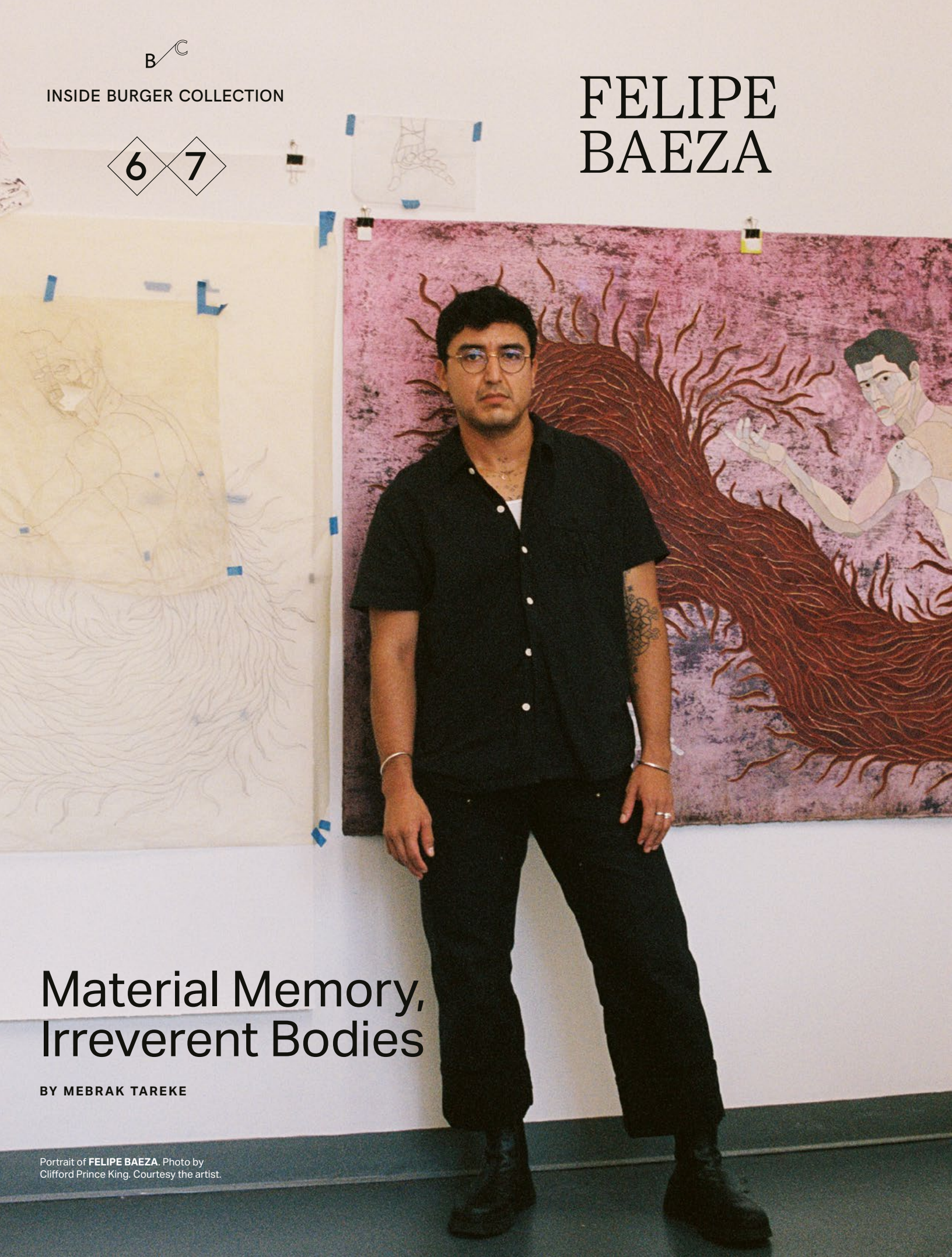
FELIPE BAEZA

Material Memory, Irreverent Bodies

BY MEBRAK TAREKE



Portrait of **FELIPE BAEZA**. Photo by Clifford Prince King. Courtesy the artist.

