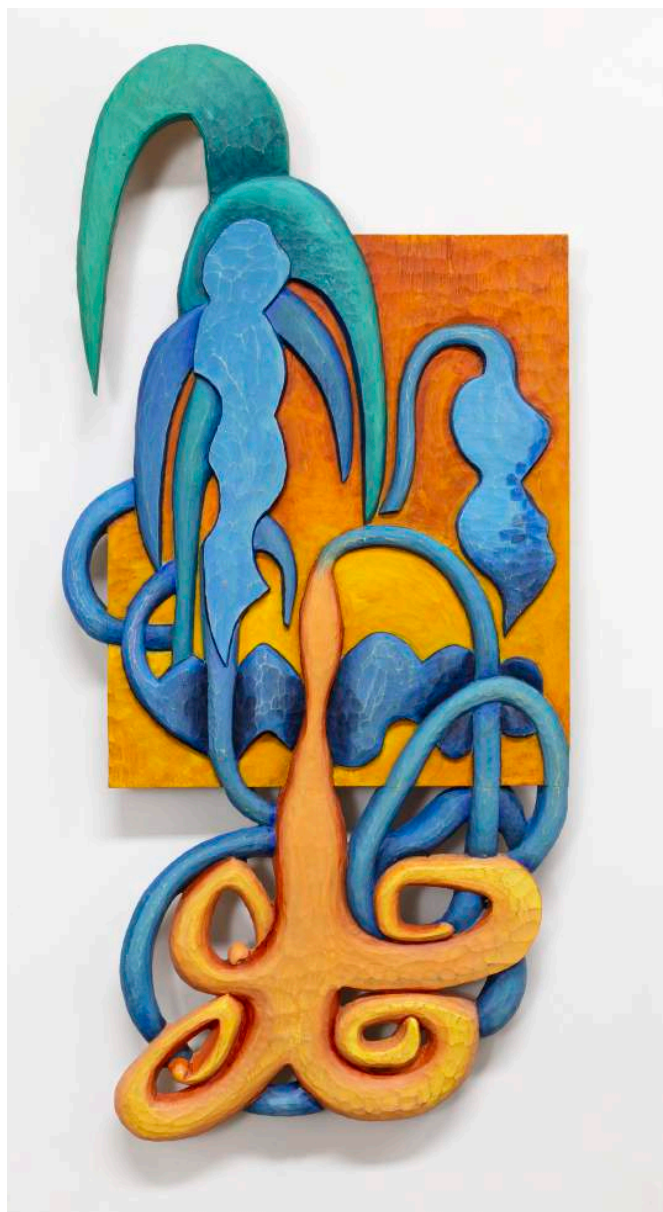


**Dürst Britt  
& Mayhew**



# **Art | Basel** **Miami Beach**

**6 - 10 December 2023**

**Booth P09**

**Alejandra Venegas**

# Dürst Britt & Mayhew

For our first participation in Art Basel Miami Beach Dürst Britt & Mayhew is proud to present a solo exhibition by Mexican artist **Alejandra Venegas**, comprising of wood carvings and a site-specific wall painting, which will envelop the viewer with a surreal landscape.

**Alejandra Venegas** hand carves landscape scenes and natural motives from various sorts of wood native to Mexico, after which she colours them with gouache or oil. Uniting the natural, warm tones of the wood with stridently bright shades is a contrast she actively seeks for. Incorporating the natural irregularities of the wood makes it much more than just a panel to paint on and gives the work a definite sculptural character. For Venegas, these works have therefore become a meeting place between painting, sculpture and drawing, but also between nature and culture, the exterior and the interior.

The insistent tapping of the gouges on the block of wood is essential to give it shape, a task that generates different rhythms and points of concentration in Venegas' work. For the artist, carving is a process of unveiling what each block of wood contains, therefore, each relief is the result of that discovery. Sculpting the surface allows the revelation of memory within nature, its perceptions and its testimonies; discovering the colour, aroma, texture and direction of the wood grains and knots is an important part of her relationship with the material.

