, she celebrates liberation in all its forms. This reframing of indigenous knowledge and art created to signal resilience is an empowering reminder that we can take control of our narratives as people of color and be shepherds for new generations of global indigeneity.

Textiles

In *Of Daughters and Dreams*, the artist collectively weaves the experiences of her Mayan ancestors — particularly the band of women in her family — to pass on precious knowledge that might otherwise be forgotten. This informs her medium and message. Take for instance the painstaking hand embroidered works on colorful textiles. Dobler Dzul learned the art of embroidery from her grandmother and employs the same techniques and materials that are native to the Yucatan. The needle work you see has been passed on for centuries. The artist wants to unpack and privilege the long line of work that has been considered women's work, domestic work, and to cast off to marginal socio-economic groups. She has a deep reverence for indigenous wisdom, indigenous epistemologies, native plants as sources for dyes, and localized artistry.

In a scan of the gallery, you see various materials speak to each other. The glaze of the ceramics articulate the complexity of the paintings while the sheen of the textiles avail your eye to the unmarked space to fully surrender to the realities of creation, of the mythological creatures and the handiwork on the fabric. That unmarked space is a pause so that the viewer can fully imagine how many hands engaged in the making of the piece, how many hours it took with needle and thread to piece together the composition of a brown naked body in repose on a unicorn, surrounded by blue birds and protected by two jaguars. The piece titled "Trono Del Jaguar" is the artist's recreation of the noble scene displayed at the Mayan pyramids of Uxmal. The jaguars represent masculine and

feminine energy and are symbolic of the twin capacities of duality. Dobler Dzul's works constantly remind us that it's not one or the other but always both at the same time.

In another textile piece, the figures get lost in pattern to connote a dream-like state. You have to spend some time with the piece to outline the characters and their interaction with each other. At this point in the show, does your eye pick up on a recurring motif? Are you seeing the full picture? In this approach, the artist is questioning representation and visibility as it relates to artists and particularly women of color: Are we ever fully seen?

In another textile piece dedicated to the political and economic importance of the henequen plant to the Yucatan, Dobler Dzul embroiders a Spanish map of Mexico over American Toile fabric. This artwork is steeped in deep research and is an object made to process trauma and rage. The piece is equal parts education (for the viewer) and rage (for the artist and, hopefully, for the viewer). The map, made by Spanish colonizers, outlines the natural resources of the Yucatan, how to tame the 'savage' Indians of the area, and details the areas where Mayans have been conquered. The book that the artist references is an example of information as systemic measures of erasure based on Spanish knowledge of indigenous people. These tomes still exist, are still referenced in MesoAmerican history, and are still problematic for indigenous people.

Dobler Dzul says, "This research has influenced me into detailing the maps, objects, and Mayan people based on how we are seen or not seen and how our bodies are still being exploited within our own lands or commodities. I wanted to play with the pattern design which is of a plantation in the south of Savanna and has Spanish moss (an invasive plant to the region) and address the similarities throughout the Americas stolen lands, rape, murder and slavery."

I'd like to imagine a world where Dobler Dzul's textiles could hang alongside stolen Mayan relics at major institutions like Museo del Prado or the Smithsonian. As a viewer to the artwork, it is also our role and responsibility to not look away, to acknowledge the pain and suffering of others and to look



to future opportunities to retell history, center people of color, and invite a more inclusive narrative into our formulations of history, especially when it comes to colonized nations and people.

