

O S C A R  
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METAPHYSICAL  
REALM OF THE SOUL

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

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2023

# OSCAR BRUM - THE GOLD OF MEMORY

by Roberto Mottadelli

For centuries restoration theorists, artists and even some poets, such as John Dryden wonder if it is legitimate to remove the layer of material that tarnishes the whiteness of the marble, but testifying to its experience. And, expanding the reflection, whether it is really the case to intervene on a painting to bring a color back to the (presumed) original radiance; or to delete a detail added by hands certainly different from those of the author, but so long ago to have become in their own way "authentic" themselves, absorbed in the evolutionary identity of that work.

It seems like a debate for specialists, and perhaps it really is, as long as we talk about phidiac sculpture, Roman architecture and Renaissance painting. But the question becomes topical, and knocks on the door, when in the attic or in the cellar it happens to recover a dusty box, and inside that box you discover photographs in black and white, or sepia colors, damaged by time and humidity, debilitated by mold and crystallization that erode the support and blur the image. In front of those photographs we are called to decide: limit ourselves to preserve or intervene and clean up, perhaps fill the gaps, running the risk of losing everything, starting from the charm of the object found?

Where everyone sees divergent paths opening up, an artist is needed to recognize a range of possibilities. One like Oscar Brum, for example. One that preserves the past, the sentimental authenticity of the photographs found, while avoiding embalming them in a case. One that renews those images, but avoiding cosmetic surgery and eschewing the contemporary myth of rejuvenation. Rather, Brum invents for them a second life that sprouts from the first and absorbs it into itself. Overwrites, adds, integrates, coats. And, through this practice, paradoxically reveals, lays bare what has survived in the photo: it awakens the echo of the past by celebrating the precious value of memory.

Memory is precious and mysterious. It preserves the past and reshapes it, returns life to those who have lost it. And precious and mysterious is the gold that Brum spreads in uneven fields on the surface of the photograph affected by time, making it dialogue with the image and with the sentimental heritage that sleeps in its depths, silent as a virgin deposit under the rock.

It is an operation, that of Oscar Brum, which recalls the Kintsugi, that Japanese restoration technique that, to weld the fragments of broken ceramics, uses a luminous mixture of lacquer and gold powder. He glorifies scars instead of concealing them, and through gold he performs the miracle of survival that is transformation and rebirth.

And it is, that of Brum, above all an operation that recalls the past of the artist's homeland: that Mexico of the Maya Peoples plundered of all wealth.

Starting with that gold that for the Spanish conquerors meant only money, and instead was also culture and art, spirituality and magic. Gold that Mexico often imported from the south, and which therefore constituted a common heritage. Everywhere gold was offered to deities, clothed priests, adorned chiefs and warriors. Some ceremonials of access to higher social roles provided that, after a period of meditation and penance, the initiate would be sprinkled with gold dust: then he would immerse himself in a sacred lake, returning that gold to water, nature and the gods.

In Brum's work, the link with Mexican tradition also emerges from the figurative lexicon, that is, from the themes and subjects of his sculptures and paintings. It can be seen above all in the recurring motif of the heart: painted, carved, scratched in stone or molded in shiny metal. It is the heart of Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, that one of the human sacrifices. Understood not only in its physiological value, as a vital organ, but also and above all as an embodiment of the personality of the individual, of that pulsating tangle of feelings, anxieties and emotions that really makes us human beings.

It is a heritage so precious that we cannot resign ourselves to the idea that it can be lost, even after death. Then we give physically the heart of the deceased to the gods or we entrust it ideally to God, perhaps through the Inmaculado Corazon de Maria. We try to keep the memory of the deceased in our hearts. In one way or another, we try to ensure a dialogue with those who are no longer there: and that dialogue on the one hand finds a very powerful symbol in the heart, on the other rests on memory, a sentimental memory that, for a couple of centuries now, has found its first activator in photography: the visual testimony that survives the subject, but must fight in turn a exhausting battle with time.

