



Roberto Benavidez, *Bosch Bird No. 11*, 2022. Paper, paperboard, glue, wire, crepe paper. 24 x 60 x 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photographer: Paul Salvesson.

## ROBERTO BENAVIDEZ

### *BOSCH BEASTS*

September 12–October 18, 2025

Perrotin is pleased to present *Bosch Beasts*, a solo show by Los Angeles-based sculptor Roberto Benavidez (b. 1973), whose work adopts the piñata form with resonances both playful and profound. The artist's first gallery solo exhibition in Los Angeles, *Bosch Beasts* features work that draws inspiration from Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516). On view from September 12 through October 18, 2025, the exhibition features new work by the artist, alongside piñatas dating back to 2014.

At Perrotin, Benavidez's piñatas are staged as if enacting their part in the central panel of Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1480–1505). In Bosch's painting, groups of nude men and women dance, parade, and cavort in a raucous orgy of what an early-sixteenth-century viewer would have considered sinful excess and the reversal of the natural order. Bosch represents white and Black figures engaging in sexual contact, alongside people consorting with gargantuan birds. While in Bosch's work, the mixing of races and species signals a world lost to vice, Benavidez irreverently appropriates the Netherlandish artist's avian iconography of sin and mixes it with his own visual vocabulary. *Bosch Bird No. 11*, originally engaged in the sensual act of feeding a berry to a waiting human recipient, now holds a piñata in its beak, while *Bosch Beast No. 14* wears a black belt with seven spikes.

The seven-pointed piñata reoccurs in Benavidez's work as a reference both to the traditional form of the craft and to the religious

symbolism of its original context. In one early use of the piñata—itsself a cross-cultural and globetrotting phenomena—it was deployed by the Spanish as a tool of conversion in Latin America. The points of the star represented the seven deadly sins, the blindfold worn by the bat-wielding assailant represented faith, and the treats found inside were the rewards for blind and unwavering belief.

Other piñatas, like *Bosch Beast Nos. 11* and *12* take on more chimeric forms. A legless, egg-shaped body is dragged by two spindly arms, while *Bosch Beast No. 14*—taken from Bosch's c.1493 triptych *The Hermit Saints*—sprouts whiskers and wings from its squat, amphibian body. Yet another piñata, drawn from the marginalia of a fifteenth-century French illuminated manuscript held in the Huntington Library, struts forward with taloned, bird-like feet as its pointed jaw juts forward to open a gaping mouth. Drawing from his personal experience as a queer and mixed-race Mexican American, Benavidez starts from a foundation of hybridity in which these monsters are the perfect actors. The ambiguity of these creatures gestures towards the fluidity of identity and its capacity to resist easy classification. Every mixed-race person who has become well acquainted with the question "What are you?" is all too familiar with how it feels to live at the borders of identities, appearances complicating the compulsion to categorize. The way Benavidez uses these hybrid bodies to conjure ideas around race echoes their meaning in sixteenth-century Europe, where notions of the monstrous were profoundly intertwined with early formations of race.



Roberto Benavidez, *Bosch Beast No. 11*, 2025. Paper, paperboard, glue, wire, crepe paper. 13 x 17 x 10 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photographer: Paul Salvesson.



Roberto Benavidez, *Illuminated Piñata No. 19*, 2021. Paper, paperboard, glue, wire, crepe paper. 33 x 20 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photographer: Paul Salvesson.

Benavidez is a consummate craftsman who creates each of his piñatas with care and precision. Handcrafting each element of his works using traditional piñata processes allows for slight variations in their appearance that register as traces of their making. To produce his sculptures, Benavidez begins with papier-mâché: paper dipped in glue is shaped over balloons to create the initial forms, before more structure is formed with Bristol board and additional glue-dipped paper. Benavidez also adds wire to construct an armature that supports more delicate appendages, like feet or beaks. Finally, each paper scale or feather is painstakingly cut and applied to the complete form. Benavidez's mapping of colors across his sculptures is itself masterful: swatches of paper are often layered to create dimensionality, iridescent hues catch the light, and fields of color create a painterly effect. His use of acid-free paper and glue ensures that unlike the piñatas found in your local party store, Benavidez's constructions are designed to endure. The life-size scale of the sculptures allows for the appreciation of the artist's skilled workmanship and lends the figures a monumental quality. Amidst these large-scale figures, one can imagine they inhabit the same surreal, Boschian world.

Originally from Beeville, Texas, Benavidez shows his work at Perrotin at a moment when his profile is rising across the art world and beyond with electric intensity. Benavidez began his practice in bronze sculpting, taking classes at Pasadena City College in sculpture, painting, and drawing, before first turning to the piñata in 2009. Appreciation for his work has steadily grown across international and national audiences, and it is now represented in the permanent collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among others. Recently, he has exhibited in the 2024 Homo Faber Biennial in Venice and the 2025 Cheongju Craft Biennale;

he was showcased in the documentary short "Piñatas of Earthly Delights," directed by Tom Maroney; his Bosch-inspired headpieces were featured in AMC's first season of *Interview with a Vampire* (2022); and he was the subject of a 2024 feature in *The New York Times*.

Benavidez is commonly asked: why the piñata? There are many answers, some of which involve the affordability and accessibility of paper, and the opportunities afforded by the medium to explore color and form. While one may assume that Benavidez seeks to elevate the piñata to the level of "fine" art, this claim would not capture the spirit of his work. Rather, Benavidez's sculptures quietly assert the communicative power and the technical prowess implicit to the piñata itself. For Benavidez, Mexican craft—in all its celebratory, brightly-colored, and hand-worked glory—acts as a stage upon which his work dances imaginatively and suggestively around ideas of race, identity, sexuality, and sin.

—Diva Zumaya