

Francesca Borgatta **Artist's Statement** www.puppetfigures.com

I make single figures or dioramas, always with a narrative content. I want to know the name and circumstance of each character. I also make wall tablets. I work with re-cycled materials, so to begin a piece I gather a few objects and lay them out so I can study their qualities; color and texture, etc. When the composition is rough, I like to hang the tablet at a distance and search for a few objects to define it more closely.

I like books that mix words and images. The Codex Borgia, with its colorful streams of characters and bold, black lettering is my favorite. I have a book of Hebrew manuscripts, with rich gilt and images and text entwined. I am fascinated by the forms that books can take, such as hanging scrolls (Chinese), or cloth-wrapped slats (Tibetan). The Aztec manuscripts were written directly on the wall or carved in stone.

I work in my backyard in the summer. In 2016, my mother was failing. A sculptor, she was miserable because she could no longer lift her mallet. I wanted to give her a gift.

My seed codex began with some seed packets from the laundry room. Water damaged, these seeds would never sprout. Instructions for planting were precise: depth of planting, distance, time for sprouting. I was ashamed of my neglect. I laid the packets out in different configurations and studied them.

In the backyard also was a walnut log which my husband hacked with an axe, leaving a pile of flat chips, four inches square. The horizontal striations seemed like lines of text. I set them in columns, and they seemed like text from a manuscript. I fixed the seed packets in an ascending column, like the Hindu chakras. A fan of packets formed a wheel. I sketched a third eye in the bottom of a plastic cup. I read the codex as a prayer for her survival.

I was happy when my mother hung the tablet in her apartment, looking out over the East River. Each day, while she slept, I went to the Met where the featured exhibit was "Jerusalem: The Crossroads", which examined the role books played in the exchange of cultures. A wealth of information was detailed about the use of the books, including how they were handled: folded in cloth, or set in a wood box with a key. There were descriptions of ceremonies involving the use of books: who read the book, and when, how the text was used for singing and chanting. Up close, small details added to the impact. Certain words, such as the name of god were rubbed out, and over-written.

In the evenings I returned to my mother and we sat on the couch near the tablet as it picked up gold from the sunset. It was still there when I came back. At my studio in Berkeley, I focused on the construction of the tablets. Two years later, when my mother died, the tablet was returned to me. I am grateful to see it in this show.