



Review

Vedette and Mesoamerican Iconography

Carmina Escobar's *Naque Canibal*: Iris Chacón and Tlazoltéotl

February 27, 2024 By **Laura G. Gutiérrez**

 Share

 Copy Link

 Facebook

 Tweet

 Email

 WhatsApp

PERFORMANCE TITLE

**Cantadora Shamana de Cabaret
Part III: NAQUE CANÍBAL**

ARTIST

Carmina Escobar

PERFORMER

Carmina Escobar

PERFORMANCE LOCATION

**Garibaldina Society
Los Angeles, California**

PERFORMANCE DATE

February 14, 2024

On the evening of Valentine’s Day February 14, 2024, a sensual creature emanating a siren-like chant and accompanied by piano strokes coming from atop the stage-cum-temple, made her way from the back and across the open dance floor of the Garibaldina Society in Los Angeles, which doubled as an ephemeral cabaret and sacrificial site.¹ This scantily dressed vedette’s skin tone was a fleshy-pink, and she wore a headpiece that was more akin to a multi-toothed gaping mouth directed to the celestial beings, while dangling “hair” covered her face. As this monstrous being—who, by her own admittance, was “only a little bit scary”—vocalized luring melodies, her hand and arm gestures beckoned her onlookers to follow her as she provocatively made her way to the top of the “temple.” From there and with the crowd assembled at her feet, she announced that we were “going to witness a ritual of sacrifice, the ultimate strip tease.” It was “a night of love” after all, and this sexy monster was ready to deliver, how could we not surrender ourselves to her love? Following this pronouncement of “love,” she grabbed her *vagina dentata* illuminated headpiece, which also served to amplify a series of howls and screams while pointing it to the crowd. For the next twenty minutes or so, we experienced a ritual like no other where this grotesque goddess executed a number that blended burlesque strip tease techniques with pre-Columbian anthropophagic, sacrificial, and purification rituals. The performance’s title, *Naque Canibal*, captured the spirit of what we had been summoned to witness: a cannibal-esque striptease; the title conjoins two disparate words/languages, *nacatetl*,

from the indigenous Nahuatl meaning stripped or naked—but queered as naque
—and the other the Spanish word for cannibal.



Carmina Escobar, *Cantadora Shamana de Cabaret Part III: NAQUE CANÍBAL*, February 14, 2024. Performance as part of *A Heart Misshapen*, Garibaldina MB Society. Courtesy of the artist and LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions). All photographs by Ray Barrera.

For the 2024 edition of Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE)'s legendary Valentine Day's party, *A Heart Misshapen*, Mexico City-born and Los Angeles-based extreme vocalist and multimedia performance artist Carmina Escobar shapeshifted into a most sensual and monstrous being.² In *Naque Canibal* Escobar embodied a hybridized creature: a cross between the infamous “Puerto Rican Bomb(shell)” Iris Chacón and Tlazoltéotl, the Mesoamerican deity of filth, sexuality, and debauchery. Iris Chacón is not only the Escobar's namesake, but this vedette, who had a widely successful television show during the 1980s and is known across the Spanish-speaking Americas and adored for, among other things, her derriere. While Tlazoltéotl is associated with sexual transgressions, such as adultery and lust, as well as other sins and vices, such as excessive pulque drinking. She is also dubbed the “filth eater” who despite or because of this possesses a purifying potential. The dress Escobar wore, conceived in collaboration with the Los Angeles-based creative duo Beck + Col, who were also responsible for its creation, could be said to be a typical vedette costume as it revealed a generous amount of Escobar's skin, breasts, and the rest of her curvaceousness body. While the dress consisted of a bustier and a lower undergarment that barely covered the derriere, these two garments as well as the shoulder pads were adorned at the edges with teeth hanging on thread, thus creating a rattling sound with Escobar's movements. Other accessories included a silver pectoral with four circular conch-like white pendants, which, as we later learned, oozed a thick white liquid (pus or

pulque?) when bitten into, as well as arm and leg wrap arounds. The attire was complemented with dangling string that simulated hair coming out of the hands, and a long braid that melded with the long tail, also made of stringy thread. Yet what ultimately leveled up the already excessive gruesome look was the layer of fleshy-colored skin that would be stripped off the performer's body to deliver what Escobar promised, the ultimate strip tease. Before the anthropophagic and sacrificial act ensued, and accompanied by an electronic musical score, Escobar treated us to a burlesque number wherein she danced provocatively while peeling her fleshy-pink skin off.



