

Exhibition Guide

Carmen Argote: I won't abandon you, I see you, we are safe

June 10–September 10, 2023



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The work of Los Angeles-based artist **Carmen Argote** (b. 1981, Guadalajara, Mexico) is distinguished by her commitment to process and her characteristic use of organic and biological materials—from bananas, and palm fronds to chicken excrement and human urine. Often collected on her daily walks, these materials are reconstituted into artworks through the ritual actions of braiding, rubbing, and consuming, which speak in significant ways to the artist's relationship to body and place. Argote's most recent series, titled *Mother*, brings these site-specific investigations inward.

Including drawings, sculptures, and works in process, this exhibition maps Argote's journey toward a deeper understanding of her interior self and the binaries that it holds—adult and child, man and woman, resident and exile, individual and collective. In this featured body of work, patterns of power and control are traced across cultures and generations to explore patriarchy as a learned behavior. Bringing together her interests in architecture, personal history, and psychology, this series engages with the scaffoldings of the mind, body, and spirit to consider the role that art, like therapy, can play in disrupting these recurring habits.

In the *Mother* series, figures emerge in states of submission, protection, restlessness, and desire, pointing to the postures that Argote assumes as she engages with her mother self and child self. Works made from thrown papier-mâché, evocative of spitballs on a classroom ceiling, reveal the artist's attempts to nurture her ripe child within—rebellious, messy, and full of cosmic wonder. Encircling the galleries is a group of braided and bound sculptures. Intended to be held and hugged, these are the comforting objects to which Argote continuously returns, the documents of her practices of re-mothering and rebirth. Guiding words of affirmation appear throughout the installation, including the exhibition's title, which is drawn from the phrases that Argote speaks over her inner child, "I won't abandon you, I see you, we are safe."

Moving from the individual to the collective, this presentation also signals a new chapter for the *Mother* works. On the gallery floor, a circular canvas marks a space of play where Argote and invited collaborators including her mother, **Carmen Vargas**, as well as **Young Chung**, **Daniela Lieja Quintanar**, **Mary McGuire**, and **Cedric Tai**, will participate in collective actions that allow the exhibition, like Argote's work, to evolve over time.

Operating at the threshold between the physical and psychological, *I won't abandon you, I see you, we are safe* gives material form to the inhabitants of the interior architectures of the self—those we project, those we neglect, those we desire, those we defend, and those we have yet to discover.

Carmen Argote: I won't abandon you, I see you, we are safe is organized by Amanda Sroka, Senior Curator, with Caroline Ellen Liou, Curatorial Assistant.

Support for the exhibition is provided by Kristin Rey and Michael Rubel, and Ann Soh Woods and Mel Woods. Special thanks to Commonwealth and Council.

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About the Artist

Carmen Argote (b. 1981, Guadalajara, Mexico; lives and works in Los Angeles) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work often points to the body, class, and economic structures in relation to architecture and personal history. She received her MFA in 2007 from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she also received her BFA in 2004. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2022); Primary, Nottingham (2021); Clockshop, Los Angeles (2020); New Museum, New York (2019); and PAOS GDL, Guadalajara (2019). Argote has been featured in group exhibitions at MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2021); SculptureCenter, New York (2019); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2017); and Ballroom Marfa (2017). She is the recipient of the Fellows of Contemporary Art Award (2020); the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award (2019); Artadia Los Angeles award (2019); an Artist Community Engagement Grant from the Rema Hort Mann Foundation (2015); and a California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Artists (2013). Argote's work is in the collections of Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. Argote is represented by Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, and is co-chair of the Artist Advisory Council at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

About the Collaborators

Through Commonwealth and Council, **Young Chung** continues to learn and grow together with Carmen Argote.