The theme of her pieces is linked to her vision of natural phenomena, the climate and the seasonality of the upper zone of Xochimilco (on the southern outskirts of Mexico City), where she lives and works. Throughout her outings around Xochimilco, Venegas carefully observes the language of the plants and animals that surround her, and as part of these observations, the motifs of her reliefs emerge: seeds that sprout from the earth, plants and flowers, grasshoppers and other animals that surround the area, rain, the sun and their influence on the transformation of the landscape. But she also uses certain ornamental figures such as the spiral that symbolizes expansion and growth.

As all the works in the presentation are hand carved they bring the viewer into closer contact with a craft that is not that obvious anymore in our contemporary society. Moreover Venegas's pieces present us with scenes that make us gaze longingly at an idea of nature that is disappearing from urban life, but which, if we look closely, is still there.

# Dürst Britt & Mayhew

**Alejandra Venegas** (1986, Mexico City) studied Visual and Plastic Arts at La Esmeralda in Mexico City. Recent solo and duo exhibitions include 'Nubada' at Proyectos Monclova in Mexico City, 'Downpour' with Alex Farrar at Madragoa in Lisbon, 'Al Cerro Irradiante' at Kubikulo in Porto, 'Frequently the woods are pink' with Paul Beumer at Dürst Britt & Mayhew, 'Cavar estanques y amontonar montañas' at Casa Santa Maria de Fundación Casa Wabi.

Recent group exhibitions include 'Earth, a collective landscape' at the AkzoNobel Art Foundation in Amsterdam, 'Bitácoras' at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Querétaro in Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico 'What the moon can tell you has been said by the sun' at Dürst Britt & Mayhew, 'Bailando en la oscuridad' at Karen Huber Gallery in Mexico City, 'Luego, la forma' at GAM Gallery in Mexico City, 'Quality Time' at Proxycoco Gallery in New York, 'Courage! Near infra red' at Galeria Rinomina in Paris and 'Hacer una Isla' with BWSMX at Ruberta in Los Angeles.

In 2023 Venegas was a resident artist at Fundación Ama Amoedo in Uruguay and in 2018 at Casa Wabi in Oaxaca. In 2014 she was selected for the XVI Biennial Rufino Tamayo and in 2016 for the Biennial UNAM of Visual Arts. In 2013 and 2015 she received the FONCA Jóvenes Creadores scholarship. In 2023 she received the Premio Tequila 1800 Colección.

Work by Venegas is held in private and public collections, including the Roche collection in Basel, the AKZO Nobel Art Foundation in Amsterdam, the Tequila 1800 Colección in Guadalajara and the Fundación ARCO in Madrid.

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# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

