

Friends Indeed Gallery

On view

February 25, 2022 - March 25, 2022

716 Sacramento Street
San Francisco, CA 94108

Fridays and Saturdays
1-3pm PST



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman, *English Flies*, 2022.
Epoxy resin, transparency film, honeybees. 28 x 36 x 2 inches.

Sula Bermúdez-Silverman: *Here Be Dragons*

In her solo show *Here Be Dragons*, Sula Bermúdez-Silverman continues her exploration of colonial myth-making, particularly how scientific and historical fact can be falsely constructed, distorted, and come to occupy a space of authority over indigenous knowledge production. Looking to explorers of the “New World” in 15th-17th centuries, many of whom had never set foot

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on the continents now known as The Americas, fantastical myths begin to emerge, including the existence of entirely new races of people—each described more monstrously than the next. The era of expansion was more than just the discovery and seizure of foreign land, it also included the subjugation and indoctrination of non-Western people. The authority of science has often been used to rationalize cruelty. The power of the myth itself can supersede humanity.

Following her previous handling of sugar and glass, the artist uses resin to provide a powerful agent for sealing together elements that do not easily bind. Suspended in liquid stillness are pearls, drawings, insects, tobacco, peppers, beans, and other materials with deep colonialist histories. Every object is researched extensively, with Bermúdez-Silverman compiling pages of notes that detail the complexities of trade mapping, scientific observation, sailors' travelogs, and naturalists' drawings and journals. These lunettes model a vitrine of curiosities that in turn, question the high authority of institutions such as the scientific academy and Western religion. Bermúdez-Silverman sources all the objects she casts from the internet—another frontier of discovery and domination, creating experts out of scores of fanatics, zealots, and well-meaning hobbyists.

Unlike a falsely worded Wikipedia entry, however, the documents and illustrations that survived their journey to the New World with its mystical lands, creatures, and faces are far more difficult to reclaim or redact. Instead, upon these myths, Western civilization has staked its claim and created a foundation of persistent belief in the 'fearsome Other'; and on this basis, has produced centuries of genocide, slavery, and disease. Bermúdez-Silverman describes reading these explorers' notes and documents as an exercise of deciphering a game of "telephone" with each traveler picking up some piece of where the other left off.

In Here Be Dragons, Sula Bermúdez-Silverman aesthetically toys with the whimsy, adventure, and imaginative in "New World" tales, while reminding us how fantasy, when seated uncomfortably within structures of racialized capitalist power, becomes corrosive, genocidal fact.

— Elena Gross

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Inspired by her Jewish and Afro-Caribbean heritage, **Sula Bermúdez-Silverman** investigates and critiques social structures through a practice that examines economic, racial, religious, and gendered systems of power. In these new sculptures, the artist addresses early global trade, the beginnings of commodification, and economic hierarchies by taking a mold of her childhood dollhouse (given to her by her grandmother) and casting it in sugar, a material whose history has dictated that of her ancestors. All of the materials reference some form of exchange, from transmission of disease to folk stories that later shaped the identity of the people of its region.

Sula earned her BFA from Bard College (2015) and MFA from the Yale School of Art (2018). She has had solo exhibitions at the University of Texas at Austin, Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, and the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, CA.

About Friends Indeed Gallery

Friends Indeed Gallery is an absurdly small experimental vitrine on the border of San Francisco's historic Chinatown and Financial District. Our gallery-cum-institution reimagines the traditional framework of what a dexterous contemporary art space looks like; borrowing from both to meet the needs of artists today. Friends Indeed Gallery is founded by curator-dealer Micki Meng with Eric Li and Nazli Ercan.

Starting this year, 10% of our annual profit goes toward land conservation.

Sales inquiries

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Press inquiries

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