Escobar has been working in her more extensive *Shamana de Cabaret* project for a few years, and during that evening at LACE's V Day party she premiered

Delicias urbanas / Urban Delights, “a triptych ritual of perpetual life.” The first two parts consisted of the video performances *Toca Tócame* (Emily Lacy) and *Parto Mitote* (Canek Kelly), which were being projected on a loop on two separate screens on the left wall of the space and throughout the evening, and the last one, *Naque Caníbal*, which I have been discussing up to now, was performed live for the camera, with Mauricio Chades as the cinematographer. All three performances are collaboratively produced, and each consisted of three distinct sonic dresses. The dress for *Toca Tócame*, created in collaboration with Liz Goetz, was displayed on the left side of the stage, and the dress for *Parto Mitote*, created in collaboration with Jerónimo Naranjo and Sabina Iglesias, was displayed on the right side. And just as *Naque Caníbal*, the other two titles were generated by conjoining two words, one in Nahuatl and one in Spanish.³

While experimental vocal techniques and sound art installations distinguish her in the performance art world, juxtaposing or overlapping symbols, melding iconographies, re-imagining Mesoamerican deities, reworking archetypes, and instantiating new rituals that concoct new ways of being in this chaotic and senseless world are characteristics situated at the heart of Escobar’s embodied artistic practice. With the sonic dress as a formal concept in the first two parts of the *Urban Delights*, the notion of merging an earthly goddess like Chacón, manufactured by the cultural industries to then embody Latin American femmeness, with an underworld goddesses, who then does the work of purging for us this collective fantasy of eroticism via a cannibalizing and sacrificial ritual, is brilliantly executed in the last part of the trilogy. A critical maneuver in Escobar’s process is her often oblique narratological techniques; as

spectators we must do the work to fill-in the blanks between sequences. For example, the cave with its gaping mouth-like opening in *Parto Mitote* (translated from the Spanish and the Náhuatl respectively as *Birthing Dance*) is supplanted by the deep proscenium stage of the Garibaldina Society for *Naque Canibal*, with all sides framed wherein the thick, dark, and velvety curtains enhance the cavernous quality of the space. These caves, if you will, echoed with the sensual monster's head piece as well as her devouring mouth, with which she consumed an assortment of body parts and hearts (made of Jell-o) and vermin, such as worms and insects.⁴ However, as Pre-Columbian sacrificial rituals, this was a communal feast through which being fed by the deities ensured not only nurturing, but an injection of a life force. Thus, after slapping her body and biting fingers off, she'd toss the maimed hands to the crowd, who also received worms and insects, or, in some instances, she directly fed into the mouth of some audience members' mouths a half-eaten or "misshapen" heart. I end by saying that this performance achieved something similar to a pre-Columbian ritual, it gave us life that evening.



Note: The author thanks Juan Silverio and the rest of the LACE team for the permission to use the photographs included in this review. Also, thanks to Carmina

Escobar for the brief conversation about *Urban Delights*.

 Share this Review

More Reviews



Not Not Performance Art

February 21, 2024

By **Rossen Ventzislavov**



Rebeldía en una Danza de los Diablos

February 19, 2024

By **Gemma Argüello Manresa**

Your Email

Sign Up for Our Mailing List



About



hey@pamuseum.org

[Site Credits](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

© 2024 Performance Art Museum