Blanca doble, 2023

hand-carved relief on cedar wood, gouache and wax

30.98 × 14.37 × 2.17 in

78.7 × 36.5 × 5.5 cm

US\$ 6.000,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs

# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

Fila de Jacarandas, 2023

hand-carved relief on cedar wood, gouache and wax

33.35 × 17.72 × 2.17 in

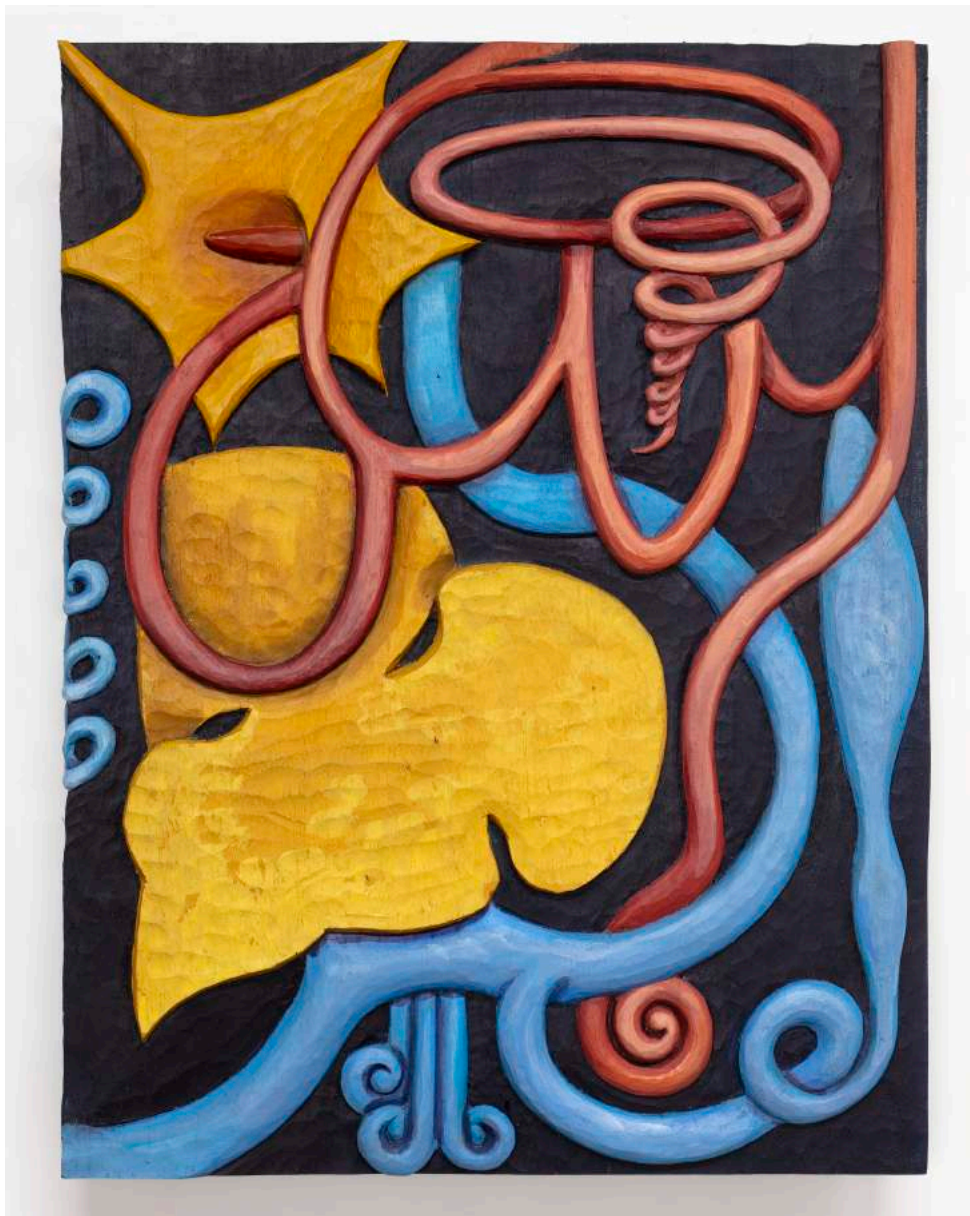
84.7 × 45 × 5.5 cm

US\$ 7.000,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs



# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

Chilacayota, 2023

hand-carved relief on cedar wood, gouache and wax

16.93 × 13 × 2.17 in

43 × 33 × 5.5 cm

US\$ 4.000,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs

# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

El Cedro, 2023

hand-carved relief on cedar wood, gouache and wax

23.62 × 11.42 × 2.17 in

60 × 29 × 5.5 cm

