

ALEJANDRA ALMUELLE

CIRCULAR BODY



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MARCH 23 - MAY 9, 2024

AUSTIN, TEXAS

INQUIRY AS THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE

Throughout the development of Alejandra Almueller's work, the devotion to inquiry has been at its center: *Where are we? What are we? What does it mean to be human?* Forging resolutions to these questions is the catalyst for the development of self and of the value systems by which we choose to conduct our lives.

Inquiry is a point of departure and begins in bewilderment, with a sense of anomaly or incompleteness. The mind works to sort like with like, to discover the center of things and make sense of the world. Our struggle to understand is confounded by inadequate or contradictory concepts and systems which define our lives. Through deep introspection, we discover the corners do not match and the center does not hold, ultimately revealing the duality at the source: that we are beings composed of both light and darkness, terrestrial and celestial. The sacred and profane reflect our bodies on the planet and these bodies exist as a source of nurture and growth or exploitation and harvest.



Body of Aperture, 2024
Earthenware, thread, 108 x 96" dia.

Almueller's exhibition, *Circular Body*, establishes this inquiry as both the point of departure and the manifestation of return. Braiding material, symbol, and form, Almueller weaves a complex of relationships among nine discrete works. The show is structured as question and answer, call and response, and is both symbolic and immediate. Each element of the installation is the distillation of a question. Large discs form platforms carpeted in materials, deepening the meanings of Almueller's constructions. Circles and cycles give a wider context to the struggle to sustain life in systems, economic and otherwise, that see the human context as one to exploit.

In *Body of Uncertainty*, seven pale figures skirted in translucent resin stand on a broad disc of salt, each in a posture of quiet inquiry. Exquisitely detailed and delicately rendered, the bodies seem to incline toward something amorphous, arms positioned as if to point to or cradle something delicate as air. Thought dawning. The beginning of self. They are positioned facing outward, as if originating from the focal point of a circle. Natural light catches in the resin bases, like energy accumulating within, sending each figure on a journey of discovery. There is a subtle geometry here, each figure following its gaze implies a trajectory, a ray extending out from the center.

Circular Body does not lay an obvious path for the viewer. The installation is not sequential, not even circular. Within, there is a wandering and returning, as in life. Here the questing begins.

For Almueller, labor is life. As the hand forms the clay, the work forms the artist and the individual. Our work makes us—the hand, the eye—their expressions both in art and in the creation of sustenance for life. Again, revealing duality, labor is a thing of value, or of exploitation. In the exhibition's most overtly political expressions, *Body of Aperture* and *Body of Labor*, Almueller's subjects are milk and grain and how both are a necessity and a right, but also a currency subject to manipulation. Against a frame of darkness, *Body of Labor* is a batán, a Peruvian domestic grinding tool,



Body of Labor, 2024
Earthenware, porcelain, corn, 11 x 20 x 12"

placed on a field of corn. Added to the grinding stone is a child's head, eyes closed, looking inward. To implement this tool, one must take the form at the shoulders with both hands to crush the grain, rocking it across the base stone. Here Almueller asks us not only to acknowledge the back and forth necessary for sustenance from the earth, but also the give and take from each other in creating and consuming food. The grinding itself may represent awakening or exploitation. This is the interaction of the body with commerce.

Almueller asks how we sustain false assumptions and destructive practices that justify the reckless plundering of nature without regard to the consequences. *Body of Aperture* recalls Almueller's *Hungry Ghosts* from her 2018 show, *Journey*, which depicted milk flowing from both male and female forms. Now, the milk spills from non-specific sets of mammaries, implying the milk of all species. White threads plunge from the suspended teats like a tap recklessly left on. The waves and swirls made by the threads on the concrete floor have an art to them as if forming a sort of script that is yet indecipherable to us.

Body of Temporality is a spiraling of 1,200 graphite-coated ceramic imprints shaped by the negative space of a closed hand. This reciprocity of holding and releasing, giving and



Body of Becoming, 2024
Stoneware, gold leaf, charcoal, 84 x 30 x 8"

Cover Panel: *Body of Uncertainty*, 2024
Earthenware, resin, salt, dimensions variable

receiving, recognizes that boundaries are fluid as the self is created. The whorl of these dark graphite imprints on the floor contrasts with the spiraling threads of milk. The choice of graphite also connotes the layers of carbon in the earth representing life for milenia – and the peculiarly human practice of mark-making and writing. As such we are again posed with questions we are compelled to decipher.

