

# MINERVA CUERVAS



**IN GODS  
WE TRUST**

march 3 – april 15, 2023

kurimanzutto

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Following its inaugural exhibition, kurimanzutto presents Minerva Cuevas's most recent solo exhibition in the gallery in New York.

For more than three decades, Cuevas's practice has been rooted in research-based projects concerned with economic and environmental issues and their socio-political impact.

On this occasion, Cuevas will exhibit large-scale wall reliefs especially conceived for the New York context. The reliefs at kurimanzutto are informed by the Mexico City-based artist's meticulous preparatory research into pre-Hispanic symbology and the history of relationships between oil and wealth management companies. The resulting pieces combine representations of pre-Hispanic gods and goddesses along with corporate logos. An earlier relief work entitled *The Enterprise* (2019) is on display at Museum Ludwig in Cologne until November 2024.

A series of sculptures, which were recently shown in Cuevas's exhibition at Museo Jumex in Mexico City, are also on view in the gallery. They combine the heads of animal figures Cuevas found and 3D scanned at Mexico's famed Museo Nacional de Antropología with vintage motor oil drums collected by the artist.

The exhibition at kurimanzutto is anchored by *The Trust* (2023), a major new mural comprising 126 monochrome panels measuring 41 x 11 feet (12.5 x 3.5 meters). The tableau image includes representations of Chalchiuhtlicue, the Aztec goddess of water and fertility, as well as Tlazoltéotl, the mythological goddess of lust and excess. Cuevas also integrates depictions of flora and fauna found in clay and stone objects from various pre-Hispanic museum collections. Through imagery of and surrounding natural resources that span centuries, she draws a connection

to colonization in Mesoamerica that started transatlantic trade and our current ecological moment. Each of these archeological elements went through digital and manual modeling processes before being painted in white acrylic and refined through exacting handwork. The artist brings these historical elements in dialogue with the logos of corporations such as Chevron, British Petroleum, and First Republic Bank, all of which use natural and even mythical motifs such as Pegasus, flowers, and an eagle to communicate values of fortitude, care, strength, and power. A turtle is also present in the relief, which is based on a figure found in the mural Diego Rivera painted at Rockefeller Center that was destroyed for its perceived communist sentiment.

In another key work in the exhibition, Cuevas, for the first time, draws directly from the tradition of post-revolutionary Mexican mural painting. She isolated specific elements from *Epopeya del pueblo mexicano* (Epic of the Mexican People) (1935), a mural painted by Rivera inside Palacio Nacional in downtown Mexico City, and reproduced only certain highlighted details from the painted scene of pre-Hispanic cultural life, such as stone sculptures and only the loincloths or ceremonial costumes imagined in Rivera's mural. Cuevas reinterprets the image as a fragmented, monochromatic relief that suggests the splintered nature of historical narratives—a way in which to view all of the works in the exhibition.

Alongside the reliefs and sculptures is a selection of historical advertisements of oil products dating from the 1950s to the 1970s that take on a new reading in the context of today's ecological crisis.