Paintings

In the triptyc "El jardín de las delicias," we recognize a landscape populated with grotesque creatures similar to the Renaissance paintings "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by Hieronymus Bosch. Through the absurdities we learn of the struggle between morality and pleasure, power and privilege. Dobler Dzul is also bridging our gaps of knowledge and making historical connections. It is no accident that when "The Garden of Earthly Delights" was painted, it was a socio-cultural commentary on our ideals of utopia and paradise as it pertained to discovery of the riches of the New World and the subsequent wealth made by Europe through colonization. Dobler Dzul's paintings she reinvent landscapes and depicts the cycles of life with many creatures of varying races and genders colliding together. In these caustic landscapes, her vibrant brown bodies yearn to be seen as sublime, recognized for their greatness beyond calculation or measurement. In Dobler Dzul's versions of Bosch's garden, she gives power to what others perceive as primitive. She amplifies representations of wealth and power through an Indigenous perspective by referencing postures of Renaissance paintings and incorporating Mexican cultural relics like glyphs and wrestling masks. Through her own symbology she unpacks references to police brutality, white supremacy, rape, lust, and death. She says she applies such tactics of composition to "dream up what future ancestors and lands would look like if they were given the opportunity of perseverance and care for our ancestral lands." By placing pressure on the past she can create future possibilities. In these paintings, we understand the strength of dreams and the blending of dreamstates with reality. Dobler Dzul perpetuates the hard truths and experiences of indigenous people through time. She says of the paintings, "It's also in dialogue with how Western religion and colonization have contributed to massive illiteracy, erasure of identity and native language."

Ceramics

As you walk around the gallery you will encounter Dobler's five sculptures. In Dobler's sculptures it's important to note all of the parts that make a whole. Upon first glance, we see a menagerie of mismatched beasts adopting colorful formations, but if you stop to inspect each detail and learn the values of their coexistence you will find a measured and thoughtful opportunity for self representation. You will find a tale that is blended with Mayan mythology and zoology, oral history and pop culture. She has paired each sculpture with stacked qualities as totem powers. She says, "I'm looking at all these different properties because these objects, from a patriarchal perspective, wouldn't be able to reproduce. If the body has no function, what does it mean now that it can do all these other things? You look at insects that can reproduce on their own. I'm combining these different elements into these new hybrids, ceramic pieces."

For Dobler Dzul, the sculptures are a political remark on the functionality of our bodies when they are void of reproduction. They are an opportunity to fully celebrate sexuality, pleasure, and other forms of human connection. She says, "I'm looking at different processes and methods of how our body will function when some of us don't want to or can't carry children. When we can't label someone's function, or they are based on what they can produce with their body." In "La madre de las serpientes," we see a fleshy woman, seated in full acceptance of her body and crowned by snakes. Dobler Dzul wants us to change our fear and evil associations with snakes, as with her other work, she wants to challenge what is acceptable. Mayan gods and goddesses were powerful snake/human creatures that told a symbiotic story of creation and power. La madre is not burdened by the snakes, she coexists and playfully surrenders to their presence on her body. In "Estrangula la serpiente, antes de que te coma (human snake), Strangle the snake, before it eats you," a masked female taunts us into observing her posture. She is a seductress and sorcerer. In her folded and layered body we believe in the reign of power, part-snake, holding snake, and part-female, we identify her form as a mermaid

of cavernous and deep earth interactions. Here, she beckons and calls for us to observe her in all her glory. In her casting, Dobler Dzul opens up the opportunity for her to be powerful, playful, full of good intentions, and as a goddess to invest with new energy. She dares us as viewers to venerate new female forms of power.

In the Yucatan Peninsula, one can happen upon a crab crossing the road. It is a humorous and magical endeavor as you witness the crustacean side-shuffle across a busy street. There is inherent danger from the constant flow of cars, bicycles, and feet. At night in the rainy season, hundreds of male crabs make their way by moonlight from the depths of the jungle to the sea to find mates and reproduce. In "Nina cangreja (crab monkey sculpture)," Dobler pulls from many influences from the animals native to the Yucatan to vernacular references of Mayan culture. We've seen this spider monkey before in the works of Frida Kahlo. In the natural world, spider monkeys communicate their intentions and observations using postures and stances, particularly postures of sexual receptivity and attack. This creature represents queer identity. In Spanish, *cangrejo* has two meanings: it means crab, but it is also used as an offensive word for gay. This creature is well aware of her body, sexuality, and her power to call on lovers at night. From these animals we learn concepts of time, sexuality, power, and the desire for livelihood. In the sculptures you get a sense of action and procession. If Dobler Dzul's paintings are somnambulists, the ceramics ground us in the distinct gifts of each animal. Humans have been learning from animals from the beginning of time, watching, and learning from their natural rhythms as something to emulate and praise. Indigenous communities position animals as equitable partners in an interconnected world between humans and other beings, animating with spirit and expanded abilities to act and communicate.