It becomes almost superfluous, at this point, to contextualize another of Oscar Brum's strands of work, the one dedicated to the theme of the Día de Muertos and the Calavera Catrina: a spectacular example of syncretism and multiculturalism that perpetuates the pre-Columbian spirit by merging it with the Hispanic and Catholic one. In some way the Dia de Muertos comforts us, telling us that we have not mistaken in entrusting the hearts of our loved ones to the gods: in the afterlife, the person whose images and memory we keep continues to be himself, albeit in a new form. He can even come back to us. Like the Kintsugi cups, like the photographs alchemically regenerated in gold by Oscar Brum.

Art critic Roberto Mottadelli. Milan, Italy 2022

- Works marked with this symbol belong to private collections.

# P A I N T I N G

Oscar's deep interest in the fundamentals of the human condition is explored and addressed by his interpretation of several ideas on the fields of philosophy, astronomy, physics and spirituality.

Such ideas range from the nature of consciousness and its universality, the dual and complementary sides of physical and emotional experience, the multidimensional nature of nature, the place of human beings, both individually and collectively as the part of the universe that thinks and contemplates itself, amongst others.

An explosion of carefully planned conversations of color and form bring the canvases to life, building dynamic compositions where time seems to have frozen right at the climax of every scene.

Expressive but yet formless (in some cases creature-like) figures interact with each other in a display of action and movement.

The artist's aim is to provide visual elements that are evocative but yet remain open to personal interpretation in order to create a more intimate dialogue between the viewer and the work of art, evoking the Freudian idea that each mind finds itself reflected in the world it experiences around it.

The sources of inspiration for Oscar's work are very vast, but one that is pivotal to his research is the symbolism and significance of the heart. Thought by many mesoamerican cultures to be the reservoir of our very essence and the most sacred element of our existence.



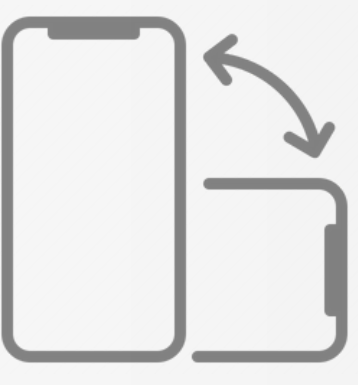
41 shades of violet in a frenzy for light\*. 2020