# ΕΠΟΠΕΥΑ DE UN PUEBLO (EPIC OF THE PEOPLE)

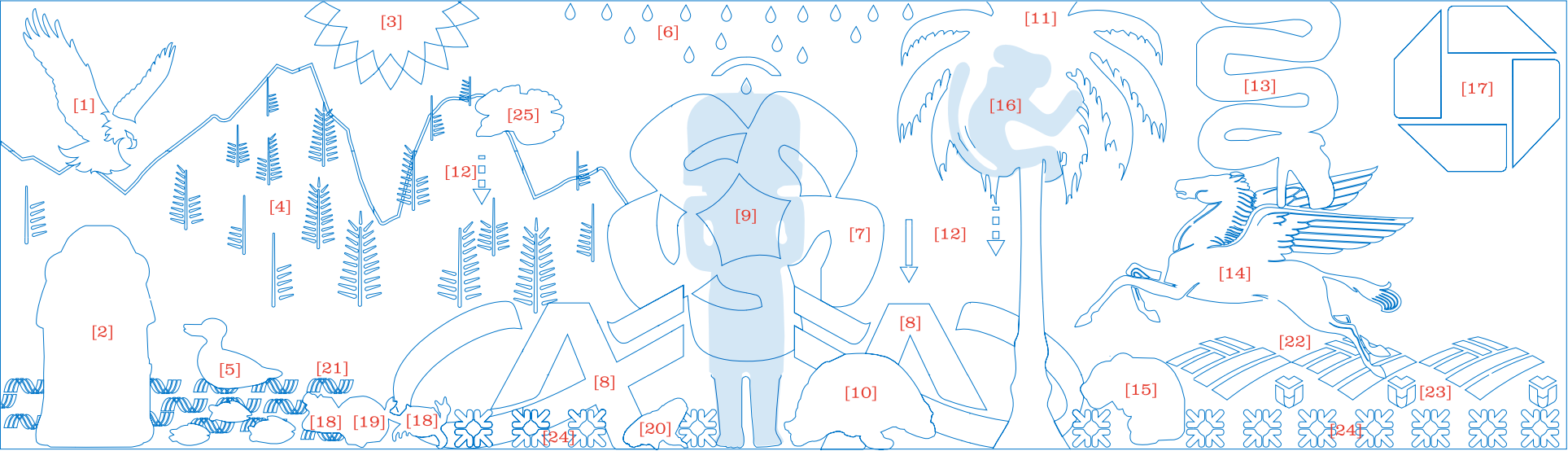
In her large-scale reliefs, *Epopeya de un pueblo* (2022–2023), Cuevas reproduces only certain highlighted details from the painted scene of pre-Hispanic cultural life from Diego Rivera's mural, such as the stone sculptures and the loincloths and ceremonial clothing worn by the figures.

Cuevas presents us with reliefs painted in white that introduce us to the rest of the artworks in the exhibition: pre-Hispanic sculptural elements, deities, the formal resources seen in the main mural *The Trust*, and the reference to Rivera, a pioneer of the Mexican mural movement who had his own connection to New York City's cultural scene. The details in Cuevas's relief become a monochromatic abstraction, a fragmentation that parallels the fragmentation of historical narratives.



Diego Rivera, *La Leyenda de Quetzalcóatl* (The Legend of Quetzalcoatl), part of the mural *Epopeya del pueblo mexicano* (Epic of the Mexican People), 1929, stairs of Palacio Nacional, Mexico City. Photo by Diego Grandi.





# GLOSSARY



**[1] First Republic Bank**  
The U.S. public bank was founded in 1885. Its branding includes a bald eagle, the nation's emblem.



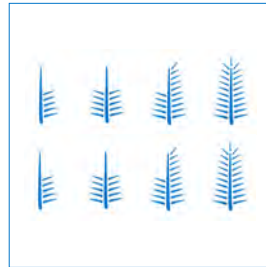
**[2] Chalchiuhtlicue**  
In Aztec mythology, Chalchiuhtlicue was the goddess of fertility and water. She was considered the most important protector of coastal navigation.

In 2019, this sculpture was part of a sale organized by the French auction house Millon & Associates. The Mexican government argued that the sale was illegal since it was unlawfully taken from Mexico.



**[3] BP**  
Standard Oil Trust, founded by John D. Rockefeller in 1870, was dissolved under the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1911 and split into 34 companies. Standard Oil of Indiana and Standard Oil of Ohio were both eventually acquired by British Petroleum, one of the four largest oil companies in the world. In 2001, in response to negative press on poor safety standards, the company adopted the green sunburst logo and rebranded itself bp—now an acronym for “Beyond Petroleum.”

In 2010, the oil drilling rig, *Deepwater Horizon*, operating in the Gulf of Mexico, exploded and sank resulting in the largest oil spill in the history of marine oil drilling operations.



**[4] Aztec Numerical System**



**[5] Duck and Fish**  
These animals were symbolic and commonly used motifs for sculptures, vessels, and other objects in Mesoamerican culture.



