

DEVIN OSORIO  
WHO AM I BUT A HEIGHTS KID



**CJG** CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY  
CHINATOWN, LOS ANGELES

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# DEVIN OSORIO

## WHO AM I BUT A HEIGHTS KID

Charlie James Gallery is delighted to present a solo show of Mexico City-based artist **Devin Osorio** titled *Who Am I But a Heights Kid*, opening April 23rd at the gallery from 6-9pm. This is Osorio's first solo show with the gallery.

**Devin Osorio** (b. 1993, New York) grew up as a first-generation Dominican American in the northern Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights. Osorio takes inspiration from Dominican culture and folkloric traditions, including a strong emphasis on textile patterns. These cultural influences merge with biographical details from Osorio's lived experience, yielding paintings that function as secular reliquaries, commemorating a life lived between cultures.

*Who Am I But A Heights Kid* is an exhibition of paintings, installation, and works on paper executed by Osorio as a means of both self-introduction and self-examination. The works investigate moments of elation and trauma in Osorio's life, and they contain the array of complex emotions Osorio holds for Washington Heights. The paintings and works on paper employ a folk art structure to fuse ritual and personal history. Tinges of Magical Realism operate within the works, as Osorio revisits the games, stories and nursery rhymes of his youth, and soars in and out of landscapes within the works.

Devin Osorio (b. 1993, New York) is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Mexico City, Mexico. Using shared and self-reflective symbolism, Osorio honors Dominican culture through shrine-like paintings that incorporate plants, animals and glyphs to create a visual vernacular of and for the Dominican American community. Osorio's work has been exhibited in New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Madrid, at galleries including Calderon Gallery, Wave Hill, REGULARNORMAL and Charlie James Gallery. Osorio is current Artist in Residence at New Wave in West Palm Beach, FL. Osorio earned a BFA from Savannah College of Art and Design. Osorio lives and works in Mexico City.

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*Sana Culito de Rana*  
(Heal, little tail of the frog)

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*Words from the artist:*

When a child is wounded, guardians usually sing the three-stanza poem, Sana Sana Culito de Rana, while rubbing the hurt area with either two or four fingers. The act is meant to make the child feel both seen and lighten their emotional state through laughter. Devin wanted to explore this performance by healing both heavy and insignificant traumas in their life by visualizing themselves performing this ritual during these moments.

In each composition, the artist represents themselves as both the victim (the main subject of the composition) and the healer (the large arm that is decked in large jewelry). Through the creation of these compositions, the artist was forced to relive these traumatic events, using this practice as an opportunity to envision a world in which one can heal their trauma as they are occurring.

The composition is divided into four scenarios alluding to the Hindu god, Dhanvantri, the physician of the gods who emerged from the waters during Samudra Mandara (The Churning of the Ocean of Milk), a momentous event in Hindu mythology in which gods obtained immortality by consuming Amrit, the elixir of immortality. Dhanvantari is depicted in Hindu iconography as a human vessel with four arms. Osorio makes a parallel between the god and the performer of the ritual in order to reveal how the act of using song to heal is quite spectacular and comparable to deities and superheroes.

DEVIN OSORIO  
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Devin Osorio  
*Sana Sana : Enfermedad*  
(*Healthy Healthy:*  
*Sickness*)  
Acrylic on Linen  
30.50 x 40.125 Inches  
2022

Set in a fictional space that combines Devin's bedroom in Mexico City and what used to be their bedroom in Washington Heights, the artist depicts themselves as a squeamishly sick adult in bed.

DEVIN OSORIO  
WHO AM I BUT A HEIGHTS KID



Devin Osorio  
*Si No Se Sana Hoy :  
Correaos*  
(If You Are Not Healed  
Today: Belting)  
Acrylic on Linen  
30.50 x 40.125 Inches  
2022

Set in their childhood living room at 565 W 175th Street in Washington Heights, Devin is depicted as a teenager laying on the ground terrified as their father threatens to beat them with a belt. Their father struggled with anger management throughout the artist's formative years, affecting their relationship with their parent and later on with other masculine individuals.