Of Daughters and Dreams is a vibrant reimagining of all the qualities that make us whole, as individuals, as a culture, as a society. As with many artists' practice, this collection of work is singular and Dobler Dzul has already evolved to examine

a new set of constructs. In her painting practice, she wants to work with muted and natural colors that are native to the materials of the Yucatan. What happens to her work if the colors fade like the frescos in Mayan pyramids? What is the emotional connection to colors the shade of maize, tobacco, blue incense? Will we, as viewers, still feel the energetic bursts of identity and representation without the pop of color? From the ceramic work she is exploring how to sustain life through clay by embedding native seeds or growing moss from the sculptures. How will this change our relationship to human forms? Much like other bodies of her work, Dobler Dzul is prepared to task the process and explore new outcomes. She asks, "What will our bodies be? Because we ultimately give back to the earth when we die, we dissolve and we get back into soil."

Marina Garcia-Vasquez

is a cultural strategist who creates global culture through storytelling. Originally from San Francisco, California, Marina's desire to share authentic narratives and build culture and community is rooted in her Mexican-American heritage. Raised by an educator mother and a labor organizer father, her parents instilled a deep sense of civic duty and nurtured the importance of radical self-representation.

She's spent her working life advocating for underserved voices by using new digital formats. At Vice, she covered youth protests on Instagram, curated a female art show on sexuality and gender, and hosted events around social issues like youth incarceration and literacy. Marina founded Mex and the City, a creative collective devoted to promoting contemporary Mexican identity through art and design. She understands the power that bold and equitable narratives can foster cultural change. As a journalist for over 16 years, Marina has worked for publications including Artsy, CNN, Vice, The Wall Street Journal, INC., Architectural Record, CORE77, and Mother Jones.

She holds a masters' degree in creative writing from the University of San Francisco and a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. She is based in New York City.

A R T W O R K S

ABUELA ME VISITA EN MIS SUEÑOS, 2021

Glazed ceramic
81 x 40 x 25 cm

The figure in *Abuela me visita en mis sueños* derives from a recurring figure in the artist's dreams. In Mayan folklore, life was created on the back of a crocodile. Inside its mouth, she has placed a representation of her grandmother's face. Dobler Dzul explains, "Indigenous cultures believe that dreams are our connectors to our ancestors, to our deepest fears or knowledge. A mouth also symbolizes a cave; in many cultures caves are spaces of creation and life. Our mouths are caves."



***ESTRANGULA LA SERPIENTE, ANTES DE QUE TE
COMA, 2021***

Glazed ceramic
40 x 40 x 20 cm

Estrangula la serpiente, antes de que te coma depicts a
mythological creature that questions whether she should kill
the snake that lives within her or allow the snake to devour her.



LA MADRE DE LAS SERPIENTES, 2022

Glazed ceramic
48 x 55.5 x 25.5 cm

La madre de las serpientes depicts a female figure crowned by serpents. In Mayan, folklore women who control snakes are seducers and child protectors. The work counteracts the dominant Western reading of the snake as deceptive and dangerous with a powerful figure that gestures towards precolonial mythology in which many gods and goddess were powerful snake/human creatures.



NIÑA CANGREJA, 2021

Glazed ceramic
30 x 30 x 17 cm

A hybrid of the spider monkey and crab, *Niña cangreja* represents queer identity. The title riffs on the dual meaning of the Spanish word *cangrejo*, reclaiming a sexual slur in the form of an empowered hybrid creature.



