

**WORTHY OF  
BELIEF:THE MESTIZO  
ART OF CARLOS  
ZAPATA**



Carnival Series, 2016



# Worthy of Belief: The Mestizo Art of Carlos Zapata

THE BALDWIN GALLERY  
OCT 20 - NOVEMBER 21, 2018

In *Worthy of Belief: the Mestizo Art of Carlos Zapata*, fetish and icon are interchangeable. Folk and tribal art meet Christian iconography to express spiritual and political realities, as Colombian sculptor, Carlos Zapata, draws on the traditions of his mestizo heritage (Spanish and Native American) and Afro-Colombian culture. ‘Worthy of belief’ is the criteria used by Catholic bishops to determine true visions from false ones, but in South America, where indigenous and slave cultures became syncretic with colonist Christianity, what is deemed worthy remains personal.

Light-hearted and carnivalesque, Zapata’s *Saint Rabbit’s* human breasts and pregnant belly glisten with silver leaf, but knotted with roots, straw, rags, human hair, coconut husk, string, bones and shell, a Catholic saint reminds of voodoo dolls, and a gun-amulet hangs off the *Shaman Protector’s* tunic.

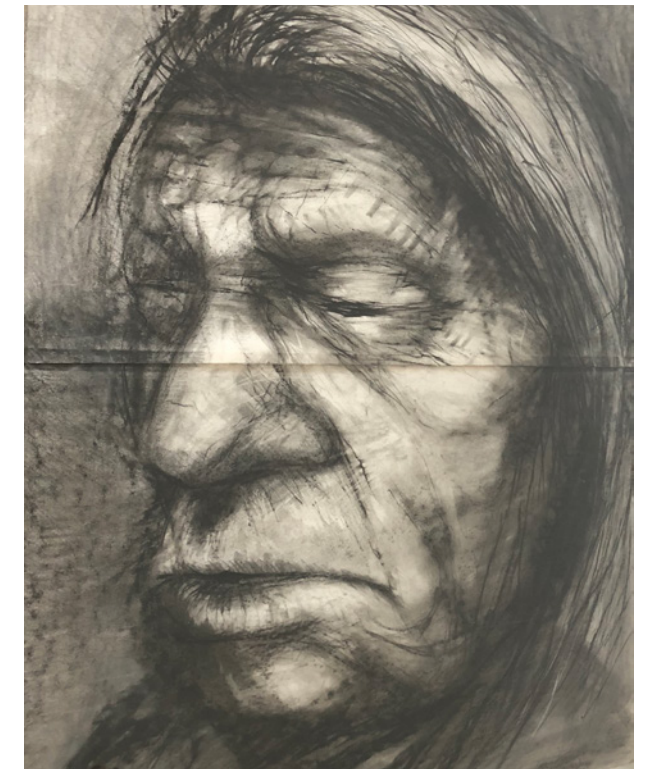
For Zapata, the personal is not just political, it is spiritual. There is Carmen, the girl who sought refuge as a servant at his grandmother’s farm, only to remain impoverished in a unjust society. Rendered in wood or charcoal, her bare feet have totemic power. And the wooden carving *Death and Life*, a tree sprouts its first green leaves beside a pale blue corpse. Here, Zapata pays homage to a child he witnessed gunned down in a Colombian street, and death, even a child’s, is understood as the antecedent of life.

*Worthy of Belief: the Mestizo Art of Carlos Zapata* will exhibit at The Baldwin Gallery, London, October 20th – November 20th 2018.



*Carmen's Head*, 2017, fabric, wax and sponge,  
37 cm H. x 20 cm W. x 20 cm D. £ 2600





*Carmen: Hand, Foot, Head*, 1989,  
charcoal on paper, Head: 102 H. x 76. W.  
Foot and Hands: 73 cm H. x 59 cm W.  
Hands £ 1500  
Foot £ 1500  
Head £ 2600





*God Money*, 2016,  
wood, textile, metal and wax,  
36 cm H. x 11 cm W. x 11 cm D.  
£ 2600





*Maximón*, 2013,  
metal, textile, wood, wax,  
acrylic paint and tobacco,  
39 cm H. x 25 cm W. x 22 cm D.  
£ 2200



# The Saint of Domestic Servants

CARLOS ZAPATA / EDITED BY DENNISON SMITH

I was born in a petroleum camp in the jungle in the 1960s. But when I was two years old, we moved to the city. It was a happy, sheltered existence, despite what was going on around us. War in the countryside. The poverty in the slums. And the social inequalities in my own home.

