

CANAL PROJECTS

FERNANDO PALMA
RODRÍGUEZ

ĀMANTĒCAYŌTL

05/03-07/27/24

**Āmantēcayōtl:
Auh inihcuac huel
ompoliuh, mitoa, ommic
in meztli**

When one understands that the snake is a network of energy, we know that what we are talking about is the earth, because the earth is clothed in energy. A tree is energy, the sky is energy, the sun is energy, and consequently, we are all an energetic sea. –Fernando Palma

Āmantēcayōtl: And When it Disappears, it is Said, the Moon has Died, celebrates Fernando Palma Rodríguez's pioneering robotic work by presenting a newly commissioned installation that speaks to the origin of corn. The installation emulates a corn field, traditionally known as a Milpa on the slopes of the Teuhtli Volcano. Alongside the Milpa we encounter robotic entities that represent deities of the Mesoamerican pantheon. Combining his training as an artist and mechanical engineer, Palma Rodríguez's practice responds to the effects of industrialization in his native territory while also proposing a definition of technology as one determined by people's capacity to cultivate life.

Āmantēcayōtl: Auh inihcuac huel ompoliuh, mitoa, ommic in meztli, is the materialization of the entangled relationship that exists between cosmology, technology, and land. At the center of the exhibition, the Cincoatl snake glides above the Milpa. Throughout time, farmers have encouraged the Cincoatl to roam their crops and because of that it has been often referred to as "snake-friend of maize corn."

In ancient codices and across Mesoamerican iconographies, the snake has been associated with a vision of the underworld. However, in this exhibition, it is presented as coming from above, for it is also known to be a transgressor between earth and sky. Besides its multiple significations, Palma Rodríguez identifies the snake's synodal-wave shape, as an expression of the creature's inherent electromagnetic force.

Surrounding the *Cincoatl* are four *Chinantles*, each representing the cardinal directions signified by the colors white, red, blue, and black. The *Chinantles* are traditional barriers made of corn stalks. Like the *Cincoatl* snake, the *Chinantles* are an avatar of the Aztec *Quetzalcoatl*, which is commonly known as the Feathered Serpent; a deity related to wind, Venus, the Sun, arts, knowledge, and learning. As the *Chinantles* slide through the four cardinal directions, they delineate the sacred place of the Milpa harvest.

Together, the mechanized entities make evident the sacred relationship that exists between Nuhua cosmologies and their entwinement in the cultivation of corn, bean, and squash, which are grown together in what is traditionally known as the Milpa. On the sides, *Tezactipoclas* interacts with viewers, embodying practices and traditions involved in relating to, caring for, and being in community with the land. The artist's invocation of the sacred pantheon, more than a personification of these deities, is a practice of becoming, which allows the artist to redefine the very notion of the robot as a conduit for the recuperation of the Nahuatl language, earth technologies, and the positioning of Aztec cosmologies.

Palma Rodríguez's approach to robotic art delineates an entirely different definition of technology as one that is determined by people's capacity to cultivate life. Recognizing the role that Nuhua cosmovision plays in the definition of Indigenous technologies, the exhibition provides an entry point into the earth-based practices

that help sustain and nourish life in community. According to the artist, Indigenous technologies are built on lessons learned from the soil and from harvesting crops, such as reciprocity, care, and interdependence. "In working the land," says Palma Rodríguez, "life merges into creation, nature into culture, and ultimately, art into technology." The artist's machines, therefore, speak to the agency and intentionality of sacred figures that aid in the cultivation of life and construction of livable worlds.

Palma Rodríguez combines his training as an artist and mechanical engineer to create robotic sculptures that are activated by drawing upon internet-sourced climate data from the Milpa Alta region. His works respond to issues facing Indigenous communities in Mexico today while also underscoring that the struggles for the protection of life and the defense of territory are inseparable from the recuperation of traditional ways of life.

Fernando Palma Rodríguez (b. 1957, Mexico) lives in the agricultural region of Milpa Alta outside Mexico City, where he runs Calpulli Tecalco, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Nahuatl language and culture. Central to Palma Rodríguez's practice is an emphasis on indigenous ancestral knowledge, both as an integral part of contemporary life and a way of shaping the future. Fernando Palma Rodríguez lives and works in San Pedro Atocpan, Mexico. He was the subject of a retrospective at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca (2017). His work has been included in group exhibitions at FRAC des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, France (2016); Parallel Oaxaca, Mexico (2016); Nottingham Contemporary, England (2015); the Biennial of the Americas, Denver, Colorado (2015); Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico (2014); and SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico (2014). Also, there was an exhibition of his work at MoMA in NYC called *In Ixtli in Yollotl, We the People* (2018).