

Artist Spotlight

ROSALBA BREAZEALE, MFA, PHOTOGRAPHY
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Figure 1. Rosalba Breazeale, *Luminous Futures #1*, 2021, Pigment print on silk taken from 8 x 10 in. chemigram on silver gelatin paper, 40 in. x 32 in. (Image courtesy of Rosalba Breazeale.)

My art practice is based on an ever-expanding network of stories derived from conversations with the land, surrounding human communities, my Peruvian and Ashkenazi Jewish ancestors, and with myself. We have been sharing our stories and recording our experiences both orally and visually for thousands of years. It is an honor and duty to share stories of pain and loss, so that we can try not to repeat past mistakes but also to express joy and resilience so that we may all have a brighter future to look forward to. To build a better future, we must first envision it.

As a transnational adoptee raised in heteronormative white communities, I experienced the violence of assimilation and erasure, which left me without a voice for years. A 35mm camera became the first vehicle through which I learned to express myself outwardly and as such, photography has been my primary visual language for over a decade. I still believe it is a powerful tool for visual expression but as my art practice continues to evolve, the mediums with which I work evolve, as well.

Research into Andean culture and religion began as a method for reconnecting with my ancestral background. It led me toward *Runasimi* (the Quechua language) and concepts that I could not find words for in my primary language, English. The term, *huaca*, became central to my art as I moved away from camera-based work. A *huaca* is a natural place or object that possesses its own spiritual essence making it animate and autonomous. It is the belief that all living beings, from the Aloe Vera sitting in my window to the largest mountain range, are our living relatives. This idea fueled my desire to imbue sculptural objects with their own energy as I expanded into camera-less photographic and fiber-based sculpture and installation.

I came to realize the limits of the English and Spanish languages as I wrestled with the concepts behind the work that eventually became my first solo exhibition, *Poems from Kay Pacha*. The Quechua term, *Kay Pacha*, is used to describe all living beings between the earth and sky in this space and time. This body of art is a constantly changing entity comprised of camera-less photography, silk and cotton textiles, felted and organic sculpture, and space specific installation. The concept of *Kay Pacha* is a collaboration between my temporal body and the multitude of living entities with whom I cohabit. Silver gelatin paper, which is light sensitive in nature, reveals the ephemeral presence and story of each plant and microbial relative. (Figure 1) Laborious processes of felting, plant and paper pruning, and *kipu*-making are responses to the imprints and bodily remnants of plant beings. *Khipu* are generally associated with the Inka although other Andean communities also used these knotted cords as a means of communication. Many were used for record-keeping purposes but more recently, there has been emphasis on narrative *kipu*.¹ Material, dye color, ply direction, knot type, and placement all contribute to the visual language. (Figure 2)

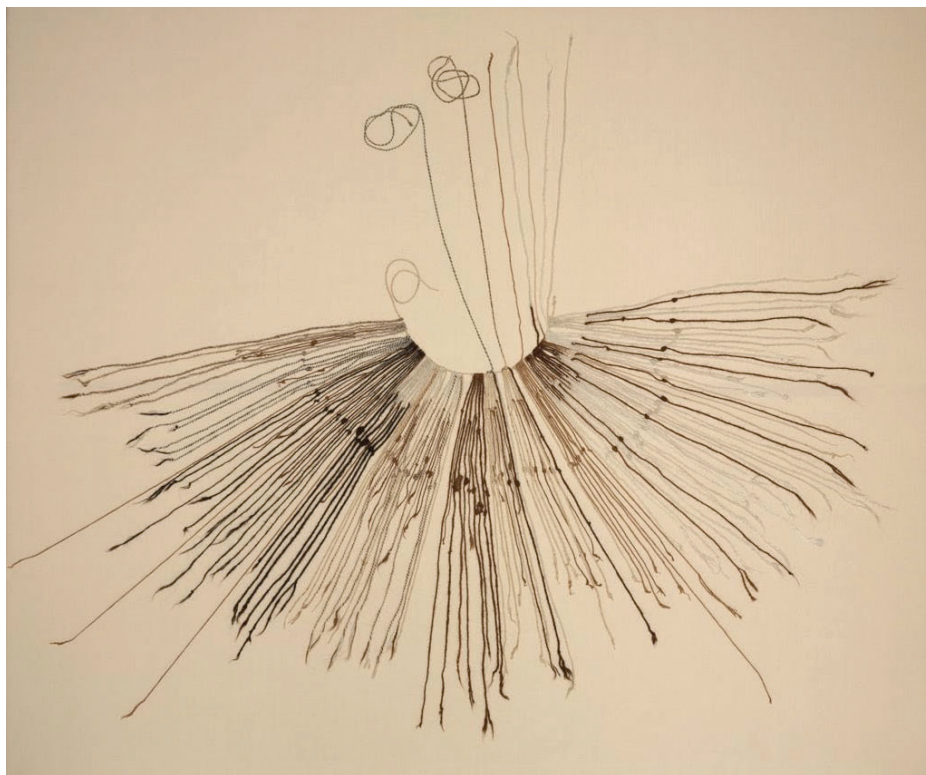


Figure 2. Inca, *Khipu*, c. 1400-1532, cords, cotton and wool cords, 85 x 108 cm (33 7/16 x 42 1/2 in.) (Image courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Art.)

Vessel for Reincarnation (2022) reanimates plant relatives previously used for chemiluminescence prints in the work, *Symbiotic Relatives*. (Figure 3) *Alocasia*, *Spathiphyllum*, *Thaumatococcus* leaves, and *Phalaenopsis* flowers are positioned as though they are crawling out of a bodily orifice. Red dye representing *Pacha* (the earth) permeates the fiber sculpture while soil collected from my home in Limington, Maine (traditional territory of the Pequawket) builds on the aura of the piece. *Khipukuna* snake out of the felt sculpture and over the sides of the pedestal simultaneously embodying umbilical cords and legs. The end of each *khipu* hangs from the pedestal and contains knots that represent each plant participant within the exhibition.



Figure 3. Rosalba Breazeale, *Vessel for Reincarnation*, 2022, Felt sculpture, plant leaves, soil, and madder dyed Inka cotton *khipu*, 17in. x 17 in. x 3 in. (Image courtesy of Rosalba Breazeale.)



Figure 4. Rosalba Breazeale, *Ayni* (1 of 3), 2023, chemigram, madder dyed Inka cotton *kipu*, and *Monstera Deliciosa*, 8 in. x 15 in. x 22 in. (Image courtesy of Rosalba Breazeale)

Ayni (2023) completes the circular life cycle of the plant relatives in the exhibition with the inclusion of living plant companions from my studio and home. (Figure 4) The *kipukuna* in these sculptures expand on the symbolism of the color red. Unknotted, they function as tendrils of energy or roots emanating from the *Philodendron bipinnatifidum* and *Monstera deliciosa*. My Peruvian and Ashkenazi heritage and experiences as a transnational adoptee growing up in the United States have granted me the opportunity to derive new meaning that embodies *Kay Pacha* (life in this present day and time). As my art practice continues to grow and change, so too will the language of the *kipu*.

¹ Sabine Hyland, "Writing with Twisted Cords: The Inscriptive Capacity of Andean *Khipus*." *Current Anthropology* 58, no. 3 (June 2017): 412–19.