DEVIN OSORIO  
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Devin Osorio  
*Culito de Rana :*  
*Guallandome*  
*(Frog Tail : Scrapping)*  
Acrylic on Linen  
30.50 x 40.125 Inches  
2022

Reminiscing on a specific moment in their childhood, Devin is depicted as a pre-teen that has fallen off their scooter at the bottom of a steep hill located in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. Every year Devin and their family and friends from the block would find any method to arrive at this specific park with food, drinks, picnic chairs, foldable tables, and fireworks. It was always a momentous event because the adults found themselves in a lighter mood due to the time off from work, allowing themselves to get drunk and use their cars as a large speaker system to play music. What always struck Devin the most was the steepness of this hill and its ending at an intersection with active cars. It became a pass-time game to ride down this dangerous hill as fast as possible and come near to being hit by a car but not doing so. This composition depicts a moment in which Devin grew scared and fell off their scooter moments before merging into the intersection, sliding down this hill on their knees.

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Devin Osorio  
*Se Sanara Mañana :*  
*Abuso Sexual*  
*(Will Heal Tomorrow :*  
*Sexual Abuse)*  
Acrylic on Linen  
30.50 x 40.125 Inches  
2022

Set in a fictional space that combines a bedroom and J.Hood Wright park on 175th Street and Wadsworth, Devin reflects on the sexual abuse they faced in their youth, specifically depicting an experience had with their babysitter.

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Devin Osorio  
*Alza La Oreja Hacia Dios*  
*(Lift your Ear to God)*  
Acrylic on Linen  
60.2 x 43.1 inches  
2021

# DEVIN OSORIO

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### *Words from the artist:*

Inspired by a game in which their uncle Jesus would ask Devin if they wanted to see god; both would cackle and giggle as he tugged on Devin's ears upwards. In this composition, the artist is represented as a young boy who is literally being pulled by the ear upwards off the globe and towards the heavens. In this piece, the artist visualizes what it would look like if humans possessed the ability to transport themselves or others through simple kinetic acts.

Young Devin is being lifted off an egg-shaped globe that houses what to the artist would have been the entire world at a young age: the Washington Bridge seen outside of their window, the neighborhood of Washington Heights, their great grandmother's home in the small town called El Desvio de Caobanico in San Jose De Las Matas in Dominican Republic, and the universe held within the globe alludes to a painting of the Samudra Manthan (The Churning of the Ocean of Milk), a momentous event in Hindu mythology in which gods obtained immortality by consuming Amrit, the elixir of immortality. This narrative is paralleled to the game Devin played with their uncle, thus comparing ear-pulled transportation to that of gods and demons churning gifts from an ocean of milk.

Additionally, the artist venerates the ability of reproduction and nurture. This is represented by portraying their parents at the bottom of the composition, both holding the world on their shoulders thus supporting the earth for Devin as the tortoise Kurma did during Samudra Manthan when Mount Mandara was sinking.

To the artist, ritualistic acts such as reproduction and this children's game remind them of deities and superheroes who can travel the entire length of the globe in seconds. Devin finds the human necessity to adapt such powerful practices based in joy and laughter in order to understand the mysteries within their life and extremely limited understanding to be remarkable and delightful



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Devin Osorio  
*Gotas Para Las Fallecidas*  
(Drops For The Dead)  
Acrylic on Linen  
60.2 x 46 inches  
2021

# DEVIN OSORIO

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*Words from the artist:*

Inspired by the ritualistic act of “pouring one out for the homies,” a symbolic practice in black and brown communities to represent a sip for a departed who would have taken it if alive, is visualized occurring literally. Depicting themselves sitting on a foldable picnic chair on the grass in J.Hood Wright park pouring streams of the Dominican rum, Brugal for both their mother, Maria Lucia Checo de Osorio who passed in 2018, and aunt Elsa Checo who passed in 1986.

The women sit either underground within the tree roots or above-ground laying on the clouds which alludes to the Aztec belief of the dead undergoing 9 challenges in order to reach Mictlán, the final resting place. In this depiction, these women show progression according to the time of departing. Their mother, being the most recent to pass, is closer to the earth while their aunt is farther along and closer to rest.