Carmen was the servant of my grandmother, and she had a tiny room, with a box where all her belongings were kept. It was all she had in the world.

She was a big influence on me. She used to feed me and look after me. She was many times like a mother to me. But she was a servant, a virtual slave, and though I was just a child, I was made to be aware of the social difference between us. I knew it wasn't right. But I was raised inside it. I couldn't articulate what was wrong. She wasn't mistreated physically. Not overtly, anyway. But emotionally, yes. 'You are just a servant: you can't say this or that.' She ate her meals alone, standing in the kitchen.

I remember potatoes, onions and other vegetables stored in hessian bags in the larder. Carmen wore rough, tatty cloth. So I use hessian and burlap in my work.

Carmen was always barefoot, and people who don't wear shoes have a very different foot. Her foot has become iconic in my memory. My memories are vivid and visual, but they live mostly as feelings. Carmen's foot has become the essence of my remembering her. So I created a giant foot out of hessian, recycled string and canvas. I wanted the size to give her more status. I wanted to build a monument to someone who served all her life. In charcoal, I've also created Carmen's head, foot and hand. My intention wasn't a true likeness. Something both stronger and broader: a portrait of all the people who sacrifice themselves.

Such a sacrifice is unthinkable. As a teenager, Carmen came from the countryside with nothing but her clothes. She was looking for a better future. She did what so many people do as refugees from war and poverty.

The *Saints* series is connected to Carmen, because the many saints represent the hope

of those who have no one to call on for help. The saints are a kind of last resort, and belief in them is particularly strong when you are powerless. In her bedroom, Carmen kept a small figurine of the patron saint of domestic workers, Saint Martín de Porres. I have, I think, elevated Carmen to the status of religious icon herself.

The series first showed at Anima Mundi in Cornwall, and it's now part of *Worthy of Belief: The Mestizo Art of Carlos Zapata* at The Baldwin Gallery in London. The collection is a chapel of many religions. I try to be universal about my faith, and I grew up with a dad who was always switching between organized religions. The saints include such venerated figures as St Money. I like the practicality of that: the way we turn religion to our specific needs. It's practical. It's straightforward. I like that.

Carmen left my grandmother's house after almost a lifetime. Five years later, when I was sixteen years old, I was in a public garden when I saw a lady walking towards me. She was dressed very smartly. Brand new shoes, new skirt, a waistcoat, her hair done up neatly, and wearing glasses. Also, she had teeth, which I only knew were false teeth when I realized it was Carmen. When Carmen lived at my grandmother's house, she had only three teeth.

It took me a while before I recognized her. To this day, that still shocks me. Worse, it shocks me that for the first time I really saw her as a human being.

It's difficult to understand how that is possible. But I was a child. I was taught to view Carmen as something like an animal. I remember her saying she could hardly see, but no one thought of buying her a pair of glasses.

It was such a joy to know, at last, in the end, she had found good fortune. With the help of her son, she had recreated herself. There really was hope.

Politics plays a part in all my work, because I grew up aware that outside my safe home was an entirely different world, whose difference was entirely unfair. But the political is also personal to me. The play of power goes right back to the first day of school,



where already there is the funny one, the bully one, the quiet one, and we go through our lives like that, at work, at home or with our families. The contrast between light and dark is there from the beginning.

When I was a child, safe in the city, other children in the countryside were being kidnapped and turned into soldiers. Their mothers would feed the army, and the army would say, 'Your child is old enough to fight for the truth.' That's how they saw it: the truth. The boy would lose his childhood. If he came home to his mother, he wouldn't be a child anymore. I have a son myself. So I created the *Child Soldiers* series.

You'll find traces of the automata tradition amongst these sculptures. Sometimes, though it was my intention to use movement, as the sculpture developed, it became clear no movement was needed. Also, sometimes the automata element became less about the movement and more about the sound. There's a piece about abuse of authority, where you turn the crank and the young soldiers beat a civilian. You're implicated by putting the action in motion, but the most haunting part is the sound of the turning crank.

I was conscripted into the army at age seventeen and saw a lot of ugly things. I wasn't directly involved in any beatings, but it didn't really matter: you're part of the army, and if you're ordered to do it, you feel like you have no choice.

