



Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent

Curated by. Teresa Silva

This project is presented through DCASE's ArtSpace grant program

Photography by James Prinz & Tom Van Eynde



Introduction:

Luis A. Sahagún: Both Eagle and Serpent is an expansive solo exhibition of new work by the Chicago-based visual artist at the Chicago Cultural Center in the Michigan Avenue Galleries. The solo show curated by Teresa Silva opened on Saturday, February 1, 2020, but has been closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This virtual exhibition transports you to a selection of artworks from the exhibition and it grants you safe and dynamic access. In addition, a research guide based on the topics from the exhibition was created in collaboration with Librarian and Archivist Analú María López. The guide lists sources from The Newberry Library in Chicago that complement Sahagún's cultural knowledge and artistic expression. The list touches on subject areas addressed by the artwork and the curatorial statement.

Plan Your Visit to the Newberry Library:

The Newberry Library is an independent research library, specializing in the humanities and located on Washington Square in Chicago, Illinois. It has been free and open to the public since 1887. No appointment is necessary to visit the Newberry Library, however first-time visitors must register with photo identification. Because materials in the library are unique and fragile, borrowing is not permitted. Ask ahead if you can take non-flash photographs and personal notes with a pencil. Begin planning now and enjoy your trip to the Newberry Library once they reopen this summer, to discover these resources first-hand!



Teresa Silva is a writer, curator, and the Director of Exhibitions & Residencies at the Chicago Artists Coalition. She is a lifelong Chicagoan, having spent some formative years in Catalonia, Chile, and Germany.

Teresa curated the solo exhibition *Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent*, showing at the Chicago Cultural Center in 2020. In 2019, she ranked #6 on the “Art 50: Chicago’s Visual Vanguard” list by Newcity for her significant contributions to supporting local, talented artists. In 2018, Teresa was a Robert Rauschenberg Resident for Artist Administrators in Captiva, FL. In 2017, she was a Diversity + Leadership Fellow with the Alliance of Artists Communities.

Teresa is a multiethnic, multilingual Latina, an aunt and caregiver, and an artist advocate. Her cultural upbringing taught her to value art and to pay attention to the historical, political, and social dimensions that shape us. She resists categorization and instead subscribes to Audre Lorde’s notion: “If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive.”

Since 2015, Teresa has been a member of the national artist network, Tiger Strikes Asteroid. Currently, she serves as Board President for VGA Gallery and Board Member for Heaven Gallery.



Luis Sahagun was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico in 1982. His grandfather came to the United States in the 1940s under the Bracero Program, working in Chicago Height’s steel industry. Sahagun’s father found field work in the late 1970s, and Luis was brought to this country in 1985, living undocumented until he was naturalized in 1995 under Ronald Reagan’s Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Sahagun, a 2001 graduate of Chicago Height’s Bloom High School, earned his BFA from Southern Illinois University in 2006 and his MFA in painting from Northern Illinois University in 2015.

He has participated in multiple solo, juried, invitational, and national exhibits in the U.S and Mexico. In addition to being featured in *New American Paintings* (Issue #111), Luis’ work has also been showcased at the International Exposition of Contemporary Art (expo) Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago Cultural Center, and the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. Sahagun has worked as an Teaching Artist for the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, the Smart Museum of Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. He is currently an Artist-in-Residence/Visiting Professor for Critical Race Studies in Michigan State University.



Analú María López is a Librarian, Archivist, and Photographer living on Indigenous land that, along with the larger region, has always been home to Indigenous peoples, including the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi, the Illinois Confederacy: the Peoria and Kaskaskia, the Myaamia, the Wea, the Ho-Chunk, the Menominee, the Thakiwaki, the Meskwaki, the Kiikaapoi, and the Mascouten. We currently refer to this land as Chicago.

Born and raised on the Southwest side of Chicago in the neighborhood of La Villita (Little Village), where she still resides, she is Xi’úi/Guachichil from the Chichimeca Nations of México. Interested in underrepresented Indigenous narratives dealing with identity, language, and decolonization she writes and creates photographic-based projects exploring these topics.

She holds a Master of Library and Information Sciences with a certificate in Archives and Cultural Heritage Resources and Services from Dominican University and a Bachelor of Arts in Photography with a minor in Latin-American Studies from Columbia College Chicago. Currently, she works at the [Newberry Library](#) of Chicago as the Ayer Indigenous Studies Librarian.

