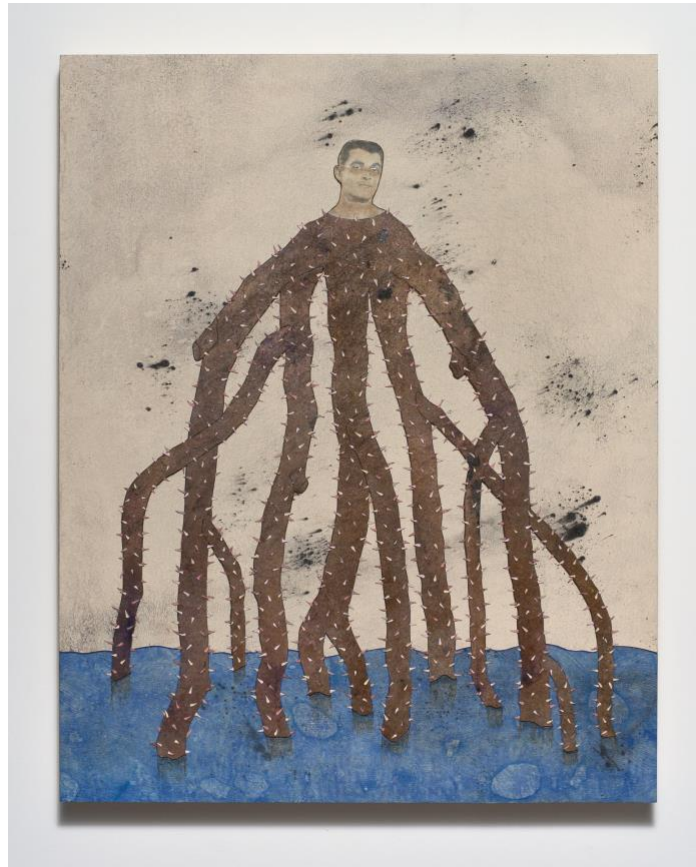


Felipe Baeza

by Susan Thompson¹

Using collage, *décollage*, and printmaking techniques, Felipe Baeza’s multimedia works on paper explore the adaptive, resilient nature of the body in peril. Informed by the artist’s own experience with displacement and immigration, Baeza’s work seeks to affirm the histories of marginalized and persecuted peoples. Drawing on mythologies rooted in Mayan traditions and Afrofuturism, Baeza focuses on physical transformation and regeneration. Celebrating the beauty of the male form, and sometimes incorporating imagery clipped from pornography, the artist’s compositions are populated by fragmented, dismantled bodies that sprout vegetation from their severed limbs. The figures’ dismemberments suggest the trauma of past violence, yet these sites of rupture also offer fertile ground for new growth. The merging of the corporeal and the botanical provides an alternative path toward regeneration for the wounded body. The artist’s cool, subdued palette and matte-finish washes combine with his surreal imagery to create a ghostly, dreamlike effect that borders on the spiritual. Sanded surfaces lend an organic, earthen texture. The musculature of Baeza’s protagonists is rendered in cut paper shapes and sometimes outlined in winding twine, further articulating their disintegration. Sinewy vines emanating from truncated bodies are accentuated by embroidery and dangling threads, an allusion to suture that gestures toward repair, if not restoration.



Felipe Baeza, *I who was taught, by you, to be invisible in order to be safe*, 2021. Ink, charcoal, varnish, acrylic, watercolor, and cut paper collage on panel, 20x16 inches.

Baeza’s fantastical, hybridized figures often appear either implanted in earth or floating on water. That they occupy such interstitial spaces is suggestive of both migration and mutation, time-honored strategies of adaptation to hostile environments. The works’ evocative titles allude to such transitional states of being, as in the 2019 works *Moving through the flesh to elsewhere* and *Nafragó mi cuerpo pero nunca fallecio* (My body was wrecked but never died).

A recent series on board features the artist’s characteristic composite figures variously embedded in soil and sea. In contrast to his deeply saturated large-scale works on paper, these intimate compositions are more subtly atmospheric, yet just as psychologically potent. In *The echo of a fugitive rupture* (2020), a pair of legs protrudes from the earth, seeming to bicycle in the foggy air with a quiet desperation while the body’s buried upper half dissolves into a root system below ground. A thicket of cascading black threads flows from the surrounding foliage above, entangling and obscuring the flailing legs.

1. Susan Thompson is a curator and writer based in Brooklyn, NY, USA. This essay accompanied the exhibition catalog for Prospect.5 New Orleans: Yesterday We Said Tomorrow, New Orleans, LA, USA | Keith, NJ and Nawi, D. 2021. Prospect.5 new orleans: yesterday we said tomorrow. *Rizzoli Electa*. ISBN-13 978-0847868674.