Daniela Lieja Quintanar is a curator and researcher, originally from Mexico City. Her curatorial practice takes inspiration from everyday life, spaces of political struggle and communal forms of knowledge production. She is the Chief Curator and Deputy Director, Programs at REDCAT Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theater. Recently, she curated *Lisa Alvarado: Pulse Meridian Foliation* for REDCAT. From 2016–2022, Lieja Quintanar served as the Chief Curator and Director of Programming at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Some of her exhibitions at LACE included *Intergalactix: against isolation/contra el aislamiento* (2021), *CAVERNOUS: Young Joon Kwak & Mutant Salon* (2018) and *Emory Douglas: Bold Visual Language* (2018, co-curated with Essence Harden). In 2016, she coordinated Teresa Margolles's *La Sombra* project for the Public Art Biennial CURRENT: LA Water. Lieja Quintanar was part of the curatorial team of the MexiCali Biennial (2018–19) and the PST: LA/LA exhibition, *Below the Underground: Renegade Art and Action in 1990s Mexico* (curated by Irene Tsatsos) at the Armory Center for the Arts (2017–18). In 2018, she was awarded the Andy Warhol Foundation Curatorial Research Grant.

Mary McGuire is Professor of Art History at Mt. San Antonio College where she teaches courses in modern and contemporary art. She has written articles, curated exhibitions, and given talks on subjects including modern dance, feminist performance, and queer spiritualities. Her current manuscript project, *Social and Spiritual Movement in Art: The Judson Arts Program and the Long 1960s*, situates New York City's Judson Church as a nexus of art, religion, and social movements. She recently began hosting a series of salons with Los Angeles-based artists, the first of which featured an action by Carmen Argote.

Cedric Tai (Un-disciplinary Artist, Educator, Friend, Neuroqueer, ADHD/Autistic, Filipino/HongKongChinese-American) thinks through sculpture, talking, writing, performance and experimental exhibitions. They've partnered with neuroscientists, academics from critical psychiatry, artist collectives, disability justice influencers, and somatic therapists to co-create art and accessible resources where mental health meets anti-capitalist solidarity.

Carmen Vargas (b. 1953 Guadalajara Jalisco, Mexico; lives and works in the Los Angeles area) is a mixed media artist currently based in the Los Angeles area, with over 25 years of experience in fashion, arts administration, and arts education working at institutions such as Plaza de la Raza, Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA), Ontario Museum of History and Art, and the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach.



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Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

June 10–September 10, 2023

Organized by Amanda Sroka, Senior Curator, with Caroline Ellen Liou, Curatorial Assistant

On columns:



Exiles, 2023

Palm fronds, jute, zip ties, and clear gesso

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City

On walls:



Shadow: Strawberry blond, 2022

Acrylic, iron powder, oil on oil paper pieces, graphite, and watercolor on heavy paper

Courtesy of Kim and Keith Allen-Niesen



jackets from mom / Domestic Familial, 2022

Corn husks, various jackets, crepe rubber bands, gel medium, zip ties, and linen

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



how thin are the walls between, 2022

Cochineal, papier-mâché, post its, acrylic, tape, gel medium, iron powder, and banana skin

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



let the child speak, 2022

Cochineal, papier-mâché, post its, tape, gel medium, iron powder, paper, and graphite
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



you are not late, 2022

Cochineal, papier-mâché, post its, acrylic, tape, gel medium, iron powder, and banana skin
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Selection of *gynecological fantasies, 2023*

Oak gall dye and gouache on paper
Courtesy of the artist



Gynecological Fantasy, 2023

Oak gall dye on linen
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Two Paintings Projecting, 2022

Oil on linen, oil on canvas, bath towels, artist's clothing, museum wax, red Egyptian paste, paper, graphite, cold wax, and rooster leg ties
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Dis Ease 2, 2020–21

Earth, strawberry syrup, acrylic, and crayon on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Selection of *urine maps, 2021*

Tannic acid dye, crayon, iron powder, and urine on paper
Courtesy of the artist



Part of the flock, 2023

Chicken coop parts, oak gal dye, pastel, iron powder, and papier-mâché
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



