

Of Being Between:

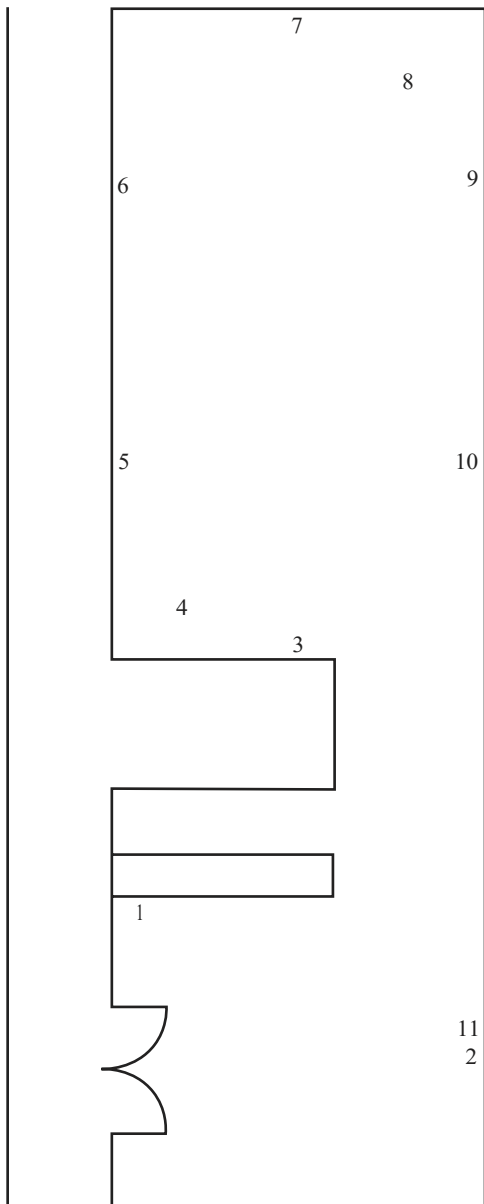
Claudia Cuesta

**Curated by
Ellinee Nelson**

**26 July 2024—
17 August 2025**

Or Gallery

Exhibition Map



List of Works

1. **Self-portrait**, *Symbolic Correspondence* series, 1993, paper, felt, steel, 35 ½ x 2 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
2. **Culture Caps**, 2002, 9 embroidered baseball caps, limited edition, 2002. Courtesy of the artist.
3. **Grief**, 2023, collage, mixed media, framed in plexi box, 24 1/8 x 18 1/2 x 3 inches. Courtesy of the K. Juda collection.
4. **In between**, 2024, found object, fabric, steel, glass container light with ashes, 2024. Courtesy of the artist.
5. **Infinity**, *Paradigmas* series, 1994, velvet and beeswax, 60 x 60 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
6. **Pink Circle**, *Paradigmas* series, 1994, velvet and neon, 60 x 60 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
7. **Grief Series 1-7**, 2024, inkjet prints, 8 x 10 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
8. **Cocoon**, *Symbolic Correspondence* series, 1993, steel and glass, 40 x 18 x 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
9. **Blue Horizon**, *Paradigmas* series, 1994, velvet and neon, 60 x 60 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
10. **Black Unity**, *Paradigmas* series, 1994, velvet and coal, 60 x 60 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
11. **Relic of Time**, *Relic of Time* series, poetry book, 1998/ book edition printed in 1993, 5 1/8 x 4 1/8 x 3/16 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Of Being Between: Claudia Cuesta

Ellinee Nelson

Of Being Between is the first retrospective look at the Colombian-Canadian artist's prolific career. Since the 1980s, Cuesta has integrated multimedia approaches to sculpture that reflect interdependent relationships between material and process. Her contributions are distinguished by dynamic allusions to the human body that call into question the nature of the medium. The exhibition emphasizes her multidisciplinary, use of diverse materials, and embodied processes by bringing together sculptural installation, painting, poetry, photography, and collage.