"Anima," Felipe Baeza's first institutional exhibition recently held at the Print Center New York, brought together more than 40 works on paper created over the past 15 years. These works defied the coherence of a survey. Ethereal figures surfaced and receded across paper that had been sanded, cut, and layered, tracing a path of evasion and instability through printmaking methods that were both traditional and expansive. The show clarified the material weight of Baeza's practice. His 2025 exhibition at kurimanzutto, "To feel a then and there," centered queer and migratory modes of becoming that resist any fixed sense of becoming. In this show, his unruly figures refused the need to belong, carving out lighter modes of being to survive the weight of systemic oppression in the US. In recent works, glass has also emerged as a material through which Baeza explores these fugitive beings through sculptural forms that remain fluid and unpredictable.

What happens when a practice grounded in transience enters a permanent space—in this case, the Burger Collection? In a conversation that took place over Zoom in January and February, Baeza and I set out to investigate the "material memory" of his practice across those three sites: an institutional survey, a commercial show, and an art collection.

FELIPE BAEZA, *Anima*, 2011, collage on paper, 28.9 × 22.5 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist; Maureen Paley, London; and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York.



Materiality: The Essence of Printmaking

Your recent show "Anima" at the Print Center New York was a survey of 15 years of work. How did seeing pieces from 2011 change your perspective on the more hybrid bodies you are creating today?

When I look at works from 2011 today, I no longer see them as self-contained objects but as generative experiments that allowed later forms to materialize. Revisiting those early pieces underscored how persistent certain concerns have been in my practice, even as materials and formal strategies have shifted. While I once understood them through the lens of hybridity, I now think of them more as amalgamated forms or vessels rather than hybrid bodies. The language has evolved accordingly. The figures I am working with today feel more expansive in their instability, but the impulse toward fragmentation, layering, and refusal was already present in earlier works.

Revisiting those works showed me that my practice isn't oriented toward clarity but toward the deepening of a visual language that consistently resists fixity. For instance, a flame-like motif in early pieces—such as *Anima* (2011)—reappears in shifting forms, somewhat unconsciously. In hindsight, that piece feels like a breakthrough: I was already thinking along these lines, I moved away from it for some time, and eventually came back to it. In that sense, the work now reads as a kind of future vision.

You have described your process as a deliberate form of erosion. Do you find that the abrasive act of sanding down paper frees the image from its immutable state of being?

I would agree. For me, sanding has become a gesture of destabilizing the material surface. Paper is typically understood as something that preserves and stabilizes an image, and abrasion interrupts that expectation. When I sand, carve, or distress the surface, I allow the image to release certainty and to reveal something else. As the surface registers touch, pressure, and time, the work



(left) **FELIPE BAEZA**, *Sonder (Sylvia W.)*, 2025, ink, acrylic, cut paper, twine, varnish, and watercolor on paper, 61 × 53.3 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist; Maureen Paley, London; and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/ New York.

(right) Installation view of **FELIPE BAEZA**'s "To feel a then and there," at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2025. Photo by Gerardo Landa. Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto.

shifts from preservation toward vulnerability. The image is no longer fixed, but instead hovers in a state of becoming and dissolution.

Sanding also makes the surface more porous, so that gesture and material transformation remain visible instead of being concealed beneath a façade that's finished. You can see this in *Sonder (Sylvia W.)* (2025): the paper takes on a leather-like quality—sturdy, yet worn down to expose its layers. This is only a reproduction, but in person, the work gradually reveals itself. There is also a subtle translucency in the varnish, where the background and foreground begin to merge, vying for attention. Ultimately, what shines through is the gaze—the eyes.

You treat paper as "skin." How did your experience at the Federico Sevilla Sierra Memorial Residency at the Mullowney Printing Company in 2025 shape the way you manipulate "flesh" in your newest works?

My ongoing collaboration with the Mullowney Printing Company, which began in 2023, has strongly influenced how I approach materiality, though not necessarily how I conceptualize or construct flesh. In fact, thinking of paper as flesh came later. Early on, I worked with paper in a more traditional, rigid way—mainly making editions and prints, and treating it as the binder that holds an image, rather than an active part of it. That understanding has shifted as my process became more experimental.

