TRYNA BE A MOUNTAIN

Aru Apaza
Bard College

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TRYNA BE A MOUNTAIN

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts of Bard College

By
Aru Apaza

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
December 2023
This work could not have been possible without the people who raised me. stood next to me. held my hand. loved me. asked more of me. questioned me. cried with me. resisted with me. dreamed with me. marched with me. prayed with me. sang with me. trusted me. pushed me. pulled me. waited for me.

Yuspgara // gracias // thank you,
may creator return all of the goodness back to you.
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With a strong emphasis on gesture, materiality and humor, my work embraces multiplicity. Standing at the vast intersection of Ancestral Technologies and modern day Western Imperialism, I resist essentialism, recognizing poles implicitly share a body. My work speaks from the constant examination of multiple elsewhere.

My art practice is informed by Aymara concepts poised at holding temporal complexity. In Aymara, Pacha is the term used for space/time, while Kutí refers to the process of revolution, or upheaval. The phrase PachaKuti is used to “intertextually evoke colonial history, while pointing to a future from characterization of the present”4. Aymara Anthropologist Carlos Mamani Condori claims that the first PachaKuti happened with the arrival of the Spanish to the Andes in 1532. Since then various events – indigenous resistance of western hegemony, to politicians' platforms during election time – have been dubbed as Pachakuti. A Pachakuti occurs anytime an understanding, existence, or life way is subverted. As a child of immigrants, and the firstborn in the United States, Pachakuti is my birthright.

Keeping in syncretic time, the Aymara language translates nayra to mean eye, front, sight, or past. Similarly, qhipa is used to refer to back, behind or future. Shifting definitions in terms further illustrates non linear Aymara time. We are constantly looking into the past as we create the future. These concepts engrain Aymara life with cyclical compulsions refusing to be still. It is a colonial desire to pin down and fix. Aymara time is alive and in constant transformation, all while facing the past.

The component work in TRYNA BE A MOUNTAIN derives from the Living Archive, an archive that allows for “historical narrative, current reflections and real life feedback”2. The work comes from source texts, field recordings, photographs, archival footage and lived experiences aimed to complicate personal narratives. I am not interested in righteousness but rather expanding capacity to hold nuances.

Like Pachakuti, my familial narrative and coalesced understanding is in constant upheaval. Through my own expansion of holding space for the complicated, the uncomfortable and the difficult I understand my family and the conjoining world in which we navigate. Informed by material and concept, each work contains truth and its subversion.

Unlike some artists of my nation3. I don’t long for a romanticized version of indigeneity. In constant transmogification, I seek to confront an

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2 The Living Archive as defined by the living archive for student activism at UCSD. https://knit.ucsd.edu/tellushowucit/what-is-a-living-archive/#:~:text=A%20“living%20archive%20(Rhodes,%20movement%20in%20a%20particular%20community.
3 Roberto Mamani Mamani comes to mind, as the only Aymara artist with world recognition. His work is beautiful but lends itself to a lionization of culturally inherited imagery, further freezing us in a state of charming exotification.
indigenous Aymara neurosis by excavating information the culture doesn't provide.

My origin in protest art making remains presently visible through my graphic use of color, text and absurdity. I find pluralistic expansion in play and experimentation. Working interdisciplinary between sculpture, painting and durational media, I circle through time, revisiting familiar moments through the lens of mutation in order to rewrite history. There must be a multitude of approaches if there are multitudes of truth.

As American society continues to polarize, our collective capacity to withstand multiple narratives must be strengthened. Born of mutation and longing, my work finds comfortability in conflictual relations. I am interested in offending dichotomies.
MAN TRYNA BE A MOUNTAIN

man tryna be a mountain!
tryna be a phrase!
tryna be a house!
tryna be anything lasts longer than now!

tryna be alone!

tryna be never alone!

(you wont) last longer than now

tryna be daddys little landslide
hearts put in my braid

(tryna be) one long down broadway

with night heart,
window heart,
airforce ones &
cuban link heart

no braids in my heart
just sugar and honey
no fractal shaped leaf to
play hands and say hello
& ground is my color
& fear calls bones collect
& lower on the structure brings full muddy mess

& as much as you try wind blows heavy heads,

water hands limbs legs

remains scathed in flesh in the body.

& much as you try

much as you try

you’ll never be bigger
than this landscape
Gallery Map

Main Gallery:
Counting in Aymara (MAYA, PAYA, KIMSA), 2023
muslin, acrylic, spray paint.

“This Is Me If You Even Care”, 2023
locally harvested clay, hay, goat nails, hair braided, crab claw

Here - We Have Enough, 2023
acrylic, oranges, braid, eagle, market bag

Retrato #1, 2023
wood, fringe, goat nails, cowboy hat, locally harvested clay, hay

Estoy Haciendo Arte, 2023
market bag, durational performance (40 min.) 2022

I Bit My Braid When You Came, 2023
paper, dye bath, spray paint, mural

SMALL GALLERY:
For Limbs and Backbone, 2023
ash tree, wire cage, clay, market bag

This is a Map, 2023
fringe, market bag

Sebastian, La Naturaleza, 2023
acrylic, canvas, neon lights

Mandar Familia, 2023
archival footage (8 min.), acrylic, muslin

Tratando Ser (Tryna Be), 2023
sound sculpture (8 min.), goat nails, market bag, locally
harvested clay, hay, serge synthesizer, field recordings

Diffraction, Refraction, or “Somehow Here”, 2023
sound installation (8 min.), field recordings, serge
Synthesizer
TRYNA BE A MOUNTAIN
December 2 – December 16, 2023
aru apaza

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