US\$ 5.000,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs



# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

La lluvia rodeó el jardín, 2022

Diptych of hand-carved reliefs on walnut wood, gouache and wax

23.62 × 28.74 × 2.36 in

60 × 73 × 6 cm

US\$ 8.000,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs



# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

Agua que aflora, 2022

hand-carved relief on walnut wood, gouache and wax

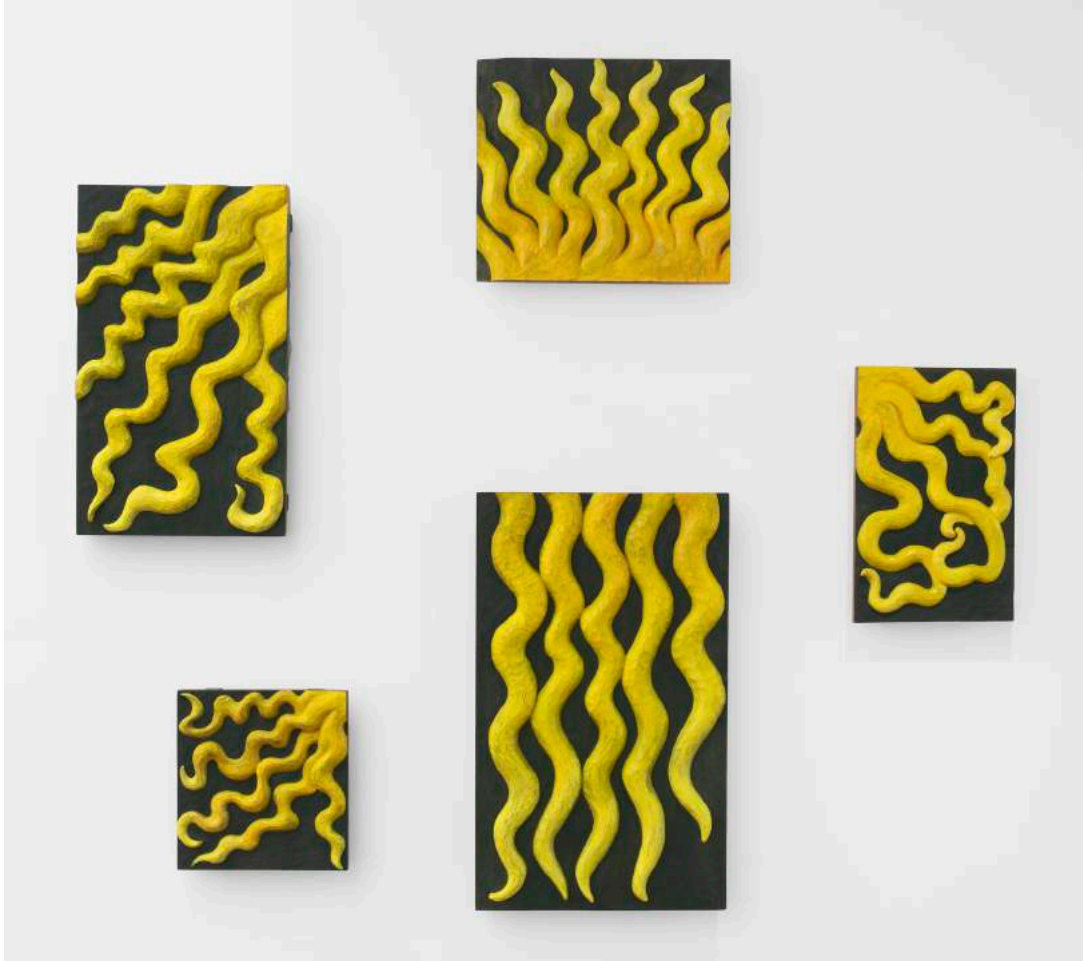
19.69 × 35.43 × 2.36 in

50 × 90 × 6 cm

US\$ 8.500,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs

# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



## Alejandra Venegas

Sol, 2022

Polyptych of 5 hand-carved reliefs on walnut wood, gouache and wax

48.03 × 52.95 × 2.56 in

122 × 134.5 × 6.5 cm

Important: The pieces can be arranged in different positions

Dimensions (each):