PENE TÍMIDA, 2021

Glazed ceramic
19.5 x 10 x 10 cm



TRONO DEL JAGUAR, 2021

Glazed ceramic
33 x 60 x 21 cm

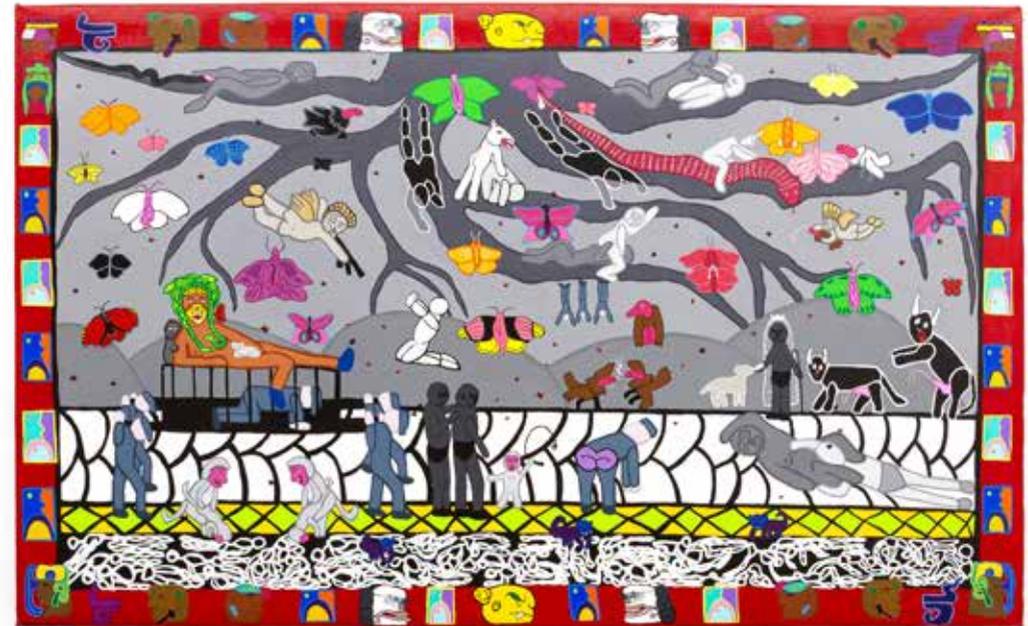
Trono Del Jaguar was inspired by the Trono Del Jaguar at the Maya pyramids of Uxmal and the temple of the little person (dwarf) king. Jaguars represent both masculine and femininity. Representing fertility and sexuality, they are also associated with nobility, power, protection and night (death).



EL JARDÍN DE LAS DELICIAS: INFIERNO, 2019

Acrylic on canvas
139 x 213 cm

El jardín de las delicias: Infierno is part of a triptych divided into three landscapes: heaven, earth and hell. Figures appear in gestures of subservience, domination, and incarceration. Rendered in grey, white, and black tones the central image seems to depict a world with color leached out of it — yet glimpses of sensuality in this highly restrained composition and colorful butterflies gesture towards the possibility of redemption and transformation.



EL JARDÍN DE LAS DELICIAS: TIERRA, 2018

Acrylic on canvas
139 x 213 cm

El jardín de las delicias: Tierra is part of a triptych divided into three landscapes: heaven, earth and hell. The borders are filled with Mayan hieroglyph-inspired imagery that represent animals, spirits, and women. In Tierra, wrestlers, animals, and deities are besieged by armed policemen, indicating a battle for the garden of earthly delights.



JAGUAR PROTECTOR, SUEÑOS DEMONIÁCOS, 2022

Acrylic on canvas
104 x 161 cm

In Jaguar protector, sueños demoníacos, a three-headed woman encroaches upon a reclining nude figure protected by a jaguar with a snake protruding from its mouth. Inspired by recurring dreams, the painting seeks new forms for ancestors who have had their stories, bodies, and voices erased to speak in the present and future.