Curatorial Statement:

Both Eagle and Serpent is an exhibition presenting an artistically constructed and colorful mythology as an act of cultural resistance and reclamation. Working at the intersection of migration, race, gender, and socio-economic status, the exhibition challenges preconceived notions of what it means to be the immigrant, the other and marginalized from Sahagun's point of view as a Latinx artist. *Both Eagle and Serpent* presents a wide body of intricate paintings, drawings, and sculptures that combine beads, rope, jute, icons, concrete, lumber, and drywall, which simultaneously celebrate and critically look at his relationship with his hybrid cultural origins and identity. Sahagun is a previously undocumented immigrant, former laborer, ex-gang member, grandson of a curandera, educator and studio artist. He comes from a cultural lineage of Indigenous alchemy and spirituality and European imperialism, which hybridized traditions, histories, and belief systems. Sahagun's mythology reflects on the integration of these ancestral parts to impart a holistic understanding of the present and himself in the world.

The exhibition title, *Both Eagle and Serpent*, is inspired by the queer and feminist Chicana writer, Gloria Anzaldúa whose seminal book, *Borderlands* is a meditation on the binaries of male and female gender, patriarchal and matriarchal order, and the critique and celebration of a dual culture. The eagle-and-serpent

symbol is represented on the Mexican flag and is derived from the pre-Hispanic Mexica story of *Huitzilopochtli*, the god of war, who guided people to an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its beak. The eagle symbolizes the spirit of the sun, the paternal figure of war, *Huitzilopochtli*. The serpent symbolizes the human soul as the maternal figure, Tonantzin.

Together they connote the struggle between male and female. As Anzaldúa points out, the symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the ostensibly "higher" masculine power indicates the patriarchal order vanquishing the matriarchal order of indigenous Mesoamerica. For Sahagun, *Both Eagle and Serpent* means to honor and represent both masculine and feminine energy as an artistic device to heal. It's a mythology that celebrates ancient beginnings and shapes new contemporary identities in his artwork. Through experiencing spiritual and psychic interventions, Sahagun has learned that he harbors feminine energy in a male-presenting body. *Both Eagle and Serpent*, as an exhibition and symbolic reference, opens up a conversation about gender, power, conquest, trauma, and survival.



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



Brown Chicago, 2014
Cardboard

Subject Area: *Settler colonialism* (Latin-America)

Artist and Curatorial Topics: spiritual erasure, conquest, colonial violence, cultural survival, resilience, rituals.

Newberry Library online catalog:

1. [The Tears of the Indians / Being / An Historical and true Account / Of the Cruel / Massacres and Slaughters / of above Twenty Millions / of innocent People / Committed by the Spaniards / In the Islands of / Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, &c. / As also, in the Continent of / Mexico, Peru, & other Places of the / West-Indies / To the total destruction of those Countries. / written in Spanish by Casaus / an Eye-witness of those things / And made English by J.P. / \[i.e. John Phillips\]... London, /: Printed by J.C. for Nath. Brook, at the Angel / in Cornhil, 1656. **Call number: VAULT Ayer 108 .C3 1656**](#)

Summary: English version (translated by John Phillips). Initially written and intended for the Crown Prince Philip, aimed to move the future king (Philip II) to action by providing graphic detail of the destruction that Las Casas had witnessed in the new lands. The Short Account was first written in 1542, and published in 1552. It caused a sensation in Spain and, especially, among Protestants throughout Europe. *this version of the book contributed greatly to the leyenda negra.

2. [El gobierno de la republica edita en facsimil el manuscrito 218-20 la Colección Palatina de la Biblioteca Laurenziana :Códice florentino para mayor conocimiento de la historia del Pueblo de México.](#) México: Archivo General de la Nación, 1979. Call number: Ayer folio F1229 .S23 1979 (facsimile) *The original can be seen on the World Digital Library.

Summary: Facsimile reproduction of the Florentine codex. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún is considered the father of American ethnohistory, by the way in which he collected data on the Nahuatl culture; He did it through Nahuatl questionnaires that were applied by students of the Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco School, called Sahagún informants. Such were the sources for the elaboration of his "General History of the Things of New Spain" and the different versions that he elaborated of it; that is to say, the summary of it that he sent to the Council of the Indies, the text that he sent to Pope Pius V with the title "Brief compendium of the idolatrous suns that the Indians of New Spain used in times of their infidelity" or the one delivered to his superior, Fray Rodrigo de Sequera, who is known as Manuscrito or Copia de Sequera. Both the "General History" and the so-called Fuentes de Sahagún are partially in the Florentine and Matritenses Codices and, there are particular editions of some of the sources. The Florentine Codex is a copy that Fray Bernardino de Sahagún himself made of his work "General History of the Things of New Spain", in order to be sent to the King of Spain. It is unknown how he arrived at the Library of Florence, to which he owes his name and where it is still preserved. It is historical, mythological and ethnological. It includes texts in Nahua and in Spanish and numerous illustrations that show the European influence.



