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An Ongoing Relationship with a Serpent Energy

BY DELIASOFIA ZACARIAS | JULY 10, 2019

When I first think about snakes, I immediately think of serpents as a symbol of evil power and chaos from the underworld. Aside from being highly scared of them, I attribute this association with my religious upbringing. However, for San Antonio based artist, Audrya Flores, the serpent represents a creative life force, rebirth, transformation, but most importantly healing. In her solo exhibition, *Digging*, on view at the Central Library gallery, Flores repurposes textiles and organic materials to create six self-portraits and a floor piece. With a recurring visual vocabulary of a serpent, the artist addresses trauma, mental health, and issues of identity within her work.

Being very transparent about her battle with depression and anxiety, Audrya Flores opened up to us about her professional counseling, therapeutic practices, and an extensive collection of religious candles. It was during a guided imagery intervention that Flores fixated on the image of Santa Marta Dominadora in one of her candles. In folklore, Santa Marta Dominadora was the only female dragon/snake slayer and is popular in Hoodoo for the domination and control of problems, situations, and people in the lives of practitioners. As Flores became enthralled with the image of the serpent, she learned about how Santa Marta Dominadora had been portrayed and rendered in other religions. Flores explained that most catholic saints and deities have synchronized representations within other religions. That's when she came across Filomena Lubana.



“I read about what [Filomena Lubana] represented, it struck a chord. She’s not like Santa Marta Dominadora; she isn’t coming to defeat a serpent or dominate it. She IS the serpent and she comes to dominate what you ask her to dominate. As soon as I read it, I got goosebumps. And it just made sense to me. What else would I call onto to devour this sickness within me? It was the serpent.”

As the serpent represents rebirth, being uncomfortable in your skin and being forced to grow, it has been a powerful tool for healing in Audrya’s life. In these sequential self-portraits and site-specific installation, it was important to the artist to depict the serpent as a benign protector and mediator. “I wanted to get the serpent right. I wanted to convey both the affection I feel for that serpent energy but also the respect and awe of it.” Flores also shared that her open dialogue about her artwork with her 6-year-old son helped her shape the features in the snake.

In *Tending To*, the viewer is drawn to the overall heart-shaped composition, but upon closer examination, you can see a female figure curled up in a fetal position and a snake back to back. Despite the monstrous-looking snake, Flores explains that this composition is meant to represent a moment of healing. The snake is actually protecting her back and providing that safe space for the figure to regenerate.



Audrya Flores, Tending To, 2019, latex paint on stretched vintage linen, 48 x 72 inches

“It is important for me to communicate it isn’t that the snake consumes me and I end up defeating the snake. What is really happening, [is that] the snake has given herself and has allowed me to recreate a safe space and gather myself again for the real world. She has allowed me to shed the skin like a snake. It comes full cycle. Healing is cyclical, it is ongoing.”

With warm colors and a floral background on each self-portrait, the artist invites the viewer to a Garden of Eden of sorts. By nature and last name, Audrya Flores is drawn to plants and animals and wanted to create a safe space. Through her use of vintage linen bedsheets to allude to a time of innocence and easier times, Flores also adds a layer of intimacy and vulnerability to the space. She uses bedsheets as a derivative representation of sacred space, bed/bedroom, where one is at their most exposed.

“[The bedsheets] are like ghosts to me. They have this residual energy — people have slept there, they have dreamt there. Some of them are so faded only on one side. It’s so interesting to me. Those prints are dead now. They were so popular at one point. I wanted to touch on people’s nostalgia. In this story, I am reaching back to the person/kid, before I

started having all this anxiety, before I was traumatized, before I really struggled. It seems so far back to think about those things and those prints help me remember.”



Audrya Flores, *Promesa* (detail), 2019, cactus, marble chips, lava rock, wheat, coffee beans, flowers

After working with cacti for roughly seven years, Flores has studied its texture, body, healing elements, and adaptive tendencies. In *Promesa* (or *Promise*), Flores used the wavy leaf prickly pear cacti for its thicker and bigger pads and its resilient nature. Approximately 300 cacti pads make up the body of the site-specific installation of a snake. In her intent to use natural and organic materials, she created the snake's head out of marble chips, lava rocks, wheat, coffee beans, and flowers. Throughout all her research, Flores discovered that Filomena Lubana likes coffee, so, if you are making an offering, you are supposed to place coffee beans on the ground. She will appear as a snake and consume them.



“Originally, I wanted to make the whole serpent out of stone. Because I kept thinking back to Tepeyac. We visited that place when we were in Mexico City a couple of years ago. I was so moved by the pilgrims, people making a pilgrimage fulfilling their “promesa” — they ask for something. They were going up the cobblestone path on their knees and I was

Audrya Flores, *Promesa*
(detail), 2019, cactus, marble
chips, lava rock, wheat, coffee
beans, flowers

so moved by that. So, I wanted to do a serpent path to follow as a pilgrim. It kinda dissolved with my use of cactus. As I was installing it, I was literally on my knees. The whole body of the snake going all along the curves and it just made me feel very good. I fulfilled my 'promesa'. I was on my knees traveling the path as I am building this shrine. It was painful, it felt really good to give this labor of love as a thank you."

As Audrya Flores explores and documents her own healing processes through her art, she does so in a way to promote awareness and solidarity. It is through a recurring visual vocabulary, warm color palettes, and natural elements that Audrya Flores shares a vulnerable journey of healing. She creates a safe space that is accessible for everyone to join in dialogue about mental health, trauma, and issues of identity. Her solo exhibition, *Digging*, opens July 10th with a reception from 5:30-8pm and will be on view through August 29, 2019, at the Central Library.

About the Artist

Audrya Flores is a Tejana artist, educator, and mother from Brownsville, Texas who creates assemblage and installation work exploring themes of healing. Flores repurposes textiles and organic materials for her work. The mystical images in her work are influenced by dreams, spirituality, the occult, and her border town roots. Using the story-telling traditions of her family, she addresses trauma, mental health, and issues of identity. She explores and documents her own healing processes as a way to promote awareness and solidarity. Flores received her Bachelor of Arts in Education from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She has exhibited at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Mexic-Arte Museum, Lady Base Gallery, Provenance Gallery, Luminaria Contemporary Arts Festival, and Centro de Artes. Flores lives and works in San Antonio, Texas.

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Deliasofia Zacarias is one of the Unfiltered San Antonio co-founders. Double-majored in business and studio art, Zacarias is interested in art politics, food, and a whole lot of Netflix. She is currently LACMA's Emerging Art Professional Fellow in Los Angeles, CA. [View all posts by Deliasofia Zacarias](#)

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