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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Gala Porras-Kim's exhibition chronicles her investigations into institutions and the cultural artifacts they keep**



Gala Porras-Kim, Whitney Biennial, installation view, 2019. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy the artist; Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles and LABOR, Mexico City.

**November 8, 2021 (St. Louis, MO)** - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents an exhibition of Gala Porras-Kim, whose engagements with institutions and the cultural artifacts they collect has produced a profound body of work. Hers is a research-based practice, in which she delves into the ways cultural institutions present, store, interpret, define, legitimize, and preserve objects—whether those be ancient artifacts or modern or contemporary works of art. Through her investigations, Porras-Kim questions the ethical principles of museum conservation and examines how objects can be used and misused to make an official narrative through artifacts. Her art practice is in part an epistemological pursuit: how do institutions know what they know, and how do the narratives they convey affect our understanding of our past, present, and future? Porras-Kim brings alternative forms of logic to bear in her pursuit of understanding, and she invites audiences to arrive at personal interpretations of institutional narratives, making use of their own imaginations, intuitions, experiences, and knowledge. *Gala Porras-Kim* features multiple bodies of the artist's recent work, including drawings, sculpture, and sound, presented at CAM, March 25 through July 24, 2022.

Porras-Kim approaches her work from a desire to make institutions more flexible. Her practice is not unlike that of an advanced student in any number of fields—linguistics, anthropology, history, or property law—yet rather than produce thesis papers from her research, she makes art. She has created displays of unidentified drawings, sculptures, and objects as a means to question museological practices. In a project created for the 2019 Whitney Biennial, she considered an untranslated glyph-covered

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Mesoamerican monolith and offered three ways of making meaning from a stone. To draw attention to the objectification of “anthropological finds,” Porras-Kim enlisted the talents of a shaman to question human bodies from the first century BC—currently presented and stored at the Gwangju (Korea) National Museum—as to where they belong. In a letter to the museum director, Porras-Kim described her act as an “attempt to honor the voice and personhood of the dead.” The resultant installation, *A terminal escape from the place that binds us*—which features ink stains through which the spirits of the dead were conjured—will have its United States museum debut at CAM.



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Porras-Kim’s work functions as a mediator—between institutions and the objects they present and store, and between members of the museum staff. “The museum needs a mediator because it’s difficult to talk about the problems of an institution and work in it at the same time.” Whether she engages with institutions through residencies, fellowships, or other official or unofficial means, an ethics of care underlies her interventions, a care for both the institutions and the objects they keep.

Her investigations into the preservation and categorization of cultural artifacts feel especially pertinent in the contemporary moment, as institutions, audiences, and colonial and postcolonial governments engage in a reckoning of the global circulation of pre-colonial artifacts. Just as Porras-Kim asked the unburied bodies in Gwangju, *Where do you belong?*, she asks of the objects she encounters in vitrines or in the desk drawers of archives, *How did they arrive there? How do they want to be treated? How do they want to be known and understood?*

Gala Porras-Kim will give an Artist Talk at CAM during the run of the exhibition on a date to be determined.



The exhibition is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and sponsored by the Henry Moore Foundation, and Ann R. Ruwitch and John Fox Arnold. The Artist Talk is generously supported by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

*Gala Porras-Kim* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator, with Misa Jeffereis, Assistant Curator.

**Gala Porras-Kim** (b. 1984, Bogotá, Colombia; lives and works in Los Angeles) received an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and an MA in Latin American Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her solo exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2019); Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA (2018); and LABOR, Mexico City (2017). Selected group exhibitions include 34th Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2021); Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2020-21); Ural Industrial Biennial, Ekaterinburg, Russia (2019); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2019, 2017); Palazzo Ca’tron, Venice, Italy (2019); PinchukArtCentre, Kiev, Ukraine (2019); and Tina Kim Gallery, New York (2019 and 2018). Porras-Kim is the recipient of the Art Matters Grant (2019), Radcliffe Fellowship for Advanced Study at Harvard University (2019), Artadia Award (2017), Rema Hort Mann Foundation grant (2017), and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award (2016), among others. Porras-Kim’s work is in the collections of Brooklyn Museum, New York; FRAC Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, France; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Perez Art Museum, Miami; Seoul Museum of Art, South Korea; and Whitney Museum of American Art.

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**About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis**

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis creates meaningful engagement with the most relevant and innovative art being made today. Founded by civic and cultural leaders in 1980, the Museum transformed from a small gallery into an internationally recognized arts institution, now permanently housed in a flexible, open, and inviting building designed by renowned American architect Brad Cloepfil. CAM's distinct architecture reflects the organization's values and supports a dynamic range of exhibitions, public programs, educational initiatives, and community collaborations. The only museum in the region solely dedicated to contemporary art, CAM is one of the preeminent non-collecting institutions of its kind in the United States. We are a site for discovery, a welcoming space, free and open to all. For more information, visit [camstl.org](http://camstl.org).



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