Are the saints good? It depends on who is using them. Saint Death protects the kidnappers. Growing up in Colombia, there were different kinds of kidnapping: kidnapped children, forced to be soldiers, but also the kidnappings of everyone else. You didn't have to be rich to be a target. It's one of the worst kind of crimes, and yet kidnappers have their saints too. This way they can think, 'What I'm doing is good, because even the saints are helping me.'

When I created *Shaman Protector*, I strung his hessian jacket with black, brown and white talismanic heads. These are kidnap victims, from the many peoples of Colombia, and *Shaman Protector* protects them until the day they are free.

I'm sceptical of organized religion, but I believe in God, and I feel the presence from time to time, which is great. I've seen how hope is necessary, and how you need to ask someone for help, for guidance in desperate situations and even normal daily life. Where I grew up, people had so little economic and social power, they gave up on calling the police. In the more remote parts of the country, it wasn't only a problem of disempowerment: there were no police available.

I'm lucky to live in England now, free to remember and create art from my childhood memories. So many of my memories of Colombia are rich and wonderful, but as to those that aren't: from the violence, I create art to help people imagine, with the hope that maybe it'll never happen again.



*Death and Life*, 2012, acrylic paint, wood and wax, 37 cm H. x 49 cm W. x 24 cm D.  
£ 2400



“I’m lucky to live in England now,  
free to remember and create art  
from my childhood memories.  
So many of my memories of  
Colombia are rich and wonderful,  
but as to those that aren’t: from  
the violence, I create art to help  
people imagine, with the hope  
that maybe it’ll never happen  
again.” - Carlos Zapata



*Carmen's Head*, 2017,  
fabric, wax and sponge,  
37 cm H. x 20 cm W. x 20 cm D.  
Head £ 2600



*Saint Francis*, 2015,  
roots, wax, textile, metal, wood, human hair,  
coconut husk, string, bones and shell,  
36 cm H. x 20 cm W. x 10 cm D.  
£ 1900



*Maria Mountain*, 2015,  
roots, wax, textile, metal, wood, human hair,  
coconut husk, string, bones and shell,  
36 cm H. x 20 cm W. x 10 cm D.  
£ 1900





*Saint Joseph*, 2015,  
roots, wax, textile, metal, wood, human hair,  
coconut husk, string, bones and shell,  
36 cm H. x 20 cm W. x 10 cm D.  
£ 1900



*Maria Magdalene*, 2015,  
roots, wax, textile, metal, wood, human hair,  
coconut husk, string, bones and shell,  
36 cm H. x 20 cm W. x 10 cm D.  
£ 1900



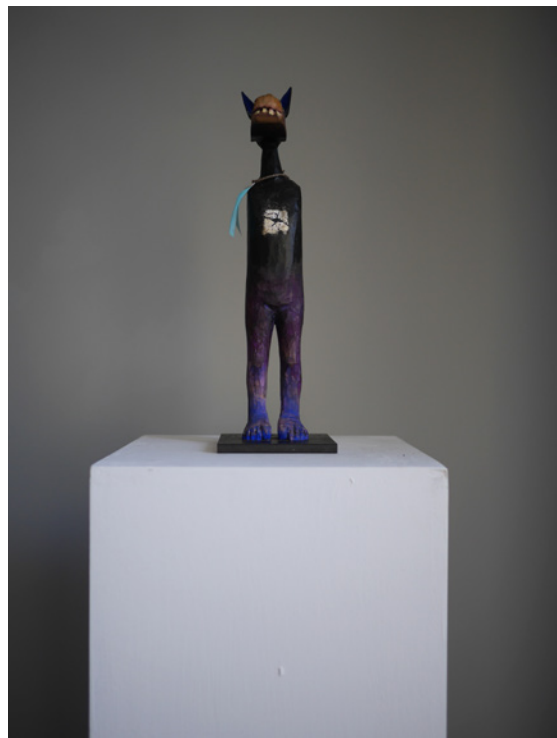
*Shaman Protector*, 2015,  
wood, acrylic paint, textile and metal,  
2 m H. x 18 cm W. x 31 cm D.  
£ 7500







*The Three Powers*, 2013,  
wood and acrylic paint,  
35 cm H. x 18 cm W. x 18 cm D.  
£ 9500



