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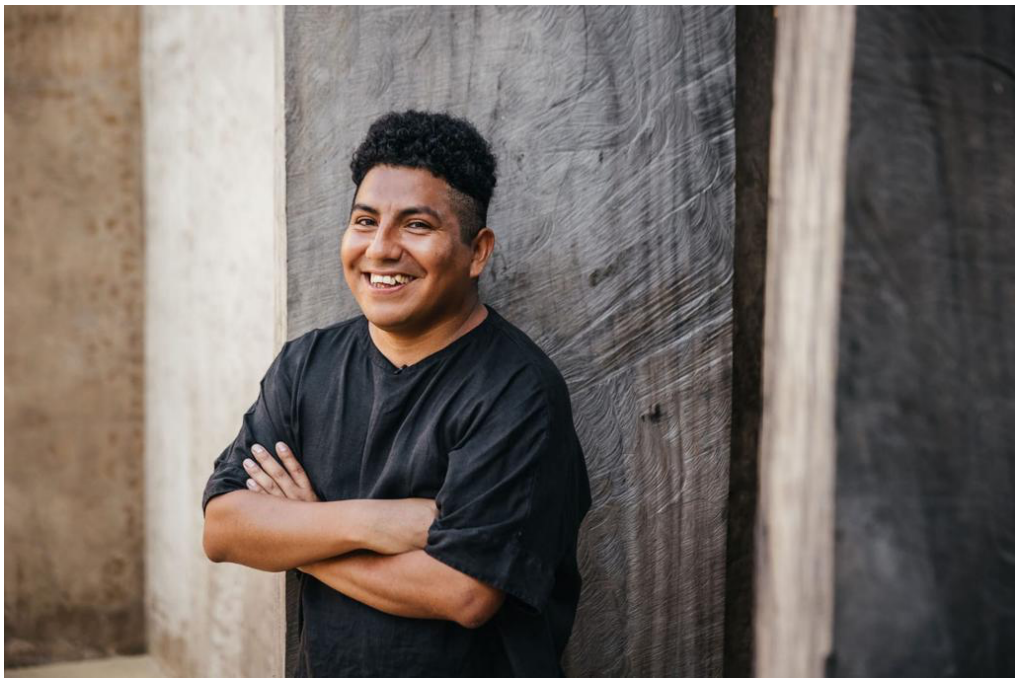


Gabriel Chaile.
Photo: Alex Krotkov

GABRIEL CHAILE'S MONUMENTAL SCULPTURES KEEP PRE-COLUMBIAN HISTORY FROM DISAPPEARING

BY ALEX GREENBERGER
September 30, 2025

As the fall season kicked off in New York earlier this month, High Line Art curator Cecilia Alemani jokingly provided dealers at **Marianne Boesky Gallery** with a warning: They might never get the adobe dust from **Gabriel Chaile**'s sculptures out of the gallery's nooks and crannies. Chaile, who was standing next to her, began to smile, recognizing that this was likely true.

