

JOSÉ EDUARDO BARAJAS

BLEEDING BOUNDARIES

How do you paint a metamorphosis? In his latest series of canvases, presented here under the title *Bleeding Boundaries*, José Eduardo Barajas uses the two-dimensional surfaces of 35 canvases, assembled into four large works, to convey a fundamental reorientation of his relationship to his body and, by extension, to the act of painting itself.

Prior to this series, Barajas's paintings — made by covering canvases with big expressionistic gestures then gradually resolving the forms that floated to the surface — were often defined by dream-like ambiguity. In his latest sequence of paintings, Barajas has changed his media and process; following Donald Judd's seminal 1962 essay *Specific Objects*, he's also pushed the boundaries of his long-standing interest in how paintings interact with space by assembling his new works into a sequence of stelae, the engraved stone planks used by ancient civilizations to promulgate official state histories.

The history captured here is both deeply personal and ultimately inscrutable, linked to, but not representing, the events of the artist's last seven months: a cancer diagnosis, a pregnancy, physically taxing treatment, and now an imminent birth. Rather than the cliché of rendering life and death as mirror images, he's sublimated those themes into a sequence of delicately calligraphic abstractions, suggestive of the parasitic growths, both generative and destructive, that make our bodies into alien beings.

Barajas began work on this series with a sequence of oils — a medium he hadn't used in five years — that zoomed in on disquieting interior landscapes of diseased vesicles and blossoming cells. Those images were to share space with canvases that suggested distended bellies, overripe vegetables and the acrid inflorescence of a cadaver flower. Ultimately, though, Barajas wanted to move beyond such literal representation while the introduction of new materials required a more radical deviation from the glossy, impervious surfaces of his previous work. The body, after all, is porous. What if, rather than attempting to represent transformation, the work transformed instead?

In the canvases seen here, Barajas drew on Louise Bourgeois' late-career maternity paintings, which used blue and red watercolors to convey the bleeding boundaries between nesting bodies, to create a series of urgent, expressive abstractions in watercolors, inks, acrylics and oils — images that resemble blood-stained parchment or spider veins creeping beneath sun-starved skin. Applying the pigments with his own hands and allowing their aleatory spread through the canvas, he's reen countered the pictorial space as an extension of his body, endlessly in flux. The rampaging cells and cleaving zygotes of those first explorations prowl through the surface rather than over it. In these free-floating stelae he's left behind the blur of memory to inscribe an indeterminate future not on stone but on skin.

José Eduardo Barajas explores the relationship between the Mexican painting tradition and contemporary practices such as installation, video, sculpture, and site-specific work. He uses painting as a tool to re-signify the world beyond rational thought, transforming subjective experience into a collective vehicle for knowledge.

He holds a degree from the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado "La Esmeralda." His work has been exhibited both individually and collectively in Mexico and abroad. Recent exhibitions include: *De los sueños te despiertas*, Galerie Nordenhake, Mexico City 2024; *Mnemosine*, Proyectos Multipropósito, Mexico City, 2023; *El fin de lo maravilloso*, Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, 2023; *Saliva*, Peana, Mexico City, 2023; *¿Por dónde sale el sol?*, Jardín 17, Relaciones Públicas, 2020; and *Campamento para jóvenes naturalistas*, Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro, Querétaro, Mexico, 2020.

Publications dedicated to his work include: *SKY*, *Vacaciones de trabajo* -FONCA, 2018; and *¿Por dónde sale el sol?*, Relaciones Públicas, 2020.

Text by Michael Snyder.