The cyclicity of this artwork is inspired by a 13th-century depiction of Varuna, the Hindu goddess of wine, for its strong stance and water-like fluidity. Devin creates a circular arrangement to represent the continuation of shared space, communication, and love with those who have passed through the simple act of sacrifice. This ritual fascinates Devin because it taps into acts of divinity; the ability to share tangible items with those who are no longer alive reminds them of deities and superheroes who can speak and interact with the afterlife. Devin finds the human ability to build ceremonial practices that allow them to connect with those they have lost while still alive to be powerful and very much restorative.

Yet, the deceased are not the only ones going through challenges. The placement of the artist wearing a long floral dress and their usual adornment of earrings and heels, an outfit that would not be regularly worn on masculine bodies at this park, touches on Osorio’s desire to sit comfortably in public dressed as they please within their community but do not, opting to do so in other neighborhoods instead. Although they do not feel completely comfortable sitting in public wearing effeminate clothing in Washington Heights in real life, they do in their paintings.

Osorio depicts themselves in front of a luscious tree, specifically the tree that they grew up with on the corner of 175th Street and St.Nicholas which still stands to this day. This placement represents the artist’s grief and how they’ve been able to allow pain to be an agent of change.



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Devin Osorio  
*Por Mami Soy Empatico*  
(Because of Mom I am  
empathetic)  
Acrylic on paper  
39.25 x 27.5 inches  
2022

# DEVIN OSORIO

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From a very young age Devin's mother was empathetic beyond reason; turning the cheek when the artist's father was enraged and gifting additional clothing to a thieving mother who had stolen Devin's sister's shoes at a house party. This lack of restriction in order to ensure that others are okay inspired the artist to inspect their roots/lineage in an attempt to understand how their ancestors specifically influenced their self-development.

Inspired by a ceremony that is done for saints in the religious practice of Los Misterios or Dominican Voodoo, in which followers create alters that are specific to saints to whom they pray, Devin created an altar for their mom who went by the nickname, Luisa. In Los Misterios, altars are decorated with various objects and substances according to the saint's tastes such as the Baby Jesus being housed with candy and Chango being housed with smoke and rum. In this composition, Devin decorates Luisa's altar with a hanging bundle of eucalyptus leaves, a ginger flower inside a thin glass vase, a hanging ceramic of a piñata, and a representation of the artist with Anthurium leaves growing from their head to represent Luisa's empathy, natural willingness to give back to those around her and ensure that they are all safe and healthy, and organic inclination towards viewing the world around her with abundance rather than lack.

In the bottom left-hand corner of the composition, Devin has included a small glyph that they designed in 2021 titled, "bochincheras," which translates to Gossipers. Their mother loved to spend all of her free time with her friends socializing and more than anything, harmlessly gossiping over a 12 pack of beer. This made her a pillar in the community because she was always around, able to chat with anyone around her. Making those in her gaze feel as though they were a dear friend. This mission to be healed for the purpose of being able to heal others is an attribute that has stuck with the artist since Luisa's passing and is a characteristic they make sure to work on in order to continue her legacy.

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Devin Osorio  
*Por Jesus Soy Carismatico*  
(Because of Jesus I am  
Charismatic)  
Acrylic on paper  
39.25 x 27.5 inches  
2022

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Devin has always felt distant from their relatives due to their lack of accepting their queerness, choosing to ignore rather than confront it. This has forced the artist to create family bonds outside of the home. With this weight in their heart, Devin was inspired to inspect their roots/lineage in an attempt to understand how their ancestors specifically influenced their self-development.

Inspired by a ceremony that is done for saints in the religious practice of Los Misterios or Dominican Voodoo, in which followers create alters that are specific to saints to whom they pray, Devin created an altar for their uncle Jesus. In Los Misterios, altars are decorated with various objects and substances according to the saint's tastes such as the Baby Jesus being housed with candy and Chango being housed with smoke and rum. In this composition, Devin decorates Jesus' altar with a potted Spike Yucca plant, a Star Flower held within a Presidente beer bottle, a small winged devil toy, a wooden toy cat driving a floral car, and a representation of the artist with a Fatsia Japonica plant growing from their head to represent Jesus' charismatic and light-hearted character being the family's comedian.