1) 19.69 × 11.81 × 2.56 in / 50 × 30 × 6.5 cm

2) 12.60 × 14.37 × 2.56 in / 32 × 36.5 × 6.5 cm

3) 14.45 × 9.06 × 2.56 in / 36.7 × 23 × 6.5 cm

4) 10.24 × 9.65 × 2.56 in / 26 × 24.5 × 6.5 cm

5) 23.62 × 14.37 × 2.56 in / 60 × 36.5 × 6.5 cm

US\$ 16.000,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs

# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

Albor, 2022

hand-carved relief on Xiloxochitl wood, gouache and wax

24.09 × 17.91 × 1.97 in

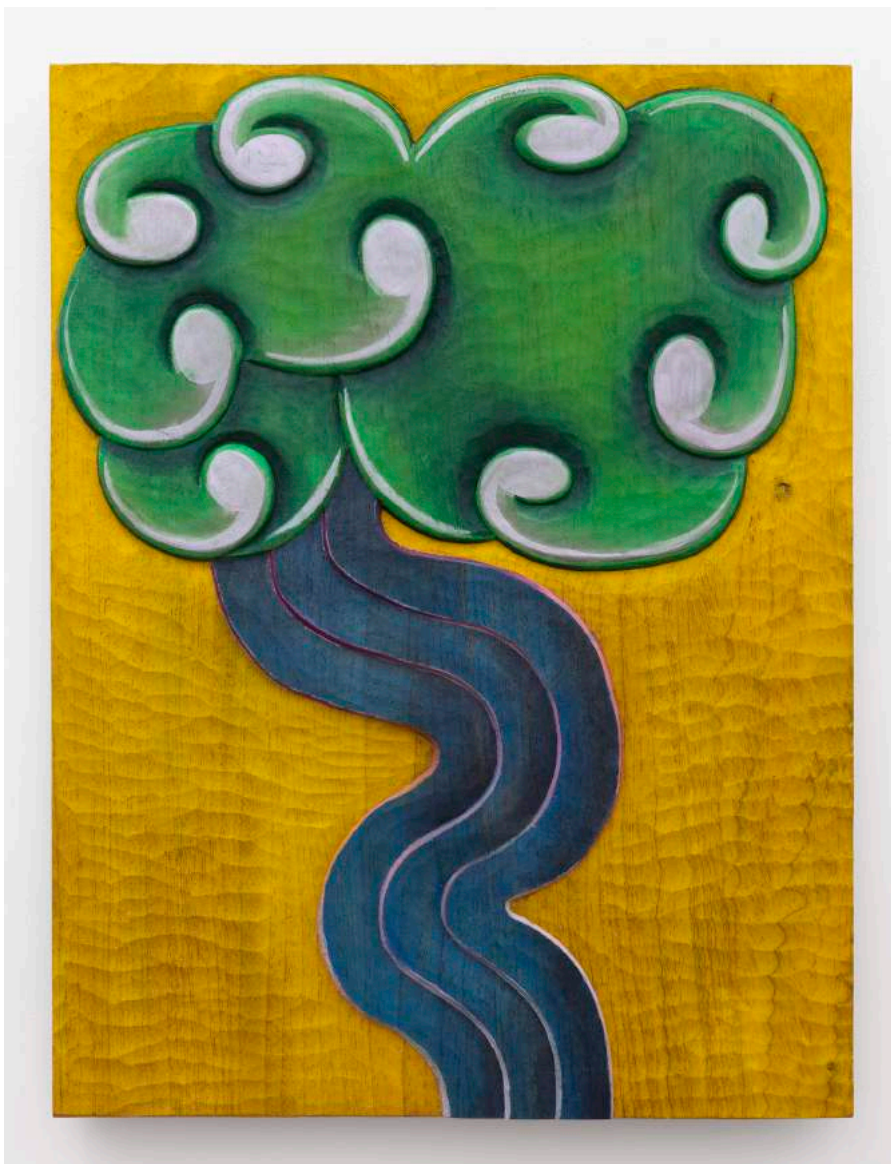
61.2 × 45.5 × 5 cm

US\$ 5.500,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs



# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



**Alejandra Venegas**

Nubada árbol, 2022

Hand-carved relief on Xiloxochitl wood, gouache and wax

23.43 × 17.91 × 1.97 in

59.5 × 45.5 × 5 cm

US\$ 5.500,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs



# Dürst Britt & Mayhew



## **Alejandra Venegas**

Isla, 2020

hand-carved relief on white cedar wood, gouache and oil

13.78 × 9.72 × 1.77 in

35 × 24.7 × 4.5 cm

US\$ 3.200,-

Price excludes applicable VAT and possible transport and installation costs

## Radiant moments

A conversation between Alejandra Venegas and Alexander Mayhew

Over the past few years you have become well-known for your intriguing wood reliefs. At Art Basel Miami Beach you are now also showing polyptychs. This seems to be a new direction. What is the reason for making these?

