

# On the Wall 8

March 17 – October 2, 2021

Tamara  
Gonzales



*Red Lunar Skywalker*, 2014  
spray paint on canvas  
66 x 54 inches



Installation view of *Ometeotl* at  
Klaus von Nichtssagend in 2017



*Untitled*, 2016  
alpaca and wool  
33 x 26 inches

Tamara Gonzales is known for incorporating into her artwork visual culture more traditionally associated with lived culture, such as lace, graffiti, embroidery, textiles, and other decorative techniques. With inventive combinations of such elements, the artist's paintings, drawings, and textiles collaborate to build up blocky figures filled with multi-colored fields of florals and *faux bois*. Created by a range of techniques, from spray painting through lengths of lace to block printing sections of canvas, Gonzales' oeuvre showcases a unique commitment to developing abstraction through prisms of multiculturalism. With this unique, evolving visual language, *On the Wall: Tamara Gonzales* parades visions of geometries that sprout from the floor and onto a wall-climbing path, eventually linking together into a room-sized mural artwork that the artist playfully calls "Cosmic Recess."

The playful spirit of "Cosmic Recess" is conveyed both literally and figuratively. Massive, blocky legs stretch down from the ceiling adorned with punky, spiky hair connected with winding vines and energetic patterns. The cartoonish legs graze the gallery floor in colorful boots and bare feet. A mischievous ball bounces wall to wall, getting kicked from one foot to the next, and maps a game at play. The ball appears to be at the mercy of shuffling feet, or it may be that the feet are vulnerable to the power of the ball. The ball's lacey motif offers up a potential clue to the world that makes up "Cosmic Recess."

To create the patterning on the ball, Gonzales used as a stencil a commercially produced lace tablecloth of the Aztec Sun Stone, now housed in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. She purchased the tablecloth in Teotihuacán. The Sun Stone depicts the five consecutive worlds of the sun from Aztec mythology. Though it resembles one, the stone is not a calendar; more likely a ceremonial container or altar linked to the Aztec Sun God and festivities dedicated to Him. This stone is perhaps one of the most famous Aztec artifacts. Beyond adorning local souvenirs and the Mexican twenty peso gold coin, the Sun Stone appears in much contemporary Mexican and Mexican-American folk art. This circulation of imagery and fluid meaning is something that Gonzales is interested in within her own image-making. How do images circulate? What new rituals do they invite, and how should an artist honor their origins?

# On the Wall: Tamara Gonzales



*Maestra (Lucmilla)*, 2017  
Cotton embroidery on denim  
69 x 58.5 in



*Untitled*, 2020  
Alpaca fiber and wool in artist's frame  
38.5 x 30.5 in

This ornate and energetic ball's specific object lineage is present within the narrative of "Cosmic Recess" as a kind of cosmos or celestial instrument keeping the world in orbit. Gonzales often channels and reinterprets patterns and images from her lived experiences, travels, and direct participation within unique spiritual communities. Therefore, the imagery in her work frequently features a personalized spiritually-based iconography. It functions as a form of translation, creating a hybridized visual language based upon personal reflections upon experience, experimentation, practice, and process. For Gonzales, this kind of visual vocabulary is a way to honor and extend the mutual exchange of ideas. Her artwork becomes an active meditation on these collisions of time and culture.

Similarly, the artist's use of lace as a readymade stencil is abundant within her work. She uses lace for the specific symbolism of a pattern, like the Sun Stone tablecloth in "Cosmic Recess," and at other times, she uses it to create texture. The graphic and abstract surface achieved by the lace stencil contrasts with Gonzales' bold, thickset lines and filled spaces in her mammal-like figures.

Lace as a textile and craft inherently carries cultural histories and stories within its pattern and materiality. Historically, lace adorned the home, or the body acknowledged as a treasured heirloom; it is decorative, domestic, sensual, and valuable all at once. From another perspective, lace, and the process of its making, shares a visual relationship with spider webs—the careful labor of weaving a home, a nest, and a means for sustenance. The spider is also an important insect within creation myths across cultures. The writer and philosopher, Donna Haraway, recently described spiders as "[t]he tentacular ones [that] make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others." In other words, the spider offers a way to imagine co-existing in the world today, offering paths towards collaboration and new ways of telling stories collectively.

In addition to extensive patterning, "Cosmic Recess," like many Gonzales paintings, features heavily outlined bodies with soft, looping ornamentation that cumulatively balances abstraction with figuration. The figures prove mysterious and difficult to name. They are not quite human but also not quite animal. Mythology, folklore, and various origin stories personify animals to create deities' identities. Examples include the protector Spider Woman in Navajo











*On The Wall: Tamara Gonzales*  
 Providence College Galleries, 2021  
 Photo: Scott Alario



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tradition and Hindu figures such as Ganesha the Mouse god, Indra the Elephant, and Durga the Lion, to name a few. Gonzales' figures suggest a similar kind of animism with scale and ornamentation.