Dream of a silver jaguar with jade teeth\*. 2015



Man's divine figure. 2017



Quintessence of a multi-dimensional heart. 2015 - 2021

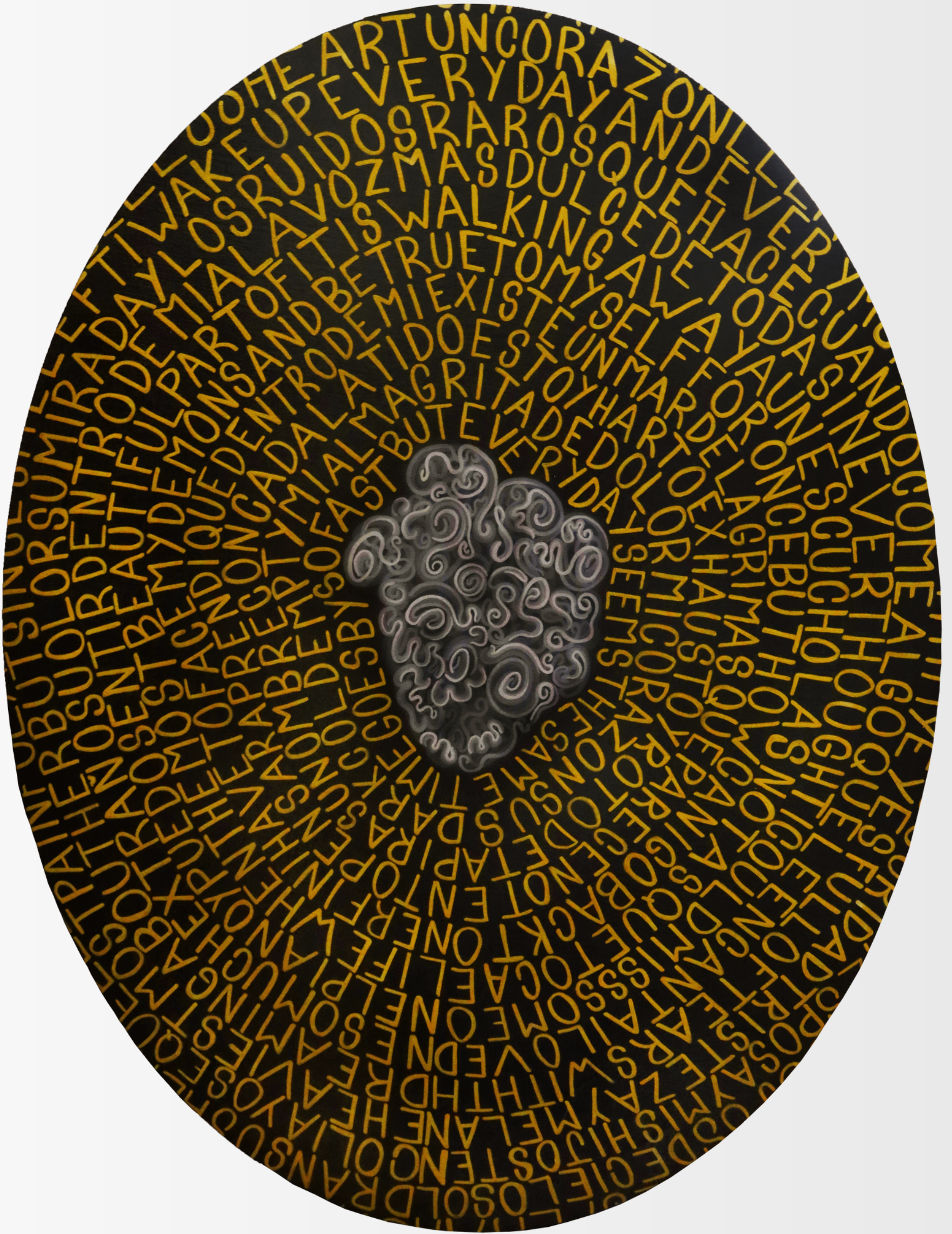


Cosmic vulva / The 5 elements. 2015



Rest in peace on a bed of flowers. 2017





Self-thoughts / June 29th. 2022



Self-thoughts / March 25th. 2022



Self-thoughts / August 10th. 2022

# PHOTO-INTERVENTION

This project started after the artist found his late grandfather's photo album collection. It contained photographs as old as the 1940's and up to the 1990's. This happened when the basement they were kept at got flooded and the photos were "ruined" by water, humidity and a very particular phenomenon that would inspire Oscar to expand the boundaries of his artistic production.

Oscar has used paint, ink, 24k gold leaf, and the naturally occurring fungi caused by the water and humidity to which the photos were exposed, as well as damages caused by other factors, to reshape the context of the subjects depicted on them, redefining their existence in a contemporary world.

Fungi feeds from dead and decaying materials, giving instead place for new life to emerge, transforming death into the precursor of the future. Just like fungi transforms physical matter, this project is an attempt to retell the original stories of these photos, whose absolute truth has died with the artist's grandfather, but their essence and great value have become immortal through the his reinterpretation.

Oscar has created different mini series from this collection, exploring some of his personal interests like the infinite cycle of regeneration and rebirth that, he states, is the balancegiving force of ours and all realities. This exploration engulfs scientific and spiritual subjects from which Oscar's fascination feeds, leading forward his creative spirit.

Two of the most important physical elements of the pieces are fungi and gold. The first one as the destructive force that is essential for existence; and the second one, the most sacred of elements, which purifies and gives new life. This project's conceptual base is strongly influenced by the japanese philosophy of Wabi-Sabi, which the artist has interpreted through his own perspective. We are all ephemeral and ever-changing, like the fungi damaged photographs, but our essence, our light, just as gold, transcends time.

Beliefs of rebirth and reincarnation have been part of humanity since the beginning of time and have shaped entire civilizations. These spiritual beliefs have also become an important source of inspiration and play a defining role on how the artist approaches the symbolic construction of his pieces.



