

CARLOS
MOTTA

SEPTEMBER 16 – DECEMBER 30, 2022

YOUR
MONSTERS,
OUR
IDOLS

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HD video with color and sound, 16 min.

Courtesy of the artists and P-P-O-W, New York. Supported by the
Wexner Center for the Arts and the Goethe-Institut Bogotá.

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FOREWORD
Megan Cavanaugh &
Kelly Stevelt



This fall, we are thrilled to present two groundbreaking exhibitions organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts, *Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols* and *Sharing Circles: Carol Newhouse and the WomanShare Collective*. In different ways, both presentations demonstrate the Wex's importance as a laboratory for art and ideas—one that brings together diverse communities to explore our common entanglement as cohabitants of a shared world. We draw inspiration from the featured artists, whose work delves deeply into histories and herstories of queer and feminist resistance, drawing attention to lives and legacies overlooked by the official record- and gatekeepers. Animated by a spirit of defiant optimism, these exhibitions teach us to value difference in all its guises and to trust in the power of collective self-determination, even in the face of seemingly immovable systems of domination and oppression. The artists' faith in the power of communal engagement is a tonic, and one from which we have so much yet to learn.

The largest US exhibition by Carlos Motta to date, *Your Monsters, Our Idols* is a focused solo presentation of the artist's genre-defying and often multi-authored projects that affirm art's unique capacity to interweave past, present, and future. The exhibition also furthers the Wex's mission to foreground the lived experiences of marginalized communities—celebrating myriad and multifaceted forms of gender, sexuality, racial and ethnic identity, and even those exploring the barriers between species. This is represented in Carlos Motta's Wex Artist Residency Award project, *The Columbus Assembly*, which epitomizes what our residency program endeavors to accomplish: supporting artists in exploring new media and modalities while facilitating peer-to-peer dialogue with campus and community partners. We thank curator Lucy I. Zimmerman for the tireless work she and her team—including research assistant Indigo Gonzales Miller and graduate intern Arielle Irizarry—have put into realizing this singular exhibition.



Installation view of *We Got Each Other's Back Chapter 1: Narrative Shifter: A Portrait of Julio Salgado* (2019) in Carlos Motta: *Your Monsters, Our Idols*



The Conquest is a history of silences /
It subordinates the body / And reduces
desire to ashes.

—Carlos Motta, *Nefandus*

Earlier this year a wave of so-called “Don’t Say Gay” bills flooded state legislatures across the United States aiming to prohibit in public schools the teaching and discussion of LGBTQIA+ history, gender identity, and queer sexuality. Florida’s bill banning such discussion through third grade was signed into law on March 8, 2022; Ohio’s version, House Bill 616, promises to go further, potentially extending the ban through high school.¹ A high school student from Georgia—another state considering such legislation—commented on its impact: “Making LGBTQ history secretive causes people to fear it, like it’s a monster. If the government thinks it’s bad, shouldn’t I?”² Such bans join a list of more than three hundred bills targeting transgender people, proposing to bar them from playing on sports teams, or to prosecute parents who support gender-affirming care for their children.

The work of the Colombian-born, New York-based artist Carlos Motta situates these attacks on LGBTQIA+ people within a longer history of the repression of queer and ethnic minorities, while looking equally to the ways that such minorities have resisted oppression. In both cases, looking to the past is seen as a critical activity, one that illustrates the intuition of the German critic Walter Benjamin, who wrote that “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.”³

The exhibition *Your Monsters, Our Idols* gathers a selection of works spanning nearly three decades from Motta’s prolific career. It draws out two major themes in his practice. The first argues that norms of gender and sexuality have been prescribed and limited by colonialism; the second explores critiques of democracy from the perspectives of marginalized communities. Both themes address past and present operations of power. Yet Motta’s work extends beyond simply revealing the workings of these oppressive systems. Through producing alternative archives and composing counternarratives, often in collaboration with other artists, activists, and thinkers, he amplifies visions of radical alterity—that is, liberated forms of expression imbued with self-determination and sovereignty that resound with difference.

