

## Ballroom Marfa reopens with ‘Espejo Quemada’ exhibition

BY URSULA MUÑOZ-SCHAEFER

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MARFA — Ballroom Marfa is back for the first time since lockdown. The museum opened its doors to tourists as well as local members of Marfa’s art scene on Friday, June 25, with “Espejo Quemada,” the newest exhibition by Bolivian American artist Donna Huanca — and her first since COVID-19. Through vibrant colors and a mesmeric setting, the exhibition served as an appropriate “welcome back” after the museum’s long hiatus.

Although Huanca currently resides in Berlin, she says her first visit to Marfa inspired the show — which was a long time coming.

“I came to Marfa the first time in 2005, and ever since that trip I’ve always wanted to do a show here,” she told The Big Bend Sentinel. “Everything is about geology and nature, and things that are beyond our understanding.”

Made to feel as immersive as possible, the installation features paintings, video and sculptures, including an interactive outdoor geoglyph with speaker boxes echoing nature sounds. Its title — which translates to “Burnt Mirror” and deliberately feminizes the word “burnt” — suggests ignition, reflection and change. The abstract nature of each piece calls for all sorts of different interpretations.

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“When I make art, I think about creating all these different sensorial experiences for you so that you really have a unique read on it,” she said. “People might smell different things and people might hear different things, and it’s sort of indescribable, and I like having that element of unique experience, person to person.

Earth appears to be a common theme, with oil and sand included among the materials in the paintings displayed in the North Gallery, the orange hues reminiscent of Marfa’s magmatic makeup. Much of Huanca’s artwork — like the large medallion sculptures punctured with braided hair and body piercings — also seemed to reflect on Huanca’s cultural heritage, which the artist often navigates through a decolonialist lens. She cites Bolivia’s Urkupiña Festival — a pagan celebration of indigenous dances and rituals — as a major inspiration for her immersive artwork.

“There was a total immersion of sound, visual performance, music, color and couture,” Huanca explained. “As a child I remember feeling like this was so incredible, to be able to have an experience that way — that every single person attending the festival had their own point of view.”

According to Daisy Nam, the curator of “Espejo Quemada,” this exhibition had originally been planned last year, right before all public institutions closed and the pandemic forced everyone to remain home. When the show was finally planned this year, the works took on a different meaning.

“This happened to be the show that was on the schedule in June,” Nam told The Big Bend Sentinel. “But as we were planning the exhibition, it all kind of made sense because of the sensorial elements to the exhibition and Donna’s way of sharing that experience for viewers.”

Indeed, bodies and human touch are among the predominant allusions in Huanca’s abstract artwork, whose sculptures consist of the titular mirrored surfaces audiences see themselves reflected in. Even the static paintings are composed of curved strokes that suggest movement. These implications, Huanca said, almost make the artwork a rumination of what we’ve yearned for in this past year of social distancing.

“When it came down to making specific works and titling them, I was thinking about protection and sort of bliss states,” she said. “It was definitely in reaction to collective trauma that we’ve all been through.”

Still, Huanca seemed content with the show’s outcome as well as her trip to Marfa.

“I think the Marfa that I came to 15 years ago, versus the Marfa of today, is very different,” she said. “I think it’s incredible that there’s such a close-knit community here.”