**[6] Oil Drops**



**[7] Citibanamex**  
Banamex, the second largest bank in Mexico, was formed in 1884. In 1992, during Salinas de Gortari's presidency, Banamex, amongst other Mexican banks, was privatized. In 2001, Citigroup Inc. acquired Banamex making it the largest-ever U.S.-Mexico corporate merger. The company operated as a Citigroup subsidiary under the combined logo and brand name Citibanamex. At the beginning of 2022, Citigroup announced the sale of certain parts of its operations in Mexico.



**[8] Crédit Agricole**  
The French international banking group and the world's largest cooperative financial institution can trace its history back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Local banks were created based on cooperative principles in

response to the absence of loans for farmers.



**[9] Tlazoltéotl**  
In Aztec mythology, Tlazoltéotl was the goddess of lust, passion, and sexuality.



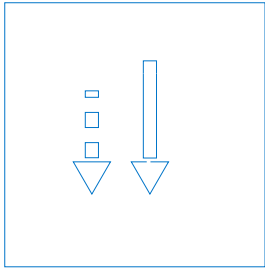
**[10] Turtle**  
This is a detail from Diego Rivera's *Man, Controller of the Universe* (1934), which was a mural originally commissioned in 1933 for Rockefeller Center in New York City by Nelson Rockefeller. At the time of the commission, Nelson, the grandson of Standard Oil founder John D. Rockefeller, was a board director at Rockefeller Center. He would later work for other family businesses including Creole Petroleum Corporation and Standard Oil of New Jersey before becoming Governor of New

York and eventually Vice President of the U.S. Nelson had the mural destroyed due to Rivera's refusal to remove images of communist figures. The mural was repainted in 1934 at Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.



**[11] National Emblem of Saudi Arabia**  
The palm tree is part of the Saudi Arabia national emblem adopted in 1950. The emblem consists of a palm tree on top of two crossed swords. The palm tree represents the Kingdom's assets, defined as its people, heritage, history, and resources. The two swords represent the forces used to protect the nation's assets.

Saudi Arabia's economy is driven by oil, one of the country's most valuable resources. Recently, conflicts began over OPEC+, the oil cartel led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, agreeing to cut oil production to avoid a potential plummet in oil costs in the event of a global recession.



**[12]**  
**Stock Exchange**  
**Graphic Elements**  
The U.S. stock exchange is located in the Financial District of Lower Manhattan in New York City. It is the largest stock exchange in the world.



**[13]**  
**Snake/Quetzalcóatl**  
In Aztec mythology, the snake symbolizes earth, water, and fertility. Quetzalcóatl was one of the most important gods for the Aztecs, who took the form of a feathered snake. He was a deity capable of moving through earth and sky, mediating the origin and growth of vegetation.



**[14]**  
**Mobil**  
Standard Oil of New York merged with Vacuum Oil and eventually became Mobil. Standard Oil of New Jersey merged with Humble Oil and eventually became Exxon. In 1999, Exxon and Mobil merged to become ExxonMobil, now the largest oil firm in the U.S. and one of the four largest in the world. Many of their products feature the red horse, Pegasus, which has been the company trademark since its affiliation with Magnolia Petroleum Company in the 1930s. Mobil is one of the brands ExxonMobil does business under.



**[15]**  
**Rabbit**  
In Aztec culture, the rabbit was associated with agriculture and human fertility, as well as drunkenness, excess, and transgression.



**[16]**  
**Ocelot**  
Feline creatures were symbols of strength, courage, and cleverness in Aztec culture. Their role was important among high-level warriors, who wore ocelote hydes to attain their attributes.



**[17]**  
**Chase Bank**  
JPMorgan Chase Bank is one of the Big Four banks of the U.S. Chase National Bank was formed in 1877. In 1955, it merged with The Manhattan Company to become Chase Manhattan Bank. David Rockefeller, the grandson of Standard Oil founder John D. Rockefeller, was the president and CEO from 1960 to 1981. The bank merged with J.P. Morgan & Co. in 2000. Chase is one of the brands JPMorgan Chase does business under. The octagon shaped logo was adopted in 1961.