When the cempasuchil flower acquired it's colors\*. 2020



Flowers in the void\*. 2020



Interdimensional dancers (1 & 2)\*. 2019



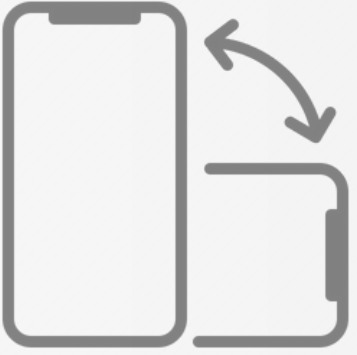
Warm is satisfying\*. 2021



Warm is refreshing. 2021



Warm is cool\*. 2021

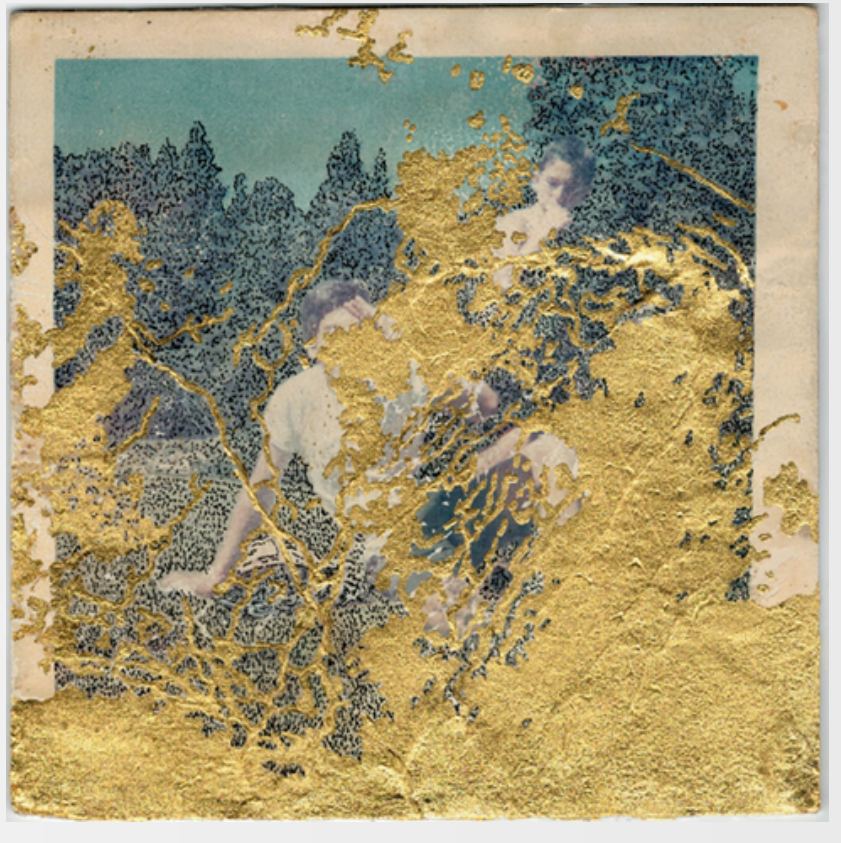