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What, in Motta’s practice, does radical alterity look like? What forms does it take? Echoing the French philosopher Michel

Foucault, it often takes the form of monsters: creatures that represent the impossible and forbidden.⁴ As Foucault argued in his 1974–75 lectures on biopolitics at the Collège de France, “The monster is a fundamental figure around which bodies of power and domains of knowledge are distributed and reorganized.”⁵ The scholars Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai expanded on this claim in 2002, arguing that monstrosity can be understood as “a regulatory construct of modernity that imbricates not only sexuality, but also questions of culture and race.”⁶ Both ideas are central to Motta’s thinking and artmaking. Monsters are dangerous because they resist categorization; they exceed the legal and moral rubrics of what is acceptable, and even intelligible. Motta’s work therefore reveals how the figure of monstrosity represents a colonial encounter with otherness, but also claims monstrous identities as a way of asserting power and rejecting the imposition of normative values.

The exhibition’s initial gallery shows this idea at work. Across different artworks, it addresses the determining influence of colonialism and Christianity on the lives of minorities. The exhibition’s title is drawn from the short video *Nefandus* (2013), which engages colonial archives. In the video, a boat travels down a river, camera surveying a verdant jungle and the flow of water. Two men—one speaking in Spanish, the other Kogi, an indigenous Colombian language—narrate how acts of sodomy (*pecados nefandos*, abominable crimes) were stigmatized by Europeans, and even weaponized by colonizers against Native inhabitants. A hand submerges a 16th century print depicting a grisly scene—conquistadors commanding their dogs to attack Indigenous people accused of sodomy—into a rocky shoal. *Nefandus* thereby ponders what is unthinkable or unrecoverable about this past, and dreams of an understanding of precolonial sexuality not shaded (or eclipsed) by a European worldview.

Western archives were never intended to preserve the lives of people relegated to the margins, Motta’s work claims—but archival omissions offer opportunities to unsettle given narratives. In *Corpo Fechado—The Devil’s Work* (2018), for example, Motta echoes the practice of critical fabulation in the work of the American writer and scholar Saidiya Hartman, by offering agency and voice to a historical individual to whom they were denied. Motta’s video draws out the story of José Francisco Pereira, a West African man enslaved in Brazil and later Portugal, whose presence is preserved in criminal records of the Portuguese Inquisition in the 18th century, where he is accused of witchcraft for creating *bol/sas de mandinga* (amulets), personal “rituals of salvation,” intended to protect the maker from evil and injury.

Played by Paulo Pascoal, Pereira is called to speak. “My body is scarred by forced labor, by punishment, by labels: Black man, slave, African, sodomite, sorcerer, exiled, legal case, object of

¹ “House Bill 616,” Ohio House, <https://ohiohouse.gov/legislation/134/hb616>, accessed September 6, 2022.
² Hal Story, quoted in “What Students Are Saying About Anti-L.G.B.T.Q. Legislation, Multilingualism, and Nature’s Wonders,” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/24/learning/what-students-are-saying-about-anti-lgbtq-legislation-multilingualism-and-natures-wonders.html>.
³ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 257.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1995*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Verso, 2003), 56.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*, 62.

⁶ Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text* 72, vol. 20 no. 3 (Fall 2002): 119.

history, case study, storm.” He continues: “The colonial church had a way of making the world and its drives repugnant. What it failed to understand, or perhaps it understood too well, is that our amulets were our sustainability, our solidarity, and our freedom.”

During Pereira’s 1731 trial, he confessed to summoning demons for protection and fornicating with them. His character in *Corpo Fechado* affirms: “Sex with the devil was a pact against the cruelty of their dogma. Demons defy God’s control.” His speech is juxtaposed with passages from *Liber Gomorrhianus (Book of Gomorrah, c. 1051)* by the Benedictine monk Peter Damian, often cited as the fundamental text defining sodomy as a Christian vice, and quotes from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940).⁷ By summoning these voices, Motta draws out from the gaps in the archive an alternate narrative that lends interiority and agency to someone whose life was previously registered only as a transgression.⁸

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“I don’t want to die looking like a human.” So says Tiamat Legion Medusa, the body-modification artist and performer in Motta’s video *When I Leave This World (2022)*. The work is comprised of a flesh-suspension performance created in collaboration with Motta, and a pendant portrait, a documentary interview, in which Medusa affirms that transitioning from male to female and from human to lizard is a protest of humanity itself. In the video’s final moments, Motta joins Medusa’s embodied dissent. Facing away from the camera, Motta hangs in Shibari rope bondage, arms bound to a horizontal beam and ankles tied so that his body forms a crucifix. Next to him is Medusa’s supine body, flesh painted in greens and metallics inspired by the paintings of William Blake, suspended from shark hooks. Together, they present a mesmerizing image of transcendence: a teratological sublime.

