

CANDELILLA, COATLICUE, & THE BREATHING MACHINE

Ballroom Marfa, 108 East San Antonio Street, April 5-September, 2019

By *Kate Green*

Candice Lin, *on the back of syphilis mountain candelilla grows*, 2019. candelilla wax, beeswax, red clay, cement, paint, grow lights, oil barrel, stagnant water, dried and living candelilla plants, dimensions variable.



The southern border of the United States has long been defined by those on the northern side, whose demands for contraband and low-wage workers are matched by their resistance to equitably reforming immigration policies. While xenophobia, hostility, and capitalism wreak havoc on the borderlands, this show includes three artists who highlight the strength of the region's indigenous communities and traditions.

Candice Lin's installation *on the back of syphilis mountain candelilla grows*, 2019, features a clay fire pit glowing in a darkened gallery. Melting in and beyond it is a waxy substance partially derived from candelilla plants, which were once exported to the north to treat syphilis, a disease that was blamed on the very people who processed the cure. Lin amplifies the sense of looming threat with a mural of skin scarred by syphilis. Elsewhere in the show, Fernando Palma Rodríguez's roughly half-dozen robotic contraptions include a pair with bodies made of ladders on wheels, arms made of plants, and wolf-like cardboard heads (*Xi mo matlazacan ce cehe*, 2006).

As the sensor-activated creatures roll, they seem intelligent and tricky, like coyotes in American Indian mythology. Past, present, and future collide in Beatriz Cortez's low-fi geodesic domes made of zip ties and chain-link fencing, which call out the structures that nomadic indigenous people made long before they were popularized in twentieth-century utopic communities. Nearby, Cortez's modified pinball machine—players root for journeying migrants rather than the Western looter Indiana Jones—toys with the perversity of colonialism. Her three fortune-telling machines are more subtle. At the touch of a button, one receives a slip of paper that might read, "When the future comes: / Cuando llegue el futuro: / We will have learned challenging things / Habremos aprendido cosas desafiantes." The collective pronoun and future perfect are persuasive. Rewriting stories is hard, but our future depends on it.