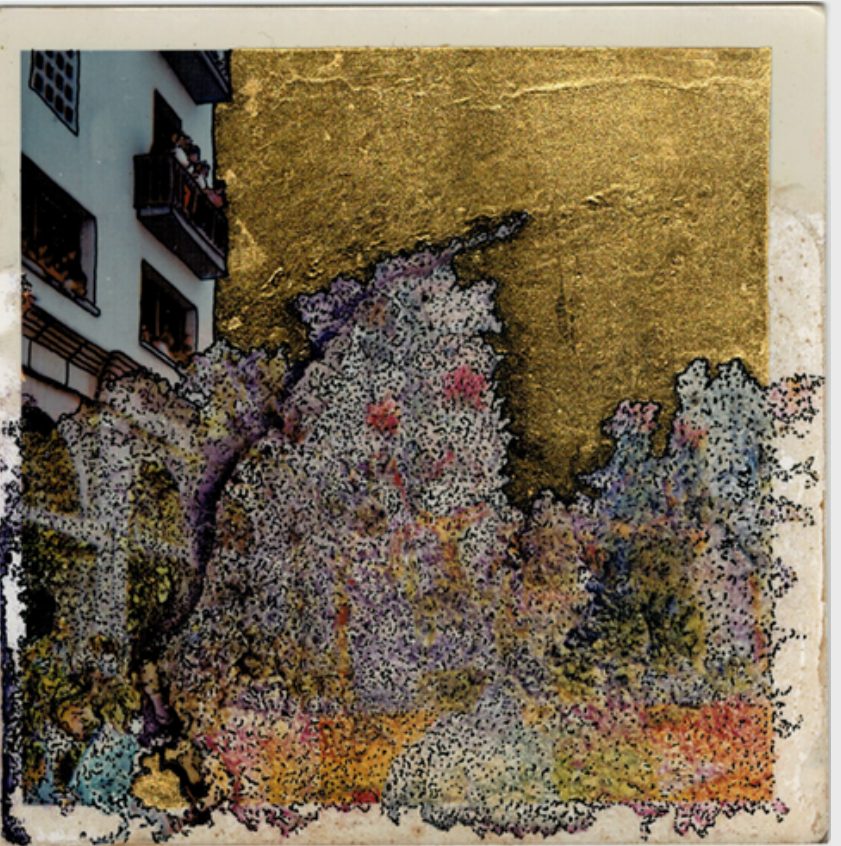
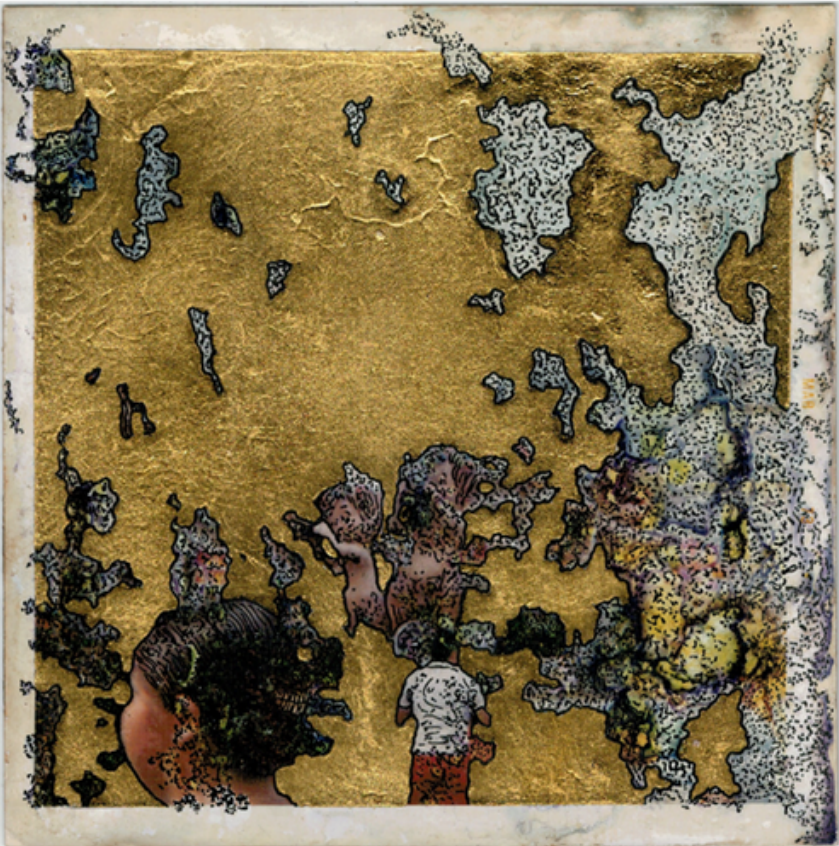
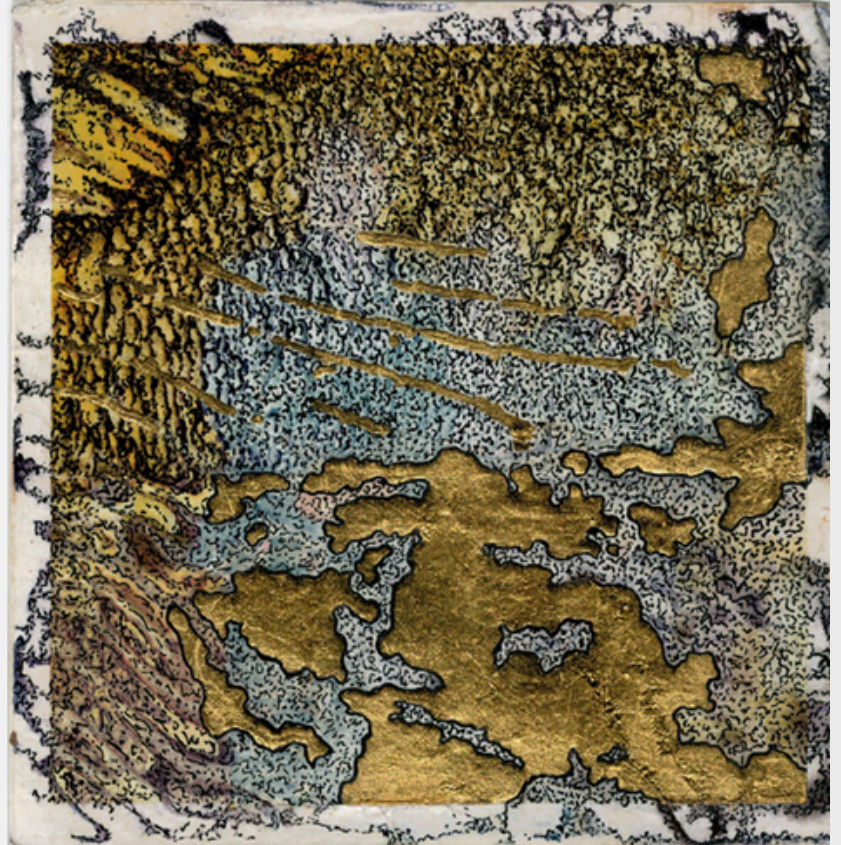
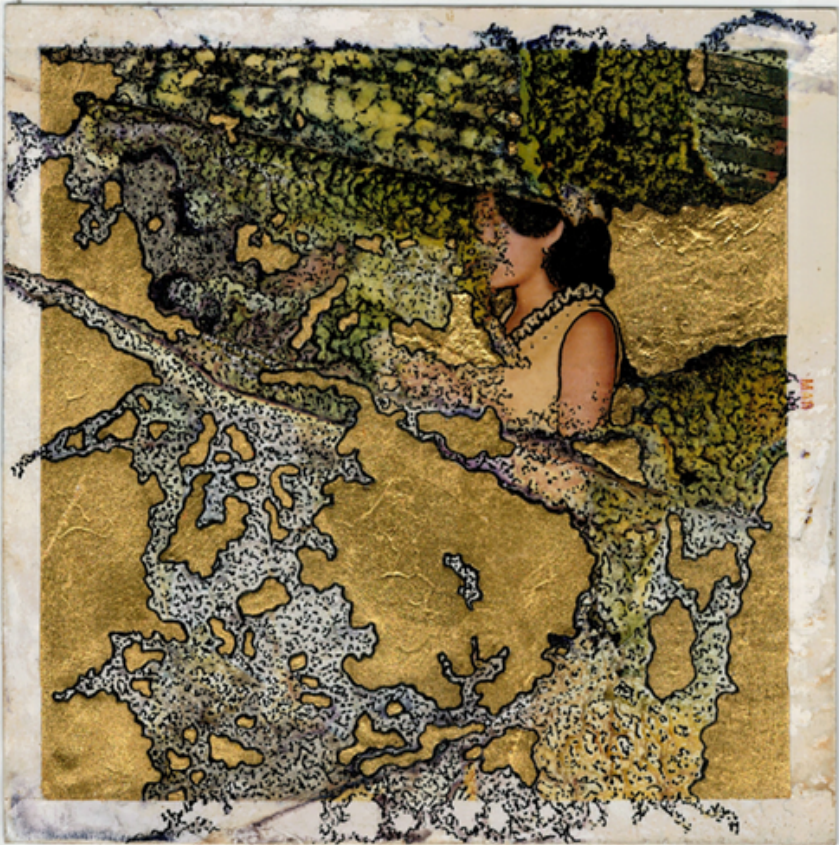