Reflecting on this scene, the celebrated scholar, author, and filmmaker Susan Stryker contributes to this publication an essay, “Leviathan: Thy Names Are Legion, Hear Us Call.” The essay explores the varied meanings of Leviathan, including its figurative reference to a mythical sea monster; Leviathan’s precursor in Mesopotamian mythology is Tiamat, whose slain body was used to create the heavens and earth. This mythic creature was later adopted by the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes as a figure of primordial power, standing in both for the totalitarian state and its all-powerful sovereign leader. Stryker’s essay is a call to resist Hobbes’s misappropriation of Leviathan as a body-politic and to summon up again the monster of premodern myth, such that we might access its forms of transformation, transcendence, and the possibilities for re-worlding that Motta’s work inspires.

A trio of interrelated works—*We the Enemy* (2019) in two forms, and *Mourning Stage* (2020/2022)—further explores the themes

of monstrosity, metamorphosis, and power. *We The Enemy* presents an installation of forty-one small bronze sculptures on steel stakes mounted atop thin concrete pedestals. Inspired by art-historical representations of the Devil, and of evil embodied, the bronze figures feature extreme facial expressions with mouths agape, seemingly frozen in the midst of screaming, shrieking, or howling. The sketches for these sculptures served as inspiration and material for a second work, *Mourning Stage*, the result of a collaboration between Motta and the artist Simon(e) Jaikiriuma Paetau. Originally a live performance, it is presented in video form for the first time in this exhibition.⁹

In the video, Paetau slinks onto the screen wearing an oxygen mask and proceeds to animate the disfigured expressions and intense emotions of Motta’s figures. Some of Motta’s illustrations are fleetingly mapped onto her face, evoking nefarious pleasure, anguish, and horror. *Mourning Stage* thereby grapples with monstrosity and abjection, signaling that, “monsters not only reveal certain material conditions of the production of horror, but they also make strange categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that we still cling to.”¹⁰ Conversely, the conditions of colonialism are projected onto the body, enacted, and grieved.

Contrasting the baroque theatricality of the sculptures is the video version of *We the Enemy*. Here Motta addresses the violence of language, but also how speech acts may subvert or challenge systems of oppression. It draws on Motta’s collaboration with John Arthur Peetz and Carlos Maria Romero under the moniker SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!). Together the artists co-authored five manifestos, which were interpreted in a 2017 performance and published in a reader alongside historical and contemporary speeches, manifestos, and texts.¹¹ Introducing the reader, SPIT! asserts: “The radical raging ethos of sexual and gender liberation, and our demands for a truly just and emancipated society seem to have been mollified with crumbs from a table at which we don’t even want to sit.”¹² Refusal, the artists avow, is vital to collective liberation.

Greek artist Despina Zacharopoulou performs in the video as “We the Enemy,” a collective subject who recites a list—beginning with the first-person plural—of nearly two hundred slurs for queer people, including some they have reclaimed as badges of honor. Zacharopoulou recites them with a tone of palpable rage and controlled defiance, through to the end, which concludes that queer people “are and will always be the enemy.” Art historian Jack McGrath writes that while these epithets were used to mark otherness, they were “taken back by the oppressed” and “turned back against the oppressor. Double binds double back

9 Mourning Stage appeared at the Berlin Biennale, Gathering 3, 2020. Motta collaborated with Simon(e) Jaikiriuma Paetau and Isabel Gonzalez Toro (sound design).

10 Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 6.

11 The group first performed *We the Enemy* at Frieze Projects, London, on October 9, 2017.

12 SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!) Carlos Motta, John Arthur Peetz, Carlos Maria Romero, “The SPIT! Manifesto Reader Introduction,” *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader: A Selection of Historical and Contemporary Queer Manifestos* (PDF, 2017), 1. https://carlosmotta.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SPITReader_Final.pdf.