Bisecting the gallery, suspended by filaments, 122 beeswax-coated plexiglass boomerangs form the vertebral *Body of Return*. This shape evokes both a spine and a boat, structures that support internal and external journeys. The path of a boomerang shares a geometry with the outbound and return flight of bees which fertilize the grains of all civilizations. In earlier works, Almueller has used the “boat” as a form representing the vehicle for transportation in early civilizations and metaphorically as a vehicle for discovery. Here, Almueller’s boat is not substantial enough to carry a person, rather it is the subjective traveler, the self that is a passenger, transported. The bee’s wax, as with the resin skirts of *Body of Uncertainty*, bring light into the piece, absorbing and holding it as potential.

Spinning clockwise at one revolution per minute, *Body of Record*, is a vertical, framed paper disc painted black on one side, left white on the other. The paper is pierced with hundreds of tiny openings introducing fractions of opposition onto the planes. Light penetrating the darkness, shadow penetrating the light. This fundamental duality of night and day informed the earliest human understanding of time and space, bringing the cosmos into the function of daily life.

Body of Time is composed of 24 paired gold and silver bowls. They arc across an earth scattered disc like a crescent phase of the moon, gathering and reflecting sunlight and moonlight. Like a sundial, it is horizontal, human captured, marking time celestial, geologic, and now, personal.

Three life-size, charcoal-sketched, and



Body of Return, 2024
Plexiglass, beeswax, filament, 96 x 96 x 12"

gold-faced forms compose *Body of Becoming*. As if in ascension, the light filled faces emerge first, complete, preceding the bodies only now coming into definition. Thought and form, male and female, corporeal and ethereal, all are expressed here as non-exclusive but simultaneous dualities. Barely elaborated sketches of bodies yet to form are vaguely visible behind the three. Encircling the heads, haloes of deep space replace the typical golden haloes of religious expression, instead granting the human form its golden aspect.

Previous Body contains the installation’s entirety in its most elemental expression. It stands symbolically as the point, the center of the circle. A pair of pelvic bones, one male, one female, are placed back-to-back, facing outward and forming the pedestal of a gold-filled bowl. This womb-like structure reflects potential for the divine, evoking the celestial, ancestry, and the life force that brought us into existence. Here is a place of rebirth. The materials speaking to structure and form, the bowl, again repeating the idea of the circle, of beginning and ending.

Circular Body stuns with immediacy and grace. The energy of the exhibition gathering, glowing, spinning, grinding, emerging, urges the viewer to awaken to the task of life and insists on acknowledging layers of meaning, of paradox, continuing the thought, the idea of the body within, the body without, and potential for transcendence.

This body of work reveals that it is the question that creates us, not its answer, returning us to the center of the cycle, the place of possibility. In each of the nine installations, Almueller never turns away from the complexity of the struggle for both an inner and external existence, the paradox and duality of human struggle. From grounding her work in the natural elements of earth, clay, and wax, to incorporating components of commerce (salt, corn, milk, and gold), to utilizing practical forms like bowls and grinding tools, Almueller speaks to what it is to be human.

Margaret Bentley is a writer, editor, and the director of The Wee House Residency program in Alpine, TX.