An Old God Renewed, 2016
Wood, drywall, metal, acrylic, spray paint, jute, & resin



Subject Area: *Settler colonialism* (Latin-America)

Artist and Curatorial Topics: curandero, conquest, colonial violence, cultural survival, resilience, rituals.

Newberry Library online catalog:

1. [The Badianus manuscript. Codex Barberini. Latin 241. Vatican Library: an Aztec herbal of 1552.](#) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940. Call number: **Ayer 510 .M4 C95 1940** (facsimile)

Description: In 1552, during the early years of Spanish rule in Mexico, two Native American students at the College of Santa Cruz in Tlaltelolco created the book. Written by an Indigenous physician (Martinus de la Cruz) in Nahuatl then translated by another Indigenous person, Juannes Badianus, into Latin, it gives a genuine picture of Aztec medicine at the time of the conquest, or rather of certain aspects of it. The (Badianus) manuscript is an herbal. It therefore deals with the pharmacological treatment of diseases; it is not concerned with surgery and similar subjects. Martinus de la Cruz, who wrote the Aztec text of the herbal, was a teacher of native medicine, and Badianus, who translated it, was “Reader in Latin.” In some instances, there were no Latin equivalents to certain plant names, so they left the words in original Nahuatl. Today their work, *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis* which is Latin for “Little Book of the Medicinal Herbs of the Indians” is commonly called the [Badianus Manuscript](#). Housed in the Vatican Library, The *Badianus Manuscript* is the oldest known American herbal book and earliest known plant pictures of “American” botany.

2. [In laudem Serenissimi Ferdinandi Hispania\[rum\] regis Bethicae & regni Granatae obsidio, victoria, & triu\[m\]phus. Et De insulis in Mari Indico nuper inuentis.](#) [Basel] : I.B. [Johann Bergmann], 1494. Call number: VAULT Ayer 107.56 1493 1494

Summary: Leandro di Cosco’s Latin translation of Columbus’s letter to Raphael Sánchez concerning his discovery of America. Six woodcuts, folio 1a: “Fernandus Rex hy[s]panie”, folio 29b: “In[s]ula hy[s]pana”, folio 31b: West India islands, folio 33b: “In[s]ula hy[s]pana”, folio 36a: Shield bearing the arms of Castile & Leon, folio 36b: “Oceanica cla[ss]is”.

Two woodcuts illustrating the pamphlet *De Insulis nuper inuentis* (1494) were among the first “maps” offering visual evidence of the existence of a new-found world. They were published in 1493 inside a pamphlet containing Latin translations of three letters sent by Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) to the Spanish Court in which he announced the discovery of islands in what he wrongly believed to be the Sea of India and thus the gateway to Cathay (China).

Drawn in the tradition of late medieval landscape art—and thus devoid of modern notions of proportion, scale, and the rules of perspective—the two illustrations offer complementary views of Columbus approaching America as a geographical place, travel destination, and human habitat. The illustration on the right shows Columbus’s ship, the Santa Maria, as a multi-oared Mediterranean galley at anchor in the foreground; on the illustration’s center right, the artist shows Columbus, standing up in a row boat, approaching the island of Haiti (“Insula Hyspana”) and on the way of making contact with a group of disproportionately drawn figures representing Native Americans. The second illustration on the left offers a cartographic overview of the islands discovered and named by Columbus. They include Fernada, Hyspana, Ysabella, Saluatorie, and Conceptionis Marie.

The eight-page pamphlet was an immediate bestseller. Between Spanish and Latin editions, and Tuscan and German translations, it is estimated that some ten thousand copies of the illustrations were available to a literate minority within only five years of his voyage. Reflecting the artistry of untravelled artists who created map-like representations by following medieval conventions for depicting natural and human spaces, the illustrations proved to be highly influential, celebrating Columbus’s claim to have found a passage to China while providing first visual clues to a mostly illiterate European audience about previously unknown American lands and peoples.

Subject Area: *Settler colonialism* (Latin-America)

Artist and Curatorial Topics: curanderismx, ceremonies, celebration, family trinkets, rituals.