**[18]**  
**Marine Fauna**  
These objects represent part of the marine fauna of the coast where pre-Hispanic civilizations lived. Crab was an important food source, and the sea snail was thought to be sacred due to its close association with water. Sea creatures were used to make utilitarian, ornamental, and ceremonial objects, many of which were painted with chapopote, or tar.



**[19]**  
**Shell**  
The British oil company formed in 1907 through the merger of Royal Dutch Petroleum Company of the Netherlands and The "Shell" Transport and Trading Company of the

United Kingdom. The shell logo derives from the founder's father's business of selling seashells to London collectors.



**[20]**  
**Frogs and Toads**  
The sculpture of the toad is a reference to Templo Mayor, the main temple of the Aztec people in their capital city of Tenochtitlan, which is now modern day Mexico City. These animals were considered helpers of Tlaloc, the god of rain.



**[21]**  
**Marathon Oil**  
Two years after its founding in 1887, the Ohio Oil Company came under the control of Standard Oil Trust, John D. Rockefeller's monopoly that by 1905 controlled 91% of the U.S. oil market. In 1911, it became independent again, and in 1962, the name changed to Marathon Oil

Company. In 2011, the company split into two independent companies: Marathon Oil and Marathon Petroleum.



**[22]**  
**Bank of America**  
Bank of America is one of the Big Four banks of the U.S. and the second largest banking institution in the world by market capitalization. Its founding dates to 1904, when Amadeo Pietro Giannini, son of Italian immigrants, created the Bank of Italy in San Francisco to provide banking options to people with lower incomes. In 1927, Giannini consolidated additional banks under Bank of America of California, which became BankAmerica in 1968. After suffering significant losses after the 1998 Russian bond default, BankAmerica was acquired by the North Carolina-based NationsBank to become Bank of America Corporation in what is known as the largest bank acquisition in history.



[23]  
Valley

Valley was founded in 1927 as the Passaic Park Trust Company in New Jersey, which later changed its name to Bank and Trust Company. Bank and Trust acquired the Bank of Allwood in Clifton, New Jersey, in 1956, and the Bank of Wayne in Wayne, Pennsylvania, in 1976. Its current name was chosen as a reference to the Passaic River Valley, an area shared by Clifton, Wayne, and Passaic.



[24]  
Citizens Bank

Latt Maxcy founded Citizens Bank in 1963 along with 20 other men in Providence, Rhode Island. Today, the company remains family-owned and operates in 14 states in the U.S.  
  
The bank's logo consists of four symmetrical shapes of the same size that appear as green inward-pointing arrows with clipped heads that form a circle. The logo symbolizes the multidirectional coverage of the bank's activities.



[25]  
Bird

Birds were common in pre-Hispanic domestic and ritual contexts. Their feathers were considered very valuable and were used to create luxurious garments, adornments, and penachos, or headdresses.

# EXHIBITION CHECKLIST



1. *Standard*, 2023  
vintage motor oil can,  
and artificial flowers,  
29 1/2 x 11 x 11 in.  
(75 x 28 x 28 cm)



2. *Epopeya de un pueblo 3 (Epic of the People 3)*, 2022–2023  
wall relief; Foamular and acrylic paint, 139 3/4 x 165 x 3 7/8 in.  
(355 x 420 x 10 cm)



3. *Epopeya de un pueblo 2 (Epic of the People 2)*, 2022–2023  
wall relief; Foamular and acrylic paint,  
137 13/16 x 106 5/16 x 7 in.  
(350 x 270 x 18 cm)



4. *Epopeya de un pueblo 1 (Epic of the People 1)*, 2022–2023  
wall relief; Foamular and acrylic paint,  
133 7/8 x 235 x 3 7/8 in.  
(340 x 597 x 10 cm)





5. *Epopéya de un pueblo 4*  
(*Epic of the People 4*),  
2022–2023  
wall relief; Foamular  
and acrylic paint,  
41  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 52  $\frac{5}{16}$  × 12  $\frac{3}{8}$  in.  
(106 × 133 × 32 cm)



