

**Carolyn Castaño**

***My Mother Mountain***

**May 29–August 8, 2026**

**Gallery 400, University of Illinois Chicago**

**Exhibition Extended Checklist**

***Cumanday: El Nevado Del Ruiz, 2023***

Watercolor, acrylic, foil, and appliqués on watercolor paper mounted on canvas

78 x 144 x 1.75 in.

El Nevado del Ruiz, or Cumanday in the language of the Quimbaya people, is one of four glacier-topped volcanic mountains in Colombia's Los Nevados National Natural Park. Sustained by delicate cycles of precipitation and temperature—with no winter snowfall at the equator—Colombia's equatorial glaciers not only serve as natural thermometers of the earth but feed rivers and ecosystems that supply 75% of the country's water. Colombia's glaciers have lost more than 80% of their surface area in the last 100 years and are disappearing faster than the global average. Studies predict that all of Colombia's glaciers could become extinct by the 2040s or 2050s, creating water scarcity and severely impacting the region's unique biodiversity.

***Chundua: Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, 2023***

Watercolor, acrylic, and appliqués on watercolor paper mounted on canvas

78 x 144 x 1.75 in.

The array of collaged elements that build Castaño's work is wide, including acrylic, watercolor, and drawn passages, disparate brushwork, appliqués, gold foil, and fabric pieces. Castaño melds their visual dynamism to larger implications such as the layered meanings of gold in South America and the environmental impact of excessive consumerism. She says, "I was interested in collaging fabric into the landscape to create a kind of trompe l'oeil effect. A painted tree branch would open to a passage of an electric sunset with palm trees, printed in a maquiladora somewhere in Haiti or Indonesia, regions where climate impacts are so significant." Similarly, gold holds critical meanings in

South America, both for Indigenous beliefs about its links to the sun and its divine properties, and for its ongoing economic exploitation.

***Poleka Kasue: Volcán Nevado Santa Isabel, 2026***

Watercolor, acrylic, foil, and appliqués on watercolor paper mounted on canvas  
70 x 119 x 1.75 in.

Adopting the scale of colonial landscape paintings such as Frederick Edwin Church's *Heart of the Andes* (1859), Castaño disrupts the conventions of those romantic depictions through collage, juxtaposition, vivid color, and varied brushwork and materials. Colonial landscape depictions of the 18th and 19th centuries often focused on the awe-inspiring features of the land, in many cases, highlighting resources that could be exploited for human benefit. Interrupting Eurocentric methods, Castaño prioritizes non-human life, interdependence, the holistic viewpoint of Indigenous perspectives, cultural continuity, and ecological preservation.

***Graphical Andes, 2026***

Watercolor, acrylic, foil on watercolor paper mounted on canvas  
72 x 108 x 1.75 in.

Throughout her work, Castaño incorporates abstracted interpretations of the relationships between the glaciers and Andean culture. A prominent example is the checkered pattern that appears in several of her works, which references Andean textiles, including the gridded Wiphala flag, a colorful symbol of unity and self-determination among Indigenous Andean peoples; the Tocado, an Incan garment with geometric motifs used as a form of graphical communication; and traditional Wayúu mochilas, small bags made of colorful yarn woven to reflect spiritual beliefs.

Castaño says, "I'm inspired by the Andean cosmovision of apu, or mountain worship, the names like Cumanday [from the Indigenous Andean Quimbaya people] for Nevado del Ruiz, meaning beautiful mountain, or Poleka Kasue for Volcán Santa Isabel, meaning woman of the mountain." In some instances, Castaño's grid colors mirror the infographic color-coding of climatological heat maps, with shifts from blue to orange mimicking the temperature shifts in a region over time. Indigenous Colombians believe that glaciers are

spirits protecting the land; receding glaciers have prompted Indigenous leaders to advocate for protection of the sacred landscapes through climate action.

***Agua Santa (Cascada de Santa Elena), 2026***

Watercolor, acrylic and appliqués on watercolor paper mounted on canvas

72 x 51 x 1.75 in.

While traveling back and forth between Colombia and California as a child, Castaño spent a lot of time in her mother's town, Santa Rosa de Cabal, and soon grew fond of the waterfalls—including the Santa Elena waterfalls pictured here—and rivers that supply the town's water. As her mother grew older, Castaño began to equate her mother with the mountains from which the waters and rivers flow: a guardian elder, as Indigenous people Andean do. Castaño says, "In many ways, this work—aside from commenting, celebrating, or bringing awareness to the glaciers or Colombian landscape—is my attempt to reconnect with that part that has been separated or dislocated, an attempt to heal or connect with a kind of immigrant longing."

***Volcán Nevado Santa Isabel, 2023***

Watercolor, acrylic and appliqués on watercolor paper mounted on canvas

60 x 48 x 1.75 in.

***Mother Mountain, 2026***

Plaster sculpture with video mapped projection

2:16 mins

27.5 x 39 x 23.5 in.