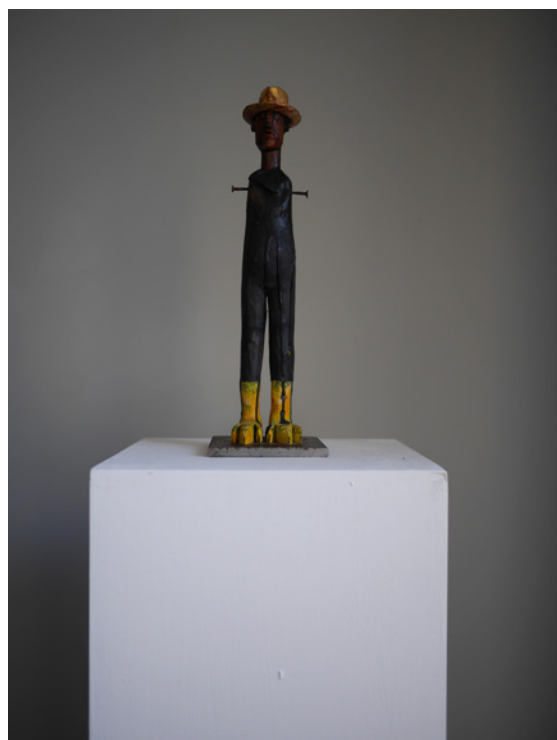
*God Horse*, 2016,  
wood, wax, textiles, metal and acrylic paint,  
37 cm H. x 10-30 cm W. x 10cm D.  
£ 1500



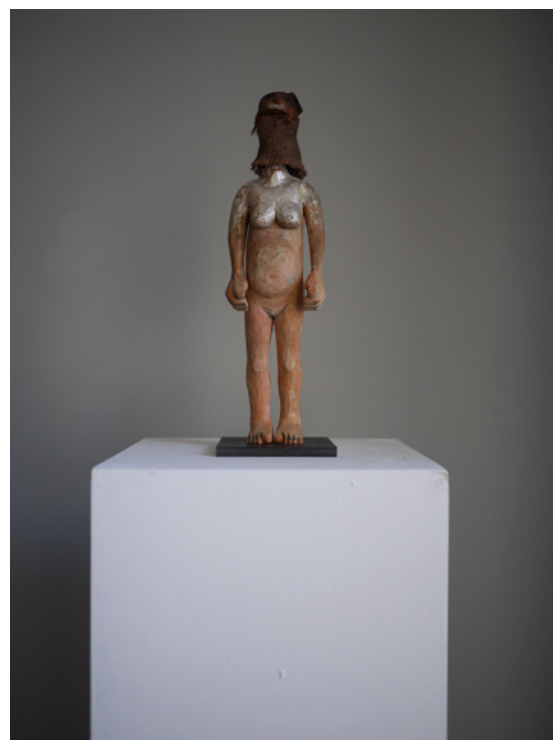
*God Pig*, 2016,  
wood, wax, textiles, metal and acrylic paint,  
37 cm H. x 10-30 cm W. x 10cm D.  
£ 1500



*God Bull*, 2016,  
wood, wax, textiles, metal and acrylic paint,  
37 cm H. x 10-30 cm W. x 10cm D.  
£ 1500



*God Chicken*, 2016,  
wood, wax, textiles, metal and acrylic paint,  
37 cm H. x 10-30 cm W. x 10cm D.  
£ 1500



*God Rabbit*, 2016,  
wood, wax, textiles, metal and acrylic paint,  
37 cm H. x 10-30 cm W. x 10cm D.  
£ 1500

