

Art Review: Diálogos on View at the Franklin Park Conservatory Gallery

SHARE Facebook Twitter Pinterest WhatsApp



"Madre Mente with Butterflies" — by Flama Calio Saari



Jeff Regensburger

July 18, 2022 7:40 pm

Amid the explosion of vibrant summer flowers, the larger-than-life animal topiaries, and the expansive collection of Chihuly glass, it can be perhaps a bit too easy to overlook the current art exhibition on view in the Franklin Park Conservatory's gallery space.

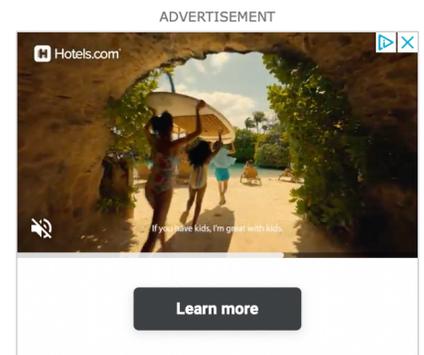
Don't.

It's fair to say that in many respects *Diálogos* (curated by Egle Gatins and Elena Osterwalder), matches the vibrancy and intensity of anything you'll see on the Conservatory grounds this summer. The exhibition features the work of seven Latinx artists, all doing spectacular work in their respective mediums and all presenting pieces that highlight their unique perspectives.

Curators Gatins and Osterwalder intend that the exhibition will invite conversations about the Latinx experience in the United States. Acknowledging that perceptions about art from Latin American often focus on crafts and folk art, the co-curators set out to redirect viewers to the rich fine arts tradition found therein. The results are as visually engaging as they are thought provoking. Taken together the pieces on view touch on themes of geography, migration, and our cultural and social histories.

Group shows can be unwieldy, especially when the work isn't explicitly tied together by a specific theme. That very unwieldiness though creates an opportunity for viewers to build connections between works; to find those threads that create cohesion from otherwise disparate elements.

Christian Casas' *ABC's* presents the Spanish alphabet as child's teaching tool, but with a focus on illustrations of anticolonial resistance. It's a piece that not only brings oft-ignored persons and stories to the fore, but also asks us to consider what we learn, when we learn it, and most importantly who does the teaching. With a reliance on traditional carving, splashy colors and child-like illustrations it offers a pitch perfect form of cultural subversion.





Left: Michaela de Vivero Red 2021 Gold leaf, wood, dyed sisal, acrylic paint, polyurethane. Right: Christian Casas ABC's (detail) 2021 - 2022 Pyrographed pinewood, dye.

This centering of colonization then serves to prime viewers to consider the inclusion of gold and gold leaf in the hand-made paper works of Michaela de Vivero. These distressed paper hangings suggest recently excavated ancient maps or scrolls, with the gold leaf highlights functioning as either a destination (the acquisition of gold being a prime driver of exploration on and colonization in the Americas) or perhaps as the kind of repair seen in the Japanese art of kintsugi. Like the ABC's of Casas', de Vivero's contributions to *Diálogos* remind us that indeed, "The past is never dead..."

