

SEBASTIÁN HIDALGO***Encounters with Neptune***

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Sebastián Hidalgo works and lives in the sacred and ancient city of Cholula, Mexico, a location deeply resonant with the work that he creates. The artist's studio is flooded with natural light, surrounded by books, historical reference images, and handwritten notes with words, numbers, and sketches taped to the wall. Nearby lies the imminent presence of the active Popocatepetl volcano and the Great Pyramid of Cholula. These natural and human-made structures shroud the city in geological and historical energy, deeply tied to the history, myths, and culture of the city and its people. Cholula is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and one of the oldest still-inhabited cities in the Americas.

On Hidalgo's studio shelves, in a book titled *Pueblos de la Sierra Madre: Etnografía de la Comunidad Otomi*, an ethnographic study of the Otomies people of Mexico, was an image of a figure made of *amate* paper (bark paper used in Mexico since pre-hispanic times) representing the *alma del cacahuete* (soul of the peanut god) used during fertility rites. The *alma del cacahuete* image weaves a thread of connection to Hidalgo's painting, *Gigante de Jade (Jade Giant)*. In this painting, the linear figure is enhanced by its jade, mineral-like oil-painted background with hints of yellow emanating through the surface. The giant's plexus releases rays of energy from its center, structuring the painting's composition; hands and feet hold the balance, reminiscent of a mandala, as in Hidalgo's more simplified and demure diagrammatic painting, *Mandala de metal (Metal Mandala)*.

The exhibition, entitled *Encounters with Neptune*, is made up of a body of work that revolves around two main concepts: chaos and mandalas. Both concepts function as starting points for generating organizational systems that reflect different parts of our psyche. Through these paintings, Hidalgo is interested in influencing the tides of the mind, in the way an image is read and understood. By using both poles – together and related to each other – the mind is activated, going from one side of the range to the other. One pole plunges into confusion and chance, into a dark zone; the other builds symmetrical structures that suggest a certain coherence and lucidity, its direction points and develops towards and from the center. But this apparent divergence eventually leads to the same place, both paths can unify and deceive. Neptune acts as an uncomfortable figure that invites us into the unknown, invisible but present, both in its role as the farthest known planet and as a mythological being. Neptune is a symbol, a deity, a ruler of the seas, and their impulses. The set of works in the exhibition imagines internal dialogues and silent encounters with this uncomfortable figure.

Elemental energies of fire, water, earth, and air inhabit the works: from *Polaris*, a figure floating in an energy field made of stars and sky, the nebulous pink fire of *Mariposa en llamas (Butterfly on fire)*, and the terrestrial, earthly realm of *Jardín interior (Inner Garden)*. The works are linked to the time in which they are made, to the passage of time, to what Hidalgo is experiencing during their preparation, and also to the season(s) of the year that encompasses them. The change in temperature, light and solar energy affect the process, the color ranges used, and the general feeling. Hidalgo says, "I usually start with a simple idea, which can be a drawing, a color, a scale, a way of working with the material; it is a starting point from where it develops, from there I respond and take each piece in its own direction, and sometimes the initial idea disappears or is left behind, uncertainty is important to keep the process alive. I usually put myself in a dream-like state of mind, in which I can project and imagine possibilities,

responding to what is in front of me.” Hidalgo’s pieces start with the preparation of the canvas: fabrics are prepared with *Cola de Conejo* (rabbit skin glue), calcium carbonate, zinc white, linseed oil, and formaldehyde on cotton fabric, a process that takes about a week. This creates a stable, bright, flexible surface that is very sensitive to action, which integrates the layers that are applied throughout the process. Preparing the stretchers and the canvas helps Hidalgo become familiar with the pieces and find their own identity.

Hidalgo writes, “As a whole, I seek to balance temperatures, atmospheres, temporalities, elements. So I can think of, for example: relating wood with electricity, or an ethereal atmosphere with some metal, or joining a fragment of a *tepalcate* (a piece of pre-Hispanic clay pot) with some Greek mythology and computer elements. The result is partly constructed and partly unexpected. That is how the titles of the pieces and the set are manifested, I like to think of them as book covers and think, what is this book about, what does it contain, what is it called? Images are taken to the plane of words and concepts and generate new relationships that shoot us in some direction, where perhaps we reflect ourselves.”

Sebastián Hidalgo (b.1985, Mexico) works and lives in Cholula, Mexico. Hidalgo’s practice has been anchored in a constant exploration that has allowed him to generate a polyvalent body of work while searching for a sensation of expansion and unity through ideas of psychedelia, dream memory and contemplative states of mind. The dynamic materiality of his work bridges together the philosophies and imaginations of anthropology, Archaic art, sci-fi, mysticism, cartoons, Taoism, and Cyber-Aesthetics. Hidalgo studied at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain and Unarte, Puebla, Mexico. Recent solo exhibitions include *Radio Solar* (2022), Saenger Galería, Mexico City; group exhibitions at Fortnight Institute, NY (2022), Harkawik, NY (2022), La Quiñonera, Mexico City (2022), Galería Karen Huber, Mexico City (2020) and Museo Internacional del Barroco, Puebla, Mexico (2020), and more. *Encounters with Neptune* is the artist’s first solo exhibition in the United States.

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