PARAÍSO PERDIDO, 2021

Acrylic on canvas
162 x 259 cm

Paraíso Perdido depicts pairs of figures wrestling, boxing, and copulating amidst an idyllic landscape. A scene of simultaneous struggle and indifference, the painting speaks both to sexual pleasure and the struggle to protect and fight for reproductive rights.



ABUELA ME VISITA EN MIS SUEÑOS, 2022

Embroidery on textile
93 x 138 cm

The figure in *Abuela me visita en mis sueños* derives from a recurring figure in the artist's dreams. In Mayan folklore, life was created on the back of a crocodile. Inside its mouth, she has placed a representation of her grandmother's face. Dobler Dzul explains, "Indigenous cultures believe that dreams are our connectors to our ancestors, to our deepest fears or knowledge. A mouth also symbolizes a cave; in many cultures caves are spaces of creation and life. Our mouths are caves."



*ESTRANGULA LA SERPIENTE, ANTES DE QUE TE
COMA, 2022*

Embroidery on textile
92 x 98 cm

Estrangula la serpiente, antes de que te coma depicts a
mythological creature that questions whether she should kill
the snake that lives within her or allow the snake to devour
her.



LA MADRE DE LAS SERPIENTES, 2022

Embroidery on textile
83 x 87 cm

La madre de las serpientes depicts a female figure crowned by serpents. In Mayan, folklore women who control snakes are seducers and child protectors. The work counteracts the dominant Western reading of the snake as deceptive and dangerous with a powerful figure that gestures towards precolonial mythology in which many gods and goddess were powerful snake/human creatures.



NIÑA CANGREJA, 2022

Embroidery on textile
88 x 93 cm

A hybrid of the spider monkey and crab, *Niña cangreja* represents queer identity. The title riffs on the dual meaning of the Spanish word *cangrejo*, reclaiming a sexual slur in the form of an empowered hybrid creature.



***CUENTOS TEJIDOS, DANCING JAGUAR WITH
CACAO TREE, 2021***

Embroidery on textile
130 x 340 cm

The tapestry *Cuentos Tejidos, Dancing Jaguar with Cacao Tree* depicts a woman pleasuring herself on the back of a unicorn. She is surrounded by a host of animal figures, among others the jaguar who represents both masculine and feminine traits and the coyote who is associated with trickster myths and smuggling immigrants across the border.

A lush fabric teeming with plant-life provides that backdrop for a dreamlike embroidery that depicts a self-portrait of the artist staring at a crocodile. In Mayan folklore, life was created on the back of a crocodile.



LA TIERRA NO ES DE QUIEN LA TRABAJA, 2022

Embroidery on textile
180 x 126 cm

A found printed toile fabric serves as the background for Priscilla Dobler-Dzul's embroidery *La tierra no es de quien la trabaja*, which visually superimposes the expropriation of labor and resources in two distinct yet entangled geographic and cultural contexts: US-American slavery and the exploitation of indigenous labor, customs, and plant-life in the Yucatán. Her engagement derives from her own family's history with the henequen fiber, which is processed as a textile and used in a range of domestic, commercial, agricultural, and industrial products. Atop a scene depicting slave owners at leisure in Savannah, Dobler-Dzul embroiders a map of the Yucatán, along with Mayan figures, migrant workers, and native henequen and hierba plants to gesture towards the ongoing systemic structures that seek to erase indigenous cultures, histories, bodies and lands.



