

Edgar Calel

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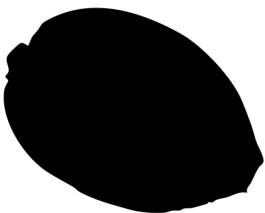
Edgar Calel (*1987) taps into the rituals and traditions of his native Guatemala. His work highlights the working conditions around export-oriented agricultural industries, particularly palm oil and coffee plantations, which play a central role in the country's economy. Calel further examines the impact of the plantations on the environment, as the extensive cultivation of coffee, sugar cane, bananas, and palm oil in Guatemala leads to deforestation, soil damage, and the depletion of natural resources.

At Kunsthalle Bern, Edgar Calel creates a walk-in landscape featuring a mountain of salt. The installation echoes the efforts of indigenous Guatemalan communities to fight against the exploitation of their land and for the protection of nature. In the installation, ants made of copper and gold represent the labor of farm and land workers, whose individual contributions are rendered invisible. The artist also presents a series of embroidery paintings that he makes collectively with his family. The embroideries depict images related to community life, traditional agriculture, ancestors, and nature.

Calel uses materials such as textiles, stones, plants and found objects for his works, which are often created in collaborative, collective processes. The artist, who belongs to the indigenous Maya Cakchiquel community, actively engages with ancestral Mayan knowledge and the living traditions of his heritage, making them an inherent part of his work.

Altogether, the works reflect Calel's concern for the exploitative treatment of land and labor that comes with a never-ending pursuit of profit. Through his art, Edgar Calel creates a space to reflect on land and soil, inviting us to think about alternatives to endless growth.

The exhibition of Edgar Calel is kindly supported by the Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim-Stiftung.



EDGAR CALEL (*1987) belongs to the indigenous Maya Cakchiquel community in Guatemala. He was born in Chi Xot or San Juan Comalapa, where he lives and works. Calel studied at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Guatemala City.

Calel does not understand his multimedia practice as art in the Western sense, but rather as Naoj—an expression of collective knowledge, spiritual experience, and cultural memory of the Cakchiquel. He gained international recognition through contributions to the 11th Berlin Biennale (2020), the Carnegie International (2022), and biennials in Liverpool, Gwangju, and São Paulo (2023). Works by Calel can be found in the collections of the Tate Modern, the Museo Reina Sofía, and the National Gallery of Canada, among others. The Sculpture Center in New York presented a solo exhibition of Edgar Calel's work in 2023, and in 2025 he was part of a group exhibition at the Tate Modern in London.