

Henry Mattei

Portfolio 26



Sculpture and painted surfaces

Brooklyn New York

Selected Work

ARTIST STATEMENT

On his first childhood visit to Puerto Rico, Henry Mattei chose a Ponce vejigante mask and brought it home. In his bedroom, he felt it watched over him. That early relationship with an object still informs his work: the mask's horns, color and dotted surfaces reappear in paintings and sculptures made through a patient practice of attention.

His mother left Puerto Rico for the South Bronx at fifteen, without speaking English. Mattei grew up in the Northeast without learning her Spanish. His art follows the connection between them toward an island he is still learning to know. The colors of vejigante masks, Old San Juan's houses, and Puerto Rico's landscape and food enter his paintings and sculptures as references he continues to seek out and study.

Roman Catholicism was the faith handed to Mattei at birth. He chose to leave it and develop a spiritual practice of his own, finding connection in the woods, around places and objects he encountered or fashioned himself. Later, his study of Taíno spiritual traditions helped him recognize affinities with experiences he had already lived. His work grows from that recognition and his belief that spirit is present throughout physical life.

In the studio, cardboard from delivery boxes becomes an armature beneath layers of papier-mâché and heavy body acrylic paint. Horns rise from sculptures and break the planes of canvases. Across their surfaces, Mattei places dots one by one, likening the intention of each mark to a rosary bead within his own spiritual practice. Repetition becomes a way to attend to his own state of being. He reads the differences between marks as traces of his presence: how steady he feels, where his attention goes, and how he returns to the task.

The prickly forms bring that attention into the viewer's physical world. Their textures can startle the senses and make an encounter feel newly immediate. Mattei hopes his works can become lasting presences in other people's lives, as the mask became in his: objects through which an everyday relationship can deepen into a spiritual one.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Henry Mattei is a Brooklyn-based artist working with sculpture and painting. The son of a Puerto Rican mother and an Italian American father, he explores his relationship with Puerto Rico through making, independent study, and learning Spanish. Alongside the artwork, he is developing a documentary and interview project, with writing emerging from the same inquiry.

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Cemí I, 2024

Cemí sculpture series

Acrylic on papier-mâché over recycled cardboard

40.6 × 15.2 × 19.7 cm (16 × 6 × 7¾ in.), H × W × D

Available | USD 5,000



Cemí II, 2024

Cemí sculpture series

Acrylic on papier-mâché over recycled cardboard

35.6 × 20.3 × 12.1 cm (14 × 8 × 4¾ in.), H × W × D

Available | USD 3,000



Cemí Painting in Red, Green and Blue, 2025

Available | USD 1,500



Cemí Painting in Black and White, 2025

Available | USD 3,500



Cemí Hummingbird Feeder I, 2026

Components: hand-patinated copper wire; 1/12-scale bricks and pallet

Available | USD 2,500

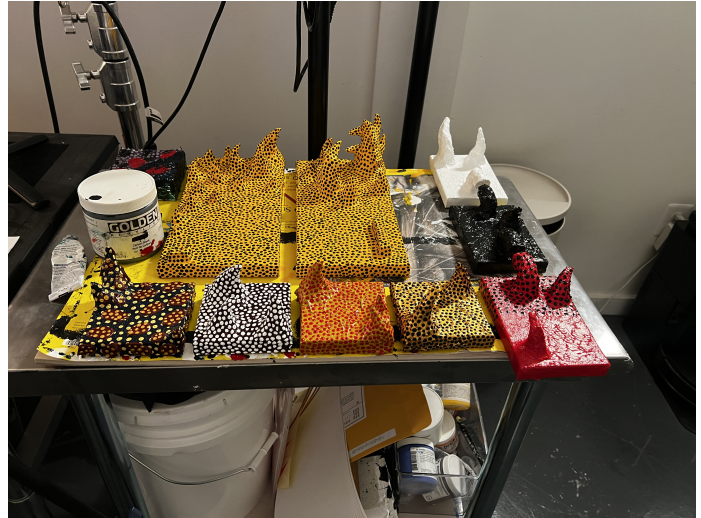
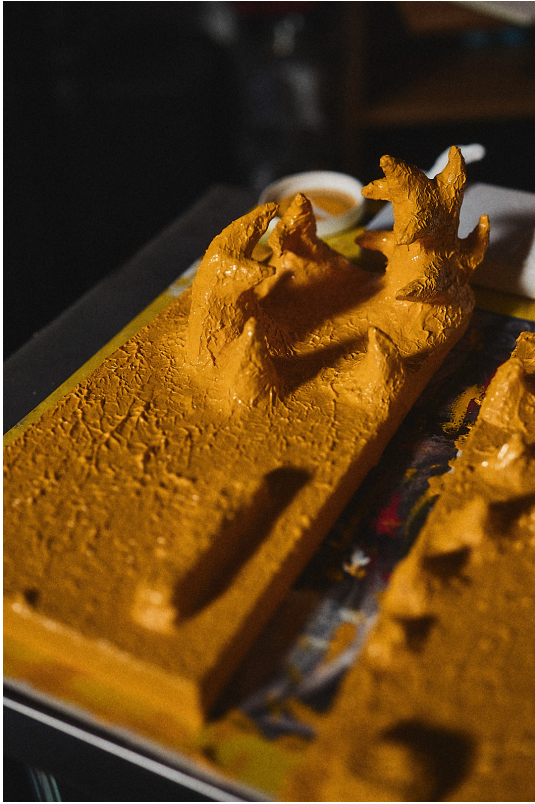


Cemí Hummingbird Feeder II, 2026

Components: 925 sterling silver wire; 1/12-scale cinder blocks and pallet

Available | USD 4,000

Form and surface



Studio photographs show pointed forms at different stages of preparation, painting, and patterning.



A paired view of the suspended forms shows how painted planes, wire, and small architectural bases are brought into the same group of work.

Puerto Rico and maternal lineage

Henry Mattei is developing a documentary and interview project tracing his maternal family connection to Puerto Rico. His mother moved from the island to the South Bronx at 15 in the 1970s, without speaking English. Mattei relates his own decision to come to New York to a shared pursuit of opportunity. The connections between their experiences remain part of the inquiry.

Vejigante mask making offers an entry into conversations about art, culture, spirituality, and the parallels Mattei sees with his studio practice. A mask brought home from his first childhood visit to Puerto Rico remains an important reference for his relationship with objects.

The project approaches the island through land, nature, food, dance, language, and people. It follows a personal search for connection, allowing encounters and discoveries to shape the direction of the work. Learning Spanish supports this inquiry; family and place research will help establish the paths it follows.

Film and writing extend the questions that arise in the studio. Together, these forms offer ways to consider how cultural learning changes Mattei's understanding of the objects he makes.



Studio form before painting

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