Newberry Library online catalog:

[1. Report of a council meeting of bishops and priests in Mexico City to discuss their ministry to the Indians](#)

[manuscript] 1539 April 27. **Call number: VAULT Ayer MS 1275 no. 2**

Summary: Report of a meeting of bishops and priests to discuss spiritual matters, pastoral duties, and issues of church government as they pertain to the Indigenous people. Having been instructed by the king, Charles V, to meet from time to time to discuss how best to govern their respective archdioceses, bishops Juan de Zumárraga of Mexico, Juan de Zárate of Oaxaca, and Vasco de Quiroga of Michoacán, as well as various officials and members of the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian orders gather in Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) on April 27, 1539. The report contains the text of the king's instructions, followed by the 24 topics that were discussed and voted upon. These topics concern the administration of the sacraments of baptism, communion, and marriage to the Indigenous people, the need for proper baptismal fonts, and the importance of following proper rites and ceremonies involving these sacraments. Christianized Indigenous people must be taught when it is proper to kneel, to genuflect, or to beat one's breast. There is consensus that Indigenous festivals, dances, bonfires, burning of incense, and other ceremonies should be prohibited, and that Indigenous altars and places of worship should be destroyed. Church bells must be rung only for Christian services, and not as part of any Indigenous celebrations; Indigenous "*voladores*," ceremonial performers who swing from high poles, are not permitted in church patios; and crosses are forbidden in Indigenous houses. The bishops also forbid the use of corporal punishment in converting the Indigenous people. Other issues concern the construction of new churches; and the education of Indigenous people in church schools. In addition to the signatures of the three bishops and the commissaries and provincials present at the meeting, the report bears the signature of Julián Garcés, bishop of Tlaxcala.



***Ceremonial Object (Wizard)*, 2016**

Joint compound, concrete, spray paint, & 21k gold leaf



Land Guardians, 2016
Concrete, drywall, acrylic, wax, & foam



Land Guardians, 2016
Concrete, drywall, acrylic, wax, & foam



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



***Lo que grita mi piel*, 2019-2020**

Wood, jute, pin nails, charcoal, beads, caulk, & Virgen de Guadalupe, Santo Toribio, San Martin de Porres

Subject Area: *Settler colonialism* (Latin-America)

Artist and Curatorial Topics: Virgen de Guadalupe, apparitions, conquest, art as submission, reclamation, patriarchy, postcolonial study.

Newberry Library online catalog:

1. [La estrella de el norte de Mexico...](#) En Mexico: Por doña Maria de Benavides, viuda de Juan de Ribera ..., Author: Francisco de Florencia, 1688. Call number: VAULT Ayer 657.65 .F63 1688

Summary: This first edition book printed in Mexico in 1688 was written by Francisco de Florencia, a Jesuit scholar who was born in the colonial city of St. Augustine in Florida. He wrote this grand tome of the Virgen de Guadalupe cult's history, which included every piece of information he could find about it, from testimonies about the cult to other writings about it (including Sor Juana), in order to convince the papacy to officially authorize the veneration of the image.

2. [\[Virgin of Guadalupe\] in Poetic Garden in Honor, Praise, and Obedience . . . to the Most-blessed Virgin \[. . . \]. \("\[Not\]ra S\[enora\] de Guadalupe Aparescida en Mexico," in \[C\]lentunculus rigorosus, in laudem purissimae . . . Sanctissimae Virginis \[. . . \].\)](#) 1669. Call number: Case folio BT660.G8 A95 1669

Summary: According to the official Catholic account, the Virgin first appeared to Juan Diego in 1531, but church officials in Mexico did not start heavily promoting the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe until the mid-17th century, with a series of publications celebrating the Virgin and her apparition in Mexico. This Latin poem was one of those publications, whose featured copperplate engravings were attributed to a certain Antonio de Castro.