In the bottom left corner of the composition, Devin has included a small glyph that they designed in 2021 titled, "Callejero," a term used to describe someone that spends a lot of time on the streets, typically associated with those who party too much thus spending too much time outside getting into mischief rather than sober at home. Devin used this symbol in Jesus' altar because the artist's family is known for their ability to socialize and being in the epicenter of the social scene, Jesus being the leader in that department. This ability has made Devin a charismatic and sociable individual.

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Devin Osorio  
*Por Alba Soy Diosa*  
(*Because of Alba I am Goddess*)  
Acrylic on paper  
39.25 x 27.5 inches  
2022

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As the artist has matured with age, they've been able to accept the complexity of their transness. This all started in part to their aunt's unconditional acceptance of their queerness before Devin came out of the closet. From a young age, they supported Devin to pursue a career in fashion, dress in clothing that was a better representation of themselves, and even joke with Devin about their lack of interest in women through food. She showed Devin that it was favorable to be fabulous and fully themselves rather than anything other. This unfiltered acceptance inspired the artist to inspect their roots/lineage in an attempt to understand how their ancestors specifically influenced their self-development.

Inspired by a ceremony that is done for saints in the religious practice of Los Misterios or Dominican Voodoo, in which followers create alters that are specific to saints to whom they pray, Devin created an altar for Alba Nery. In Los Misterios, altars are decorated with various objects and substances according to the saint's tastes such as the Baby Jesus being housed with candy and Chango being housed with smoke and rum. In this composition, Devin decorates Alba's altar with a pothos plant growing in a glass jar that has been decorated with beaded bracelets, a framed parrot feather that was dropped by the artist's pet bird, Cuca, a ceramic dog with double spouts, a single Calla Lily in a glass vase, and a representation of themselves holding two diablo cojuelos, masks that are used during Dominican Carnival to represent Alba's sensuality, willingness to love life, and ability to care for those that are vulnerable around her.

In the bottom right corner of the composition, Devin has included a small glyph that they designed in 2021 titled, "Savage Softness," a term they came up with to describe Dominican women. Like most women in Latin America and the Caribbean, they are forced to grow up in a macho society which makes them brutal and fierce whilst also gentle and nurturing. These polar attitudes perfectly describe Alba's nature and have allowed the artist to flourish while growing within her warmth, and become a strong effeminate person, a goddess.

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Devin Osorio  
*Alba Nery Rodriguez*  
Acrylic on paper  
39.25 x 27.5 inches  
2022



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Devin explores their legacy and the performance of objects through the creation of symbolic figures which immortalize specific elders. These representational objects are made up of a collection of objects found throughout the globe that remind Devin of the individual according to their physical traits and metaphorical properties.

“Alba Nery Rodriguez,” is a portrait of their aunt-in-law Albanery who was previously married to Devin’s uncle Jesus. She is intelligent, strong, and beautiful. To Devin, she represents divine femininity in human form. Her portrait was inspired by Giorgio Di Sant’Angelo’s masks created in 1972, a Han Dynasty lion mask from China, a Ganesha sculpture from the Thanjavur district in Tamil Nadu of Southeastern India, an antelope mask from the Nuna or Nunoma people of Burkina Faso in the Black Volta River Region, a female figure mask from the Mossi peoples of the White Volta River Region in the Yantega Province of Burkina Faso, and lastly from a helmet mask with a female figure from the Yoruban Fakeye family from Ila Orangun or Effon-Alaiye region of Nigeria.

The object is floating above a depiction of 175th street between St. Nicholas and Audubon, the block that Devin grew up on. Alba Nery and her family lived within the buildings on the block locally named, “El Porton,” throughout Devin’s upbringing. They were not allowed to walk into the building growing up due to its heavy association with the drug trade. Once their uncle Jesus married Alba Nery, the artist was able to meet individuals that lived in the building and began to spend time within the space. Replacing some of the fears with feelings of home.