Vigorous lines produce ornate puffy skirts, winding foliage, psychedelic-patterned boots, and a sizeable sinuous snake. All such elements have a cartoonish and theatrical quality. When reflecting on her life's work, Gonzales often speaks of her love of animé, which is evident in the many creatures and characters in her paintings and weavings, even when abstracted. While this is a stylistic relationship, there is also an interesting link to artists like Leo Lioni, Tove Jansson, and Remy Charlip, all of whom worked in illustration and comics. These three artists used joy, celebration, and ritual within invented or abstracted worlds as ways to address community, creativity, and more existential conditions. Gonzales does the same in "Cosmic Recess."

Following this vein of image-making, a long, undulating snake runs the gallery floor's length like a small river or a creek. The snake also has meaning across many cultures, spiritual practices, and legends. For Gonzales, the snake connects to water, taking on a more considerable ecological resonance within this current world climate. She has left the snake without a distinguishable head or tail. It is an abstraction of a wave with no beginning or end. As one might orient themselves in the world by searching for the North Star above, the snake in "Cosmic Recess" functions like a way-finder from below, shepherding the viewer back to the essential element of life-giving water.

As the viewer encounters "Cosmic Recess," their gaze is forced up towards the towering figures and to what may lie beyond. Many church architectures were designed with this same choreography in mind, to cast the eyes up towards the heavens in worship and possibility. Gonzales is interested in this spiritual gesture and a persistent mortal pondering of what exists after our earthly existence. Gonzales asks, what if humanity has won "the cosmic lotto?" To be born conscious on this earth, within a human body that is so capable, while at our side, heaven and the cosmos serve as steady agents, aligning us and permitting ways to stay connected to the wildness that is this world. "Cosmic Recess" generously positions the viewer to partake, to play ball, and find that possibility.

– Kate McNamara, Curator at Large, Providence College Galleries

**ABOUT THE ARTIST**—Tamara Gonzales was born in Madera, CA, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Gonzales is a prominent participant in the community of artist-run spaces and artist-driven projects in New York City, and her work is held in public collections, including the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA. She has been awarded residencies such as Center of Contemporary Art, Andratx, Mallorca, Spain (2012); International Artists Exchange Program, Basel, Switzerland (2008); Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi, India (2001); Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY (1999); and Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT (1997).

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Bo Yancon* at Klaus von Nichtssagend, New York, NY (2019); *Ó Lua* at The Pit, Los Angeles, CA (2018); and *Campesino Bailando* at 39 Great Jones, New York, NY (2017). Recent two-person and group shows include: *Talking All Morning: Tamara Gonzales and Chris Martin* at The Pit, Los Angeles, CA (2021); *Mask* at Klaus von Nichtssagend, New York, NY (2020); *All of Them Witches* at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2020); *It's Necessary to Talk About Trees* at River Valley Arts Collective, Catskill, NY (2019); and *Out of Control* at Venus Over Manhattan, New York, NY (2018).

**ABOUT PCG**—Providence College Galleries (PCG) presents exhibitions and public programs focusing on contemporary art, innovative artistic practice and interdisciplinary cultural activity. Operating within two gallery spaces and across Providence College's campus, PCG supports the educational, service and community-oriented mission of the College with dynamic visual arts productions, including those that foster audience participation, cross-departmental collaboration at the College, and cultural exchange at local, national and international levels. PCG ultimately strives to produce projects by artists and intellectuals who demonstrate how and why creative practitioners are vital forces in promoting diversity and shaping contemporary global culture.

On the Wall is PCG's annual commission of large-scale artworks applied directly to the walls of the Reilly Gallery. An interdisciplinary initiative develop new scholarship on the rich traditions of the mural format, this exhibition series empowers artists to expand their studio practice and gives PCG's community the opportunity to participate in mural research and production processes. *On the Wall: Tamara Gonzales* is the sixth iteration of the series.

*On the Wall: Tamara Gonzales* is organized by Kate McNamara, PCG's Curator at Large. Technical assistance provided by Benny Merris and PCG staff Scott Alario, Elizabeth Corkery, Angela Crenshaw, and Jamilee Lacy. The exhibition is sponsored by Providence College's Department of Art and Art History. Additional support is generously provided by Pete Peterson (PC'86) and Theresa Cairns Peterson (PC'89).

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Providence College, Providence, RI 02918

**401.865.2400**  
**[pcgalleries@providence.edu](mailto:pcgalleries@providence.edu)**  
**[pcgalleries.providence.edu](http://pcgalleries.providence.edu)**





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