

# Craft Contemporary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ***Carolyn Castaño: Cumanday – Beautiful Mountain***

**October 1, 2023 – January 7, 2024**



**Image:** Carolyn Castaño, *Cumanday: Beautiful Mountain*, 2023. Watercolor, gouache, appliques, fabric, sequins, on watercolor paper on canvas, 144 x 78 inches. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Amy L. Tierney, Thrive Images

**Los Angeles-** Craft Contemporary is pleased to present *Cumanday - Beautiful Mountain*, an exhibition of new works by Colombian-American artist, Carolyn Castaño addressing climate change as a continual invasion and exploitation of bodies and landscapes of Latin America. Known for her techniques of mixed media watercolor and hard-edge paintings, Castaño displays lush compositions of snow-capped tropical landscapes of the South of Colombia, layering bright colors, geometric patterns from modernist painting, traditional South American textile patterns, graphs depicting climate change, and floral and fauna appliques found in the textile districts of Los Angeles and Colombia. Against the tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialist painted travelogues and map-making, the images on printed fabrics are fake representations of “tropical paradise,” pointing to the continual drags of colonialism and its destructive effects on the environment through resource exploitation and postindustrial manufacturing.

“By putting abstractions and patterns on the same plane as traditionally painted landscapes I hope to not just capture the historical simultaneity of cultures and ecosystems, but also a sense of their possible futures,” says Carolyn Castaño.

Through the lens of the Andean region, the works in the exhibition reflect the ways in which we are all a mixture of different cultures, economies, sensibilities and periods in history. The eponymous painting, *Cumanday: Beautiful Mountain* spans twelve feet across and seven feet high and depicts the glacier, one of six remaining tropical glaciers in Colombia that are in danger of disappearing due to global warming. The name Cumanday comes from the Quimbaya, a pre-Columbian indigenous group known to inhabit the area, and translates to “beautiful mountain” or “white mountain.” More commonly known as Nevado del Ruiz, the snow-capped volcano forms part of a chain of volcanos across the Andean region called the Andean Volcanic Belt, from Colombia all the way to Chile and Argentina. Its white immaculate surface contrasts with the backdrop of free-flowing grid patterns. The grid pattern is inspired by Pre-Columbian textile patterns, such as the Tocapuic, which was the predecessor to the modern-day ruana, a woolen poncho worn by both country and city folk, but more specifically in the mountainous regions of Colombia. The colors in the grid are in the color scale from light blue to red and reference the color graph used in the COP climate conference. In a nod of solidarity with environmental and land rights activists, the grid also recalls the Wiphala, the flag of Andean peoples. Parrots and parakeets sit atop technicolor leaves. The blossoming flowers take on a Disneyfication, bulge-like inflatables. While the landscape appears uninhabited, like in the tradition of colonialist landscape painting, which promoted European expansion in the Americas, the layering of traditional and prefabricated textile motifs stands in for the hands that made them. The textiles and appliques signal our complicity in the cycle of production and consumption. As we look to “save” these pristine or resource-rich landscapes, the sequined appliques and printed fabrics reflect our own role in the transnational capitalist system.

The exhibition also features depictions of two other glaciers, El Nevado del Tolima and El Nevado de Santa Isabel, which are in danger of losing their glacial area in the next four years. In a grouping of watercolors, *This is Dedicated to the One I Love (Collection of Living and Deceased Glaciers)* Castaño records the disappearing chain of glaciers in the style of Colombian 19<sup>th</sup> century artist Manuel Maria Paz. He formed part of the Comision Corografica (The Chorographic Commision) that set out to catalogue and record all the regions in Colombia. The undefined contours and washed-out quality of Castaño’s depictions frame her gesture as one of safekeep while acknowledging the risk of the disappearance of her subjects.

Another name for Cumanday is Big Father, with which Castaño juxtaposes Madre Monte or Mother Mountain. Together they explore the masculine and feminine in the natural world and a form of anthropomorphizing of elements like mountains, rivers, and trees. The figurative clay sculpture depicts the woodland goddess thought to roam swamps and jungles around Caldas and Antioquia (Caldas is the state name of the region where the Nevado del Ruiz is in). She is part of different folk characters in Colombian folklore, such as Patasola (a woman who walks in the forests backwards), Tunda (a shape shifter from the Choco region), El Mohan (a male water monster), El hombre Caiman (half man/ half alligator). Most importantly, she is a protector of the forest. She surrounds herself with animals and defends the forest against people who want to harm the environment. If we think of the environment as a relative or as having human-like emotions such as love, understanding, desire to protect, but also anger, perhaps we can provide it with greater care and protection.

Castaño's unique blending of different visual languages, from hard-edge painting, traditional landscape painting, folklore, textile, and fashion appliques reveal the complex chain of politically-drive cultural production and the varied forms of counter-resistance that shapes our relationship to each other and the land. Historicist and controversial, the works in the exhibition are influenced by a type of South American rasquache- one that remixes and re-interprets. How the painting on Pico sound systems and Chicha political paintings meets the landscape paintings of Frederic Edwin Church and Manuel Maria Paz and find their way into Santee Alley in Downtown Los Angeles or a tourist gift shop in Leticia, Colombia's southernmost city in the Amazon. In these southern border communities, the lack of State lends itself to a different kind of layering: a fight against the elements, the humidity, the mosquitoes, fighting back the jungle. But the jungle is always encroaching and on the verge of taking over.



