

HYPERALLERGIC

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Anabel Juárez's Castles of Wonderment

By enshrining her memories into sculptural form, Juárez celebrates her emotional pilgrimage through the growing pains of childhood to adulthood.



Jenny Hata Blumenfeld May 24, 2022



Installation view of *Anabel Juárez: Recordar Es Vivir* at the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum, 2022 (photo by Tatiana Mata)

LONG BEACH, CA — I met Anabel Juárez one Friday afternoon on the campus of California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), where the artist completed her BFA and where her solo show *Recordar Es Vivir* (“Remembering Is Living”) recently opened

at the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum. As Juárez guided me through the ceramics department — where she produced the works included in *Recordar Es Vivir* as an artist-in-residence — she recounted how she crossed paths with CSULB in a seemingly fortuitous way, unaware of the high degree of experimentation at the school’s ceramic department and its role as facilitator of some of the most recognized names in contemporary art. Though Juárez initially began with the idea of majoring in sculpture, she quickly found herself immersed in the Ceramics department and a pathway towards a paved consciousness around ceramics and craft.



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After graduating in 2013, Juárez was originally invited by Kristina Newhouse, previously curator of the Kleefeld Contemporary, to install her work for the opening of the newly revitalized museum. However, COVID continued to push her ambitious solo show to an unspecified date. For Juárez, it meant more time to build the body of work, a precious commodity for artists. Rather than focusing her ambition on producing large-scale works, the artist — who is known for her life-sized dress forms and flora sculptures — took the opportunity to mine her personal past and present for *Recordar Es Vivir*.



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As Juárez took me through several lawns guarded by a cascade of departmental buildings separating the ceramics wing from the Kleefeld and we entered the Mini Gallery where *Recordar Es Vivir* can be found, the artist shared that the works in the exhibition were small for her, offering a different but welcome challenge. The centerpiece of the show features a pushcart, displaying statuary and colorful ceramic sculptures and a roof made of hand slumped glass elements. While Juárez taught herself the glasswork through a series of YouTube videos and experimentation, the scale and technical execution of clay presented here is not for the timid hand. Her sculptures are constructed with imagery in mind, speaking to the control and mastery that Juárez executes in form. One sculpture of butterflies captures movement at a standstill, while the softness of stuffed teddy bears is articulated through the compressing movements of Juárez's fingers.



Detail view of *Anabel Juárez: Recordar Es Vivir* at the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum, 2022 (photo Jenny Hata Blumenfield/Hyperallergic)

Teddy bears, butterflies, flowers, gourds, and Our Lady of Guadalupe are just some of the objects enshrined on this castle of wonderment. An empty balcony on the second level of the pushcart offers visual respite, a distinct contrast to the other levels that flutter with childhood nostalgia and play. Altogether, the pushcart forms a sort of a charm bracelet reliquary, each component a vessel of the memories of the artist as a young girl who grew up in the '90s in Michoacán, México, spending the first half of her life in Mexico before traversing her teens and adulthood in California. On the wall of the gallery, charcoal rubbings of a shut window and door from her grandparent's home act as a physical artifact of memories no longer accessible to the artist. In a visual loop, the architecture rebuilt through these drawings redirects one's focus to the architecture of the pushcart and the symbolism of the objects that adorn it.



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By enshrining her memories into sculptural form, Juárez celebrates both her own literal pilgrimage in space and time, and her emotional pilgrimage through the growing pains of childhood to adulthood. In doing so, the artist upends the narrative of limitless promise, opportunity, and freedom associated with migration and particularly that of the American West. Juárez instead reminds us that the act of migration and its consequent change should not erase the values embedded in one's cultural experience. As a viewer, there is an unrelenting understanding — through show title and construction of imagery — that to remember is an act of empowerment. The depth in which Juárez has honored her personal history through drawing and sculpture in *Recordar Es Vivir* demands a recalibration of the ways in which we might take in our own personal histories of what we have left behind, what we continue to hold, and the space we define for our respective futures.



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Anabel Juárez: Recordar Es Vivir continues at the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum (California State University, Long Beach, Horn Center, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach) through June 25. The exhibition was organized by the museum.