

LUIS BERMUDEZ

Sobre La Vida

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Opening reception:

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Luis Bermudez
El Interno, I-2, 1990
castable refractory with glazes
44 x 15 x 4 in. (111.8 x 38.1 x 10.2 cm)

“I come to my work, impelled to give tangible presence to the episodes in my life of peculiar intensity – the ones that announce their transcendence, and touch the common core of human experience.”

Venice, CA – L.A. Louver is proud to present sculpture by Luis Bermudez (1953-2021). This survey exhibition of work made between 1986 and 2014 demonstrates the artist’s lifelong preoccupation with the interconnected nature of place, identity, and materiality, and the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. Entitled *Sobre La Vida*, which translates to “About Life,” the presentation celebrates the creative developments of a beloved cultural figure, who was an influential force in the lives of artists both within and outside of Los Angeles throughout the course of his career as an artist, educator, and curator.

Bermudez’s aesthetic and philosophical vocabulary is embodied by the artworks of the *La Caja* series. Though differing in their unique textures and colors, the conceit of these works is the same: two complimentary forms poised on the cusp of interlocking engagement. Made from Bermudez’s distinctive, bespoke castable refractory – a material between cement and clay – these sculptures conjure a sensorial experience through their gritty, scaled, surfaces, and earthen coloration. The *La Caja* works consist of one ‘negative’ and one ‘positive’ element, evoking tension through a feeling of anticipated contact left unsatisfied. *Moksha, M-10*, a mossy-textured work from 1986, literally builds upon these engaged forms, crowned by a stepped vortex. Weighty and architectural, these works display sophisticated engineering of material and form. Existing as objects of positive and negative space, the sculptures evoke physical and metaphysical forces that evade language – a common thread throughout Bermudez’s oeuvre.

Vulnerable Offering and *Ultimate Offering* similarly embody tension and contrast as gentle, unglazed porcelain bowls balance atop winding reptilian bodies. Redolent of Pre-Columbian iconography and objects of religious ritual, these works emit a mystical aura. Other sculptures like *El Caracol, C6* of the *Sacred Structures* series illustrate the same reliquary quality: a delicate vessel (formed from a modified sake bottle) stands as a metaphor for the human figure, protected by a larger, stronger covering; every surface exquisitely textured. Bermudez intended for these works to be viewed from all sides, their physicality encouraging a performance of circumambulation.

In *Othila (Separation)* (2013-2014) of the *Runes* series and *El Cenote, C-3* (2006) of the *Sacred Places* series, Bermudez’s invitation to view from all angles endures. In addition to offering unique and phenomenological experiences, these sculptures present a metaphor for nonlinear time and narrative. Drawing on philosophical traditions, both ancient and modern outside of the Western perspective, Bermudez subverts the notion of prescribed interpretation



Luis Bermudez
Vulnerable Offering, 2004
ceramic and unglazed porcelain
30 1/2 x 9 x 9 in. (77.5 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm)



Luis Bermudez
Jumper, 1995-1997
castable refractory and earthenware with glazes
27 x 24 x 8 in. (68.6 x 61 x 20.3 cm)

and interaction despite their specific forms. Finding inspiration in both the natural world and his Mesoamerican heritage, these works are simultaneous representations of environmental sites and objects of transcendent, ancestral contemplation.

The ultimate fulfillment of Bermudez's interests in negative space, spiritual symbolism, experiential architecture, and environmental importance is accomplished in the immersive, room-sized *Sobre La Vida* (1993-1994). The installation is made of multiple facets including four walls punctuated by ceramic portals and paneless windows, a suspended yoyo-like *luna*, a tree fashioned in castable refractory and steel, and a human-scaled guardian figure whose silhouette is echoed in the doorway of the structure. Through its semi-abstracted forms and interactive nature, *Sobre La Vida* recreates and reframes our subjective experiences of perception and interaction through the presentation of a multiplicity of perspectives.

Bermudez's persistent quest to portray the interstitial seam of the subjective and universal is further demonstrated in the *La Cueva* and *La Cabeza* series. Wall-mounted, these works confront their viewer with faces existing at varying degrees of abstraction and representation, ranging from the melting, viscous-looking *La Cueva*, C-5 to the mirrored, iconographic symmetries of *La Cabeza (Duality)* to the zoomorphic states of Pre-Columbian deities seen in *La Cabeza (Alter Ego)* and *La Cabeza (Seeking)*. Perhaps the most striking of these mysterious, cephalic sculptures are those entitled *La Cabeza (Self Portrait)* in which Bermudez's head emerges from the mouth of a sharp-toothed creature. It is within these self-portraits that Bermudez lays explicit claim to his heritage, inserting himself within a lineage of artistic creation that gives form to the immaterial fabric of reality.

About the artist

A revered teacher and advisor, Bermudez held positions at several California Institutions including California State University, Northridge, the University of California, Los Angeles, and Otis College of Art and Design. He was as professor at California State University, Los Angeles, a position he held from 2002 until his untimely death in 2021. He is remembered by his students as a mentor who struck a potent balance between generosity and rigor, guiding them to hone their own skills and passion. Bermudez was recognized for his curatorial projects, notably the UCLA Ceramics Invitational of 1992, and worked with the Consulate General of Mexico to present *NEPANTLA DREAMS: Cal-Mex State L.A.* (2004-2005).

Bermudez's work has been shown at the Everson Museum of Art, the American Museum of Ceramic Art, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (today the Museum of Art and Design), and the Armory Center for the Arts, among others. His work is held in the permanent collections of institutions including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, the Crocker Art Museum, the Scripps College Ceramic Collection, and the Long Beach Museum of Art. Most recently, Luis Bermudez received acclaim for his inclusion in the Hammer Museum's 2023 biennial exhibition *Made in L.A.*