7 See note 3.

8 For an expanded perspective, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Corpus Infinitum,” a text commissioned by Galeria Municipais, Lisbon, for the occasion of Carlos Motta’s exhibition *Corpo Fechado*, October 31, 2018–February 10, 2019.

Archived at https://carlosmotta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/DENISE_FERREIRA.pdf.

on themselves.”¹³ This unifying power of radical difference, as articulated through speech acts, physical embodiment, and performance, is at the heart of Motta's multimedia practice.

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We Who Feel Differently (2012) is among the best-known works in Motta's ongoing *Democracy Cycle*. It functions as a vital hinge-point in the exhibition's trajectory, demonstrating how Motta works not only with historical archives and existing materials and symbols, but also builds new forms of knowledge: alternative forms of archives, documentaries, and oral histories guided by the premise of the self-representation of LGBTQIA+ and ethnic minorities.

First shown at the New Museum in New York City a decade ago, the installation is rooted in a web archive consisting of fifty interviews of activists, theorists, and cultural producers from Colombia, Norway, the US, and South Korea.¹⁴ In each of its iterations, *We Who Feel Differently* is accompanied by public programs to deepen and complicate themes and questions. Describing Motta's digital archive projects,¹⁵ the curator Hendrik Folkerts makes the case that they “all propose the online space as a *living* and rhizomatic source of knowledge, using it for events in the physical world. The iterative nature of these works is essential to understand Motta's relationship to the archive, not as something fixed, but as something contingent on local context and engagement.”¹⁶ Inasmuch as it collapsed distinctions between an outer “political” realm and a more intimate realm of emotions and affects, the project was a breakthrough for the artist as he wondered what had become of the revolutionary origins of queer liberation. Has the much-vaunted recent progress for LGBTQIA+ rights been mostly a matter of assimilation into heteronormative frameworks like the military and marriage?

Presenting *We Who Feel Differently* a decade later begs the question: where are we now? Likewise the culmination of *Your Monsters, Our Idols* is invested in recent struggles and transformations. Motta's project for the Wexner Center Artist Residency Award is *The Columbus Assembly* (2022). In a spirit of solidarity with recent struggles around naming, monuments, and memorials, the project aims to think beyond the traditions of colonial and patriarchal forms of commemoration. What role, Motta asks, might monuments and memorials play in contemporary processes of attaining radical equity, diverse representation, and justice?

Born in Bogotá, Colombia, one of many places named after the historical figure of Christopher Columbus, Motta has long

considered how his country's existence symbolizes a fraught history of colonization, one marked out by the explorer's name. While the seeds of *The Columbus Assembly* were sown before the uprisings against systemic racism and state sanctioned violence in the late spring and summer of 2020, it was undoubtedly shaped by their spirit and the associated toppling of monuments to colonial and confederate figures.

Columbus, Ohio, is the largest city in the world named in honor of the Italian navigator. During the 1992 quincentennial of Columbus's arrival in the Americas, the city of Columbus spent nearly \$100 million to celebrate his legacy.¹⁷ Reflecting on the coincidence of his birthplace and the location of his artist residency, Motta convened cross-disciplinary scholars and creatives to think about what it would mean to change the name of Ohio's capital city. Rather than seeking to supplant one name with another, he sought to create a forum to think critically about commemoration and to discuss strategies of decolonization. In doing so he aimed to invoke a layered process of reparative justice, equity, and representation for communities of queer, trans, BIPOC, and immigrant people who have often been rendered invisible.

The interlocutors included faculty from Ohio State and members of the Columbus community, as well as scholars and thinkers from across the country. Their exchanges evidenced little consensus, but rather opened onto further questions that stand to complicate the legacies of colonialism that continue to impact notions of identity, belonging, and our sense of place. Themes from these conversations inspired the script for a multichannel audio work read by eight residents of Columbus (edited versions are included in a free publication). Eschewing visual representation, *The Columbus Assembly* lets their voices resound, and asks their listeners to speculate with them about dismantling centuries of oppression, building a more just future, and reflecting on a community-to-come that we cannot yet envision collectively.