The Feral One, 2023

Palm fronds, jute, blue powder stain, papier-mâché, gel medium, and clear gesso
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



other other, 2023

Oak galls, oak gall dye, gel medium, and linen
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Protector: Surrender, 2022

Figs, acrylic, gesso, gel medium, crayon, and iron powder on paper
Courtesy of J. Patrick Collins



Protector: No, 2022

Figs, acrylic, gesso, gel medium, crayon, and iron powder on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Nest for my father, 2022

Motorcycle gear, found palm nest, acrylic, bird leavings, iron, and gel medium
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Pain Body, 2022
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Protector: Fig, 2022
Figs, acrylic, gesso, gel medium, crayon, iron powder, and salt on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Protector: Open, 2022
Crayon, gel medium, and iron powder on paper, frame
Private collection



Selection of *written affirmations*, 2022–23
Colored pencil and gouache on paper
Courtesy of the artist



2833 Boulder Street, 2020
Compilation of videos of actions with shaving cream and strawberry syrup
(color, sound)
Videography by Craig Kirk
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Ripe Child (a cosmic one), 2022
Cochineal and papier-mâché on linen
Collection of Michael Sherman & Vinny Dotolo, Spaghetti Western



Daughter: also a son, 2022

Pillow, silk, glass beads, ceramic beads, leather, intimate garments, palm fronds, iron powder, watercolor, oil, acrylic, gathered nature, cap, linen, zip ties, plastic supermarket bag, and dried sponge mushroom

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Ripe Child, 2022

Banana, papier-mâché, and pastel on linen

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



How I carry HER, 2022

Oak galls on linen, gel medium, oak gall dye

Courtesy of Ann Soh Woods



I do not need to give to receive, 2020–21

Earth, strawberry syrup, acrylic, crayon, chestnut dye, and iron on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



Carmen Vargas

Huipil, 2023–ongoing

Huipil, belt unfinished, and necklace in henequen estropajo and hemp, with symbols.

Teabags flower, dry avocado peel, ginger, seeds, aluminum pearl, natural pearls, and handmade miniature book with wise words from tea bags

Courtesy the artist

In vitrine, right to left:

Letter to Carmen Vargas, 2023

Pen on paper

Courtesy of Carmen Vargas

Letter to Mary McGuire, 2023

Pen on paper

Courtesy of Mary McGuire

Letter to Young Chung, 2023

Pen on paper

Courtesy of Young Chung

Letter to Daniela Lieja Quintanar, 2023

Pen on paper

Courtesy of Daniela Lieja Quintanar

Letter to Cedric Tai, 2023

Pen on paper

Courtesy of Cedric Tai



Carmen Argote, Young Chung, Daniela Lieja Quintanar, Mary McGuire, Cedric Tai, and Carmen Vargas

Opening action, June 2, 2023, 2023

Pigment, papier-mâché, canvas, and rope

Courtesy of the artists

On floor:



comforting object: hold me down, 2022

Oil on canvas, shirt, canvas tote bag, and crepe rubber band

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: and paradox, 2022

Corn husks, banana peels, linen, crepe rubber band, and clear gesso

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: nothing is lost, 2022

Palm fronds, crepe rubber band, linen, copper, copper powder, clear gesso

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: eraser, 2022

Cotton house mats and crepe rubber bands

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: endure the wait, 2022

Palm fiber, shells, linen, clear gesso, zip ties

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: endure the wait, 2022
Palm fiber, shells, linen, clear gesso, zip ties
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: stacked, 2023
Palm fronds, acrylic, plastic feed bag, oak galls, thermoplastic, banana, clear gesso, and linen
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City



comforting object: The one who chokes, 2023
Oil on canvas, oil on hat, graphite, pillow, linen, and crepe rubber band
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, Mexico City

On tables:

Communication Tools, 2023

Oak gall and rope

Courtesy of the artist

Visitors are encouraged to use these according to the instructions