Ruben Ulises Rodriguez Montoya, *As I willed myself out of entropy*, 2022

moCa Cleveland names Ruben Ulises Rodriguez Montoya as the third recipient of Toby’s Prize

The award continues the tradition of supporting emerging artists and celebrates the legacy of arts philanthropist Toby Devan Lewis

CLEVELAND, OH (May 2, 2023)—The Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (moCa) announces artist Ruben Ulises Rodriguez Montoya as the winner of the third iteration of Toby’s Prize, a biennial award named for philanthropist Toby Devan Lewis, who was a deeply involved trustee at moCa.

The prize provides a $25,000 unrestricted cash award and $25,000 to fund the production of new artwork. The prize also supports a solo exhibition at moCa Cleveland and an accompanying catalog.
Ruben Ulises Rodriguez Montoya (b. 1989, Parral, Chihuahua, MX) is a multidisciplinary artist and myth-maker whose work centers around anthologies and social issues concerning border culture, abjection, adaptation, and mestizaje. Aided by speculative fiction, cultural mythologies, science fiction, and the labor of his family, his work hybridizes and creates parallels between the land, the human, and the animal as a way to investigate the process in which violence eradicates, erases, and erodes communities of color.

“Toby’s Prize has changed the course of my life and art practice completely,” said Montoya. “It is a major building block to dreaming like an adult. I am humbled, teary-eyed, and looking forward to working with everyone at moCa Cleveland.”

Montoya’s recent solo exhibitions include James Webb and The Thestral Born Without a Vertebrate (2022) and Inside the Bowels of the Hoofed Beast (2020), both at Sargent’s Daughters, New York City, NY; and Ex Situ Canis Latrans (2021), Murmurs LA, Los Angeles, CA. Select group exhibitions include Durian on the Skin (2022), Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Outburst (2022), Palm Springs Museum of Art, Palm Springs, CA; were:-Nenetech Forms (2021), and MOCA Tucson, Tucson, AZ. He received his MFA in Sculpture + Extended Media from Virginia Commonwealth University and is represented by Murmurs Gallery.

Montoya’s exhibition is scheduled to open at moCa Cleveland in summer 2024. The museum will work with the artist on a variety of programming in support of the exhibition.

Nominating Committee
The nominating committee for this iteration of Toby’s Prize included Marissa Del Toro, Assistant Director of Exhibitions and Programs at NXTHVN and an independent curator based in New Haven, CT; Raphael Fonseca, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art at the Denver Art Museum; Stephanie Koch, Program Officer at the Teiger Foundation and a researcher, facilitator, and curator based in Chicago, IL; and Lauren Leving, Curator at moCa Cleveland and co-curator of the US Pavilion at the upcoming 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale.
“Toby's Prize can change an artist's career. The combination of the offered fees, the institutional exhibition, and the publication is extremely rare for a young artist,” said Nominating Committee Member, Raphael Fonesca. “This opportunity can quickly push the artist to other institutional experiences in the US and abroad.”

Added Fonesca, “Ruben's practice calls my attention not only because of how detailed and appealing his sculptures are to the viewer, but also because of all the conceptual layers behind them; memory, traveling, and dealing with found objects are essential to him, and I feel that through his work one can connect with many art historical, diasporic, and existential narratives.”

THE LEGACY OF TOBY DEVAN LEWIS
Toby Devan Lewis (1934-2022) was a contemporary art visionary whose impact resonates in Cleveland and across the country. She had an unbridled passion for artists and a consummate belief in the power and importance of contemporary art spaces. As a curator and advisor, Lewis stewarded award-winning commissions by now-acclaimed artists and built cutting edge collections, including the internationally-renowned Progressive Insurance collection that she helmed for over 20 years. As a philanthropist, Lewis helped to envision and support projects at art and cultural institutions including the New Museum in New York, NY, Anderson Ranch Art Center in Aspen, CO; ArtPace San Antonio, TX; and ideastream, Playhouse Square, and the Cleveland International Film Festival in Cleveland, OH, among many others.

“Toby was a luminary,” notes Megan Lykins Reich, moCa's Kohl Executive Director. “She had this powerful magnetism that shifted the energy of any room she entered. Toby provided amazing opportunities to artists and arts organizations alike, allowing them to confidently develop career-shifting works and industry-changing initiatives. Her prescient eye, passionate heart, incisive mind, and generous spirit truly shaped contemporary art.”

Joining moCa's board in the 1980s, Lewis's influence and insight were instrumental to the museum's growth, building project, and 2012 move to its current location, which houses a special project gallery that is her namesake. In 2017, she and moCa began imagining a new opportunity for emerging artists—Toby's Prize—that would provide substantial support for the development of new work and critical scholarship. Toby's Prize continues her legacy at moCa.

PAST PRIZES
The inaugural Toby's Prize was awarded to artist Sondra Perry, whose exhibition *A Terrible Thing* opened on the evening of moCa's 50th anniversary gala in April 2019. Perry took moCa's building and site as the focus of her research and new commission, creating an experimental video and sculptural installation in the Lewis Gallery that challenged understandings of the museum's architecture, ecosystem, history, and surrounding neighborhood. The exhibition catalog was published by Hatje Cantz in 2022.
The second Toby's Prize award was given to Puppies Puppies, Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo, who received the award at a pivotal moment in her practice when she was re-imagining how to use her network and reputation to uplift other trans and queer artists of color. In an act of radical generosity, Kuriki-Olivo split the Prize with several artists including Jerome AB and J.J. Adams, who staged solo presentations alongside her in moCa's Mueller Family Gallery, and Lexxi Foxx and Alethea Rael, with whom she created a new film. Kuriki-Olivo's upcoming catalog, chronicling her artistic practice, is scheduled to release in fall 2023.

FREE ADMISSION & HOURS
Daily Admission at moCa Cleveland is always free to all. Museum Hours:

- Thursdays-Sundays, 11AM-5PM
- Holiday hours available at mocacleveland.org

ABOUT moCa CLEVELAND
For more than 50 years, the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (moCa) has played a vital role in the city's cultural landscape. moCa is a conduit and catalyst for creativity and inspiration, offering exhibitions and programs that provide public value and make meaning of the art and ideas of our time.

Since its founding in 1968, moCa has presented the works of more than three thousand artists, often through artists' first solo shows. Soon after its founding, moCa was the first in the region to exhibit the works of many vanguard artists such as Laurie Anderson, Christo, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Adrian Piper, and Andy Warhol. Recent artist commissions and solo exhibitions include work by Tauba Auerbach, Simon Denny, Aleksandra Domanović, Michelle Grabner, Byron Kim, Ragnar Kjartansson, Tony Lewis, Kirk Mangus, Catherine Opie, Adam Pendleton, Sondra Perry, Joyce J. Scott, Do Ho Suh, Liu Wei, Renée Green, and Nina Chanel Abney, among many others.

2023 INSTITUTIONAL SPONSORS
All current moCa Cleveland exhibitions are funded by Leadership Circle gifts from Doreen & Dick Cahoon, Joanne Cohen & Morris Wheeler, Margaret Cohen & Kevin Rahilly, Grosvie & Charlie Cooley, Becky Dunn, Harriet Goldberg, Agnes Gund, Jan Lewis, and Toby Devan Lewis*.

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*of treasured memory