Over the years, I have come to see paper as a living surface—one that absorbs pressure, pigment, and time. Mullowney works primarily with traditional Japanese *washi* papers such as *kozo* and *gampi*, which we have used in most of our editions. Both behave in ways that feel bodily and responsive, resembling skin. I was particularly drawn to their lightness and translucency, which allow for layering—embedding collage between sheets or applying it to cotton paper through *chine-collé*. More broadly, my relationship with paper has pushed me to test its limits—soaking, staining, sanding, layering—until it exceeds the role of a flat surface and becomes something more corporeal. The process has reinforced my interest in paper as a surface that carries memory and transformation, rather than something that simply holds an image.

A Queer Futurity: "Then and There"

Your first solo exhibition at kurimanzutto in 2025 revealed that if materiality is a way of refusing fixity, it could also bring to light questions of belonging, suspension, and queer futurity—bodies in flux imagining forms of life shaped by migration, opacity, and continual becoming. The show also referenced José Esteban Muñoz's "queer futurity." How did this idea take shape across the exhibition?

José Esteban Muñoz has been an important influence, particularly in his understanding of queerness as something that resists capture or containment. His writing gave language to a condition I was already working through materially—the sense of existing across

multiple temporalities at once. For me, the "then and there" is not a fixed destination but an affective state of being or orientation.

That idea takes form in *This time and place is not enough*. The floating figure occupies a suspended space where memory, longing, and futurity co-exist. These aren't utopian images in the sense of being perfect, but they insist on imagining different ways of being while remaining entangled in the here and now. The figures open a space of possibility, suggesting forms of becoming that remain unfinished, porous, in constant negotiation with what has been and what could still transpire.

Showing in Mexico City marked a significant homecoming. Did the local landscape or the US political climate in 2025 influence your approach to displacement and belonging?

Very much so. When my work speaks to social and political realities, it's never abstract. I am directly affected by how governments regulate bodies, restrict movement, and determine who has rights. My own experience of limited mobility due to my immigration status is central to that. Even when I am able to travel, there's always an underlying uncertainty about being able to return: would I be able to come back? There's always a sense that I'm not fully in control—that my autonomy is conditional and not secure.

Being able to attend my exhibition in Mexico City felt like a homecoming, but one marked by a complicated emotional and political weight, particularly in light of stringent US immigration policies in 2025, which continue to shape our lived experiences. That tension between mobility and restriction, presence and absence, remains deeply embedded in my work, informing how I think about displacement, belonging, and the conditions that determine who gets to move freely.

Mexico doesn't offer a simple resolution either. I'm not fully at home there—I'm also perceived as a foreigner. Still, it was incredibly moving for my family to see my work for the first time. Being able to share that body of work with them was one of the most beautiful experiences for me. But it was also a lot, and to be honest, I don't think I have fully processed it yet.

The figures in your recent work often appear to be in a state of flux. What are these bodies running away from?

I value this question—I don't think I've been asked this before. But I wouldn't say these figures are fleeing anything. In many ways, they are trying to survive, and even thrive, within systems of oppression. We spoke earlier about this condition of suspension, and that's something I have been trying to conceptualize—but not to romanticize it. The reality is that many of us live in this state, negotiating with it in real time.

If you look at the floating figure in *Our Shadows Merging* (2023), there is an impression of being suspended. But rather than escaping, I see these figures



as moving away from legibility—resisting systems that impose clarity, categorization, and containment—while also moving toward intimacy and the possibility of transformation. Their movement is less about departure and more about inhabiting a space of continual becoming.

In 2022 you introduced glass and sculptural elements to your work. How does glass expand on the "fugitive" nature of your print-based practice?

Glass drew me in because of its transformative nature, as it shifts from liquid to solid form while remaining precarious and full of unexpected outcomes. It is a material that resists complete control, which is also how I have experienced working with paper. The three glass sculptures I created come from the same mold but those appear in different colors. I'm drawn to glass partly because the color patterns merge and form unpredictably. That process feels very close to how I approach monotype in the studio, where there is always a moment of release and acceptance.

