

mariana castillo deball

*serpent
disappearances*

mar 12 — apr 18, 2026

opening
mar 12, 6 — 8 pm

kurimanzutto
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Mariana Castillo Deball's practice examines how historical narratives are produced, circulated, and reclaimed. Through drawing, scratching, rubbing, and tracing, she reactivates materials and stories from the past, considering who has access to historical objects and how histories can be embodied anew.

For her first exhibition at kurimanzutto, New York, Castillo Deball presents *Serpent Disappearances*, a project that traces the development and construction of her major public artwork *Feathered Changes* (2025), commissioned for the plaza at the new David Geffen Galleries at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, designed by Peter Zumthor. Located on land once shaped by a nourishing marsh ecosystem, the plaza project reflects the artist's interest in geology, time, history and labor as intertwined forces embedded in a particular site.

Over the course of more than two years, the commission involved close collaboration with the architect, engineers, and on-site construction teams in Los Angeles. *Serpent Disappearances* brings this extensive fieldwork into the gallery, foregrounding the tools, methods, and relationships that informed the making of the LACMA plaza.

Visitors are first met by *Feathered Serpent* (2016), a concrete work that predates and conceptually anticipates the Los Angeles commission. Originally produced for the exhibition *Feathered Changes, Serpent Disappearances* at the San Francisco Art Institute, the sculpture reflects Castillo Deball's research into the dispersion of Teotihuacan mural fragments into collections worldwide—an inquiry that connects archaeology, museum practices, and the circulation of artifacts across multiple institutional and cultural contexts. For many years, the Feathered Serpent—a mythological creature present in Mesoamerican cultures, symbolizing the connection between earth and sun, soil and water, place and transformation—has been a recurring motif in Castillo Deball's practice, to which she returns through different means of expression.

A large-scale textile unfurls through the gallery, created through direct frottage—rubbing fabric over a textured surface to capture its imprint—from the concrete pavement of the LACMA plaza. Acting as a palimpsest, the fabric

accumulates impressions from multiple zones of the site, including infrastructural features such as manholes, producing a tactile mapping of the building's footprint.

Hung on the walls is a series of ceramic works sketching the techniques the artist developed in collaboration with the construction team on site in Los Angeles. Together, they tested various methods for marking concrete surfaces, using ropes, brushes, stamps, and even their own hands to create the rhythm and textures that shaped the composition of the plaza floor. These ceramic slabs offer a close, detailed view of the artist's process.

The exhibition also presents a series of *paliacates*—cotton scarves commonly worn by construction workers to protect them against dust and sweat—produced by the artist using a Japanese resist-dye technique with indigo pigment. Each hand-made textile reproduces sections of the plaza floor in miniature and includes a label crediting the more than one hundred workers involved in the project, who received a *paliacate* from the artist as a gesture of thanks in 2025.

Construction workers also wear leather belts to hold their tools; these waistbands are often customized with their names and personalized engravings—they function as individual, portable body-workshops. The artist customized a series of leather belts embossed with a modular metal stamp set of the Aztec calendar she found in downtown Mexico City. These belts hold ceramic pieces of human tools and animal paws including those of a beaver, snake, road runner, bison, wolf, raccoon, and bear.

The exhibition concludes with a selection of concrete slabs poured on site in Los Angeles. Produced through the same brushing techniques as the previous ceramic works, these works record organic lines, rope patterns, and animal footprints. Installed on utilitarian metal shelving alongside photographic documentation of the plaza's production, they form an index of gestures, materials, and collaborations from the construction process.

Together, these works bring the plaza project into the gallery, reframing its construction as a process of collective inscription. Rather than presenting the public artwork as a fixed outcome, *Serpent Disappearances* foregrounds the labor, experimentation, and material negotiations that shaped it. In

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doing so, the exhibition extends Castillo Deball's ongoing inquiry into how histories move across geographies—becoming embedded in new sites, new contexts, and new forms.

about the artist

Mariana Castillo Deball takes a kaleidoscopic approach to her practice, mediating between science, archaeology, and the visual arts and exploring the way in which these disciplines describe the world. Her installations, performances, sculptures, and editorial projects arise from the recombination of different languages that seek to understand the role objects play in our identity and history. Her works result from a long research process, allowing her to study the different ways in which a historical object can be read as it presents a version of reality that informs and blends into a polyphonic panorama. Seeking to initiate a dialogue with institutions and museums beyond contemporary art, she collaborates with ethnographic collections, libraries, and historical archives. She often produces multiples —books or objects with different uses and formats— to explore how they might generate new territories. Weaving her way through the fields of anthropology, philosophy, and literature, Castillo Deball draws inspiration from a wide range of sources as she engages in the exchange of knowledge as a transforming process for everyone involved.

Mariana Castillo Deball earned a BFA from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 1997. In 2003, she completed a postgraduate program at Jan van Eyck Academie in the Netherlands. Deball has been awarded with the Prix de Rome (2004), Zurich Art Prize (2012), a fellowship at the Henry Moore Institute (2012), and the Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst (2013). She was an artist in residency at the Berliner Künstlerprogramm in Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) in 2011.

Mariana Castillo Deball lives and works in Berlin and Mexico City.

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