

For Immediate Release:

# *Aliento corporal/Corporeal Breath*

Evan Dawson  
Lucia Garzón  
Joseph Lazaro Rodriguez  
Noemi Nieves-Hoblin  
José Ortiz Pagán  
Cesar Viveros

September 14 - October 12, 2024  
**Closing Celebration: October 12th 2-7pm**



“Another reason for reconsidering and the necessity of re-affirming the spiritual in art, or the spiritual possibilities of art, if you want to put it more modestly, is that we have not only not awakened from the nightmare of the materialistic attitude in art as well as society, but materialism has become a plague, indeed, the reigning ideology in both.” -Donald Kusbit, “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art”

Big Ramp is pleased to announce *Aliento corporal/Corporeal Breath*, a group show curated by William Schwaller that explores the interstices of the body and the spiritual in contemporary artistic practices. At a moment in time when culture is as secular and materialistic as it has ever been, the artists and the work in this exhibition offer timely reminders of the millenary relationship between art and spirituality. While materialism and capitalism are certainly omnipresent forces that artists rightfully and variously reject, the artists in the show are also exploring the spiritual dimension of artistic practice itself or turning to the spiritual in order to reclaim ancestral knowledge and beliefs that colonization and displacement sought to eradicate. Skeptical of earlier, postmodern parody and satire levied against organized religions or the capitalistic marketing of spiritual lifestyles by influencers, the artists in this show present their own earnest visual languages of individual and collective spirituality.

The artworks in this show are not just representations of religious or spiritual beliefs, these works function as or approximate the experience of spiritual objects, and thus relate or refer to the body. They are the products of meditative habits and are objects to be worn, touched, or manipulated. At the same time these works are rooted in contemporary aesthetic practices where unorthodox and meaningful material choices betray the hybridity of these objects and the transculturation at work in our globalized art communities. Joseph Lazaro Rodriguez’s colorful sculptures and wall pieces are engaged in a practice of care and devotion. The artist wraps biomorphic forms, sometimes resembling body parts, with surgical netting and colorful compression bandages. For Rodriguez, these abstract compositions serve similar functions as folk retablo shrines and ex-voto paintings: to honor and commemorate miraculous events or spiritual intercessions. The altar is similarly an archetype within Cesar Viveros’s small and large scale sculptures. His work reclaims both the subjects and forms of indigenous Mexican and Mesoamerican cultures and their functionality as altars or

censers, which may be activated and adorned for ceremonial events. Noemi Nieves-Hoblin draws upon her Puerto Rican cultural heritage in the production of contemporary vejigante masks as a means of exploring the complexities of cultural and racial identity and the impacts of colonization, which in the case of the vejigante is intertwined with Christianity's coercion of indigenous peoples and crafts. Puerto Rican culture and spiritual practices are also at the core of José Ortiz Pagán's work. His *Barreras* series act as reliquaries in the form of sea urchins. These works remind us that reliquaries, shrines, and ex-votos are all vehicles for narrative, they tell the stories of those who made them. Here the reliquaries' content are not so much powerful spiritual objects, but materials that speak to the histories and difficulties of Puerto Ricans on Borinquen and across their peregrinations and displacements. Lucia Garzón mines the iconography and DIY aesthetic of home shrines and altars. Garzón's meticulously and whimsically crafted rug exemplifies her capacity to imbue humble objects and materials with significance that is, perhaps, only known to her and her family. Echoing the purposeful, and yet playful, material decisions of all the artists, Evan Dawson's works derive from the artist's desire to create habits and routines that result in a studio practice of regularly making work with readymade materials from his daily life, but that also generates a meditative and quasi-spiritual practice.

### **Artist Bios:**

**Evan Dawson** is a Philadelphia based interdisciplinary artist. His work has also been seen across Philadelphia at High Tide, Little Berlin, Mascher Space, Pilot Projects and Atelier Gallery in Philadelphia; The Columbus Museum of Art and Sculpture Center, in Ohio; Microscope Gallery and Art in Odd Places in New York City. He has also shown internationally in Nepal and Thailand. Evan holds an MFA in Sculpture and Expanded Media from The Ohio State University.

**Lucia Garzón** is an interdisciplinary artist working in a range of media including wood, textiles, print, and video. Lucia graduated from Tyler School of Art in 2018 with a BFA in printmaking. The main themes in Lucia's work focuses on the intersection between personal identity and immigrant values. Lucia was awarded the Joseph Roberts Foundation grant in 2019 along with a solo show at Da Vinci Art Alliance. Lucia has been an apprentice at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, attended Acre Residency, and was an artist in residence at University of the Arts ILab. Lucia currently lives and works in Philadelphia.

**Joseph Lazaro Rodriguez** is a Cuban-American, multidisciplinary artist. He uses his personal experiences and broad range of styles and mediums to create paintings, drawings, sculptures, and large scale multi-channel video installations. He studied at Pratt Institute and received an MFA from The Pennsylvania Academy of The Fine Arts in 2019. Rodriguez exhibited work at The National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia and recently had his first museum solo exhibition in 2022 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. He has also presented works at The Wassaic Project in Wassaic, NY, Anna Zorina Gallery, NYC, Regular Normal Gallery, NYC, Gross McCleaf Gallery, GrizzlyGrizzly and Works on Paper Fine Arts Gallery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and is privately collected. Rodriguez received a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Nursing, and worked as a critical care nurse in large urban hospitals focusing on cardiothoracic and heart transplant surgical populations in tandem with his studio practice before retiring in 2017. He resides and works out of his studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Noemi Nieves-Hoblin** is a Philadelphia based artist who began working in glass at Tyler School of Art and Architecture, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in glass in 2024. Her work utilizes glass as a canvas for narrative sculpture, inspired by personal mythopoetic stories that are passed down orally. She uses glassblowing, frameworking and stained-glass processes to create work that references the natural world and familial histories.

**José Ortiz Pagán**, a Puerto Rican multi-disciplinary artist based in Philadelphia, is renowned for his dedication to using art as a powerful tool to address social issues. Throughout his career, he has initiated community art projects in the city, aiming to preserve cultural presence and empower individuals and communities. Within his process is embedded the use of radical imagination and hope as strategies for change. Ortiz-Pagán employs spirituality as a means of resistance, creating meaningful experiences that honor and validate diverse communities within various diasporas. José Ortiz-Pagán's significant contributions have been recognized through prestigious awards such as the NALAC Catalyst for Change Fellowship and the Artworks grant from the Philadelphia Foundation and the Forman Arts Initiative. His artwork has been featured in various exhibitions worldwide, including the Trienal Poligráfica in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the International Printmaking Biennial in Taiwan ROC, and the Bronx Latin American Biennial.

**Cesar Viveros** is an artist born in Veracruz, Mexico. With more than 25 years of experience creating public art in the United States and Mexico, he has been collaborating with the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program since 2000. His public work is inspired by the communities he has worked with, and when exhibiting his "personal" work, Cesar likes to do so in public settings. Here, people interested in syncretism studies, Mexican immigrants seeking to reconnect with their origins, researchers of vanishing cultural heritage, Hispanic people curious about typical Mexican ancient celebrations that may differ from those in other countries, or the general public interested in celebrations that define cultures can find a source of firsthand experience on pre-Columbian and "mestizaje" periods seen through the eyes of an indigenous artist. Food justice workshops, sweat lodge ritual practices, Aztec dances and ceremonies, large-scale as well as miniature altars for Day of the Dead celebrations, sculptures and reliefs, fresco painting, mosaic, and featherwork are some of the signature elements of his work outside of murals.