

*Contracorrientes: Dr. Lakra & Miguel Covarrubias*

Curated by Emily King

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kurimanzutto, New York

NEW YORK — kurimanzutto presents *Contracorrientes* (Countercurrents), an exhibition curated by London-based writer and curator Emily King, that brings together the work of two prominent visual provocateurs in modern and contemporary Mexican art: Miguel Covarrubias (1904–57), known as “El Chamaco” (The Kid), and Jerónimo López Ramírez, known as Dr. Lakra (b. 1972). Born nearly seven decades apart, the artists are linked by a shared precocity and a counterhegemonic perspective that challenges dominant artistic and geographic frameworks. Through a dialogue of line, visual culture, and cartography, the exhibition examines how both artists navigated the world not as outsiders but as “thorough cosmopolitans,” as King describes, immersed in the cultures they depict.

Both artists left formal education in their teens to enter the vanguard of their respective eras. Covarrubias gained recognition in 1920s Mexico City and New York, particularly through his caricatures for *Vanity Fair*, while Lakra emerged from the 1990s underground tattoo scene and Gabriel Orozco's *Taller de los viernes*. Despite these distinct contexts, both built their practices on a precise and expressive use of line.+

This mastery of line led both artists toward sustained engagements across the Pacific Rim. The exhibition brings together Covarrubias's illustrations from *The Island of Bali* (1937), including depictions of dancers and women, with Lakra's “irritated monks,” a series of drawings that rework Bhutanese iconography. Lakra's travels to the Philippines and Japan inform these works, while Covarrubias's study of Bali shaped a body of images that merge observation with stylization. Across these works, cultural references are reconfigured through line and composition rather than presented as documentation.

The exhibition further explores how both artists use the body as a primary site of expression. Covarrubias's *The Lindy Hop* (1936) translates the rhythms of Harlem dance into line through the articulation of limbs and movement, a sensibility that reappears in

his depictions of Balinese dancers. Lakra's monoprint series based on Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), a novel tracing a child's journey through a shifting world of spirits and encounters, similarly constructs figures through contorted, unstable poses. Across these works, movement generates form.

Lakra extends this exploration into three dimensions through a group of large-scale ceramic vases. Produced using wooden and plaster molds and fired at low temperatures, these works depict animals, mythological creatures, skeletons, and anthropomorphic figures in bold, linear compositions. This attention to animal and hybrid forms resonates with Covarrubias's own illustrations, such as *Snake* (1937), made for William Henry Hudson's *Green Mansions*, in which line is used to articulate both natural and symbolic imagery. Drawing on East and Southeast Asian visual traditions—including wayang kulit (Indonesian shadow puppetry) and Chinese porcelain—the vases incorporate motifs such as the dragon, rendered through a graphic language that recalls Japanese tattooing. Here, tattoo is translated from inscription on skin into surface and object.

The exhibition also presents a cartographic dialogue. In 1939, Covarrubias created the "Pageant of the Pacific," a series of mural-sized maps that centered the Pacific Ocean and traced connections between Asia and the Americas; smaller lithograph versions from 1940 are on view, alongside related works such as *Typee Girl with a Kava Bowl*, *Nude Female Model*, and *Tattooed Indian / Indio tatuado*. In response, Dr. Lakra's large-scale mural (2024), *Los más corrientes del Pacífico*, charts the interconnected culture of tattooing across the region. While Covarrubias maps peoples and forms, Lakra foregrounds tattooing as a visual language that inscribes identity and history onto the body. By rejecting Eurocentric conventions that place the West at the center, these works propose alternative spatial and cultural relationships, shifting attention from mapped territory to marked bodies.

Ultimately, *Contracorrientes* brings into focus two artists who work across drawing, print, ceramics, and cartography, using line to connect bodies, images, and geographies. Across the exhibition, movement, mark-making, and mapping operate as parallel systems through which visual culture is translated and reconfigured.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with texts by Emily King, Álvaro Enrígue, and Lars Krutak.