In *Of Being Between*, Cuesta creates textural juxtapositions through combinations of velvet and neon, glass and steel, canvas and plastic. Her methodology involves meticulously selecting materials that she activates through a process of deep self-reflection and physically laborious experimentation. She hand-fabricates each work and transposes her internal landscape onto the materials. A reciprocal relationship develops over time as she embraces the implications that this process has on her own body. Experientially, this exhibition encompasses and communicates the physical dynamics that imbue Cuesta's methodology within the space of the gallery.

Cuesta's work challenges, often playfully, the manufactured belief systems, power structures, and technologies that shape our worldviews and identities. Speaking to both the personal and collective aspects of embodiment and grief, Cuesta's work reveals the fluidity between individual and shared experiences. In a time when the boundaries between the personal and the collective are constantly being renegotiated, *Of Being Between* offers an urgent reflection on interdependence.

Artist Statement

Claudia Cuesta

The sculptural art work *In between* (2024) contains my brother's ashes. He died peacefully this year and granted me permission to use his ashes in whichever way I choose.

Over the last 40 years I have been exploring human consciousness, life, death and transformation, attempting to embody what keeps informing my perception.

Sitting with his ashes has been an important breakthrough in my life. The realization that he is not that, that the ashes are a biological matter; calcium phosphate, salt and minerals, and that the sacred is the space between life and death. Emptiness has been a central theme of all great religions for centuries.

Grief (2023) alludes to the shedding of one's material attachment. A three dimensional object created with fabric, paper, coffee stains and plastic which is then photographed, becomes in effect, a memory of an imprint on skin and soul.

In *Paradigmas* (1994) I have attempted to reconcile and integrate my relationship with Colombia, the country of my birth. The love, beauty, and violence that is my inheritance; a culture of extremes.

The profane and the sacred have continued to be a source of inspiration. This is a place from which to look at belief and what is real.

Self-portrait and *Cocoon* from *Symbolic Correspondence series* (1993) question the transformation from solid matter to formlessness and what defines identity as a fluid medium.

Biographies

Claudia Cuesta (b. 1954) is a Colombian artist, teacher and mentor based in Sechelt, BC. As a multidisciplinary sculptor, Cuesta integrates sound, film, photography, performance, and poetry into her practice. She has worked with industrial, intangible, and organic materials, such as copper, air, beeswax, velvet, light, and wood. While hand fabricating simple forms, Cuesta plays with scale, texture, and colour. Cuesta explores the interdependence between the material world and identity, mediated through her experiences of motherhood, immigration, and loss.

Cuesta graduated with an MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 1988. Her work has since been exhibited at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver; the Vancouver Art Gallery; the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; the Power Plant, Toronto; the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha; the Museum of Modern Art, Bogotá; and other venues.

Since 2003, Cuesta has worked collaboratively with urban designer and artist Bill Baker under the name art.site, specializing in the integration of art and architecture. They have undertaken public art commissions and numerous artist residencies, including a recent residency at RAMA, Torres Vedras, Portugal. Cuesta taught at Emily Carr University of Art and Design until 2008, at the Universidad Nacional, Colombia, in 1995 and at schools in England between 1989 and 1993. Her work is held in collections, including at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, Bogota and Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha.

Ellinee Rae Nelson (b. 1996) is originally from Chicago—the unceded ancestral homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: The Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwe Nations—and is currently based in Vancouver on the unceded ancestral lands of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Ellinee is an MA candidate in the Critical Curatorial Studies program at the University of British Columbia. She holds a BA in Art History from Columbia College Chicago where she began her career in art handling, collections management, and arts administration. Ellinee's curatorial practice is dedicated to queer and feminist perspectives in contemporary art, archive and collections research, and uncovering underrepresented practices. In her research, Ellinee uses disabled embodiment and access intimacy as tools to trouble the limits of engagement with contemporary art and exhibitions. Referencing her own disability and chronic illness, Ellinee is interested in autotheory as a methodological approach to develop an accessible curatorial praxis.

Or Gallery 236 Pender St East, Vancouver, BC V6A 1T7, Canada

Contemporary Art Space and Bookstore
Open Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm

Or Gallery acknowledges its presence on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliwətał First Nations, who have stewarded this land since time immemorial.

Or Gallery is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the British Columbia Arts Council, and the City of Vancouver along with numerous community partners, donors, and volunteers. We are especially grateful for the visionary support of The Audain Foundation.

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