**In 2018 I started making wood reliefs as an expansion of my painting practice. To be able to integrate painting and sculpture in my work has a transdisciplinary intention. I try to cross or dissolve these boundaries, to move between them in a rhythm that comes and goes. The sculptural work offers me tools to experience painting from another direction, in relation to volumes and textures. In turn, painting brings a universe of strokes, gestures, rhythms, and approaches to bring colour to the sculptural work.**

**In working with reliefs, I question the relationship between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional. This thought led me to also start developing polyptychs, modular pieces that offer different possibilities of spatial integration and scale. This compositional play offers potential for new narratives.**

In your presentation at Art Basel Miami Beach we see carvings made from three different kinds of wood: walnut, cedar and xiloxochitl. Can you tell us how you choose your woods and what are the differences between the woods you use?

**The decision has mainly to do with a process of coexistence with the material. In my studio, I keep many pieces of wood from different sources, which I observe methodically and regularly. Sometimes one of them catches my attention because of certain characteristics or because I sense a certain narrative in its presence, and that is when I decide to work with a particular piece.**

**It is always interesting to have the experience of working with different woods, each one with its peculiarities. It is not like a blank canvas, wood has memories and that is one of my starting points.**

**Some woods are carriers of particular stories that can be related to my family background or to the places where I live or walk. Others are recycled, more anonymous and even strange, but in their characteristics I discover new narrative possibilities.**

**Sometimes it is like talking to someone close to me, and sometimes it is like talking to a stranger. This relationship is not only about capturing**

my intentions in the material, but also about paying attention to its marks, pre-existing traces, knots, shapes, hardness, malleability, resonance, etc.

My approach to materials is quite varied and experimental, and many of the decisions are made in the process and through persistent observation.

For the colours you use either gouache or oil. Are there instances when you specifically choose either gouache or oil?

It has always seemed to me that gouache, although it is a material almost in disuse, has a beautiful intensity, coverage and a certain tendency to opacity that, in relation to wood, impregnates a natural quality.

A large part of my work is devoted to drawing and painting. Before the carved reliefs, I did an extensive series of drawings on large-format rice paper in ink and gouache. In the transition from working on paper to carving wood, I found it interesting to use the same material to give colour to the relief, as a way of giving continuity and connecting the two disciplines.

There are certain hard woods like ciricote or huanacaxtle, that do not absorb water-based materials as gouache due to the amount of resin they emit, so I use oil instead. Often the choices I make in terms of materials have a very practical sense, almost a nod to a certain functionality. Each piece has specific processes and characteristics.

In the booth you have also created a site-specific wall drawing. You have made one before in a collector's house. Can you tell us about the process of making a wall drawing and how it relates to your wood carvings? Does it also relate to the tradition of Mexican muralism in any way?

Drawing is the basis of my work. I like to work with the immediacy and spontaneity of drawing in contrast to the long processes of working with wood. Drawing is always at hand and it is a fertile ground in which many ideas grow, transiting into the three-dimensional or pictorial. In these transitions and translations of scale and materiality, I am interested in the power of the relationship between body and line. My work strongly reflects the landscape and it is always important to work with different scales – a mural is an ideal medium for that. I develop compositions that tend towards a certain openness and spatial expansion, while at the same time using methods of observation that refer to a very close, almost microscopic view.