Boat ride during a neutron star collision (pt.2) \*. 2021





Deconstruction of the mind (pts 1 & 2)\*. 2021



Timelessness (pts. 12 to 17)\*. 2022

# SCULPTURE



Personal growth \*. 2017



What dreams are made of \*. 2023

# CONTEMPORARY MEXICANITY

This project is the result of an intrinsic and deep process of reflection on what it means to be Mexican in the contemporary world. What is it that defines and makes us proud as a nation and as a community in the XXI century.

The collection follows the two main paths through which the artist confronts his own artistic research and production, painting and photographic intervention; both crowned with 24 carat gold leaf, a fundamental material in the artist's work.

images taken by the photographer Hector Pomar and intervened by Oscar Brum are the core for this project. For both of them, Mexico is an inexhaustible source of inspiration and reverence. Its exuberant historical and cultural past, its mesmerizing landscapes, its exquisite natural richness, its fabulous gastronomy and the huge and growing list of artists who have made this country their own, are some of the aspects represented in these pieces.

The majesty of gold, the minute detail of the strokes and the carefully planned perspective in each of the photographs seek to elevate to a divine plane the particular vision of contemporary Mexico that both artists share. We are constantly bombarded with negative news and information, crises, crime, corruption and many other demons that torment society, and it is normal that we pay all our attention to these urgent issues, leaving aside those truly transcendental for the human condition.

It is because of the desire to share with the world this vision of a magical country, full of hope and wonderful people that this collaboration is born. Only through the support and development of intellectual and creative activities is that our species will manage to overcome its adolescence and mature to become a beacon of light that enlightens, guides and inspires everyone.



4 of 16 pieces from "Contemporary Mexicanity". 2022

# LIST OF WORKS

**41 shades of violet in a frenzy for light. 2020**

Acrylic & 24k. gold leaf on circular linen panel.

D. 70 cm.

Private collection.

**Dream of a silver jaguar with jade teeth. 2015**

Acrylic on linen.

100 x 100 cm.

Private collection.

**Man's divine figure. 2017**

Acrylic on circular linen panels.

D. 15 cm. ea. (x3)

USD \$ 285.00

**Quintessence of a multi-dimensional heart. 2015 - 2021**

Acrylic on linen.

240 x 80 cm

USD \$ 5,795.00

**Cosmic vulva / The 5 elements. 2015**

Acrylic on linen.

80 x 70 cm.

USD \$ 3,150.00

**Rest in peace on a bed of flowers. 2017**

Acrylic on linen.

120 x 60 cm.

USD \$3,250.00

**Self-thoughts / June 29th. 2022**

Acrylic, spray paint & ink on linen.

80 x 60 cm.

USD \$ 860.00

**Self-thoughts / March 25th. 2022**

Acrylic & ink on linen.

50 x 40 cm.

USD \$ 270.00

**Self-thoughts / August 10th. 2022**

Acrylic & ink on circular linen panel.

D. 25 cm.

USD \$ 150.00

**When the cempasuchil flower acquired it's colors. 2020**

Ink & fungi on damaged photograph (1970's)

11.5 x 8 cm.

Private collection.

**Flowers in the void. 2020**

Ink & fungi on damaged photograph (1970's)

11.5 x 8 cm.

Private collection.

**Interdimensional dancers (pts. 1 & 2). 2019**

Acrylic & fungi on damaged photographs (1970's)

15 x 10 cm.

Private collection.

**Warm is good (Series) 2021**

Ink on damaged photographs (1970's).

11.5 x 8 cm. (ea)

Private collection.

**Boat ride during a neutron star collision (pt. 2). 2021**

Ink, watercolor, fungi & 24k gold leaf on damaged photograph collage (1970's).

56 x 26 cm.

Private collection.

**Deconstruction of the mind (Series) 2021**

Ink, fungi & 24k gold leaf on damaged photographs (1970's).

11.5 x 8 cm. (ea)

Private collection.

**Timelessness (pts. 12 to 17). 2022**

Ink, fungi & 24k gold leaf on damaged photographs (1970's).

9 x 9 cm. (ea)

Private collection.

**Contemporary Mexicanity. 2022**

24k gold leaf & acrylic on mezcal bottles

33 x 50 cm. (ea)

USD \$ 260.00 (ea)

**Personal growth. 2017**

Plaster & tar.

40 x 40 x 30 cm.

Private collection

**What dreams are made of. 2023**

24k gold leaf on damaged leather shoes.

40 x 40 x 40 cm.

Private collection

# C O N T A C T



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