

Garth Greenan Gallery 545 West 20th Street New York New York 10011 212 929 1351 www.garthgreenan.com

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Contact: Garth Greenan
(212) 929-1351
garth@garthgreenan.com
www.garthgreenan.com

Esteban Cabeza de Baca: Nepantla



Vessels, 2020

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to announce *Esteban Cabeza de Baca: Nepantla*, an exhibition of more than a dozen paintings and sculptures by Esteban Cabeza de Baca, all made between 2020–2021. Opening on Thursday, January 14, 2021, the exhibition is the artist's first at the gallery.

Cabeza de Baca employs a broad range of painterly techniques, entwining layers of graffiti, landscape, and ancient symbols. His work often draws on his complex ancestry as a person of Native American and Mexican descent with a direct link to the Spanish conquistador-turned-spiritual-healer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, as well as on his experience growing up on the bordertown of San Ysidro. Taking inspiration from Chicana cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's use of the Nahuatl word "Nepantla" to describe thresholds between worlds or discrete cultural frameworks, the exhibition explores the complex spiritual potential of liminal territories.

In *Vessels* (2020), Cabeza de Baca foregrounds ceramic objects against a psychedelic pink sky and the mountainous New Mexican desert. Streaks of luminous white spray paint cover the ancient ceramic forms, separating them from the landscape and highlighting their independent perspectival logic. Columns and branches of clay grow from mouths of the ceramic pots, recalling Cabeza de Baca's sculpture *Nepantla* (2021): a thin clay rope that traces the outline of a figure, seemingly rising from the earth. This dimensional interplay—using clay as a line to trace a three-dimensional object in space before reclaiming it within a two-dimensional painting—is typical of the artist's tendency to confound Cartesian single-point perspective. For this and other paintings, the artist worked en plein air, recasting the practice that was once the province of colonialist surveys.

Cabeza de Baca's new ceramic works are formed from soil, turquoise, and terra cotta derived from his paternal home state of New Mexico. Despite the geographic particularity of the material's source, the artist taps into clay's universality: the material has not only served as a timeless medium for art and functional objects, but also as an inexhaustible vehicle for story and metaphor. The artist describes his process as generating "sculptural sentience," drawing attention to the areas where many human traditions meet. In Genesis, the Judeo-Christian God breathed life into dust of the earth, creating humanity. And it is in this notion—that humanity both derives from dust and will revert to it—that Christianity veers nearest to Buddhism. The sentiment also recalls the Jewish folkloric "golem," the clay humanoid that often saved the Jewish people from disaster. Cabeza de Baca has referred to these new sculptures as "prayers for a green new era." Perhaps, this transcultural spiritual insight—that humanity is a small and integral part of the earth and cosmos—has both a liberational and restorative ecological potential.

Cabeza de Baca has received numerous grants and awards, including a Robert Gamblin Painting Grant (2013); a Stern Fellowship, Columbia University (2013); a Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program Award (2014); a Stokroos Foundation Grant (2017); and a Henk en Victoria de Heus Fellowship (2018). His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, such as: *Bluer Than a Sky Weeping Bones*, Gaa Gallery, (2016, Provincetown, MA); *Unlearn*, Fons Welters Gallery, (2018, Amsterdam); *Verano*, with Heidi Howard, Gaa Gallery, (2018, Wellfleet, MA); *Esteban Cabeza de Baca*, Gaa Projects (2019, Cologne); *Worlds without Borders*, Boers-Li Gallery (2019, New York); and *Esteban Cabeza de Baca – Life is one drop in limitless oceans ...*, Kunstfort Vijfhuizen, (2019, Amsterdam). He has participated in over 15 group exhibitions at venues such as the Leroy Neiman Art Center (2014, 2015, New York), the Yale University School of Sacred Music (2017, New Haven, CT), the Dutch Royal Palace (2018, Amsterdam, Netherlands), and the Drawing Center (2019, New York), among others.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent Esteban Cabeza de Baca.

Esteban Cabeza de Baca: Nepantla will be on view at Garth Greenan Gallery, 545 West 20th Street (between Tenth and Eleventh avenues), through Saturday, March 20, 2020. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information, please contact the gallery at (212) 929-1351, or email info@garthgreenan.com.

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