Allowing the material to determine aspects of its own formation reinforces the fugitive quality within the work. The transparency of glass, for me, is not about clarity or resolution but about surrendering to uncertainty and transformation. Glass essentially mirrors what my practice was already doing, but in sculptural form. It also clarifies how inherently sculptural printmaking can be.

A Collection of Care and Continuum

***Made Into Being II* (2024) is now in the Burger Collection. How does this specific work serve as a bridge between your early flame collages and more recent floral works?**

Made Into Being II is part of a longer lineage in which flame-like and floral motifs are interwoven. This specific work is on a small panel, but the motif has also changed materially. Previously, these forms were constructed solely with cut paper; now they are built from both cut paper and painterly marks. I am applying a very translucent varnish, which, as you suggested, prompted me to think about how the body has shifted in my work and how these motifs serve to frame the body as a vessel that can become more expansive.

In this piece, there's a torso that still looks like part of a body, but it begins to dissolve into flame-like shapes, anchored by a pair of hands. These motifs have helped me see the body as abstraction and landscape, rather than something rigid. I want to think about these bodies as vessels instead of hybrid forms. I have a hard time with the word "hybrid"—it feels very foreign to me. So, yes, these motifs have allowed me to see how I can construct the body, both materially and conceptually, in ways that feel truer to the work.



(left) **FELIPE BAEZA**, *A self that is not quite here but always in process*, 2022–25, cast lead crystal glass, 44.5 × 14 cm (left arm), 40.6 × 12.7 cm (right arm). Courtesy the artist; Maureen Paley, London; and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York.

(right) **FELIPE BAEZA**, *Made Into Being II*, 2024, ink, acrylic, cut paper, varnish, and watercolor on panel, 30.5 × 15.2 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist; Maureen Paley, London; and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York.



In your works, the idea of queer futurity remains inseparable from instability: your figures hover between here and there, now and then. How do these fugitive forms survive when they enter an institutional space such as the Burger Collection? Can the "stability" of a collection co-exist with the "transience" of your subjects?

I became aware of the Burger Collection in 2019. They funded my residency at NXTHVN in New Haven, and it was after that that they began collecting my works. From the beginning, there was this sense of care. This dialogue we're having now is part of continuing that relationship. They have lent my works to exhibitions, such as at the Print Center New York, to ensure that those are seen broadly and given the right context. It's a special situation that rarely happens; works are not often treated this way.

To your point earlier, works that enter collections can become rigid or static. This conversation shows that collections can also go out of their way to ensure that works continue to live beyond the confines of a permanent collection. I'm fortunate enough to have works in spaces where I want them to be. In that sense, my work entering this collection does not feel like a contradiction to its fugitive nature. Instead, it has become part of a continuum shaped by care and long-term commitment.

For me, stability, in this context, does not negate transience. It creates the conditions for the work to keep changing, aging, and to remain in dialogue with time. Once a work leaves the studio, there is always a degree of release, especially when it enters commercial and institutional spaces. In the right environment, that release can feel generative rather than final, especially if it's treated with care.

FELIPE BAEZA (Guanajuato, Mexico) is a visual artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He received a BFA from The Cooper Union and an MFA from Yale University. Baeza has participated in numerous exhibitions, including the 59th Venice Biennale, "The Milk Of Dreams." He is represented by kurimanzutto in New York and Mexico City, and his works are held at the Burger Collection and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.

MEBRAK TAREKE (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) is the founder of TiMS Creative, a global communications consultancy. She has written for *Frieze*, Artnet, Hyperallergic, and Kilimanjaro on art, politics, technology, and culture in the African diaspora and the Americas. She holds an MSc in social anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a BA in modern European studies from University College London. Tareke is a recipient of the Andy Warhol Foundation's Arts Writers Grant, and a NEW INC alumnus. Currently, she lives and works in Mexico City and spends time in New York.