

# CERCA Y LEJOS | CRISTINA CÓRDOVA

Ceramic Sculpture + Drawings

Visualizing emotion and conjuring a physical form to contain it, sculptor Cristina Córdova taps complex sources of personal expression and technical ability. Córdova's sculptures are poetry embodied in human forms, infused with potent gestures and a guarded gaze — introspective narratives concerned with personal and cultural history. There is a field of vision surrounding the work, an unavoidable engagement and spiritual directness that are unflinchingly honest. The use of material is equally transcendent, showing minimal regard for technical limits and the conventions of accepted ceramic properties. Córdova works intuitively, processing the ingrained influences of her culture, environment, and education, yet she is able to convey universal concepts in her work.

In this single-artist exhibition, Córdova has envisioned the entire gallery space as her creative territory, canvas, and stage — fabricating a conceptual environment for her ideology. Discarding the traditions of the pedestal and rigid, framed paintings, Córdova challenges the viewer by shifting the scale, lowering or raising works from eye level, and painting on subordinate materials such as cardboard. For an artist whose work is both sensory and confrontational, the opportunity to work with an entire exhibition space is ideal: she can move fluidly from wall to floor, she can study the light and create works accordingly, she can force perspective and create narrative groupings without regard to conventional gallery norms.

*CERCA Y LEJOS* is an appreciable shift in Córdova's work — a transposition or veering away from fiction into verisimilitude — the artist looking outward instead of inward. Central to this exhibition are two life-size, ceramic figures: one depicts her husband

and the other depicts one of their daughters. The figures stand in front of fragmented photographic murals — images from Puerto Rico. In talking about this work, Córdova said, “My work has been described in the past as having to do with surrealism and religious iconography. In this more overtly personal work, I am using images of real places and modeling real individuals; naturalism is playing a much heavier role.” Along with these tableaux are a series of large portraits of members of Córdova's family. Drawn and painted on cardboard or paper using clay slip and other materials, the oversized faces look directly and unwaveringly at the viewer.

What becomes most compelling in experiencing Córdova's work is the evolution of our viewing, an ever-deepening understanding of her narrative. The figures are in contrapposto posture — relaxed, aware, fully present. In a 1941 photograph by Jack Delano, a malaria poster hangs on the wall of a small hotel in Puerto Rico, warning the hotel guests of mosquitos transmitting the illness. This image is poignantly paired with the strong, proud figure of Córdova's daughter. There is passion and potent force in this gathering: father, daughters, sister, brother, husband.