Detail view of Lo que grita mi piel, 2019-2020



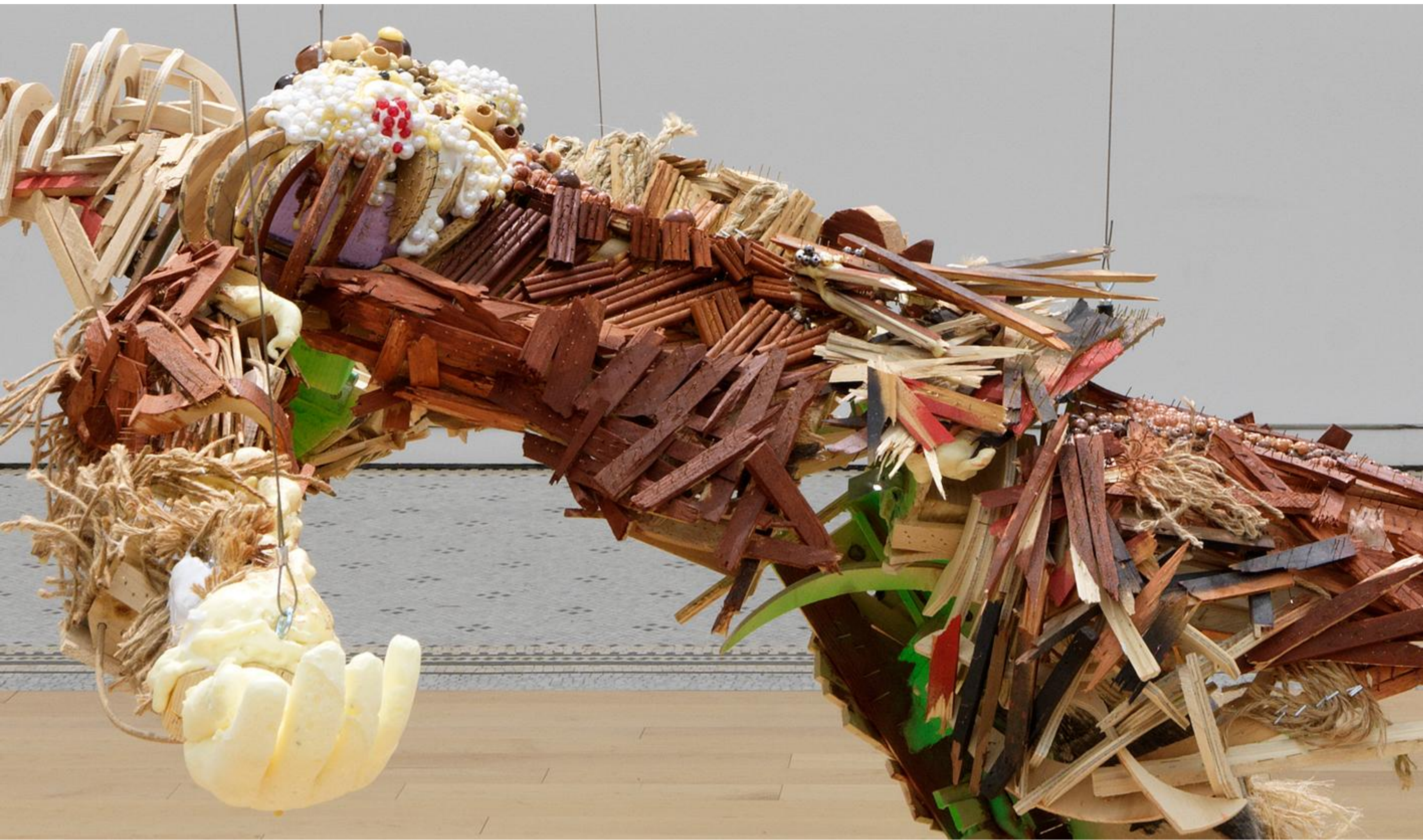
Subject Area: *Settler colonialism* (Latin-America)

Artist and Curatorial Topics: Virgen de Guadalupe, chicanx, apparitions, conquest, art as submission, reclamation, patriarchy, postcolonial study.