6. *Tlazoltéotl Priest*,  
2022–2023  
Foamular, acrylic paint,  
and financial newspapers,  
46  $\frac{13}{16}$  × 28  $\frac{5}{16}$  × 36  $\frac{3}{16}$  in.  
(119.5 × 72 × 92 cm)



9. *Petro #13*, 2023  
vintage oil barrel,  
Styrofoam, and  
papier-mâché,  
29  $\frac{1}{2}$  × 25  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 23  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(75 × 65 × 60 cm) head,  
27  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(70 × 37 × 37 cm) barrel



10. *Petro #11*, 2023  
vintage oil barrel,  
Styrofoam, and  
papier-mâché,  
27  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 29  $\frac{1}{2}$  × 25  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(70 × 75 × 65 cm) head,  
27  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(70 × 37 × 37 cm) barrel



7. *Petro #12*, 2023  
vintage oil barrel,  
Styrofoam, and  
papier-mâché,  
29  $\frac{1}{2}$  × 31  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 25  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(75 × 81 × 65 cm) head,  
27  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(70 × 37 × 37 cm) barrel



8. *Petro #10*, 2023  
vintage oil barrel,  
Styrofoam, and  
papier-mâché,  
43  $\frac{5}{16}$  × 35  $\frac{7}{16}$  × 27  $\frac{1}{16}$  in.  
(110 × 90 × 70 cm) head,  
27  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(70 × 37 × 37 cm) barrel



11. *Petro #9*, 2023  
vintage oil barrel,  
Styrofoam, and  
papier-mâché,  
35  $\frac{7}{16}$  × 35  $\frac{7}{16}$  × 27  $\frac{1}{16}$  in.  
(90 × 90 × 70 cm) head,  
27  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 14  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(70 × 37 × 37 cm) barrel



12. *What's Joe's Tank Truck Doing Here?*  
(*Mobilgas*), 2023  
vintage magazine  
advertisement,  
18  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 14  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 1  $\frac{1}{16}$  in.  
(46 × 37 × 4 cm) frame



13. *Every Second Humble Provides the Energy of 29 Lightning Bolts!* (ESSO), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



14. *8 horsepower fells this giant redwood* (Shell X-100), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



17. *Free flowing for instant protection* (Mobiloil Special), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



18. *Each Day Humble Supplies Enough Energy to Melt 7 Million Tons of Glacier!* (ENCO), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



15. *Pure Alcohol from Petroleum* (Shell), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



16. *Change to Quality Mobiloil* (Mobilgas), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



19. *Bombs Away!.. Then a Flying Horsepower Getaway!*, 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



20. *Sowing trees on a "Paper farm"* (Shell), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



21. *Humble Supplies the Energy of 10 Tornados to Power America's Planes Each Day!* (Esso), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



22. *It's "Gospel" in the U.S. Army* (Mobilgas), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



25. *Bandera*, 2022 Mexican flag, chapopote, 64 1/16 x 36 in. (164 x 91.5 cm)



26. *State II*, 2004 silkscreen, 38 1/16 x 30 1/2 in. (98 x 77.5 cm)



23. *Each Minute Humble Provides the Energy of 5 Avalanches - To Move America's Freight* (Enco), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



24. *Take Spring on the Wing!* (Mobilgas), 2023 vintage magazine advertisement, 18 1/8 x 14 1/16 x 1 1/16 in. (46 x 37 x 4 cm) frame



27. *The Trust*, 2022–23 wall relief; PVC board, Foamular, acrylic paint, 41 x 11 ft. (12.5 x 3.5 m)

## Minerva Cuevas

1975, Mexico City

Minerva Cuevas finds raw material for her work by analyzing notions of value, exchange, and property that are inherent to the capitalist system and their social consequences, but also by recognizing the latent possibility of rebellion that is implicit in daily life.