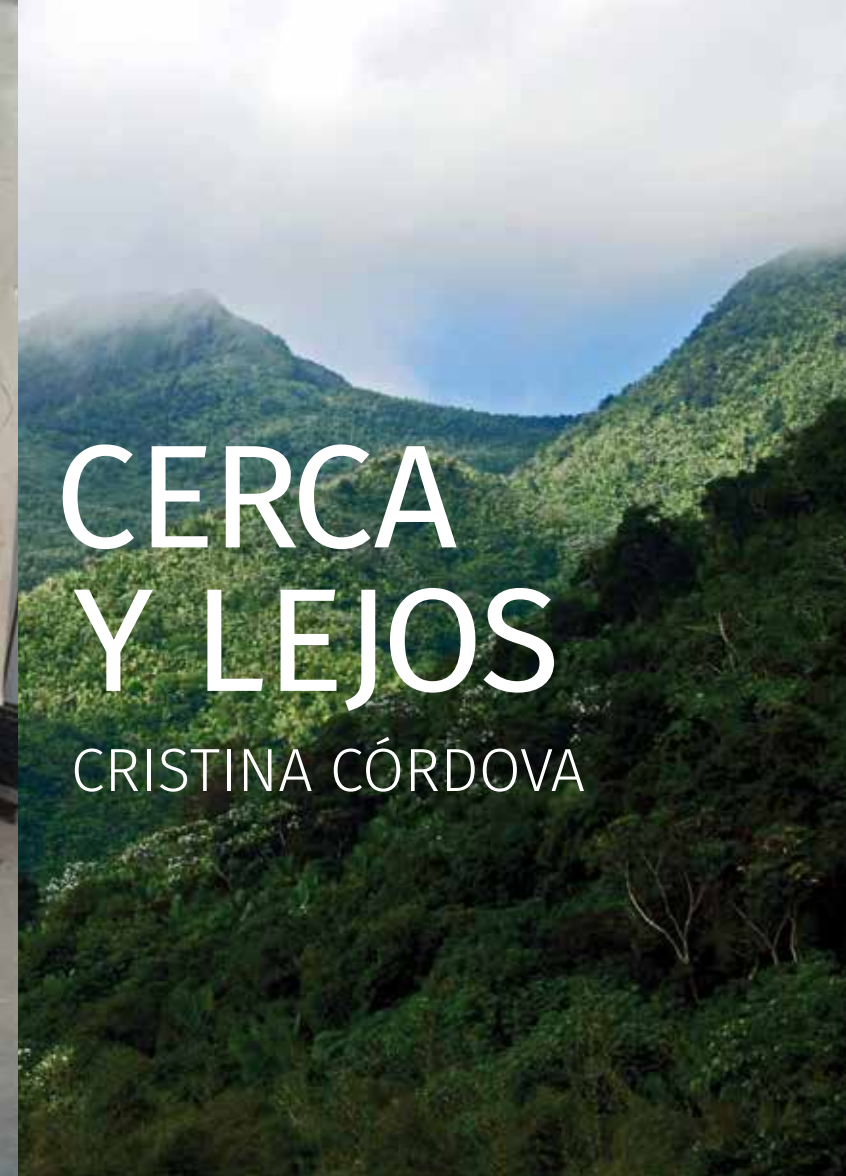
The show's title means “near and far” and refers to the proximity of the artist's family and the distance of her homeland. Taken as a whole, the exhibition creates a form of silent theater that illuminates one artist's exploration of her personal and cultural identity.

Kathryn Gremley, Penland Gallery Director

Front photos:  
*La persistencia del verdor*  
(work in progress)

Photo by Robin Dreyer

*Mount Britton, El Yunque*  
*National Forest, Puerto Rico*  
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## CERCA Y LEJOS

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Deep in the realm of primal codes there is an instinctive connection to the place where our neurological infrastructure is first laid. Likewise, there is an involuntary vinculum to that core group of individuals that first mold our existence. I am often impressed by the active influence these places and individuals have on my day to day. Near and far — they are beacons to my identity, some tying me back to a specific geography and the sediment of generations. For better or worse they persist and perpetuate themselves through my actions and my willingness to explore the liminal space between two cultures. Through image and form, *CERCA Y LEJOS* explores these deep-rooted and inexorable human and geographic connections.

Cristina Córdova

*Sortilegio*, clay, charcoal, mixed media, acid-free cardboard, 82 x 60 inches

For centuries, both painting and sculpture were synonymous with the representation of figures; the earliest images we know are figurative. The foundation of Cristina Córdova's work lies squarely within this global tradition. Her work is deeply poetic and highly theatrical; its sensual, playful, and mysterious qualities are a provocative mix of religious imagery, popular culture, and social issues. Like traditional sculpture and tribal art, it's grounded in the principles of catharsis, spiritual drama, and philosophical abstraction.

Traditionally, it's been the role of figurative sculpture to convey, connote, or stand in for assertions regarding the sensuality of the body and the immateriality of the soul. Even portraiture, although specific to an individual, is about the humanity of the model. This is especially true for Córdova, who has stated that her investigation of the figure allows her "to understand the indeterminate and ever-changing aspects of our humanity." Córdova has taken the figurative tradition and turned it to her own purposes; her work evokes rich psychological and social experiences.

Kathleen Whitney  
from *Cristina Córdova: Involuntary Dialogs*,  
*Ceramics Monthly*, February 2016

*Ñeque*, clay, charcoal, mixed media, acid-free cardboard, 82 x 60 inches