¹³ Jack McGrath, *Conatus: Carlos Motta*, exhibition brochure, PPOW Gallery, April 25–May 25, 2019, archived at https://carlosmotta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_PPOW_Carlos-Motta_Conatus-Smaller.pdf.

¹⁴ The exhibition *Carlos Motta: We Who Feel Differently* was presented in the New Museum's “Museum as Hub” space from May 16 to September 9, 2012. The project now lives online at <https://wewhofeeldifferently.info>.

¹⁵ Motta's project *The Good Life* is an experimental documentary project that first appeared at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, January 18–March 30, 2008. See <https://la-buena-vida.info/>. His web-based project *Gender Talents*, an archive of video portraits of trans and intersex activists, launched on March 19, 2015. See www.gendertalents.info.

¹⁶ Hendrik Folkerts, “As Many as 1: On Carlos Motta's *Democracy Cycle* (2008–2019),” in *Carlos Motta: History's Backrooms* (Milan: Skira, 2020), 23.

¹⁷ Meagan Flynn, “Columbus, Ohio, once spent \$95 million to help celebrate Columbus Day. Now, it's canceled,” *The Washington Post* (October 8, 2018), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/10/08/columbus-ohio-once-spent-95-million-to-celebrate-columbus-day-now-its-canceled/>.



Exhibition installation view of
Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols



Carlos Motta and Simon(e) Jaikiriuma Paetau

Mourning Stage, 2020/2022 (still)

HD video with color and sound, 16 min.

Courtesy of the artists and P·P·O·W, New York. Supported by the
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Installation view of
We Who Feel Differently (2012) in
Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols



Exhibition installation view of
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Installation view of
The Columbus Assembly (2022) in
Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols



Carlos Motta and Tiamat Legion Medusa
When I Leave This World, 2022 (still)
HD video with color and sound, 10 min.
Courtesy of the artists and P·P·O·W, New York

LEVIATHAN:
THY NAMES ARE
LEGION, HEAR US CALL
Susan Stryker



Leviathan: thy names are legion, for thou wouldst encompass all the flesh of the world. Legend of thee choreographs the cosmotechnicities that suture metaphysics with machine.

In the beginning, one of the old stories tells us, all was void and without form, and darkness rested upon the primordial abyss; then the breath of God moved upon the face of the deep to animate and populate its formless emptiness.

To repeat that old story with a difference: breath is more-than-human; time and space elaborate themselves through its pulse and rhythm; the dimensions enact an ongoing and always-unfinished poiesis of differentiating and separating, combining and recombining, constellating and dissipating all that is into infinitely shifting and shimmering arrangement, both energetic and physical.

When we recognize that the ineffable some call God is immanent within the material cosmos, to speak of God's animating breath is to say—in anthropomorphic metaphor—that existence moves of its own volition, in partly knowable yet ultimately inscrutable ways, and that it is sufficient unto itself. It is that it is: an animate totality of which we are not apart.

The name *Leviathan* comes into modern languages from ancient Hebrew but refers to qualities or entities described in other stories, some older than Hebrew itself. Leviathan and its other-named kin emerge from primal chaos as monsters of the deep—sometimes depicted in whale-like form, or as a writhing, many-headed sea serpent coiling back upon itself, or as a snake devouring its own tail to mark a boundary between order and its preconditions.

Imagined as a mythic creature surging through a fluid medium, Leviathan bears witness to an ontological capacity for generative movement emanating from a mystery antecedent to time and space as they currently exist—a mystery simultaneously elsewhere and nestled in the budding blossom of here-and-now. Leviathan is one name among many for some-thing *in potentia*: in the process, on the cusp, of becoming this-thing or that-thing in particular. Names operate on this potential to cut the becoming-cosmos together/apart in new patterns. When we narrate this cosmogenesis, our stories *world*—verb, transitive—to simultaneously describe and produce ever-unfolding materio-discursive realities.

Leviathan: may we follow thee, our sign and guide. As thou dost rise toward us may we trace thy wake in reverse, so that we might thereby approach the only sacredness we truly need—the fount of all that is. When we behold thy many images and exalt them, may we perceive in them the sublime unrepresentability towards which thy appearance gestures.