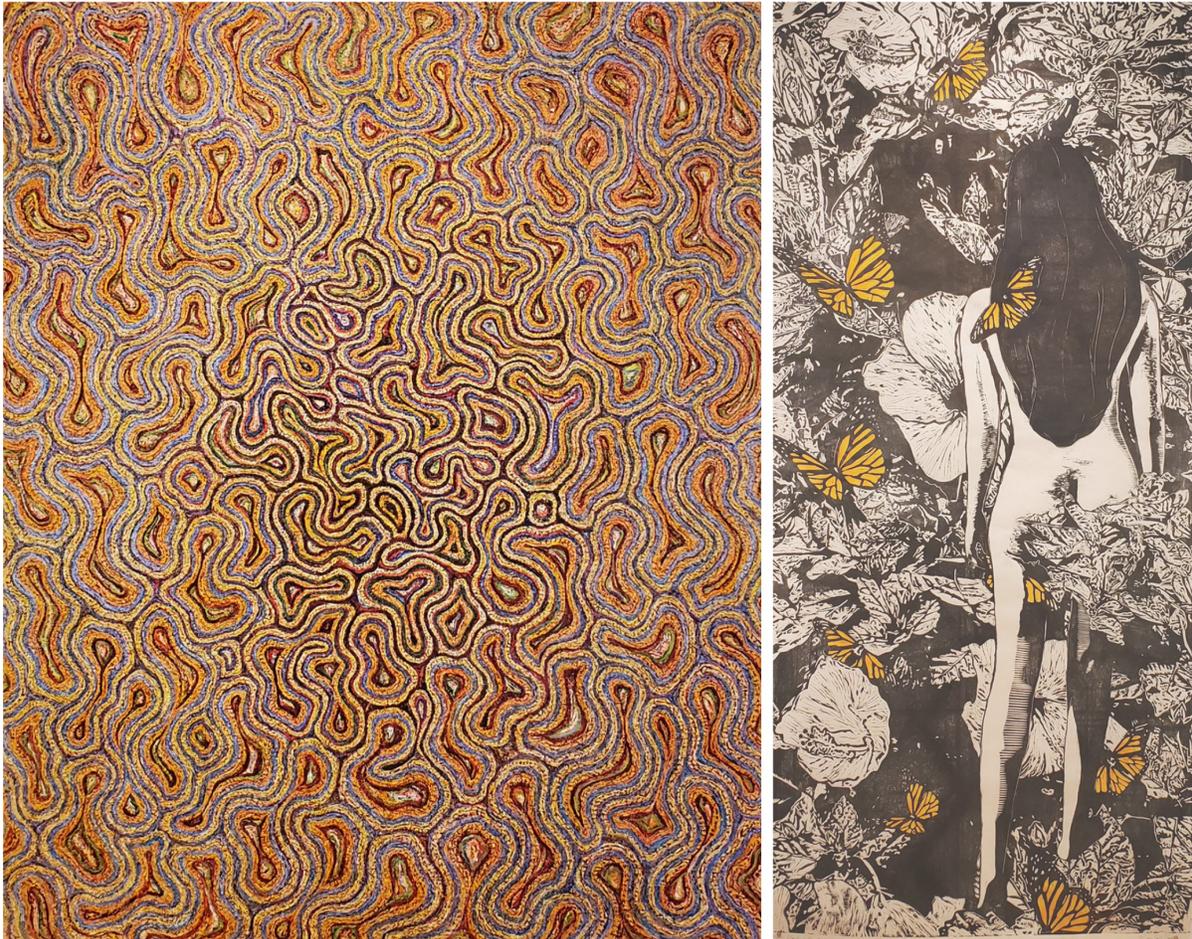
Maps, geographies, and journeys are themes that present themselves beyond the works of Michaela de Vivero. The artist Mabi Ponce de León states explicitly, "I explore what it feels like to 'be' from two places and belong to neither". This exploration is brought to viewers in *Axis Mundi*, a four-panel topographical mash-up of earth, sky, horizons, coastlines, borders, and maps. It's piece that serves to connect and weave together all those elements, while centering none.



Mabi Ponce de León 13°25'27"S 71°51'28"W 2022 Acrylic and mixed media on canvas

13°25'27"S 71°51'28"W similarly inhabits two distinct places and times. Ponce de León uses literal grid coordinates and illustrations of the Incan cross (Chakana) to transport viewers to central Peru while employing an application of paint that's reminiscent of Van Gogh or Monet.

A less literal form of exploration and topography can be seen in the paintings of Elsie Sanchez. While her works are abstract, there is a journey that's apparent in their execution. Like past cartographers, it's as if the artist is mapping and exploring something complex and not completely knowable. The edge-to-edge application of paint suggests too that whatever is being plotted is likely bigger than we can imagine.



Left: Elsie Sanchez *Entredós* 2021 Oil on canvas. Right: Elaina Calle Saari *Madre Monte with Butterflies* 2022 Woodcut on paper.

On the subject of journeys, it's impossible to reflect on the large-scale woodcut prints of Elaina Calle Saari without considering migration, immigration and the arbitrariness of political borders. Her inclusion of the monarch butterfly in many of her prints suggests a natural and persistent link between the United States and Central America that exists beyond political boundaries. These iconic butterflies serve as a compelling reminder then of what could exist if we were more willing to listen and more open to dialogues.

Diálogos is on view at the Franklin Park Conservatory through November 20, 2022. For more information visit: fpconservatory.org/exhibitions/dialogos/