

*El Corazón del Cerro* invites us to peer through the looking glass and witness parallel realities: a chimeric creature hidden behind a black mirror. Inspired by Mesoamerican myths and the sacred images found in the Borgia Codex, this encountered creature inhabiting the gallery space points towards a set of symbols that are Other.

Behind the gallery glass, a soil monster opens its faucet to reveal a screen. The soil monster, inspired by an Olmec monument —known as “Monumento 9”, recently returned to Mexico after being stolen and trafficked in the United States. It is believed to have served as an entryway to a cave. Mesoamericans viewed these internal spaces as sacred sites: meeting points between the living world, the underworld and that of the gods. Humanity was believed to have been gestated within an igneous matrix at the centre of Cohuacatépec or ‘the ancestor’s mountain’. Lava, too, is extruded from the Earth’s bellows, forming a bleeding red wound that scorches and kills everything in its path. Rapidly cooling volcanic rock creates obsidian, a hard, brittle rock used in antiquity to create both mirrors and weapons, not unlike technology’s two-fold use today.

At a time when international disputes regarding the repatriation of stolen archeological pieces abound, Rodrigo’s reference to two stolen artefacts questions the national myths created by modern states and the conflicting values these objects take within these stories. Technology used in the exhibition presents us with twin propositions: its use as a weapon of power and a tool to imagine other worlds.

*Text by Catalina Barroso Luque | Inque by Catalina Barroso Luque*

## Black Water | Black Water

Peering through a high window, I see the city and river below the fog. A furry grey head emerges from the glassy reflection. Its sable eyes glare at me; the spectre sits heavy on my heart.

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Wearing sub-zero dry suits, a team of archaeologists plunges into the crater of the snowcapped volcano. They dive through nine levels of frigid hell to reach the bottom of the caldera. The archaeologists’ bodies emerge hours later. Their heads, torsos, and arms doubled in the mirrored waters; legless monsters carrying wooden sceptres in the shape of lightning bolts. Black gloved hands held as in prayer grasp onto fossilised copal, rocks, and obsidian knives, with each artefact placed in a plastic receptacle to be later measured, weighed and carbon dated.

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We drive across the dried marshland. Empty bodies of water scorched in the extended drought. The moon is there, in front of us. A large yellow sphere that fills our eyes and stretches and darkens the reed’s shadows in equal measure.

The dog’s shaggy head turns towards me, emerging from the blackness of the tarmac. The headlights reveal an expression filled with shock and fear. Bloodshot eyes. Upon impact, my chest rams against the steering wheel, and my arms and hands are stiff, attempting to steady the weight of the spinning automobile as the left wheel drives over the pelted mass. A volt of violet goes through my body. I am unable to stop. There are no resting areas on this rural two-lane road, only my brother’s calm voice telling me to breathe.

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Black water: reflections of living ghosts. They move parallel to the world before my eyes — hazel, brown, emerald and gold.

*Dogs were considered guides to the afterlife. Canines were often subject to ritual sacrifice so that they could accompany their masters on their voyage through Mictlan or underworld. Dogs’ main duty was to help their owners cross a deep river that led to Mictlan*

*Bodies of water were understood as portals between the earth and the underworld, with the latter being associated with dampness, darkness and femininity.*

*Ximitecaltl is an extinct volcano in Mexico, which has two lagoons inside its crater. Archeological objects, believed to be offering to the god Tlaloc, have been recovered from these volcanic lakes.*

*Nine is an unlucky number associated with the earth’s interior. Hell has nine layers. Human gestation takes nine months; the fetus birthed from one of nine orifices in the human body, covered in blood.*