

EXHIBITION REVIEW OF
GUADALUPE MARAVILLA'S *PORTALS*
at ICA MIAMI

BY CLAIRE BREUKEL



A “portal” is a doorway, entrance or gate, often large and imposing. In the context of immigration, the title of Guadalupe’s Maravilla’s solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami, could not be more apt. Himself a former undocumented immigrant, Maravilla entered a portal to the United States as a Salvadoran child. As such, his exhibition tackles topics surrounding the realities of migration with unique complexity and gravity.

Using the word ice literally, while referencing the Immigration and Customs Enforcement anagram, Maravilla shows playful yet disturbing white and red embroideries of hands, skulls and drops of water melting from cubes, or perhaps the red drops are blood.



These embroideries overlay a wall mural reminiscent of a hand drawn map marking territory and possible routes of travel. The mural is a result of a Salvadoran children’s number and drawing game called “Tripa Chuca”, which, ironically translates to dirty guts. Maravilla’s game has been played by three generations of immigrants—second generation, newly documented and undocumented.

This wall is in turn the background to four life size sculptural sound gong headdresses. Combining Mayan symbols, mythology as well as contemporary and anatomical paraphernalia, Maravilla conflates cultural references to create a modern day costume of multiplicity embodying today’s complex immigrant identity.



Unlike many art-driven politicized dialogues, Maravilla’s headdresses offer solutions, albeit momentary. Activated during an hour-long performance, the gongs let off vibrational sound for therapeutic healing. Adding a spiritual and human dimension to the cold hard facts of immigration processes, one cannot help feel that the vibrations are a comforting call to the undocumented children who have, and are trying to, pass through the portal.

Curated by Gean Moreno “Portals” is on view until November 3, 2019