Alejandra Almuelle CV

SELECTED SOLO & TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *De Tierra*, Elisabet Ney Museum, Austin, TX
2022 *May You Open*, Prizer Arts and Letters, Austin, TX
Of the Land, Cloud Tree Studios and Gallery, Austin, TX
2021 *The Femme Abstract*, 979 Springdale Rd., Austin, TX,
curated by Moya McIntyre
2020 *Being*, Cloud Tree Studios and Gallery, Austin, TX
Trama y Urdimbre, Prizer Arts and Letters, Austin, TX
2018 *Journey*, 1300 E. 5th St, Big Medium, Austin, TX
2017 *The Silent Narrative of Things*, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX
2016 *Locus*, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *Clay Matters, Women & Their Work*, Austin, TX
2021 *The Many Shapes of Texas Clay*, Rockport Center for the Arts,
Rockport, TX
2020 *Flux: Resist, Persist, Release, Transform*, Walkers' Gallery, San
Marcos, TX
2019 *Ceramic Invitational Exhibition*, San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts,
San Angelo, TX
Expressions in Sculptures, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX
No Me Olvides, Big Medium, Austin, TX, curated by Fernando Muñoz
2018 *Ground Light Sound*, Cloud Tree Studios and Gallery, Austin, TX
OESTE 3: A Latino Collective Exhibit, La Peña, Austin, TX
Refigured: Radical Realism, Dougherty Arts Center, Austin, TX
2017 *Lone Star*, Hunt Gallery, Webster University, St. Louis, MO
Testigos/Witness: The International Women's Day Exhibition,
La Peña, Austin, TX
Secret Object, Cloud Tree Studio and Gallery, Austin, TX
2016 *ARTBASH*, Austin Art Alliance, Austin, TX
Birth: Rebirth, Elemental Origins, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX
Disparate Mythos: Women of Sculpture, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX
Naissance, Gallery 701, Long Center, Austin, TX
Narrative Offerings, Gallery Verde, San Angelo Museum of Fine
Arts, San Angelo, TX
Obra Gráfica: Selections From the Mexic-Arte Museum Print Collection,
Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX
OESTE: A Latino Collective Exhibit, La Peña, Austin, TX
The People's Gallery, City Hall, Austin, TX
2015 *Art of the Pot*, East Side Pot Shop, Austin, TX
Mix 'n' Mash: Lotería, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX
Nepantla, La Peña, Austin, TX
2014 *Women of the Serie Project*, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX
2013 *Estamos Aquí*, Serie Project, Greenbelt Cultural Center, North Chicago, IL
2010 *Harmonious Mud*, Poissant Gallery, Houston, TX
2009 *Fired Up*, Pump Project, Austin, TX
2008 *Just Been Fired*, Gallery Lombardi, Austin, TX
2007 *Change of Venue*, Poissant Gallery, Houston, TX
2006 *Vessels and Inspirations: Ceramic and Sculptural Works of Ishmael Soto*,
Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX

- 2004 *Latinoamericano*, Artemichi, Austin, TX
The Fine Arts of Ceramics, Guadalupe Arts Center, Austin, TX
2003 *Different Directions: Coming Together in Clay 3*, San Angelo Museum of
Fine Arts, San Angelo, TX
2001 *Texas Clay Festival*, Buck Pottery, Gruene, TX
2000 *Lengua de Vaca*, Ariel Dance and Theatre Company, Austin, TX
1999 *Latinoamericano*, Las Americas Gallery, Austin, TX
White Cloud/Green Rain, Ariel Dance and Theatre Company,
Austin, TX
1995 *Primitivism*, Koelsch Gallery, Houston, TX

RESIDENCIES

- 2019 Gaya Ceramic Art Center, Bali, Indonesia

SELECTED PRESS

- 2023 Thomas, Courtney. "Alejandra Almuelle's 'De Tierra' Dialogues with
Elisabet Ney's Classically-Inspired Busts", *Glasstire*, July 14, 2023.
2020 Barnes, Michael. "You gotta see this art: Alejandra Almuelle's
portentous porcelains", *Austin American-Statesman*, August 13, 2020.
2019 Faires, Robert. "The Critics Table's Grand Tales", *The Austin Chronicle*,
June 4, 2019.
2018 Redmond, Sean. "interview: Alejandra Almuelle", *Fields Magazine*,
April 20, 2018.
2017 Brenner, Wayne Alan. "Almuelle's 'The Silent Narrative of Things'
Speaks Loud in the Shadows", *The Austin Chronicle*, May 17, 2017.
2016 Brenner, Wayne Alan. "Alejandra Almuelle: Locus' at Dimension
Gallery", *The Austin Chronicle*, April 15, 2016.



Previous Body, 2020-2024
Earthenware, 23k gold leaf, 9 x 16" dia.



Body of Temporality, 2023
Earthenware, graphite, 96 x 65"

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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*Photographs by Essentials Creative and
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Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. Since 1978, Women & Their Work has created significant opportunities for artists and audiences to experience contemporary art through ambitious exhibitions, commissions of new work, performances and programs that inform audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 2,000 women artists, presenting 340 visual art exhibitions, 166 music, dance and theater events, 30 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 861 programs & education workshops with the goal of ensuring that diverse women artists are equitably represented in all forms of art. Women & Their Work helps meet an important need in Texas providing exhibition and performance opportunities and helping to attract critical attention to the work produced here; it is the only organization of its kind in the region and one of the few organizations in the United States that dedicates itself to the

work of women artists. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on *National Public Radio* and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2020, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art acquired the 42-year archive of Women & Their Work ensuring that our entire history of the work of women artists and our website will be preserved in perpetuity.



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