**Left:** Carolyn Castaño, *Cumanday: Beautiful Mountain*, detail, 2023. 144 x 78 inches. Watercolor, gouache, appliques, fabric, sequins, on watercolor paper on canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Amy L. Tierney, Thrive Images

**Right:** Carolyn Castaño, *This is Dedicated to the One I Love (Collection of Living and Deceased Glaciers)- Volcan El Cumbal 1985*, 2023. 14 x 10 inches. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Amy L. Tierney, Thrive Images

**ABOUT THE ARTIST:** Carolyn Castaño (b.1971, Los Angeles, CA) is a Los Angeles-based artist working in painting, drawing, video, and mixed-media. Her works are influenced by her family's history of migration and her Colombian heritage. She received her MFA in 2001 from the University of California, Los Angeles, and her BFA in 1995 from the San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco. In 1996, she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. With a strong presence both nationally and internationally, Castaño's art has been showcased in numerous esteemed exhibitions, including those at Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles, Kontainer Gallery, Los Angeles, Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles, Lombard-Freid Fine, New York City, Museo de Arte Zapopan; Guadalajara, Mexico, Museo Rufino Tamayo; Mexico D.F., Mexico and Bogota International Art Fair, Bogota, Colombia. In recognition of her artistic achievements, Castaño was honored as a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Grant for Painters & Sculptors in 2013, and in 2011, she received both the COLA Individual Artist Fellowship, awarded by the Los Angeles DCA and the Getty Fellow Mid-Career Grant.

## RELATED PROGRAMS:

For a full list of exhibition programs, visit <https://www.craftcontemporary.org/programs/>

### Exhibition

Opening:

#### Press Preview Hour

Sat, Sep 30 | 10 – 11 am | *press only* | *free*

Press is invited for a private gathering with refreshments and a casual gallery walkthrough with exhibiting artists and curators of our new exhibitions, *Economics of Suffering: Part IV*, *Cumanday: Beautiful Mountain*, and *Margaret Griffith: Chirk*. This will be a great and more intimate opportunity to view the exhibitions and meet the artists and curators. Interested press please RSVP to [prima@craftcontemporary.org](mailto:prima@craftcontemporary.org)

### Exhibition Opening Reception

Sat, Sep 30 | 11 am - 5 pm

Museum admission | members free

Join us for a full day opening celebration of three very special exhibitions: *Economics of Suffering: Part IV*, *Cumanday: Beautiful Mountain*, and *Margaret Griffith: Chirk*. The day will be highlighted by floral

crown making, a Cali salsa dance lesson, Latinx DJ, Elenora, exclusive exhibition merchandise, yummy bites by Sus Arepas, an adults-only bar, and of course, the galleries to explore. Guests of all ages are invited.

- 11-1 PM: Flower Crown Making
- 2-3 PM: Dance Lesson: Salsa Caleña
- 3-5 PM: Drinks and dancing with DJ Eleanora

*In partnership with Sonido del Colibrí, Bridging Latin American traditional musicians & US artist communities through performances, educational & cultural exchanges.*

**Gallery Walkthrough: Carolyn Castaño & Margaret Griffith Exhibitions**

Sun, Nov 5 | 11:30 am – 1 pm

Exhibitions Manager Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai leads a public walkthrough of our current exhibitions, *Carolyn Castaño: Cumanday- Beautiful Mountain* and *Margaret Griffith: Chirk*. Join this insightful in-person program and learn about the various concepts and material processes explored in these exhibitions.

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<b>Craft</b>		<b>Lab</b>		<b>Family</b>		<b>Workshop:</b>
<b>Natural</b>	<b>World</b>		<b>Appliqués</b>	<b>with</b>	<b>Carolyn</b>	<b>Castaño</b>
Sun,	Nov	12		1:30	–	3:30 pm
\$10 / members free						

Join exhibiting artist Carolyn Castaño to create do-it-yourself appliqués inspired by the natural world. Using simple sewing and gluing techniques participants will combine found fabrics and iron-on transfers to create fabric masterpieces that celebrate our connection to the earth.

**CREDITS:**

*Carolyn Castaño: Cumanday – Beautiful Mountain* has been organized by Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai, Exhibitions Manager at Craft Contemporary.

This exhibition is supported in part by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, and the Bernard Kester Trust in Memory of Edith Wyle.



**Craft Contemporary** is an art museum whose purpose is to reveal the potential of craft to educate, captivate, provoke, and empower. Craft Contemporary achieves its mission by exhibiting the artists of our time who favor craft materials and processes. Giving voice to local artists, emerging artists, and often under-recognized mid-career artists is a museum priority that works to ensure the recognition of various voices not always heard in larger institutions. The museum strives to achieve equitable access through free and low-cost programs, and the inclusion of multiple teaching artists from communities throughout Los Angeles who offer unique art making workshops, 3-12 school programs, senior adult workshops, and art talks. For more information, visit [www.craftcontemporary.org](http://www.craftcontemporary.org).

**LOCATION:** 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

**ADMISSION:** FREE every Sunday

**REGULARLY:** \$9 for adults; \$7 for students, teachers, seniors; Free for Craft Contemporary members

**HOURS:** Tuesday - Sunday, 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM