

commonly known as Aztecs, reconnects him with not only his Mexican background but with his Indigenous roots.

The lack of representation of Indigenous cultures in both historical and art historical discourses is appalling. By including Mexica's color, mythology, and aesthetics into his work Piedra revives his own ancestral culture, taps into pre-colonial influences, and shares its vibrant colors and ancient knowledge with all of us. His piece *Cōātlīcue Transformed* is a remarkable example of Piedra's practice. Rich in iconography, the piece represents the Mexica Goddess *Cōātlīcue* in the style of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. *Cōātlīcue* is perched on a prickly pear cactus, a plant with strong historical relevancy to Mexico's history. The Goddess's halo is comprised of numerous *tecpatl*—Aztec ceremonial knives, used in human sacrifices to feed the gods with blood. *Tecpatl* as well as the Virgin are both recurring in Piedra's work.



Cōātlīcue Transformed, felted wool, glazed and underglazed terracotta, 2021.



¡¡DALE!! ¡¡DALE!! ¡¡DALE!!, cardboard, crepe paper, ceramic *tecpatl*, manila rope, white oak, 2020.

In an earlier performance piece, *¡¡DALE!! ¡¡DALE!! ¡¡DALE!!*, 2020, the artist used a large-scale piñata filled with *tecpatl*. In a room filled with adults—pre-pandemic days—Piedra starts hitting the gigantic creature while all of us were waiting anxiously for the potential candy that would drop on the floor. Without any sort of instruction, every single person present in the gallery rushes to the floor to take one—or a couple, in my case—of these knives home. In this performance, Piedra is able to metaphorically compare the *tecpatl* to candy, symbolically feeding his audience with culture.

Piedra's ability to play with paradoxical elements from his lineage and contemporary aspects of his reality entices the viewer to reflect on the many themes within his body of work: colonization, religion, prejudice, cultural appropriation, generational trauma, and much more. I hope that after seeing Cesar Piedra's pieces in this exhibit you will be as inspired as I am by his aptitude to use the labels society assigns him as a stimulus to create and share his experience in this country. Now on to Robert Ibarra —

By embracing the purpose and intention of imperfection, and having the work loosely supported by its backing, touching the glass, and not worrying too much about the structural integrity of the fragmented pieces emphasizes how vulnerability is an important aspect of my work and takes a lot of courage to be open about.

Robert Ibarra

Reflection, self-awareness, introspection, and vulnerability, emotion are just some of the terms that jump at me when I look at Robert Ibarra's work. Through his art, he is able to process his feelings, trauma, and reality. In his black and white images, Ibarra utilizes drawing and

self-portraiture to reflect on memory and mental health. Ibarra found his talent and interest in drawing at a young age, but it was not until recently that he decided to focus on self-portraiture as a way to engage with the viewer in a personal and emotional way.

When looking through this selection of Ibarra's works, I was able to identify two different people: a boy and a young man. I was able to draw similarities between the two — are they the same people? Perhaps the boy is the man's child self? It all started with Ibarra looking at old family photographs. He describes the experience of looking through these photos as bewilderment; he was surprised to see so many images of his young self as happy—the absence of “happy” memories created a disconnect between his adult and child personas. Ibarra mostly portrays his contemporary self with a pained expression, and as a child, he is always shown smiling.



The Boy I Don't Remember, charcoal and graphite on BFK, 2019.

In *The Boy I Don't Remember*, 2019—even though this piece is not included in *Two Views*—Ibarra contemplates on the contrast between the smiling young child and the troubled adult. The anguish in the face of the young adult is palpable, while the lightness and playfulness in the child are still present. This kind of composition is common in Ibarra's pieces, by overlapping different feelings, emotions, and facial expressions he is able to combine realism and abstraction offering a personal dynamism and adding movement to his work. In a way, the artist is able to convey a sense of chaos while displaying different memory snippets into one single layout.

to be holding him back, the artist renders them as if they are fading away, letting the adult Ibarra live without the burdens from the past. Ibarra, throughout his oeuvre, resorts to repetition as a way to portray movement while, at the same time, emphasizing emotion.

In addition to his complex compositions, Ibarra also draws inspiration from modern art movements, such as Cubism. The influence can be seen in his limited color palette, his use of contrast, and especially in the deconstruction of his images as seen in *Better Off Gone* and in his latest series *Continuous Shift*. Once he finishes the drawing aspect of the piece, he then cut the image

In *Better Off Gone*, 2020, the young man seems to be reaching out, while several different hands are pulling him back. Even though the multiple hands seem



Better Off Gone, charcoal and graphite on BFK, 2020.

into fragments, sometimes placing them in dissociated ways such as in *Continuous Shifts Construct #3*. The act of dismantling can be linked to not only the vulnerability present in his work, a visual representation of human memory's fragility, but most importantly to his own bravery of being vulnerable, personal, and transparent in an incredibly raw and public manner.

It goes without saying that art is an intrinsic part of my being, as a museum director and curator. Seeing the way Ibarra and Piedra use their art to better understand who they are shows me that I am not alone. Their pieces not only offer us a view into their own personal world, but a new perspective, an invitation to reflect on who we really are.



Continuous Shifts Constructs #3,
printed image on mat board, 2021.

Vivian Zavataro
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Robert Ibarra



Cesar Piedra

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