In my native context, the relationship to muralism is inevitable, but I am interested in thinking beyond the 20th century Mexican muralist

movement, headed by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. I look to earlier references, such as the frescoes in pre-Hispanic temples like Teotihuacan or Cacaxtla. Also the 'Tequitquin art', in which the iconographies and techniques of European art are fused with the indigenous ones. An example of this are the 16th century frescoes in the monastery of San Agustino de Malinalco, in the state of Morelos, Mexico.

Are you influenced by any Latin American artists or do you consider yourself to be working in a specific Mexican tradition?

**I do not feel exclusively tied to one tradition; many of my references come from different times and contexts. In my processes and research I am in dialogue with them in different ways. Like many artists in Mexico, I am very influenced by pre-Hispanic art, its sculpture, ceramics, murals, all its artistic expressions. At the same time, I am influenced by the artisanal work that is done throughout the country, in woodwork such as furniture, masks, toys, but also in the production of ceramics or textiles. I look at artists such as Mardonio Magaña, Feliciano Mejia, the wood reliefs of Abraham Jimenez Lopez, the paintings of Chucho Reyes Ferreira and Adolfo Best Maugard. But I also think of Jean Arp's or Paul Gauguin's wood reliefs, the Japanese Ema wood plaques, the poster designs of Kiyoshi Awazu, or popular culture designs of the 80s and 90s like those of Lisa Frank. And then I also turn to the drawings of the monk Sengai Gibon, the paintings of Joan Mitchell, Vivian Suter, Hilma af Klimt and Sonia Delaunay, the tapestry of Dom Robert, folk art in wood from all over the world, botanical illustrations or even decorative motifs in architecture and design objects.**

Since 2018 your works have been shown not only in Mexico, but also in Brazil, the United States, France, The Netherlands, Switzerland and Portugal. Can you explain the appeal of your work to people from so many different cultural backgrounds?

**Although my imagery arises from my experience of immersion in a specific territory, the place where I grew up and where I currently live, I believe that many of the elements I depict find symbolic echoes in the human being. The same happens with colour.**

**At the same time, it seems to me that the subject matter transcends issues of identity. The manual work with wood is a technique that has manifested itself in different contexts and territories. The first objects made by human beings were made of wood, there is a primitive**



relationship with this material. Its symbolic powers inevitably speak to us. Finally, in one way or another, my work is sensitive to musings about the duality between nature and culture, and this questioning transcends borders.

Can you talk us through one or two particular works on show at Art Basel Miami Beach?

‘El Cedro’ is a portrait of a particular tree. A cedar that is near the road that goes up the mountain. It is alone, there is no other tree around. It is very big, it must be very old. It has been there all my life. If you go up to it, there are some big rocks underneath, and you can sit on them and from this top see all of Mexico City in the distance, and it actually looks static, like nothing important is happening down there.

I am also fond of using toponyms as a point of departure and titles for my work. Within Mexico City, many places retain their original Nahuatl names from pre-Hispanic times. Some of these names were determined by the physical characteristics of the landscape. Over time, the city has grown and altered these original landscapes. Rivers have been channeled, and fields are now covered by avenues, houses, and buildings. ‘Agua que aflora’ is one of these toponymic names, pronounced Axochco in Nahuatl, and refers to a place where water springs from. I like the poetic character of the name. Imagining water blossoming made me create a triptych where flowers seem to grow straight from the water.

When people have seen your work, what would you like for them to remember or take away from the experience?

I would like for my works to cause a temporary pause. For people to adopt a certain caring attitude, a kind of reflection on one’s own gaze, which I also employ myself in the process of observing and representing what surrounds me. My works relate to experiencing a radiant present moment, while at the same time investigating that moment in the light of one’s memories.

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Alexander Mayhew is co-owner of Dürst Britt & Mayhew and first saw Alejandra Venegas’ work in 2019 in the group exhibition ‘Luego la Forma’ at Galería de Arte Mexicano (GAM) in Mexico City. After inviting Alejandra that same year to make her first solo exhibition ‘Timicho’ in the front space of the gallery, Dürst Britt & Mayhew started representing her in 2020.