

**Felipe Baeza**  
Unruly Forms

Each of the eight works in *Unruly Forms*, made between 2022 and 2023, has an iconic presence. All are strikingly composed around a single, roughly symmetrical central figure. At the same time, each figure is different and all embody some form of multiplicity. The human and the nonhuman merge to create fantastical images that conjure realms of myth, spirit, and imagination.

Through these strange, poetic, thriving forms, Baeza's themes emerge. If we could excavate the histories, cultures, landscapes and bodies that have shaped our identity, what would we find? If we could picture identity as a fluid notion in a constant state of suspension and becoming, how might we appear? If we could recognize the different physical, social and psychic boundaries that surround us, how might we imagine freedom? Informed by his own experiences of physical and social displacement and difference, the images of Baeza's *Unruly Forms* now multiply and proliferate across hundreds of JCDecaux bus shelters in the United States and Mexico, spanning place as well as time to reach the broadest possible audience amidst the rituals of daily life.



Confined but still intoxicated with freedom, 2023

To develop the series, Baeza researched Mesoamerican artifacts, including ceramic figures, vessels and plates in museum collections in Boston, Chicago, and New York, the three US cities for the exhibition. He is interested in reanimating the power of such objects, understanding that their original making and context imbued them with spiritual significance and energy. In turn, the power of these objects has acted on the artist's imagination, their imagery absorbed to become part of Baeza's visual language.

In his approach to both materials and themes, Baeza's artistic process is one of osmosis and incorporation. His early interest in sculpture led to studies in printmaking, where he explored the physicality of layering, pressing, cutting, stitching and collaging. On his studio floor, Baeza applies multiple passes of pigment to raw paper until the dyed material expresses the history of its making in layers of undulating color, saturation and texture. These painted sheets become backgrounds, or are cut into smaller elements and collaged to shape pictorial elements. He also integrates found images drawn from magazines and other printed matter. The hybrid images built up through Baeza's intensive process combine animal, vegetal, elemental, and cultural forms. In *Confined but still intoxicated with freedom*, vein-like red offshoots sprout from human hands connected by sinuous, root-like arm-wings to a cavity within a thorn-covered torso. A Mesoamerican-inspired headdress frames the face of a young man collaged from a vintage physique magazine as the whole figure floats against an ambiguous sky. With

these layered, mythic images, Baeza gives us metaphorical access to a different kind of truth that recognizes and celebrates the unconscious power of *Unruly Forms*. – Nicholas Baume, Public Art Fund Artistic & Executive Director



Felipe Baeza. *Confined but still intoxicated with freedom*, 2023. Image credit: © Felipe Baeza. Courtesy Maureen Paley, London. Photo: Ramiro Chaves, courtesy Public Art Fund, NY. Presented by Public Art Fund as a part of Felipe Baeza: *Unruly Forms*, an exhibition on 400+ JCDecaux bus shelters and street furniture in New York, Boston, and Chicago in the United States and Mexico City, León, and Querétaro in Mexico, August 9–November 19, 2023.

This essay accompanied *Felipe Baeza: Unruly Forms*, an exhibition curated by Public Art Fund Artistic & Executive Director Nicholas Baume with support from Assistant Curator Jenée-Daria Strand.