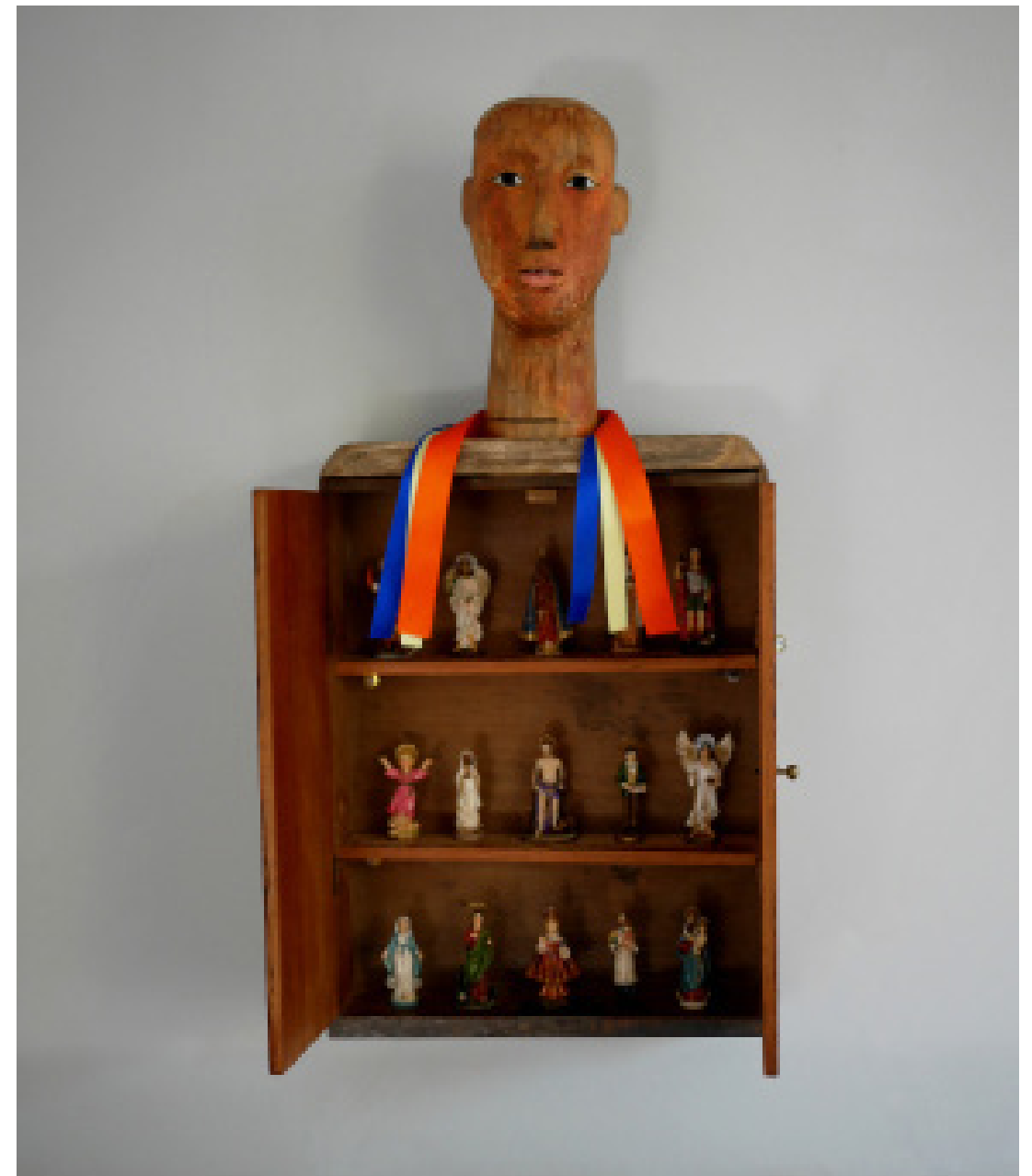


*God Bird*, 2016,  
wood, wax, textiles, metal and acrylic paint,  
37 cm H. x 10-30 cm W. x 10cm D.  
£ 1500





*Dead Child*, 2012,  
wood and acrylic paint,  
30 cm H. x 18 cm W. x 9 cm D.  
£ 2200



*Cabinet of Prayers*, 2013,  
plastic figurines, wood, metal,  
acrylic paint and wax,  
74 cm H. x 35 cm W. x 11-25 cm D.  
£ 2800



*Death*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Life*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Childhood*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Old Age*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300





*Dead Child*, 2012,  
wood and acrylic paint,  
30 cm H. x 18 cm W. x 9 cm D.  
£ 2200



*Cabinet of Prayers*, 2013,  
plastic figurines, wood, metal,  
acrylic paint and wax,  
74 cm H. x 35 cm W. x 11-25 cm D.  
£ 2800



*Love*, 2016,  
metal, textile, wood, wax and acrylic paint,  
105 cm H. x 47 cm W. x 19 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Homeless*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Marriage*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Health*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300



*Homosexuality*, 2016,  
wood, sand, wax, acrylic paint and metal,  
26 cm H. x 19 cm W. x 6 cm D.  
£ 1300





*Ex-voto for People Who Have Been Kidnapped and Liberated*, 2015,  
wood, acrylic paint and textile, 98 cm H. x 26 cm W. x 47 cm D.  
£ 6500

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