

Z'OTZ* COLLECTIVE

Waiting Outside of My Hand
September 8 - November 3, 2019

Finding A Niche

An essay on the exhibition *Z'otz* Collective: Waiting Outside of My Hand*

September 8 - November 3, 2019

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, Curated by Sandy Saad

Colourful figures cover the walls of the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, their obscure bodies are made up of various heads, limbs, fingers, and toes. Their physical characteristics are both human and animal, seamlessly merging to form quirky and otherworldly images. Viewers find fantastical scenes that include ambiguous characters whose bodies are comprised of a multitude of unlikely parts in unlikely places. With a very consistent and distinct aesthetic, these works are produced by the three artists who form Z'otz* Collective: Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano, and Ilyana Martínez. Since 2004, they have been creating figures and scenes in various media including drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, and large-scale murals. With each group member taking a turn to make a mark, their collaboration is key to the development of every piece.

The term zotz refers to the bat in Maya mythology, in which personified forces of nature and deities play an important role. Having Latin American heritage, the artists refer to the storytelling traditions of their cultures in the production of their work. Z'otz* Collective has developed a very recognizable aesthetic that acknowledges the visual vocabulary of Pre-Hispanic art forms. Their images include characters with wide-open mouths and large noses from which objects, texts, and other figures emerge. These art forms reflect a world of gods and deities, with mythological narratives that communicated a shared identity, sense of place, and beliefs. They allowed those who encountered them to connect with an unseen world, and ultimately with something greater than what is only visible.



Images: Z'otz* Collective, (left) *Flirting with Doubt* (excerpt from series) mixed media on paper, 15" x 22", 2012 - 2019, (right) *Historical Sneeze*, modeled and incised terracotta 26" h x 11" w x 13" d, 2019, (across) detail from mural *Dissolving Frontiers*, dimensions variable, 2019.



Z'otz* Collective references these visual languages and, combining them with the artists' personal accounts of immigration and displacement, produces works that convey transition and hybridity. They quote Pre-Hispanic frescos, sculptures, gods, and deities, and incorporate images and references that reflect our present. Mixed media drawings and collages combine outlandish creatures with images from magazine cut-outs, introducing us to characters who have odd-shaped heads with Pantene hair, and wear slim-fit pants. Z'otz* Collective's practice reflects on their history and place of origin, in juxtaposition with their present-day experiences. This act of narrative production communicates a new story, one that reflects on the immigrant experience – a tale of change, adjustment, and making sense of a new world.

This experience brought the artists together in Canada, where they met at various art institutions and gatherings. In 2004, they had their first collaborative artmaking session. Over

15 years, their collaboration has culminated in a body of work that employs the power of narrative to communicate experience. By developing their own visual aesthetic, Z'otz* Collective has introduced a new visual language and art form into the Canadian art milieu. Their work joins with many new voices that reflect varying experiences and identities and add to the diversity and complexity of contemporary Canadian art practice.

Waiting Outside of My Hand offers multiple series of works on paper that include elements of drawing, painting, and collage. Each series reflects years of weekly meetings and collaborative drawing sessions; their mass and accumulation take over the VAC. The exhibition also includes three terracotta sculptures made up of stacked silhouettes of creatures with large open mouths and eye sockets. Many of these elements form a site-specific mural that fills the small gallery. *Dissolving Frontiers* includes anthropomorphic figures that transition from



simple shapes and lines to fantastical creatures morphing into double-sided limbs, scaled torsos, and tangled feet. The mural also incorporates the newest form of narrative building explored by Z'otz* Collective, the niche. Within the mural, shadow boxes are placed that display various objects. The objects take on new meanings when removed from their places of origin and given a different place. Each niche contains objects that together suggest a theme or narrative, forming an interconnected network of stories. By creating niches, Z'otz* Collective explores the idea of a space to incubate, collect, and tell a story through a collection of objects. They also examine the notion of change that comes from removal from one's place of origin.

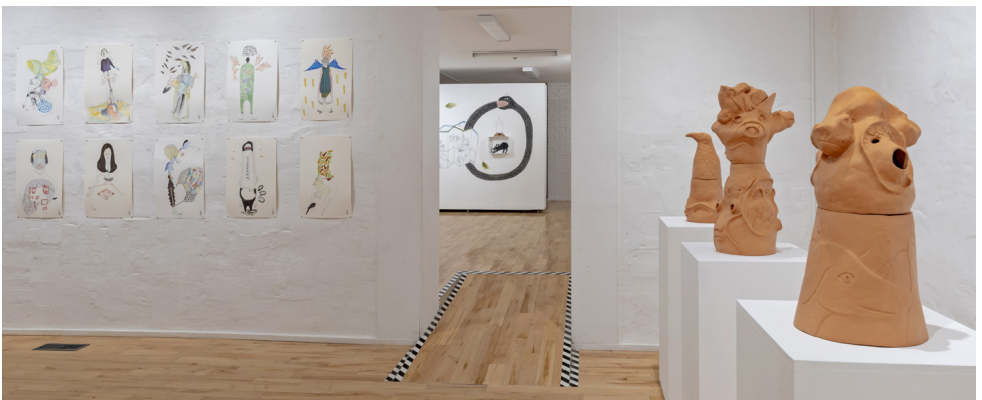


Image: Z'otz* Collective, (top, pages 3-4) *Flirting with Doubt* (excerpt from series), mixed media on paper, 15" x 22", 2012 - 2019, (above) *Late Bloomer*, *Historical Sneeze* and *Soprano*, modeled and incised terracotta, dimensions variable, 2019.



Image: Z'otz* Collective, *After Reading the Book Twice* (series), mixed media on paper, 11 x 15 cm, 2019.

Waiting Outside of My Hand introduces VAC's visitors to a body of work that is visceral and open-ended. Z'otz* Collective's collaboration is ingrained in their practice and carried out through every medium they explore. Their work conveys an intuitive energy, resulting in enigmatic images that allow individual interpretations. In keeping with their collaborative approach, the exhibition ends with an opportunity for visitors to add to the story. Empty niches in a series are placed next to objects collected from the VAC, prompting visitors to experiment by using the found objects to create their own niches. In doing so, they explore potential narratives and themes that arise when objects are recontextualized. *Waiting Outside of My Hand* invites visitors to become the decoders of Z'otz* Collective's iconography, and contributors to their stories. In doing so, we interpret, project and self-reflect, adding to the complexity of their narrative and ours.



Images: Z'otz* Collective, (left) detail from mural *Dissolving Frontiers*, dimensions variable, 2019, (right) Z'otz* Collective, *Distracted Perfections* (excerpt from series), 2019, mixed media on paper, sizes variable, 2012 - 2019.



Image: Z'otz* Collective, detail from mural *Dissolving Frontiers*, dimensions variable, 2019.

Biography

Z'otz* Collective was formed in Toronto in 2004 by three artists of Latin American heritage; Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano, and Ilyana Martínez. In a shared studio, they meet weekly to collaborate on works that incorporate drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, and site-specific installation. Their work connects to the storytelling traditions of their Latin American culture. Through the wording of their titles, the Collective gives hints to the narratives contained within their works, while leaving space for viewers to create their own conclusions. Z'otz* Collective has shown work at multiple galleries and museums across Canada including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Dunlop Art Gallery, Union Gallery, YYY Artists' Outlet, Cambridge Galleries, and the MacLaren Art Centre. All three members have been awarded grants from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation for their individual practices and have received support from the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.



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