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Devin Osorio  
*Rafael de Jesus*  
*Checo Rodriguez*  
Acrylic on paper  
39.25 x 27.5 inches  
2022

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Devin explores their legacy and the performance of objects through the creation of symbolic figures which immortalize specific elders. These representational objects are made up of a collection of objects found throughout the globe that remind Devin of the individual according to their physical traits and metaphorical properties.

“Rafael de Jesus Checo Rodriguez,” is a portrait of their uncle Jesus, the youngest of 8. He is hilarious, very joyful, and extremely explorative. He is unafraid to fail and continuously lives his life to the fullest. His portrait was inspired by a mask from the Guere people of Western Côte d’Ivoire, a Gable mask from the Middle Sepik Krosmeri River in Papua New Guinea, a Kómó Helmet mask from the Kómó or Koma Power Association from Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, or Côte d’Ivoire, a whistling jar from the Chimu people of Peru, a Lor mask from the New Britain people of Papua New Guinea, and a miniature mask from the Loma people of Liberia.

The object is floating above a depiction of the apartment Devin grew up in. Growing up the artist lived in a three-bedroom apartment with 6 people, two of which were their uncle and wife at the time. Devin always cherished his presence in the home and he played an integral part in their upbringing.

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Devin Osorio  
*Maria Lucia Checo de Osorio*  
Acrylic on paper  
39.25 x 27.5 inches  
2022

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Devin explores their legacy and the performance of objects through the creation of symbolic figures which immortalize specific elders. These representational objects are made up of a collection of objects found throughout the globe that remind Devin of the individual according to their physical traits and metaphorical properties.

“Maria Lucia Checo de Osorio,” is a portrait of their mother who was a beacon of empathy, love, and joy. She is one of the most inspiring people in Devin’s life. Her portrait was inspired by a Rain Priest Mask from the Hopi People of Arizona, a Wooden Garab mask from the Wogumas People in Kubuka the Upper Sepik River in Papua New Guinea, a Beete Mask (Ram) from the Kwele Peoples of Gabon or the Republic of Congo, a Janus Helmet Mask (Wanyugo) from the Senufo people from the Region of Savanes, Ladiokaha in Côte d’Ivoire, and a funerary mask from the Lambayeque/Sicán peoples of Peru’s Northern coast.

The object is floating above a depiction of Devin’s great grandmother’s home in El Desvio de Caobanico, San Jose De Las Matas in Dominican Republic because of fond memories the artist has of their mother seeming her most free while spending time within the walls of that shed.

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### *Words from the artist:*

Developed from a long-standing series started in 2018 titled, *Los Allacanos*, in which Devin started creating symbolic designs that were of and for the Dominican diasporic community within Washington Heights. These designs were based on similarities found within the stories of 13 individuals that were born and raised in Washington Heights who Devin interviewed and had to fill out surveys. From this research, the artist was able to extract at least 16 narratives that functioned as arches between the individuals such as an exchange between Washington Heights and the Bronx and women being the supportive elders in their lives.

Devin began to create these designs in order to provide a visual vocabulary that can be used to document the diasporic Dominican community and can be used in a plethora of mediums such as architecture, textiles, and in this case - painting.

Since the inception of this project, the artist has been creating symbolic designs that describe individuals, synthesize certain diasporic experiences and visualize tales the artist heard growing up.

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Devin Osorio  
*Huevo Queire Sal*  
(*The Egg Wants Salt*)  
Acrylic on paper  
11 x 11 inches  
2022

This design visualizes a phrase they heard growing up often from elders, “huevo quiere sal,” which translates to “the egg wants salt,” a sexual phrase meaning that a man is horny and is looking to have sex.



DEVIN OSORIO  
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This design visualizes a phrase they heard growing up often from elders, “no te veo, no te siento,” which translates to “don’t see you, don’t feel you,” which means that one is not present at the moment. Usually used for those who are socially awkward and are wallflowers. This phrase is used to let them know that they are hiding too much and should allow themselves to shine.