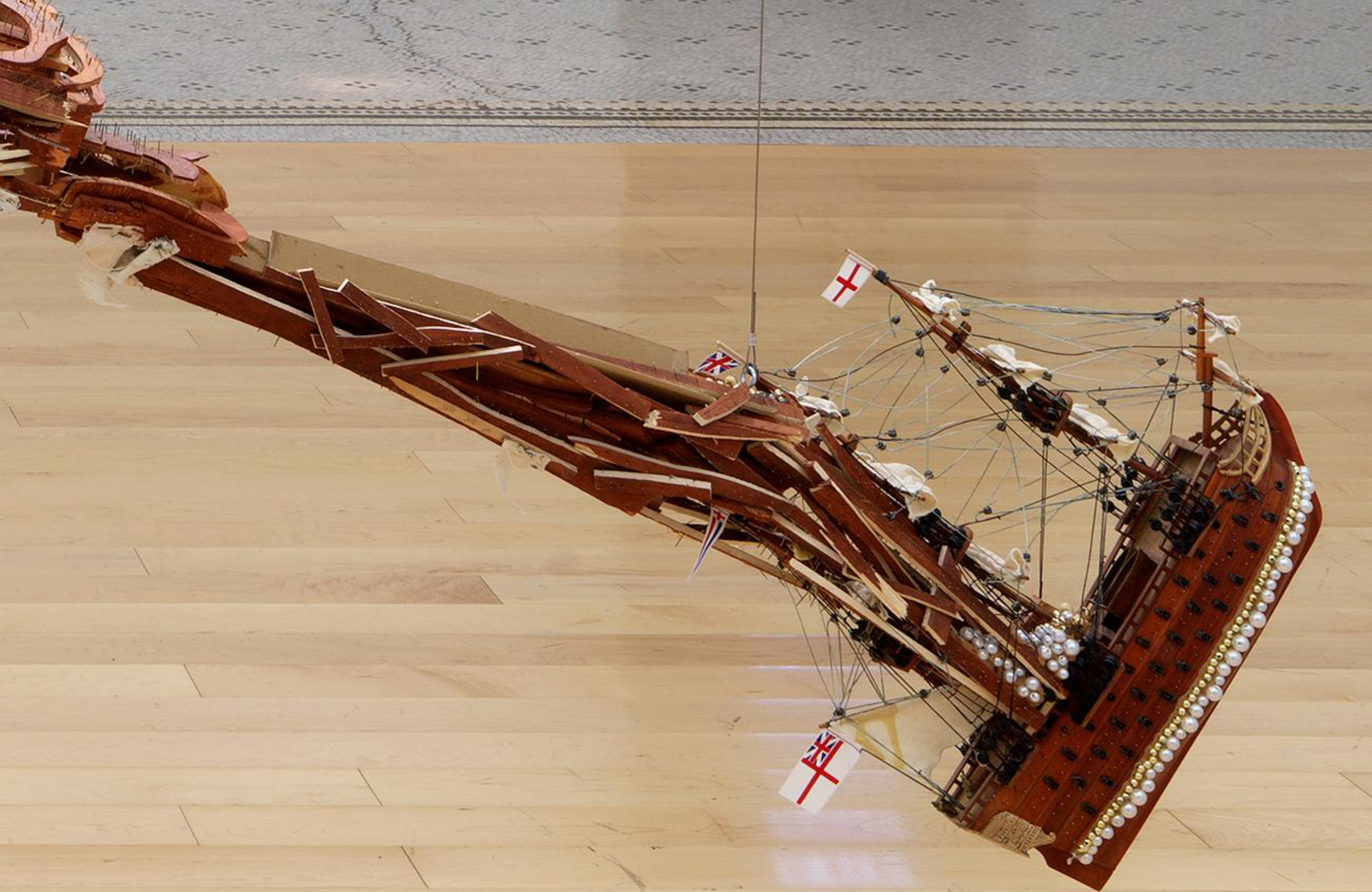
Artists reading list:

1. *The Cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico*, Louise M. Burkhart. Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990
2. Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands = La Frontera : The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
3. Castillo, Ana. *Massacre Of The Dreamers: Essays On Xicanisma*. New York : Plume, 1995. Print.

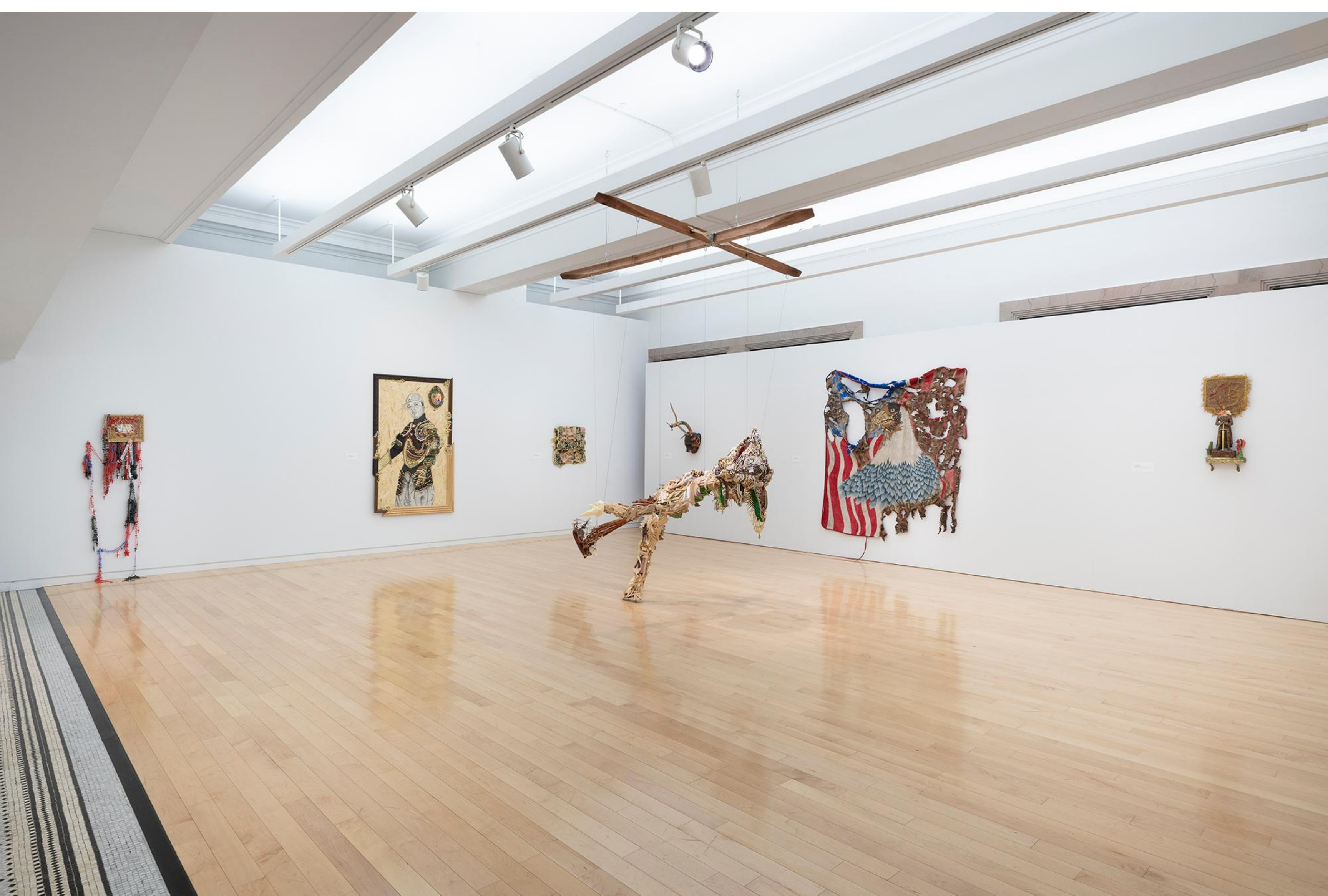
Detail view of Lo que grita mi piel, 2019-2020