Colombia's Quimbaya people conceive of Andean volcanic glaciers as elders and spiritual guardians. Created in collaboration with the artist's two sons, Toussaint and Jean-Michel, and her 91-year old mother, Luz Maria, this video embeds familial legacy and care in the landscape of Castaño's maternal ancestors. Images collaged over the figures picture Volcán Santa Isabel's ice recession, the unique Andean high altitude páramo landscape, and Colombia's dense forests, while in voiceover, Castaño's mother recites the names of thirteen Colombian glaciers, as she was taught to do as a child growing up in the town of Santa Rosa de Cabal, near Volcán Nevado Santa Isabel.

**Jean-Michel Dauphin**

***Blue Mountain***

9 x 12 in.

***Purple Mountain***

5 x 7 in.

***Gray Mountain Reflection***

10 x 12 in.

All 2026

Watercolor and acrylic on paper

**Toussaint Dauphin**

***Water***

2026

Pencil on Paper

5 x 7 in.

Castañó's sons, Jean-Michel and Toussaint, made these works in her studio. She says, "As an artist and a mother, I am always making but also caring for someone. I want my children to grow up in the studio, watching me work and making their own artwork. They are influenced by my actions, both good and bad. I hope to transmit to them an interest in looking and making, but also in caring for nature."

***Topographical Map Los Nevados, 2026***

Watercolor gouache on watercolor paper

39.75 x 25.75 in.

***Páramos Ecosystem, 2026***

Watercolor gouache on watercolor paper

43 x 44 in.

***A Páramo Bestiary, 2026:***

***Pristimantis Paisa / Rain Frog***

12 x 8.75 in.

***Tarantula Gigante de Patas Rojas / Giant Red-Leg Spider***

10.25 x 14.25 in.

***Pristimantis Calcuratas / Small Calcar Rain Frog***

10.25 x 14.25 in.

***Pecaride Collar / Collared Peccary***

12 x 16.75 in.

***Rana Arboricola Colombiana de Boettger / Botteger's Colombian Tree Frog***

10.25 x 14.25 in.

***Paca Andina / Mountain Paca***

12 x 16.75 in.

***Tigrillo / Ocelot***

12 x 16.75 in.

***Toucan de Montaña / Grey-Breasted Mountain Toucan***

12 x 16.75 in.

***Frutero Barreteado / Barred Fruiteater***

12 x 8.75 in.

***Oso Anteojos / Speckled Bear***

12 x 16.75 in.

***Chivito Colibri / Buffy Helmetcrest***

14.25 x 10.25 in.

***Condor de Los Andes / Andean Condor***

10.25 x 14.25 in.

***Danta de Páramo / Mountain Tapir***

12 x 16.75 in.

***Conejo de los Andes / Andean Cottontail***

14.25 x 10.25 in.

All watercolor gouache on watercolor paper

Here, Castaño depicts animals and topographies of the rare and unique Andean páramos, ecozones found between 9,500 and 13,000 feet above sea level. Nearly half of the world's páramos are in Colombia. With sponge-like characteristics, páramos are natural reservoirs cyclically regulating, storing, and releasing water accumulated from fog, drizzle, and glacial runoff. Glacial melting and declining precipitation are drying out these delicate wetlands,

endangering flora and fauna and threatening human water supplies. Of the estimated 5,000 animal and plant species that live in páramos, 3,000 live nowhere else on Earth. Harkening back to earlier studies of Colombia's ecology, Castaño's elevation watercolor adopts the style of early 19th century botanist Alexander von Humboldt's mountain elevation images.

*This is Dedicated to the One I Love (Collection of Living and Deceased Glaciers)*, 2023, except as noted:

***Volcán Sotora 1948***

***Volcán Las Galeras 1948***

***Purace 1949***

***Volcán Chiles 1950***

***Paramillo de Santa Rosa 1960***

***El Paramillo del Cisne 1960***

***Volcán Pico Pan de Azucar, Sierra Nevada  
del Cocuy 1960***

***El Nevado Paramillo del Quindío 1960***

***Volcán el Cumbal 1985***

***El Cerro de la Plaza, El Cocuy o Gücan 2026, 2026***

***Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Pico Bolívar y  
Cristóbal Colón***

***Volcán Nevado del Tolima***

***Volcán El Nevado del Ruiz, Cumanday, Tama***

***El Nevado del Huila***

***Sierra Nevada de El Cocuy o Gucan***

***El Nevado de Santa Isabel***

All watercolor on paper

All 16.5 x 20 in.

This watercolor series commemorates Colombia's glaciers, both those lost and those still existing yet gravely threatened. Hung in chronological order by date of disappearance, Castaño's works draw inspiration from cartographer and illustrator Manuel María Paz's 19th-century watercolor catalogue of Colombia's regions. While Castaño's series evokes the pride of María Paz's national project, it also marks the ecological impact of the colonial

era in which he worked. The newest in Castaño's series is Sierra Nevada del Cocuy, Cerro de la Plaza. That glacier, which covered 5 square kilometers in the 1800s, was declared extinct as of March this year.