

mtn
space

*CHRISTINA BARRERA: STAY ALIVE, HERE IN THE DARK
WHERE THE FUTURE IS*

February 20 - March 29, 2025
Reception: Thursday, February 20, 6-8pm



Image courtesy of the artist

mtn space gallery is pleased to present *Stay Alive, Here In the Dark Where the Future Is*, a solo exhibition of work by New York-based artist Christina Barrera.

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"I hope you live without the need to dominate, and without the need to be dominated. I hope you are never victims, but I hope you have no power over other people. And when you fail, and are defeated, and in pain, and in the dark, then I hope you will remember that darkness is your country, where you live, where no wars are fought and no wars are won, but where the future is. Our roots are in the dark; the earth is our country. Why did we look up for blessing — instead of around, and down? What hope we have lies there. Not in the sky full of orbiting spy-eyes and weaponry, but in the earth we have looked down upon. Not from above, but from below. Not in the light that blinds, but in the dark that nourishes, where human beings grow human souls."

- Ursula Le Guin, "A Left-Handed Commencement Address" delivered at Mills College, 1983

I want always to be like a river; flowing freely through, around, over, and with. Moving between ideas, forms, and ways of making and being is essential to how I make my work, essential to the versatility it takes to survive well. I use a variety of materials to make drawings, prints, fiber works, paintings, and sculptures, and sometimes my works lie somewhere between two or more of these things. I fluidly source from and weave together ancient South and Central American traditions of figuration and abstraction along with language and symbols from U.S. and settler-colonial traditions to make work that is as amalgam as I am, first generation American living in the heart of a dying empire. Bodies, animals, and objects are informed by attempting to imagine what kind of artist I might be if I had been raised and educated in an uncolonized South American art practice. I was trained as an artist in the United States and I now hybridize processes and forms to devour the imperialist culture under which I live and pull it into the service of the artistic lineage and traditions I've been denied.

Through my work I grapple with having a dispossessed, working body under a capitalist system. Every aspect of my life has shown me that the personal is political; there are no boundaries between them. When there are figures, the body shifts between glyph, ancient gold figurine, and the soft flesh of a drawing from my western education. Manic-frantic figures move through rising waters or burning scenarios, not quite landscapes – is it a swamp or flood waters? is it fire or is it tear gas? They run in circles, they carry their burdens, they travel long distances. They are moving in a future rich with possibilities, all the ruination we can imagine and the fecundity that follows. They are adapting and surviving by a multitude of tactics – they swallow what they must to go on, they resist their ownership, they implore you, "stay alive". The language in my work often moves between English and Spanish as easily as I do, and is directly pulled from or references everything from idioms, political sound bites, propaganda, advertisements, family sayings, legal language, revolutionary writings and poetry, and the history of the labor movement. The interplay between multiple meanings, connotations, and translations of words and phrases in my work often keeps the language fluid and unstable in its exact meaning – which is how I feel as I make this work to process issues of liberation, repression, and the cyclical nature of history.

Christina Barrera was born in South Florida to Colombian immigrant parents and is now an artist and educator based in New York City. Her mother was a public school art teacher and her father is a disappointed intellectual/failed union organizer who became many kinds of laborer after immigrating: chef, waitstaff, Denny's Manager, t-shirt screen-printer, and now carpenter.

Barrera began professionalized training as an artist very early at public arts schools starting at eleven years old and is still dismantling and building on that education. Because of those resources, Barrera attended the Maryland Institute College of Art on a full scholarship and is an ardent supporter of debt cancellation. She lived in Baltimore for three more years after graduating, working in multiple museums, as a muralist, an educator, and an A/V technician. In 2014 she moved to New York City to support her partner through their MFA degree and worked sixty to seventy hour weeks as an Admissions Counselor for a private art university for four years. She quit to pursue her MFA at Hunter College.

Barrera has exhibited with Swivel Gallery, MAMA Projects, The National Academy of Design, Galeria del Barrio, Hauser & Wirth, the NARS Foundation, P.A.D. Gallery, Hunter East Harlem Gallery, and Old Stone House in New York City; Fullerton College and Lauren Powell Projects in Los Angeles, CA; Scott Charmin Gallery in Houston, TX; School 33 Art Center and Current Space in Baltimore, MD; and her work is in the collection of the Nepalese Academy of Fine Arts in Kathmandu, Nepal. Barrera is a Jacques and Natasha Gelman Trust Scholar, a Stanton Grant recipient, winner of a Robert Blackburn Printmaking Award, and has received funding and support from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Studio Arts Center International, the AICAD New York Studio Program, and the National Association of Women Artists, among others.

Barrera is based out of a studio she built out with a group of peers and is a College Assistant at the Hunter College Department of Art and Art History.

About mtn space gallery — Founded in 2020 by Melissa Delprete, mtn space is a contemporary art space located within a carefully renovated 1951 art deco cornerstone of Lake Worth Beach. Melissa and Gallery Director Tina Caso are committed to exhibiting emerging and established artists who are deeply rooted in their practice and whose work is informed by the greater global arts community. For information, updates, and to stay current on events, please join our mailing list at mtnspace.com/gallery or follow us on Instagram: @mtnspacegallery



Christina Barrera, *Blackstone Might Own Everything but They Can't Own Me! HA HA HA!*, 2024, pastel, charcoal, ink, and Flashe on mended paper, 60 x 47 inches