The still-influential early modern political philosopher Thomas Hobbes took Leviathan's name for his most famous work, composed in the tumult of the English Civil War, and published in 1651: *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. Usually regarded as merely a treatise on government, it is, rather, as its subtitle suggests, a more extensive

exercise in worlding; it proposes an entire cosmogeny within which the heavens and the earth come into new relation by means of a particular socio-technical assemblage called the sovereign state.

In Hobbes's creation story, Nature is chaos, though not the generative kind; it is a war of all against all that must be pacified and transformed through the imposition of a disciplinary apparatus. It is mechanist, not vitalist. "For what is the 'heart,'" Hobbes asks, "but a 'spring'; and the 'nerves,' but so many 'strings'; and the 'joints,' but so many 'wheels,' giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the Artificer?"

Hobbes's Artificer God finds his precursor in the mythologies of ancient Mesopotamia, which are roughly contemporaneous with the consolidation, around five thousand years ago, of city-states and empires—two forms of governmentality that began to proliferate in the piecemeal shift to a post-neolithic mode of existence. The Babylonian founder-hero Marduk, for example, slays the sea-serpent goddess Tiamat, prototype of Leviathan, whose dead body furnishes the material substance of the heavens and the earth. It is mythos as propaganda, basically, for propping up a particular ordering of the material world.

To postulate materiality's inherent lack of animacy, and then to attribute the liveliness of the world to a superhuman entity who intervenes in it and proclaims dominion over it, was to assert a historically new onto-epistemic regime: one that symbolically kills the preexisting world, deems it insufficient without a metaphysical supplement, and restores it to human use through human artifice. That is, it imagines artificially creating the conditions of human life from lifeless matter.

Appropriating "life itself" is the power-move at the root of the long contest of "civilization" (meaning the process of extending rule by cities, *civitas*, over peoples and lands). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes this point by outlining a political cosmology, written roughly contemporaneously with the consolidation of a Eurocentric world order established through nation-states and the colonialisms on which they depend, to create a self-serving "deep history" of human affairs. "[W]hy may we not say that all 'automata' (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life?" he asks. If "Nature," as Hobbes renders it, is "the art whereby God hath made and governs the world," then "the 'art' of man," which imitates God's, "can make an artificial animal."

Through such human artifice, Hobbes argues, "is created that great 'Leviathan' called a 'Commonwealth,' or 'State,'" which "is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defense it was intended; and in which the 'sovereignty' is an artificial 'soul,' as giving life and motion to the whole body." This vast artificial body, a "body politic" comprised of biological populations and the territories they occupy along with the technical means of their administration and governance, is "made, set together, and united" by "pacts and covenants"—social contracts between rulers and the ruled and the