PRISCILLA DOBLER DZUL

b. 1985, Merida Yucatan, Mexico

lives and works in Tacoma, WA and Merida, Yucatan, Mexico

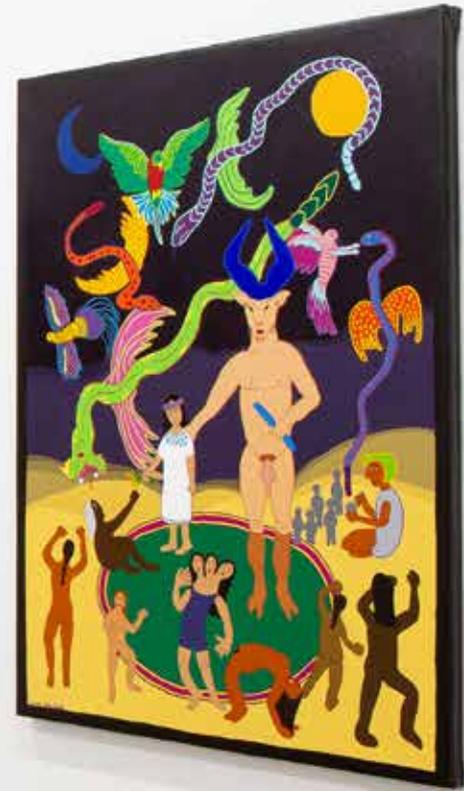
Priscilla Dobler Dzul is an interdisciplinary storyteller. Her paintings, sculpture, video, and performance works have addressed notions of belonging, borders, alienation, and social inequality as they relate to the history of migration and indigenous cultures.

Dobler Dzul's works examine the migration of cultural practices and forms between different social and political contexts, with an emphasis on the recuperation of artisanal craft and the articulation of alternative narratives of labor, power, and design. Projects like *Performing Labor, Class, and Gender* (2020) created a platform for the voices of underserved and underrepresented communities of day laborers through the interweaving of an oral history project with tactical sculptural interventions in Home Depot, an American big-box store where migrant workers frequently congregate in hopes of finding work. Her sculpture *El Volkswagen* (2020) recreates Volkswagen's iconic Beetle as a three-dimensional weaving made from wood and colored threads. This life-sized woven automobile and its interactive audio component references not only the seductive beauty of this iconic vehicle, but also the darker legacies of its production, which include land erosion, pollution, displacement, and labor exploitation.

Her most recent works comprise large-scale paintings and glazed, painted sculptures inspired by the bold colors and forms of Mayan mythological oral stories and Alebrije folk art that represent all elements of life: air, water, earth and fire. Expansive landscapes featuring a range of hybrid animals, human figures, and plant life, Dobler Dzul's ebullient canvases mix traditional mythological motifs with a contemporary approach to storytelling that creates space and representation for queer people in history and art.

Her work has recently been exhibited at Project for Empty Space, Newark, NJ; A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; Consulate of Mexico, Seattle, WA; The Northwest African American Museum, Seattle, WA; NARS Foundation, Brooklyn, NY; 125 Maiden Lane, NYC, NY; Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle, WA; King Street Station,

Seattle, WA; The Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, Santa Ana, CA and Decentered Gallery, Puebla, Mexico. Dobler Dzul was additionally a 2014 recipient of Grants for Artist Projects from the Artist Trust, 2015 Bailey Award, 2016 Edwin T. Pratt Scholarship, 2017 & 2021 Tacoma Artist Initiative Program Grantee, 2021 Puffin Foundation Awardee and a Robert B McMillen Fellowship. She received her MFA in Sculpture from the State University of New York at New Paltz in 2013. and was nominated Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Arts.

