

# Press Release

# Brooklyn Museum



Guadalupe Maravilla (born El Salvador, 1976). *Disease Thrower #0*, 2022. Gong, hammock, LCD TV, ceremonial ash, pyrite crystals, volcanic rock, steel, wood, cotton, glue mixture, plastic, loofah, objects collected from a ritual of retracing the artist's original migration route, 118 x 123 x 64 in. (299.7 x 312.4 x 162.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and P.-P.-O.-W., New York. © Guadalupe Maravilla. (Photo: Stan Narten)

## The Brooklyn Museum Presents *Guadalupe Maravilla: Tierra Blanca Joven*

The exhibition draws from the artist's own experiences as an undocumented immigrant and cancer survivor to weave together themes of displacement, illness, recovery, and healing in new and existing works; objects from the Museum's Maya art collection; and a Healing Room.

Press Preview: April 6, 2022, 9.30 am–12 pm  
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In the 1980s, eight-year-old Guadalupe Maravilla fled the violence of El Salvador's civil war and made a perilous, unaccompanied journey through Central America to the United States, where he reunited with undocumented family members. Nearly two decades later, while preparing for his M.F.A. thesis exhibition at Hunter College in New York City, he learned that he had stage-three cancer and began a grueling course of treatments.

To combat residual pain from the treatment, he was introduced to many types of ancient healing practices including a form of sound-as-medicine, which employs the vibrations and frequencies of gongs to release toxins in the body. Following his recovery, Maravilla devoted his artistic practice—which includes sculptures, drawings, paintings, choreography, sound, and performance—to healing. In his work, the artist engages particularly with the cancer and the undocumented communities of which he is a part, and whose collective trauma has given rise to a great need for care.

*Guadalupe Maravilla: Tierra Blanca Joven* opens April 8, 2022, and is part of *Mindscapes*, an international cultural program that examines mental health in collaboration with institutions around the world, including Los Angeles, California; Berlin, Germany; Bengaluru, India; Tokyo, Japan, and Kigali, Rwanda. *Mindscapes* is an initiative of the Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation supporting science to solve the urgent health challenges facing everyone.

“This is an important moment of recognition for Maravilla, the first contemporary Central American artist to present a solo show at the Brooklyn Museum. His practice speaks eloquently to the urgent need for healing felt by individuals and communities as they seek to recover a sense of physical and psychological equilibrium resulting from the trauma of a global pandemic, political upheaval, and the effects of climate change,” says Eugenie Tsai, John and Barbara Vogelstein Senior Curator, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum.

Maravilla titled the exhibition *Tierra Blanca Joven* to evoke an intergenerational experience of displacement from El Salvador: from the fifth century C.E., when an enormous eruption of the Tierra Blanca Joven volcano (now Lake Ilopango) forced the Maya people out of the region by depositing a thick layer of ash over the land, to the artist’s own displacement as a result of the 1979–92 civil war and that of undocumented, unaccompanied child refugees who have fled the country’s growing violence and are currently being held in detention centers in the United States.

Among the exhibition’s sculptures are two new works from the artist’s *Disease Thrower* series: *Disease Thrower #12122012*, named for the date the artist learned he had cancer, and *Disease Thrower #0*, whose dark color comes from coal that was taken from the fires in his 2021 installation in Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, connecting the energy from past visitors to those in the Brooklyn Museum. Other works on view include *retablos*, drawing from the tradition of devotional paintings created in gratitude after momentous events, that reflect Maravilla’s healing story as well as those of undocumented people in his community. A video documents a performance exercise that the artist conducted with undocumented Central American teens at a detention center in upstate New York, who used bodily movements to express the repetitive experience of being in confinement. Additionally, the exhibition showcases a newly designed mural featuring the artist’s signature *Tripa Chuca* drawings, large hand-drawn installations inspired by the Salvadoran children’s game that Maravilla played as a child and during his journey to the United States.

Guadalupe Maravilla is deeply inspired by the art and rituals of his Maya ancestors. For this exhibition, he selected twenty-three artifacts from the Museum’s collection of Maya art that exemplify this connection, as well as the cultural and physical displacement of Maya objects and people (much of which he learned about through books and magazines in the United States, and playing among neglected Maya ruins as a child). Many of the selected works are powerful healing instruments and showcase the Maya belief in rebirth and transcendence as well as the legacy of Maya artistry.

“*Tierra Blanca Joven* addresses displacement of my people and our ancestors from the same land across several different points in history; the civil war, gang violence and government corruption, cataclysmic natural disasters, and the trade of cultural artifacts have all exiled Salvadoran and Maya peoples from present-day El Salvador,” says Maravilla. “The exhibition brings together representations of past, present, and future into one room—where the latest sculpture from my *Disease Thrower* series will meet ancient terracotta healers from the Museum’s collection, for example—as a reflection on intergenerational communal healing. Together, they share our history of displacement, while creating new visual narratives for the entangled genealogies of other border crossing communities.”

Visitors will also be invited to experience a Healing Room, an intergenerational community space designed by teen staff in Work-Study: Art & Healing (the Museum’s paid teen internship in art education). Created specifically for *Tierra Blanca Joven* and adjacent to the exhibition galleries, the room includes writing prompts, activities, and visuals intended to inspire people of all ages to engage deeper in personal and collective care. The space also offers continued learning through a selection of texts and community resources—from a decolonial cookbook to information about local mutual aid networks—that were compiled from recommendations by the artist and Museum educators in partnership with CUNY graduate students.

*Guadalupe Maravilla: Tierra Blanca Joven* is organized by Eugenie Tsai, John and Barbara Vogelstein Senior Curator, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum, as part of *Mindscapes*, Wellcome’s international cultural program about mental health. Related Brooklyn learning resources are organized by Lindsay C. Harris, Interim Director of Education and Teen Programs Manager, Brooklyn Museum, with Rebecca Jacobs, Wellcome Trust Mental Health Curatorial Research Fellow, Center for the Humanities, The Graduate Center, CUNY.