

# 'DISEASE THROWER'

**Found objects form a narrative**



"Disease Thrower" by Guadalupe Maravilla tells the story of the artist's experience with illness and immigrating to the U.S.

Photo by Jon Mirador

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**T**HE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING can come in different forms to any narrator, such as sculptures, drawings and performances.

The residual effects of storytelling in "Disease Thrower" at the Institute for Contemporary Art capture the truth of suffering through displacement and internal illness.

Guadalupe Maravilla, an artist and assistant professor at VCU, examined the elements and process of his artwork in "Disease Thrower," which tells his story of travelling unaccompanied and undocumented to the United States from El Salvador. The story is transformed into a compelling sculptural piece, depicting the challenges of being undocumented.

When Maravilla was diagnosed with colon cancer, he sought professional treatment and explored other paths to relieve the pain of radiation and chemotherapy. Sound baths were a powerful outlet for Maravilla to release his pain.

## PIECE BY PIECE, STEP BY STEP

Each sculpture in "Disease Thrower" and their components are more than a display; the work connects the audience to the Latin community and the realities they face. Two of the main elements within the sculptures are the gongs and anatomical models that indicate where a loved one's cancer began.

Built with pliant material, the sculptures are constructed with found objects Maravilla collected when he was retracing his migration from El Salvador to the U.S.

"All the other elements are objects that I collect for the process of retracing my migration," Maravilla said at a lecture at the ICA last week. "That is very important to me — to go back to these places as an adult

and find parts and bring them back together to be part of the sculpture."

The sculptures all start with a wooden steel skeleton, then Maravilla added layers to them, starting with the off-white "skin" made of cotton, sea salt, glue and other elements that he microwaved.

"After that it becomes malleable, and then I can add them to the metal skeleton," Maravilla said. "Next step is collecting the objects and composing them."

From constructing the base to arranging the materials, Maravilla framed an exhibition that alludes to themes of humanity. The artist's history of resilience and overcoming trauma at such a young age gave the sculptures a healing tone.

"Once the gong and anatomical body part is chosen, then after that it's all intuitive," Maravilla said.

Maravilla's intuition and experiences helped him give life to the sculptures. Tokens such as conch shells and gems indicate the places he's traveled through.

## A WEARABLE TRANSFORMATION

The sculptures are not only objects of Maravilla's story — they're being made into wearable materials. In the future, the sculptures will be performance pieces, worn as clothing and play a role in healing rituals.

"It's also scary thinking about wearing them, too, because I'm gonna start wearing them now as headdresses," Maravilla said.



"Disease Thrower" will be on display at the ICA until July 1.  
Photos by Jon Mirador

As the sculptures range from 6 to 8 feet tall, they're especially heavy because of the weight of the gongs. That means the sculptures have to be well balanced and held down.

"Seeing Maravilla's exhibition in real life was one thing, but listening to his chilling and gravitating story of his childhood experiences made me realize the impact art has on the immigration crisis," said VCUarts student Jessica Foreman. "Especially how he turns these pieces into a spiritual healing process for his illness and not only a sculptural piece."

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### See something

#### THURS. 2/6

##### 'Queen & Slim' Screening at the Byrd

The Byrd Theatre will host a screening of drama-thriller "Queen & Slim," directed by Melina Matsoukas. For tickets, visit [byrdtheatre.org](http://byrdtheatre.org). 9:30 p.m., The Byrd Theatre & Foundation (2908 W. Cary St.) \$4

#### FRI. 2/7 - FRI. 2/14

##### Richmond Environmental Film Festival

The 10th annual Richmond Environmental Film Festival will highlight films that raise awareness of environmental and climate issues. For ticket information, locations and the list of movies that will be screened, visit [rvaeff.org](http://rvaeff.org). Times and locations vary. Free admission.

### Do something

#### FRI. 2/7

##### Jazz 4 Justice Benefit Concert

VCU's Department of Music will present the sixth annual "Jazz 4 Justice" concert, guest conducted by Colette McEachin. The Jazz Orchestra I & II groups will be performing, along with The Commonwealth Singers and vocalist Shy Hinnant. The proceeds will go toward VCU Jazz scholarships. For more information, contact Antonio Garcia at [ajgarcia@vcu.edu](mailto:ajgarcia@vcu.edu) or visit the event's page on [grbf.org](http://grbf.org). 8 p.m., Singleton Center, (922 Park Ave.) \$25 for students at the door, \$20 in advance.

#### TUES. 2/11

##### Cartoonist Keith Knight Takes on Racial Illiteracy

Keith Knight will present a cartoon slide-show titled "Red, White, Black and Blue," which discusses racial illiteracy in America, at an event hosted by VCU Libraries. The event is the library's 19th Annual Black History Month Lecture event. A public reception will follow the presentation. For more information, contact Sue Robinson at [srobinson26@vcu.edu](mailto:srobinson26@vcu.edu) or visit the VCU Libraries website. 7 - 9 p.m., James Branch Cabell Library, Room 303, (901 Park Ave.)

### Learn something

#### SAT. 2/1 - SAT. 2/29

##### Black History Month Highlight Tours

The Virginia Museum of History and Culture will host tours of the museum's current exhibit, "Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality." The tours will take place every Saturday from 1:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. throughout the month of February for Black History Month. For more information, visit the VMHC's website. Dates and times vary. Virginia Museum of History and Culture (428 N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard) \$10.

#### SAT. 2/8

##### ChinaFest: Year of the Metal Rat

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will host museum-wide events to celebrate the Lunar New Year. The event will include aspects of Chinese art and culture with dance performances, arts and crafts, films and a Lion dance by Yu Dance Arts. For more information, visit the VMFA's website. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., VMFA (200 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd.) Free.

Have suggestions for the events calendar? Contact [spectrum@commonwealthtimes.org](mailto:spectrum@commonwealthtimes.org)