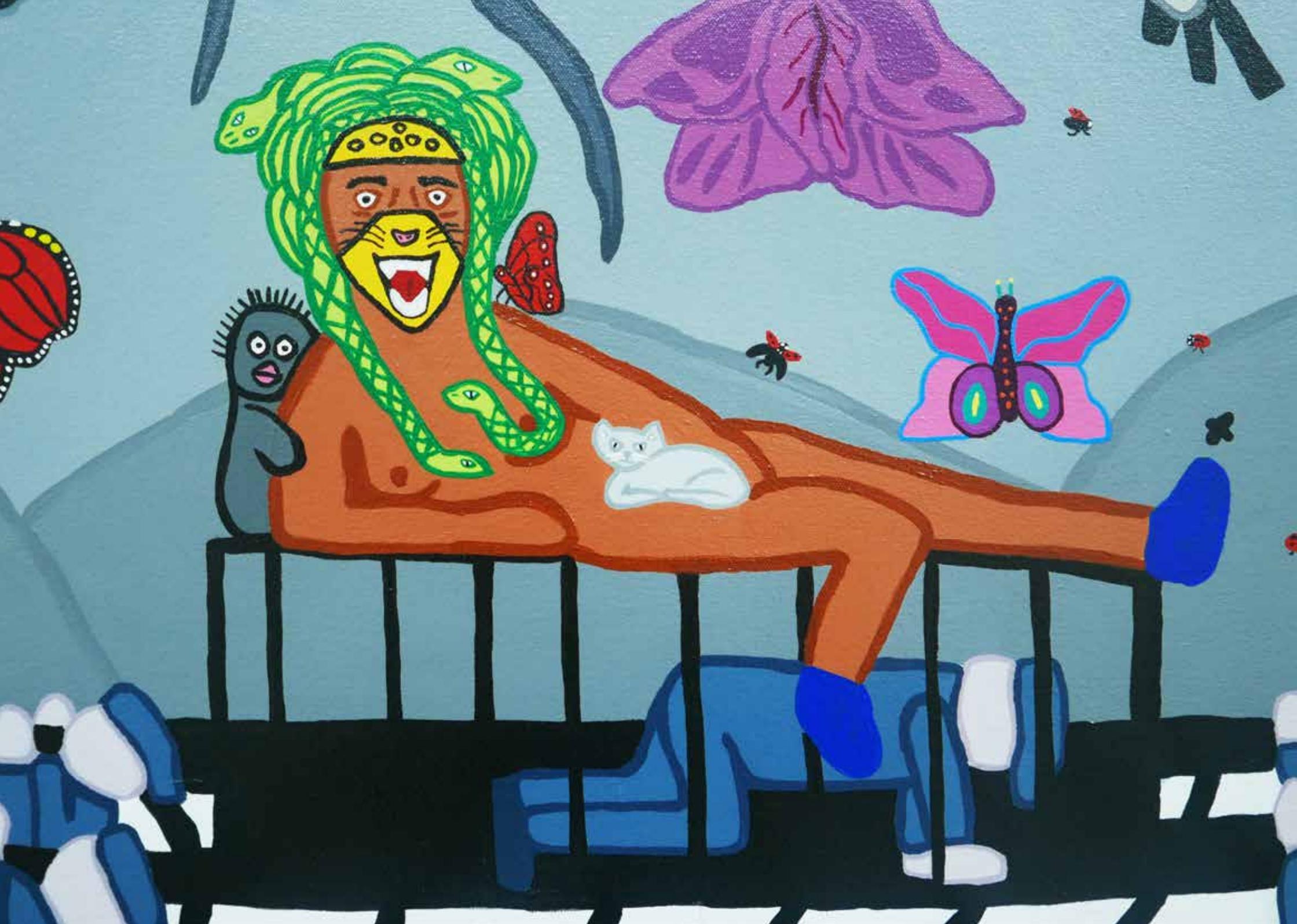












OF DAUGHTERS AND DREAMS

Priscilla Dobler Dzul

Essay "The Mayanist" by **Marina Garcia-Vasquez**

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Photography: **Billie Clarken**

This book was published on the occasion of Priscilla Dobler Dzul's solo exhibition *Of Daughters and Dreams* at NOME, Berlin, from 25 June to 27 July 2022.

NOME

Director: **Luca Barbeni**

Gallery Manager: **Olga Boiocchi**

Sales Associate: **Jesi Khadivi**

Exhibition set-up: **Nino Caltabiano**

Special thanks to: **Marie Couelle, Emanuela Laudati, Daniela Silvestrin.**