Devin Osorio  
*No Te Veo,  
No Te Siento  
(Don't see you,  
Don't feel you)*  
Acrylic on paper  
11 x 11 inches  
2022

DEVIN OSORIO  
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This design visualizes a phrase they heard growing up often from elders, “veo todo pero se nada,” which translates to “I see everything but know nothing,” which is a phrase that directly correlates to living in gang-affiliated communities and areas with high levels of crime. In these communities, there are no witnesses when evil occurs to ensure that evil stays away.

Devin Osorio  
*Veo Todo Pero  
No Se Nada  
(I see everything  
but know nothing)*  
Acrylic on paper  
11 x 11 inches  
2022

DEVIN OSORIO  
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This design visualizes a phrase they heard growing up, “lo que se sabe no se pregunta,” which translates to “what is known does not get asked,” used as a scapegoat to ignore sensitive subjects such as homosexuality, mental illness, working in the illicit markets and etc.

Devin Osorio  
*Lo Que Se Ve No Se Pregunta*  
(What is known does not get asked)  
Acrylic on paper  
11 x 11 inches  
2022

DEVIN OSORIO  
WHO AM I BUT A HEIGHTS KID



This design visualizes a phrase they heard growing up often from elders, “el que no llora no mama,” which translates to “the one who doesn’t cry doesn’t eat,” meaning that one must ask and fight for what they need or else they may die from hunger.

Devin Osorio  
*El Que No Lloro,  
No Mama*  
*(The one who doesn't  
cry doesn't eat)*  
Acrylic on paper  
11 x 11 inches  
2022

DEVIN OSORIO  
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This design visualizes a phrase they heard growing up often, “es viernes y el cuerpo lo sabe,” which translates to “it’s Friday and the body knows it,” a joyful phrase that is said on Fridays when people are about to finish work and are excited to socialize with loved ones, drink, and have a few hours of much-needed rest.

Devin Osorio  
*Es Viernes Y El  
Cuerpo Lo Sabe*  
*(It's Friday and the  
body knows it)*  
Acrylic on paper  
11 x 11 inches  
2022

# DEVIN OSORIO

## WHO AM I BUT A HEIGHTS KID

### EDUCATION

Savannah College of Art and Design  
Savannah, GA  
B.F.A in Fibers

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 Who Am I But A Heights Kid, Charlie James Gallery,  
Los Angeles, CA

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 The Nature of Family Portraits curated by Jesse  
Bandler Firestone Wave Hill, Bronx, NY  
Mexico City Design Week, curated by Edith Vaisberg  
of Adhesivo Contemporary  
Art House Project Fair, Ciudad de México, MX  
Pal' Patio, curated by Tiffany Alfonseca, Calderon  
Gallery, South Street Seaport, NYC  
Inaugural Showcase, curated by Tommy May, Blue  
Door, Los Angeles, CA  
Madrid Design Week, curated by Edith Vaisberg of  
Adhesivo Contemporary UVNT Art Fair, Madrid, Spain  
2021 Miami Design Week curated by Nicole Calderon,  
Untitled, Miami, FL  
URÓBORO, curated by Edith Vaisberg, Apartaco,  
Ciudad de México, MX  
Ni De Aquí, Ni De Allá, curated by Charlie James  
and Ever Velasquez, Charlie James Gallery, Los  
Angeles, CA  
We Still Around: Here, curated by Andréa  
Oromeño-Delph and Danny Baez, The Seaport 23-25,  
New York, NY  
NYC Salt Emerging Artist Exhibition, curated by NYC  
Salt Hudson River Park  
2019 Relámpago Caribeño, curated by Proyectos Sabrosos  
and Edith Vaisberg, Apartaco, Ciudad de México, MX  
2018 Flame Tree, curated by Bony Ramirez, REGULARNORMAL

Gallery, New York, NY

Caribbean Veranda, curated by CariBEING and Pablo  
Serrano, Lefferts Historic House, Prospect Park, NY  
A Welcoming, curated by CariBEING and Pablo Serrano  
Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY  
CAVDA Arte de Joven, curated by Ashley Ferrera, Rio  
Gallery, New York, NY

### RESIDENCY EXPERIENCE

2022 New Wave, West Palm Beach, FL, curated by  
Sarah Gavlak and Sarah Haimes