Her projects are developed as cultural and site-specific interventions. By working with objects and images of daily consumption, Cuevas allows us to rethink the role corporations have played in both the exploitation of natural resources and the conditions of social inequality worldwide. Through her work, she explores our visual and familiar references and questions our political imaginary to find channels of social communication.

Her interdisciplinary projects bring together elements of anthropology, marketing, and ecology, allowing Cuevas to examine different ways of intervening in museums, galleries, and urban spaces. Her work spans a wide range of mediums—installation, video, photography, sculpture, and public intervention—which she uses to investigate the politics that permeate social and economic ties.

Cuevas received an undergraduate degree in Visual Arts from Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas (ENAP) of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She founded Mejor Vida Corp. in 1998 and International Understanding Foundation in 2016, and she has been a member of Irational.org since 1998.

She has been an artist resident in the following programs: Berliner Künstlerprogramm at Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), Germany, 2003; Media Art of the Foundation of Lower Saxony at the Edith-Russ-Haus, Germany, 2003; Delfina Foundation, London, 2001; and The Banff Centre for Arts, Canada, 1998.

The following are among her major solo exhibitions: *Game Over*, Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2022); *Dark Matter*, Institute of Contemporary Art San Diego (ICA), CA (2022); *Migratory*, Rubin Center, El Paso, TX (2022); *No Room To Play*, daadgalerie, Berlin (2019); *Disidencia*, The Mishkin Gallery, New York, NY (2019); *Dissidência*, Galpão VB, São Paulo, Brazil (2018); *Fine Lands*, Dallas Museum of Art, TX (2017); *Feast and Famine*, kurimanzutto, Mexico City (2015); *Minerva Cuevas*, Museo de la Ciudad de México, Mexico City (2012); *Landings*, Cornerhouse, Manchester, England (2011); *SCOOP*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2010); *Minerva Cuevas*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2008); *Phenomena*, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland

(2007); *On Society*, MC Kunst, Los Angeles, CA (2007); *Egalité 2007*, Le Grand Café - centre d'art contemporain, Saint-Nazaire, France (2007); *Schwarzfahrer Are My Heroes*, daadgalerie, Berlin (2004); *Mejor Vida Corp.*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2000), among others.

A selection of group exhibitions include: *Witch Hunt*, Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Los Angeles, CA (2021); *Soft Power*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), CA (2019); *Down and to the Left: Reflections on Mexico in the NAFTA Era*, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA (2017); *Unsettled*, The Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, TX (2017); *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today*, South London Gallery (SLG) (2016); *We Call It Ludwig: The Museum is Turning 40!*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany (2016); *Bajo un mismo sol: Arte de America Latina hoy*, Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2015); *United States of Latin America*, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD), MI (2015); *Food: dal cucchiaio al mondo*, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome (2015); *Testigo del siglo*, MAZ—Museo de Arte de Zapopan, Mexico (2014); *Unsettled Landscapes*, SITE Santa Fe, NM (2014); *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2014); *Utopian Days*, Total Museum of Contemporary

Art, Seoul (2014); *Love is Colder Than Capital*, Kunsthhaus Bregenz, Austria (2013); *Resisting the Present*, Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico (2011) and Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2012); *Elles*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2010); *Populism*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2005); *Hardcore*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2003); *Dream Machines*, Hayward Gallery, London (2000); *Democracy!*, Royal College of Art, London (2000), among others.

She has participated in the following biennials: Seoul Mediacity Biennale (2020); Prospect 4 New Orleans, LI (2017); 6<sup>th</sup> Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, United Kingdom (2010); 6<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale (2010); 9e Biennale de Lyon, France (2007); 6<sup>a</sup> Bienal do Mercosul, Brazil (2007); 27<sup>a</sup> Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2006); Sharjah Biennial 7, United Arab Emirates (2005); 14<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2004); 2<sup>nd</sup> Tirana International Contemporary Art Biannual, Albania (2005); and 8. Istanbul Bienali, Turkey (2003).

Cuevas lives and works in Mexico City.

[www.minervacuevas.org](http://www.minervacuevas.org)



From the Archive

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