

Performance | "Rito" Uses Powder and Ceramic Jaguars to Evoke Myth in Madrid | CFile - Contemporary Ceramic Art + Design

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MADRID — We don't get to write about performances involving ceramics as often as we'd like, so this is a rare treat for us. The Facultad de Bellas Artes in Madrid recently hosted [Rito](#), a live performance that incorporated a male and female dancer covered in pale gray powder. They were ringed by identical ceramic jaguar sculptures, each opening their toothy jaws mid-roar. These were made by artist Susana Guerrero.





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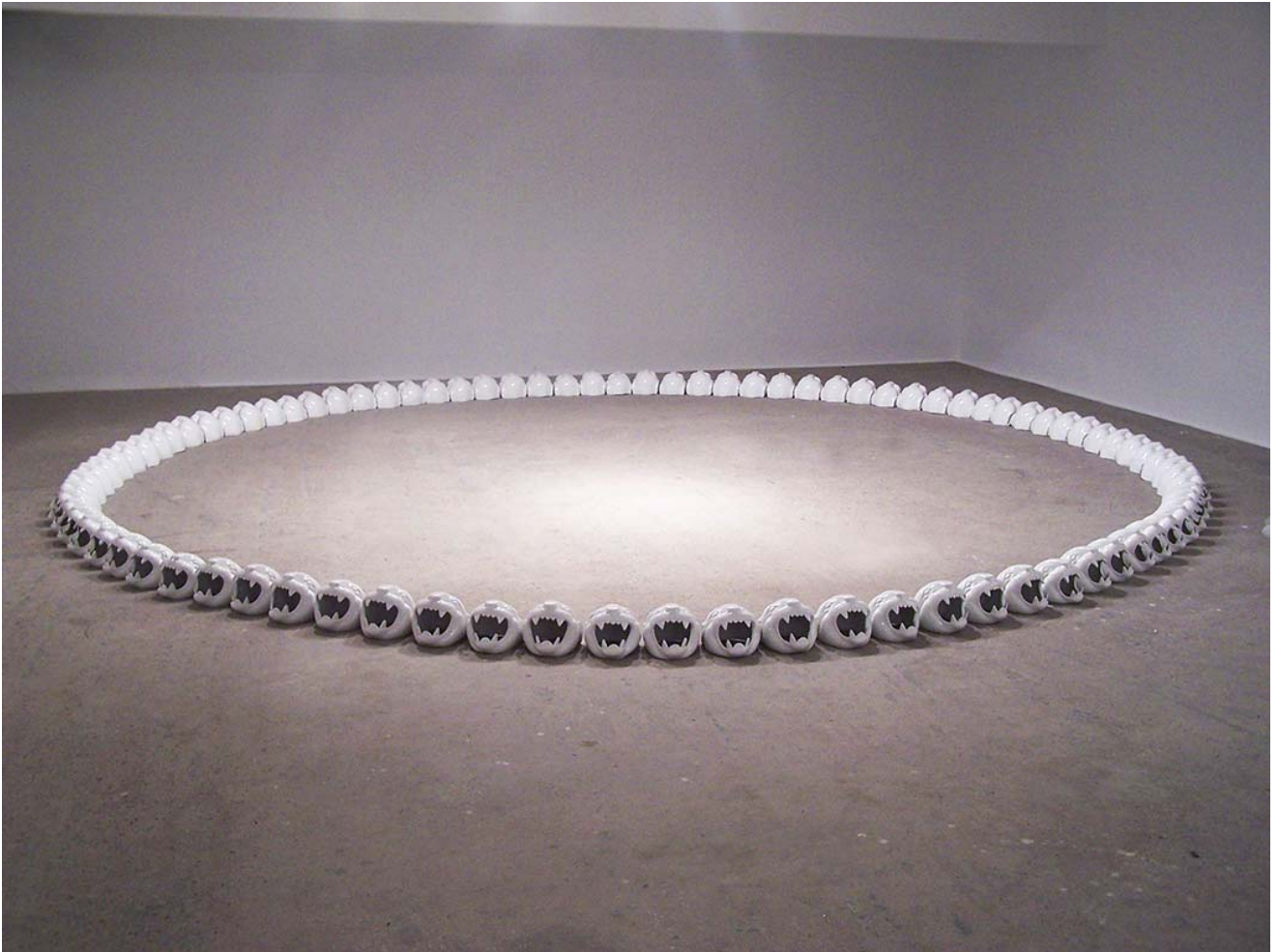
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Dance is further out of my critical wheelhouse than most things, but, to me, the performance seems to evoke myth. At least, this dance is using a lot of the same vocabulary that you sometimes encounter with etiological stories. We have the binary male and female in place, appearing at times to oppose each other, but always coming together in unity— fertility surfaces as the sometimes frantic movement slows to a crawl as the dancers embrace and kiss. The whole of the performance takes place in the circle of jaguars, setting a stage which I assume represents the world.

Further evidence of the world surfaces in the gray powder (I'm assuming pulverized clay) that coats the two dancers. I believe this symbolizes the materiality of the base world. Adam was made of clay. The dancers start clean, perhaps suggesting some divine origin, but as the performance continues they are coated in the stuff of the Earth. Their apparent attraction to each other, which happens as they are coated in dirt, is also of the world.



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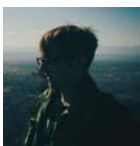
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Jaguars call to mind animism and gods found across the Southwestern United States and the South American continent. Jaguars symbolized different things to different people. One jaguar statue here in New Mexico is believed to be a fertility idol. Other cultures seem to focus on the ferocity of the animals. Ancient religions in South America have used jaguars to symbolize the underworld, while other shamans evoked the jaguar for protection when dealing with hostile spirits.

I think there's evidence for both fertility and protection in this performance. I notice that the jaguars are all facing away from the dancers, giving them space to interact and come together as a couple. Their aggression is turned outward. They're like bouncers, providing protection for the primal male and primal female in the center of the ring as though there's a threat somewhere just outside. In a way, I wish there was something installed beyond the circle because, damn, I'm curious to know what that threat could be. Oh well. The threat you don't see is more dangerous than the one you do.

Bill Rodgers is the Managing Editor of **cfile.daily**.

Do you love or loathe this contemporary ceramic art? Let us know in the comments.



Bill Rodgers is a reformed journalist living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A lover of nontraditional storytelling, he explores the role of narrative in art. Bill is Managing Editor of cfile.