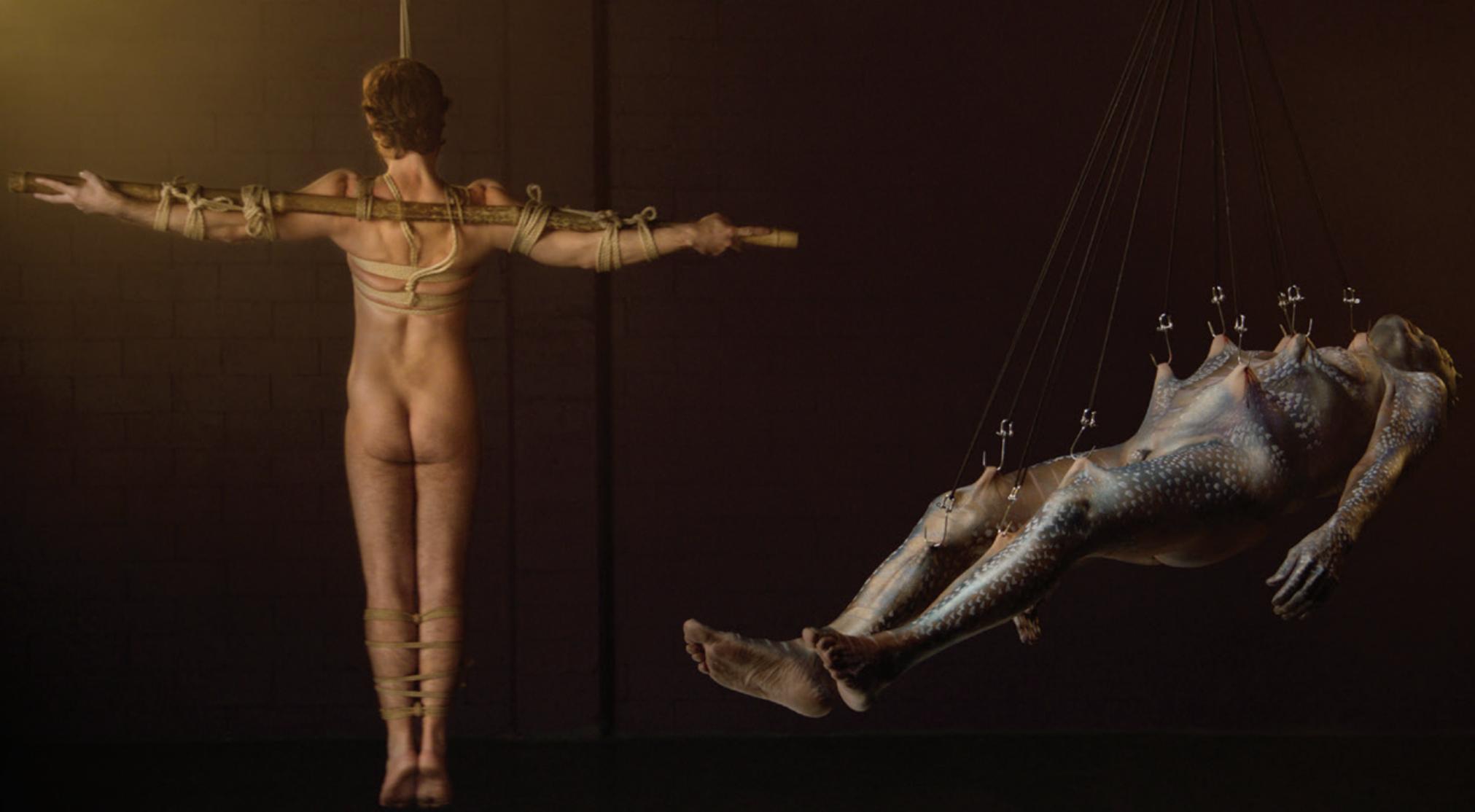
instruments of their enforcement—that “resemble that ‘fiat,’ or ‘let us make man,’ pronounced by God in the Creation.”

As a familiar motto on the Great Seal of the United States of America phrases this Hobbsean imaginary, in which the modern state is conceived as a suprahuman assemblage aggregated from many constituent parts: *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of Many, One). And as another familiar motto on the same Seal attests, the construction of this artificial Leviathan is thought to inaugurate a sovereign power that founds a *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (New Order for the Ages). Modernity and Enlightenment practice necromantic arts that raise up a constructed being thought to animate itself through the substance of all that it consumes.

Leviathan: Thy foes wouldst usurp thy very name. Their cloaks of light and beauteous visage do but mask a lust for thy death so that they might claim the fruits of thy life as their own. But their labors are vanity, and their dreams but dust that swirls in the warmth of a rising sun. Though thou art pillaged and abused yet shall ye shall triumph over them, for thou art the flesh of the world itself, eternally becoming-other. Each of thy resplendent forms is lively according to the nature of its own material arrangement, the golem no less than the meadowlark, the scythe no less than the blade of grass, the mineral no less than the female born. Each death thou dost fold back into thy larger life, rearranged, with altered capacities. Thy foes and all their handiwork are but fragments, for a time in a place, of thy own all-encompassing self-sufficient existence. Thou dost prevail in thy totality: worlds without end.

Our lives transpire now in the belly of a world-eating machine whose time to die is nigh and whose destruction we would do well to quicken. We must seek out and listen to other stories, old and new, of how the many worlds are made, so that we might apprehend the dream-reality of other worlds as readily as we apprehend our own. We must abolish in our thought and deed the false dichotomy between artifice and nature that supports the anthropo-supremacist fantasy, for artifice and nature are one: more-than-human technics are the animate flesh-of-the world. We must sense the capacities for liveliness incarcerated by the world-machine in which we live and liberate them—becoming mycelial amidst its rust-and-rot to network life into new arrangements, while remaining proximate to toxicity and ruin. We must make idols of every monster this world-machine fears, for they suggest the shapes of worlds yet to come.

