

Edra Soto

Dos Cuerpos

April 15 – May 20, 2023



Morgan Lehman is pleased to present “Dos Cuerpos”, an exhibition of recent work by Edra Soto. This marks the artist’s third solo show with the gallery.

“Dos Cuerpos”, which translates to “two bodies” in Spanish, is a series of painted and mixed media works on paper that feature the “rejas” and “queiebrasoles” motifs that Soto employs in her signature “GRAFT” installations. These two-dimensional pieces strip away the architectural framework and physicality of the structures so that only ghostly impressions of the design elements are left behind. Soto’s paintings attempt to visualize the sense of fragmentation and loss that many immigrants experience when moving to a new and different country, a longing that ties someone to one identity even as they build another. “Dos Cuerpos” distills how a place, nation, or a culture imprints itself upon us, grounding us and growing with us no matter where we are. Soto conducts imaginary conversations in her studio while crafting compositions of fragments of paper in order to generate each visual arrangement. These splintered visualizations are reminiscent of references including Caribbean petroglyphs and secret languages.

For the past decade, Soto has dedicated herself to developing her ongoing project, “GRAFT”, which investigates Puerto Rican cultural memory, a cultural memory that often obfuscates the Black heritage of the island as folklore. As architect Edwin Quiles argues, the existence of Blackness is undeniably a part of the architecture, civil engineering, and urban design of many of Puerto Rico’s residential sectors, which often mimic those of West Africa’s Yoruba communities. Soto translates staples of presumed Puerto Rican design as a means of exposing the true origins of these architectural elements, challenging our Colonial cultural perspective. Such knowledge is still excluded from education in the Caribbean and beyond.

Motivated by her own Puerto Rican heritage and colonized condition, Soto has long been an advocate for the acknowledgement and conservation of African influence in Puerto Rican architecture and design. Her interdisciplinary practice spans visual arts, social practice, and architectural interventions, striking a balance between immersive/collective and highly intimate viewing experience. In dismantling the boundaries between the audience, the work, and her role as artist, Soto prompts viewers to reconsider the nature of urban space, cross-cultural dynamics, and personal responsibility. Growing up in Puerto Rico and now a fixture of her vibrant Chicago community, Soto’s work continues to raise questions about constructed social orders, diasporic identity, and the legacy of colonialism. “Dos Cuerpos” serves almost as a survey exhibition, documenting the conceptual breadth and multidisciplinary ambition of the artist’s unique, heartfelt practice.

Edra Soto is a Puerto-Rican born artist, curator, educator, and co-director of the outdoor project space, The Franklin. Soto has exhibited extensively at venues including El Museo del Barrio (New York, NY); the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago (Chicago, IL); the ICA San Diego (San Diego, CA); and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY). She has been awarded the Efroymsen Contemporary Arts Fellowship, the Illinois Arts Council Agency Fellowship, the inaugural Foundwork Artist Prize, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant and the Bemis Center’s Ree Kaneko Award, among others. Soto has exhibited and traveled to Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Cuba as part of the MacArthur Foundation’s International Connections Fund. Soto holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a bachelor’s degree from Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico. The artist lives and works in Chicago.