

Between the Land and Sky

Between the Land and Sky, is an installation rooted in the desert borderlands and prairie ecologies that have shaped Karla García's understanding of land, memory, and transformation. Reflecting on past works, she reimagines a landscape composed of recycled ceramic grasses, concrete blocks, and terra cotta cacti sculptures. The glazed surfaces of the cacti evoke a starry night sky embedded in their forms, drawing connections between the cosmos and sacred land.

This body of work merges myth and material. García continue her reflections on the exiled desert goddess Malinalxochitl and the poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—voices that shape stories across time and space. In this terrain, the cacti become sacred beings, and the grasses act as connective tissue: linking the land beneath to ourselves, to the sky above.

García's process remains grounded in traditional hand-building techniques, yet the forms appear to shrink, expand, and shift like breath or memory. Through these gestures, García invites viewers to pause and consider the landscape not as backdrop, but as a living record of resilience, transformation, and sacred connection.

About Karla García

Karla García (1977, Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico) is a Texas-based artist originally from Mexico. Her ceramic sculptural installations are rooted in her Mexican heritage and informed by personal and cultural memory, historical research, and philosophy. She explores the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative effects of the environment on the land we share.

García earned an MFA in Ceramics and a Certificate in Museum Education from the University of North Texas. She is a Sandhills Institute Artist Fellow in Nebraska and has exhibited in museums such as the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Old Jail Art Center in Texas, and a bi-national exhibition at the Chamizal National Memorial and the Museum of Archeology and History of El Chamizal on both sides of the Texas/Mexico border.
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Scaling Stars

By Aleina Grace Edwards

Outside of Karla García's home in Dallas, the blades of grass turn blue in the moonlight. Raised Catholic, García often prayed a rosary with her classmates and their families before heading home; now, she crafts her own evening rituals. *Hola Luna*, she says, stepping out into the dark to give thanks for her family's health, her artwork—all the good in her life. She stands in the grass, feet on the earth, eyes to the sky, catching the distant light.

Growing up between Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas, García has long contemplated the landscape around her, the shapes of the sister cities and the desert enveloping them. Though she has personal ties to this environment, her relationship is best articulated across generations, or in geologic time. The desert in García's work is a collective space, defined by movement and exchange; many have looped through this land, both before and after borders ever existed as such. Combining the shapes of familiar flora and ancient architecture, *Between the Land and Sky* provides a cultural touchstone for communities who have been planted here for centuries.

The expressive cacti in the exhibition are a motif across García's recent sculptural work—metaphors for the resilient people who dwell in the desert. With her practice rooted in traditional craft methods and materials, García creates all of these terra cotta cacti by hand. She coil-builds each piece, pushing from the inside out as she works, pinching the ridges as they rise. Though some of the cacti in the exhibition appear temptingly vessel-like, none are functional—they are all open at the bottom and the top, more conduit than container. These cacti, in García's mind, are their own entities, their forms purposefully separated from any specific function. "I want the pieces to be appreciated for what they are, much like a Mexican woman, or an immigrant. I don't want to apply definitions to her," García says. It's this sociopolitical perspective, grounded in both personal and cultural histories, that defines and animates García's installation. Revisiting the stories of Mexican women in exile as she was working on this project, García weighed the implications of departure, rejection, and isolation. What difficulties did these women face? What freedoms might they have found when they were sent away, or left behind?

Integral to García's mythological lineage is the Nahuatl goddess Malinalxōchitl, abandoned in the night thousands of years ago by her brother—future founder of Tenochtitlan—and their people. Lingering in the desert where she was left, Malinalxōchitl is associated with the dangerous aspects of the natural world, its poisons and barbs. Ruler of the snakes, scorpions, and other nocturnal creatures, she was said to be a sorceress powerful enough to incite hallucinations—she was a *teyollohcuani*, a shape-shifting heart-biter. "She represents something universal for women, who are often blamed or accused for simply being," García says. "Her brother was spreading rumors about her, which prompted her abandonment."

There are few reliable images of Malinalxōchitl in the historical record, but *Between the Land and Sky* provides an alternative portrait of the goddess, envisioned via her





desert domain and characterized by subtle symbols of resilience and strength. The irregularity of the cacti forms reflect the goddess's triumphs and tribulations, and the ongoing struggles and successes of modern women. As she builds her cacti, García lets the clay contract and expand, as if inhaling and exhaling. "I've noticed when I think about bad experiences, they shrivel," she says. "When I think about good ones, they relax and expand." This duality is present in the grey grasses, too, which appear soft from certain angles, but like knives from others. The concrete blocks, stacked like plinths and pyramids under the cacti, are a nod to Mesoamerican architecture—the Tenochtitlan, perhaps, that Malinalxochitl could never inhabit. The grass elements around and on the concrete appear, then, as evidence of reclamation. By invoking the goddess's mythology, García weighs the effects of diaspora alongside the possibilities for regeneration, self-definition, and belonging. Her desert becomes a place beyond borders, beyond surveillance and subjugation. An unlikely but enduring home.

Reaching back into the histories of Mexican women, García also considers the story of the prodigious poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who, in the 17th century, went into a self-imposed exile. She became a nun, bent on avoiding marriage and focusing on her education. Within the structure of the sisterhood, Sor Juana was freed from many of the conventions that dictated women's lives at the time. She lived alone, studied poetry and mathematics, and advocated for equal rights for women and indigenous people. Ferociously curious, she looked often to the constellations and planets for perspective. Extrapolating on Sor Juana's fascination with the night sky as a source of spiritual guidance, García uses manganese in her glazes to deepen the shadows and textures of her cacti, her fingerprints leaving inky craters. What she tenderly refers to as "nuggets" of golden glaze bloom when fired, forming a lustrous, starry skin on her sculptures.

Sor Juana Inés's longest and most personal work is called *Primero Sueño*, or "First Dream."¹ The poem tells the story of a soul leaving a body on a roving search for the seemingly irreconcilable forces of divinity and truth, of a complete knowledge of the world. Of course, the journey was a failure—the sleeper wakes, the dream ends, the soul returns to its trappings. When Sor Juana defended her poems against the Church's criticism in what is often considered the first feminist manifesto, she was met with more hostility and punishment. But like Sor Juana, García ventures beyond the cultural imaginary into a terrain both descriptive and allegorical, an ancient and deeply personal place of persistence. This is an eternal borderland: a realm that exists between land and sky.



¹ Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Poetryfoundation.org, Accessed October 10, 2025, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sor-juana>.



***Escuchando el Suelo*, 2024**
Stoneware, terra sigillata, stains
Variable dimensions



***Un aliento profundo /
A Deep Breath*, 2024**
Terra cotta, glaze
18 x 14 x 11 inches



***Dentro del primer sueño /
Within the first dream*, 2025**
Terra cotta, glaze
23 x 11 x 15 inches



***Desert Moon No. 3*, 2024**
Terra cotta, glaze
12 ½ x 12 x 12 inches



***Despertar repentino /
Abrupt awakening*, 2024**
Terra cotta, glaze
15 x 11 x 11 inches