Mario Ballesteros curates a group show of Mexican artists, designers, and makers at Friedman Benda in New York.

By Elizabeth Williamson

The work of Aldo Álvarez Tostado, Víctor Barragán, Frida Escobedo, Fernando Lapose, Pedro Reyes, SANGREE, Andres Souto, and more are brought together in the group show “Everything Here Is Volcanic” at Friedman Benda in New York. The exhibition is curated by the independent curator, editor, and researcher Mario Ballesteros, and is on view from January 12 to February 18, 2022.

Ballesteros selected a range of Mexican creatives and makers from around the country, working across mediums and categories. Playing with the idea of the traditional Mexican domestic sphere, where the kitchen is central and living spaces are communal, several new and commissioned works mark what may be several firsts in terms of objects shown in the gallery—things like a working grill or a horse saddle. Utterly unique interpretations of cultural imagery appear in mosaics, ceramics, stones, wood, leather, concrete, and even cactus, exemplifying the renegade interpretations of cultural imagery appear in mosaics, ceramics, stones, wood, leather, concrete, and even cactus, exemplifying the renegade interpretations of cultural imagery.

The horse saddle has these encrypted phrases from gay dating apps chiseled into the leather. The horse riding, but because he’s queer he turns them on its head a little bit. He left school and learned how to sew, and that’s when he really found his passion for fashion.

Mario Ballesteros: It started with a conversation with Marc Benda in New York. The exhibition is curated by the independent curator, editor, and researcher Mario Ballesteros, and is on view from January 12 to February 18, 2022.

MARIO BALLESTEROS: It started with a conversation with Marc Benda around two years ago. He was very interested in what was going on in Mexico and had this idea of doing something in the gallery related to Mexican design and contemporary material culture.

In Mexico, design is in an uncomfortable middle place where it’s not really considered a cultural sphere, so you don’t get all the support that other types of artistic practices get from the government or institutions. There’s something lacking in terms of support and context. At the same time, there’s an incredible creative energy. We have such a deep-rooted material culture of craft. I’ve always felt that my calling is to help get the word for younger talents to fulfill their potential here.

WHITEWALL: What was the starting point for this show at Friedman Benda?

MB: It was also important for it to be a group of artists that, even though they are quite young, are coming into their own very strong identity. They are developing a particular perspective in terms of materials, in terms of formal identity, and in terms of the way they understand what I like to call “mutant material culture,” because it’s really a mix of art, design, architecture, and fashion. I don’t think anyone in this show is comfortable with labels.

WW: What understanding of Mexico’s creative scene do you want visitors to walk away with?

MB: Most of those that are commissioned work for the show is work that these designers wouldn’t necessarily be able to produce if it wasn’t for an opportunity like the exhibition. I like playing with the idea of the typical living unit, which is something Hannes Meyer was interested in. If you go back to the first histories of living and dwelling in Mexico, you have a very different notion of home and what the center of the home is—you have single room units with the kitchen at the center, all of the domestic and social activities were exchangeable and there was a big communal aspect outside of the house. I like the idea of playing with this and thinking of what could be this new post-domestic space.

WW: What are some of the objects that were commissioned for the show?

MB: We have a beautiful lamp by Fernando Lapose—it’s going to be a showstopper. It’s a lamp that is going to be a conversation piece. We have a gorgeous horse saddle by Aldo Álvarez Tostado, from Guadalajara, that takes the masculine aesthetics of ranching culture and horse riding, but because he’s queer he turns it on its head a little bit. The horse saddle has these encrypted phrases from gay dating apps chiseled into the leather.

WW: What is the starting point for this show at Friedman Benda?

MB: We have some fantastic stone and ceramic sculptures from SANGREE, a really interesting young artist duo of sculptors from Mexico City that play with pre-Hispanic imagery, branding, and skate culture. We have a fantastic piece, which is a kitchen grill by Tezontle. I’m super excited about that piece. We have a beautiful ceramics and textile piece by Lorna Ancona, who is an artist from Quintana Roo in the Yucatán peninsula. Her studio is in the jungle, and she works with native cloths and natural pigments. She’s doing this beautiful beaded ceramic curtain that will be part of the show.

And then we have some really young, very radical pieces in the show. There’s a beautiful lamp by Fernando Lapose—it’s going to be a cactus skeleton with a real cactus structure and sculpted wooden leaves, and 3D-printed bulbs that look like blown glass.

WW: What was the starting point for this show at Friedman Benda?

MB: We’re playing with the fuzzy and difficult-to-pin-down conditions that are very present in Mexico and in the culture. We’re playing with concepts like ritual, like gathering, like dreaming. I hope that translates in that there’s a bit of wonder, there’s a bit of shock, there’s a bit of something very familiar and very homey. I hope that in everything together really transports you to that reality here.