Leviathan: Release thy tail from thine own mouth we beseech thee, so that order now might now reordered be, and chaos loosed to do its wild and fecund work. Uncoil, Leviathan, we pray thee; retwist the supple helix of thy hydra-headed form so that thou mightst propagate otherwise and anew. Rise up, Leviathan, to swallow us, that we might plumb the depths with thee, and surface into realms that better honor thee. Leviathan, thy names are legion—hear us call! Bestow we humbly beg thy stories and thy names to summon us into the world we need.



Carlos Motta and Tiamat Legion Medusa
When I Leave This World, 2022 (still)
HD video with color and sound, 10 min.
Courtesy of the artists and P·P·O·W, New York

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Additional thanks to Hannah Segrave, Dan DiPiero, Daniel Marcus,
and Bill Horrigan

The Columbus Assembly

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Amna Akbar, Laura Barrera, Kate Beane, Marcelo Hernández Castillo,
Karma Chávez, Gina Dent, Ambrose DuPree, Indigo Gonzales Miller,
Saeed Jones, John N. Low, Twinkle Panda, Joseph M. Pierce, Martin
Joseph Ponce, Ana María Reyes, Chase Strangio, Susan Stryker, Mary
E. Thomas, Mabel O. Wilson

PERFORMERS

Michael Charles, Noah Demland, Felicia de Rosa, Indigo Gonzales
Miller, Marcus Morris, Sara Pardo Fishburn, Vicki Saunders, Joseph
Ze Soza

SOUND EDITOR

Lidia Tamplenizza

SOUND PRODUCTION

Joey Gurwin, Oranjudio

Text mural inspired by the words of Saeed Jones

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"We are on the traditional lands of many Indigenous cultures.
Most recently, home of the People of the Eastern Woodlands, who
migrated into the Ohio Valley after European Contact: The Shawnee,
Wyandotte, Delaware, Miami, Ottawa, Peoria, Potawatomi, Seneca-
Cayuga, Chippewa, among others; And the Ancients, known by their
monuments: the people of the Adena, Hopewell, and Fort Ancient
cultures." Marti Chaatsmith (Comanche Nation citizen, Choctaw
Nation of Oklahoma descendant, and Ohio State professor),
November 1, 2018. earthworks.osu.edu/land

IMAGES

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P-P-O-W, New York unless otherwise noted.

Wexner Center Project Team

Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols

Organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts and curated by Associate
Curator of Exhibitions Lucy I. Zimmerman with Exhibition Research
Assistant Indigo Gonzales Miller and Graduate Curatorial Intern Arielle
Irizarry. Organizational support for the exhibition provided by P-P-O-W, New
York; Galeria Vermelho, São Paulo; and mor charpentier, Paris and Bogotá.

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Indigo Gonzales Miller, Exhibition Research Assistant
Arielle Irizarry, Graduate Curatorial Intern
Kelly Kivland, Chief Curator and Director
David Dickas, Senior Installation Manager
Kim Kollman, Exhibitions Manager and Senior Registrar
Okell Lee, Associate Preparator
Debra Lemak, Former Administrative Associate/Current Systems Analyst
James-David Mericle, Exhibitions Preparator and Technician
Nicole Miller, Associate Registrar
Lynne Pearson, Exhibitions Department Coordinator
Mary VanWassenhove, Former Associate Registrar
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Sylke Krell, Production Manager

Related Programs

OCTOBER 20

*Fotofocus Columbus Community Spotlight Day*1 pm Curator tour of *Your Monsters, Our Idols*

2 pm Film/Video Studio Tour

3 pm Curator tour of *Sharing Circles: Carol Newhouse and the WomanShare Collective*

Galleries

OCTOBER 26

Carlos Motta in Conversation with Ana María Reyes

Virtual talk moderated by curator Lucy I. Zimmerman

wexarts.org

6 pm edt

NOVEMBER 5

Reassembly

Galleries

11 am–2 pm

Visit wexarts.org for details

Support

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Colophon

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WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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