Detail view of Lo que grita mi piel, 2019-2020



Detail view of Lo que grita mi piel, 2019-2020



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent

Subject Area: *Settler colonialism (Latin-America)*

Artist and Curatorial Topics: conquest, spiritual erasure, slavery, colonial violence, cultural survival, resilience, rituals.

Artist Reading list:

1. *Potentially Perilous Pedagogies: Teaching Trauma Is Not the Same as Trauma-Informed Teaching*, Janice Carello MA LMSW a & Lisa D. Butler PhD a School of Social Work, University at Buffalo , Buffalo , New York , USA, Accepted author version posted online: 07 Dec 2013.Published online: 11 Mar 2014.
2. Janice Carello & Lisa D. Butler (2015) *Practicing What We Teach: Trauma- Informed Educational Practice*, Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35:3, 262-278, DOI: 10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059
3. Paz, Octavio, 1914-1998. *The Labyrinth of Solitude ; and, the Other Mexico ; Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude ; Mexico and the United States ; The Philanthropic Ogre*. New York :Grove Weidenfelds, 1985.
4. Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands = La Frontera : The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
5. Restall, Matthew. (2003) *Seven myths of the Spanish conquest* /New York : Oxford University Press.



Gloria Y Paz, 2020
Sawdust, charcoal, personal objects, beads, tassel, found object, gold leaf



Cicatrices de un malcriado, 2020
Silicone and spray paint on osb wood

Subject Area: *Settler colonialism* (Latin-America)

Artist and Curatorial Topics: conquest, spiritual erasure, slavery, colonial violence, cultural survival, resilience.

Artist Reading List:

1. Caruth, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
2. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/a-portrait-of-spanish-conquistador-hernan-cortes>

