

Hellish Power

By Alix Gaytan

Chaos has been a familiar face to me. I am a Mexican American artist born in El Paso, Texas, but I was raised in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico after my mother's deportation. Dangerous situations, violent crimes, and corruption passed as normal behavior in my hometown. This unstable environment was mirrored in our home. Over the years, I witnessed my family's psychological and physical fragmentation. My family's history of being harmed by traumatic events and mental illnesses served as the initial inspiration for my artistic journey. To survive, I projected my feelings of fear and confusion onto the outside world. These emotions fed a deep curiosity to understand chaotic human behavior.

My work explores the abject as described by philosopher Julia Kristeva in "Powers of Horror." I create images of insect humanoids forever confined in their constant fragmentation within chaotic atmospheres. Other influences in my investigation of the abject being and its relation to disturbing human behavior include the painter Francis Bacon, novelists Franz Kafka and Clarice Lispector, filmmaker David Lynch, and musician Trent Reznor. By employing painting, drawing, and printmaking techniques, bodies and backgrounds coalesce into an attraction-repulsion frenzy. These humanoids are born from body fragments with diverse mutations, while they become surrounded by dysfunctional human organs and vascular systems. The viewer first becomes attracted to the vibrancy of colors and patterns but is then unsettled by the violent force emanating from the hybrid figures. When fear and confusion are expressed through our bodies, they are violently transformed into something uncanny.

At present, the familiar face of chaos feels more alive than ever, with civil unrest, economic disparities, global warming, and a pandemic clashing together in front of our eyes. Ultimately, my ambition is to offer a visual testament to the durability of the human mind and its never-ending metamorphosis. I seek for my audience to question their separate wholeness to the degree that the images enter and reframe their sense of human reality. Notions of a body's boundaries become replaced by the body's natural polymorphousness. These new creatures are vaguely recognizable to us, and we feel them intertwining with our body cells and muscles. They embody the hellish power of chaos that drives so much of our fear. Ironically, it is the same power that has been pushing us forward through the ages, and more than likely will continue to be the constant companion in our fight for survival.