

Press Release

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## CANTO

Opening reception: Friday, September 6th from 6-9pm



*Gold Rush*, 2024, Civil War era chair, found metal, metal ball beads, necklace, hand made ceramic eyes, bull hide, mule leather, paint, 62" h x 42" diameter.

Welancora Gallery is proud to announce *CANTO*, a solo exhibition featuring new works by Esperanza Cortés (b. 1957), a New York based multidisciplinary artist born in Colombia. The exhibition contains new paintings in encaustic and acrylic with sculptural elements of glazed ceramic and clay, and two large sculpture works. This exhibition will be on view from September 6 to October 3, 2024, with an opening reception on Friday, September 6 from 6-9pm.

The show's title, *CANTO*, directly translates to 'song' or 'chant' and was inspired by Cortés' musical background; she grew up hearing her father sing and she herself practiced the art of

Afro-Latin dance for many years. This dance form does not take on traditional choreography, rather, a circle of reactions between the percussionist and the dancer creates the performance. Similarly, *un canto as a chant* becomes a spontaneous reaction to life and society. As such, Cortés' work is that same reaction to the present, seeking to use sacred space and fragments of histories as departure points to investigate issues of colonialism and its presence felt today. Themes of memory, identity, nature, conflict, survival, and resilience permeate the works, examining the extent to which a consciousness—national or personal—defines itself through the opposing force of transcultural experiences.

Cortés' passion for the mosaic of the Americas, its folk art traditions and rituals shine through her usage of embroidery and other beaded embellishments. Centering flora becomes a way to reconnect to nature, overriding imperialist efforts to diminish the relationship. Threads of cotton and silk are delicately and meticulously woven to create elegant floral displays, often paired with the female form (or other corporeal elements, such as a heart, hands, or a pair of lungs), to comment upon the power held within ancestral lineages when ethnic groups are continually threatened. Repeated circular patterns are reminiscent of tree rings and the tree of life, symbols that serve as a positive reinforcement against the persistent perils of colonialism.

The work on view is poetically and intricately crafted to encourage a reconsideration of social and historical narratives, raising critical questions about the politics of erasure and exclusion. *Gold Rush* speaks to the intersections of such history, culture, and personal narrative. The use of a Civil War era chair as the foundation for the piece, coupled with the title, harkens back to the height of mining excavation in the Americas and the impact it had on the land and its populations. Other works on view directly speak to abuses committed against indigenous Brazilians and Puerto Ricans, members of the African diaspora, and children internationally.

### **About the Artist**

Esperanza Cortés (b. 1957) was born in Bogotá, Colombia and is based in New York City. Her artistic practice delves into the intersections of identity, history, and culture, challenging viewers to reconsider social and historical narratives, particularly those shaped by colonialism. She has exhibited across the United States, including the Smack Mellon Gallery, Bronx Museum of Art, Queens Museum, El Museo del Barrio, MoMA PS1, and Socrates Sculpture Park. National exhibitions include Albright-Knox Gallery, Ogden Contemporary Arts, Turchin Center for The Visual Arts, Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Neuberger Museum of Art, and the Cleveland Art Museum. She has been part of international exhibitions in Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Japan, Mexico, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Spain and Greece.

Cortés' awards include: New York State Council on the Arts Project Grant, Shortlist 2022 Creative Capital, John Simon Guggenheim, Hispanic Society Museum and Library Artist Research Fellowship, BRIC Media Arts Fellowship, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Grant, Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, Puffin Foundation Grant, New York State Biennial, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts and the

Sustained Achievement in the Visual Arts Award. Residencies include: Pine Meadow Ranch Center for Art and Agriculture, Ucross, Peter's Valley School of Craft, Children's Museum of Manhattan, McColl Center for Arts + Innovation, Museum of Arts and Design, BRIC Workspace, Joan Mitchell Center, Webb School of Knoxville, Sculpture Space, Fountainhead Residency, Bronx Museum - AIM Program, MoMA PS1 Residency, Socrates Sculpture Park, Abrons Art Center, Longwood Art Project, Altos de Chavon, Can Serrat and Bielska BWA Gallery. Cortés' work has been featured in Artforum, Artnews, Artnet, Hyperallergic, ARTFUSE, Cultbytes, New York Times, BELatina, Whitehot, New Art Examiner and Art in America. International reviews include multiple media platforms in Europe, South America and the Caribbean. Cortés' work is in private and public collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the American Embassy in Monterey, Mexico.