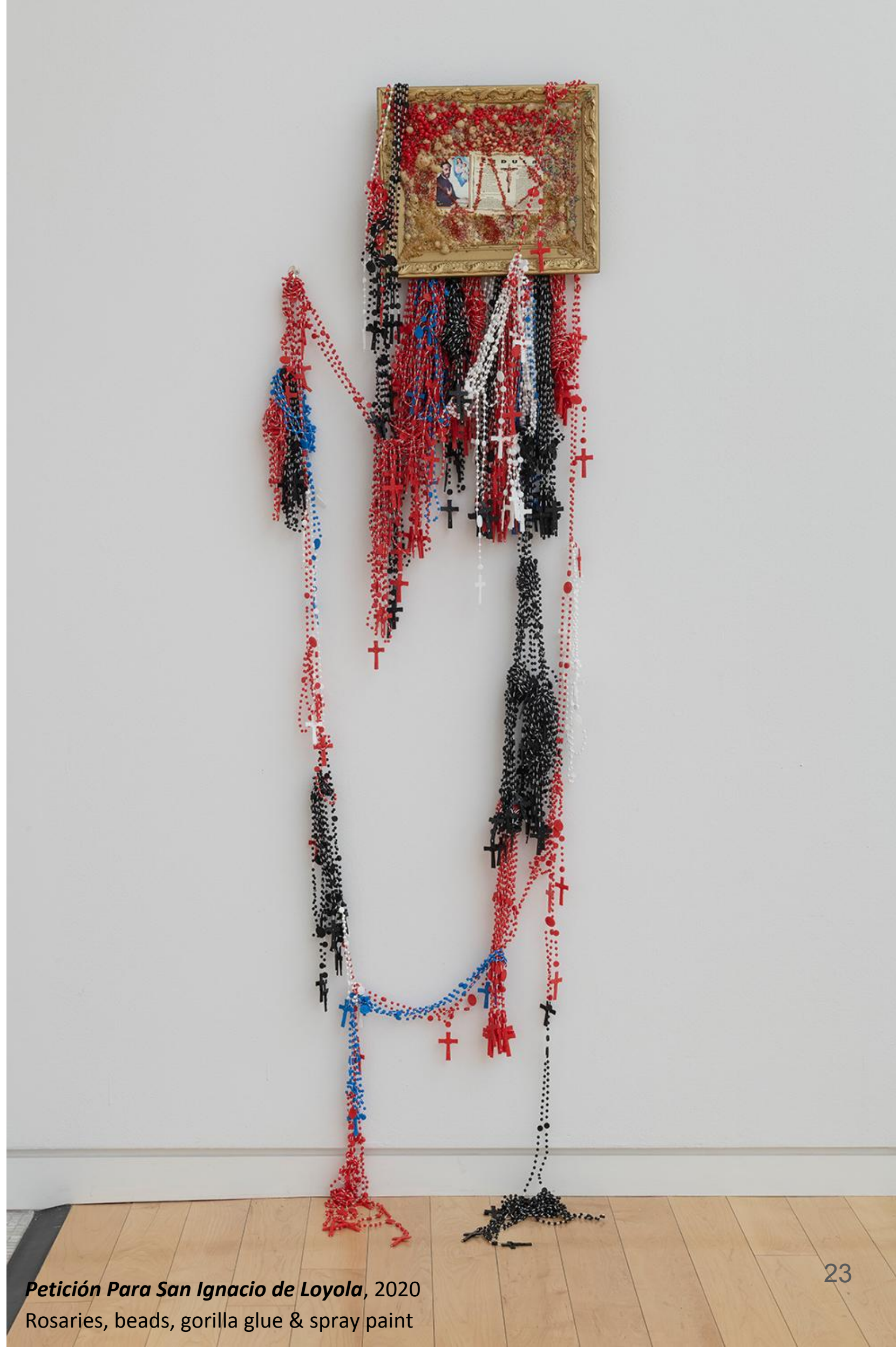


Late in James K. Polk's presidency, his wife Sarah Childress Polk received an unusual gift ...

Newberry Library online catalog:

1. [Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España / escrita por el Capitan Bernal Díaz del Castillo; uno de sus conquistadores](#). Madrid: Impreta del Reyno, 1632. **Call number: VAULT Ayer 655.51 .D5 1632**

Summary: This is the first edition of one of the most valued histories of the conquest of Mexico by one of Cortes' companions, **Bernal Díaz del Castillo** (c. 1496 – 1584). Diaz de Castillo was a Spanish conquistador, who participated as a soldier in the conquest of Mexico under Hernán Cortés and late in his life wrote an account of the events. Diaz' description of Cortes is complete and minute. No account of the ninety days before the fall of Mexico is more vivid.



Petición Para San Ignacio de Loyola, 2020
Rosaries, beads, gorilla glue & spray paint



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



rain Is Our North Star, 2018-20

synthetic rope, hand carved wood, beads, foam insulation, metal, silicone, foam, acrylic, jute, rosary beads, & found objects





Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



Humming, 2015
Cardboard, plaster, & enamel



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



Flesh and Spirit I, 2020

Sawdust, charcoal, personal objects, beads, acrylic, tassel, gold leaf



Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent



Frozen Pendulum, 2015-20
Cardboard, beads, & gorilla glue



Conflicts of Desire, 2014
Nail polish, lipstick, screws, acrylic, & oil on cardboard



Both Eagle and Serpent, 2020
Rope, jewelry, charcoal, beads, caulk,
resin, & La Virgen San Juan de Los Lagos



Beautiful Suffering, 2014
Acrylic & oil on cardboard



Flesh and Spirit II, 2020

Sawdust, charcoal, personal objects, beads, tassel, found object,
gold leaf



Ceremonial Object (Burrito), 2016-2020
Beads, concrete, wax, & found object



Luis A. Sahagun:
Both Eagle and Serpent

Two informational cards are displayed on the wall, providing details about the artist and the exhibition.

Installation view of Luis A. Sahagun: Both Eagle and Serpent