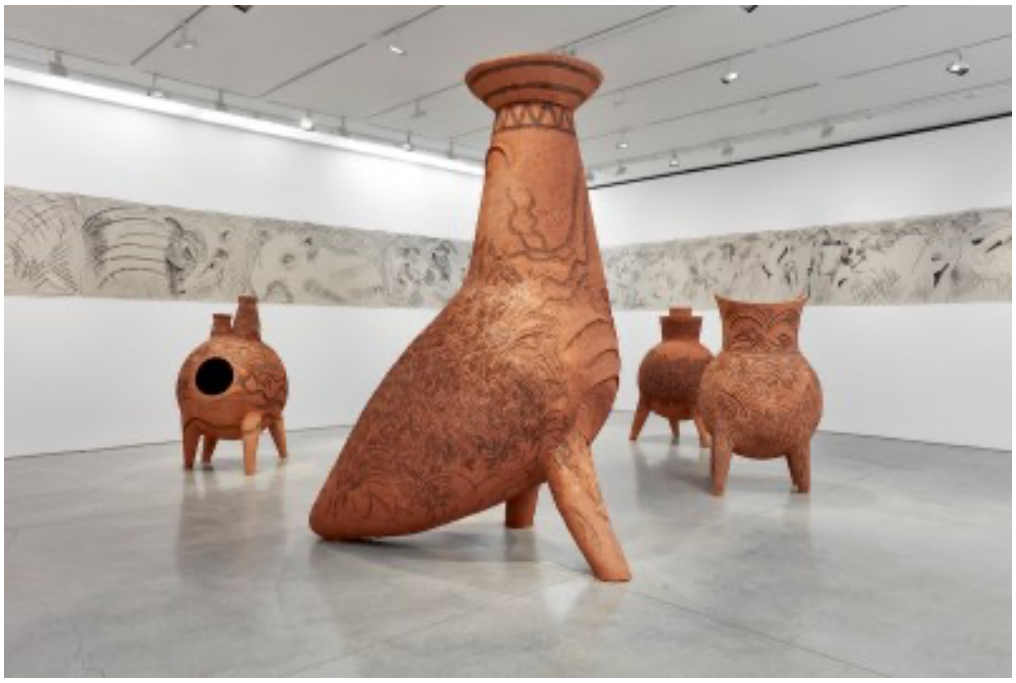
Alemani knew as much from personal experience. Her 2022 Venice Biennale featured several towering sculptures by Chaile, each resembling creatures with stubby legs and bulbous bodies. The tallest of the bunch soared 10 feet into the air, its elongated neck rising closer to the rafters of the Arsenale than any other artwork on view in a show filled with gigantic commissions.

To make one of these very big sculptures, Chaile's studio ships over his metal armatures in pieces, then coats them in adobe created on the spot. As the adobe is dried and shaped by the artist and his crew, dust is sent all over the place. Margot Norton, chief curator of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, told me of a colleague who visited her while Chaile was installing his work at her California institution in 2023. "She was floored by what the gallery looked like, because there was adobe everywhere," Norton said with a laugh. It's very possible that, somewhere between the walls of the Arsenale, BAMPFA, and Marianne Boesky, there will always be remnants of Chaile's creations.

Intentional or not, that befits Chaile's larger project, which ensures that the creations of pre-Columbian communities in northwest Argentina are not forgotten. Chaile draws his inspiration from these communities' modestly sized ceramics, then abstracts their forms and turns them monumental.

Chaile is of Spanish, Afro-Arab, and Candelaria ancestry; he is attentive to the fact that Indigenous people in Argentina were ultimately displaced by European colonizers, and that this history of dispossession remains little understood by many Argentineans. "There are very few people left in Argentina that are Indigenous to the place where they are [now]," he told me. Chaile's works seek to honor all the culture and knowledge that was lost along the way, immortalize it, and project it into the future.

In a recent interview, Chaile, speaking in Spanish and using a translator, compared his art to the stories passed on by his grandmother, Rosario Liendro, who kept her family history alive by repeating it orally. (The Biennale sculpture with the long neck was titled after her.) "It's almost like how your voice gets enhanced when you use a microphone," Chaile said of his art. "My mom is always saying to me that I'm doing what my grandmother did, just bigger."



Gabriel Chaile's Marianne Boesky Gallery show.
Photo: Jason Wyche

Chaile's career is itself bigger than ever. His show at Boesky, on view through October 18, is merely the latest stop in a world tour that has seen his sculptures appear on multiple continents. This past summer, he unveiled a new commission for Tinworks, an art space in Bozeman, Montana; the year prior to that, he brought his art to institutions in Uruguay, Spain, and Saudi Arabia, as well as to ChertLüdde, the hip Berlin gallery that has shown his work since 2018. Next year, Chaile will take part in the Biennale of Sydney.

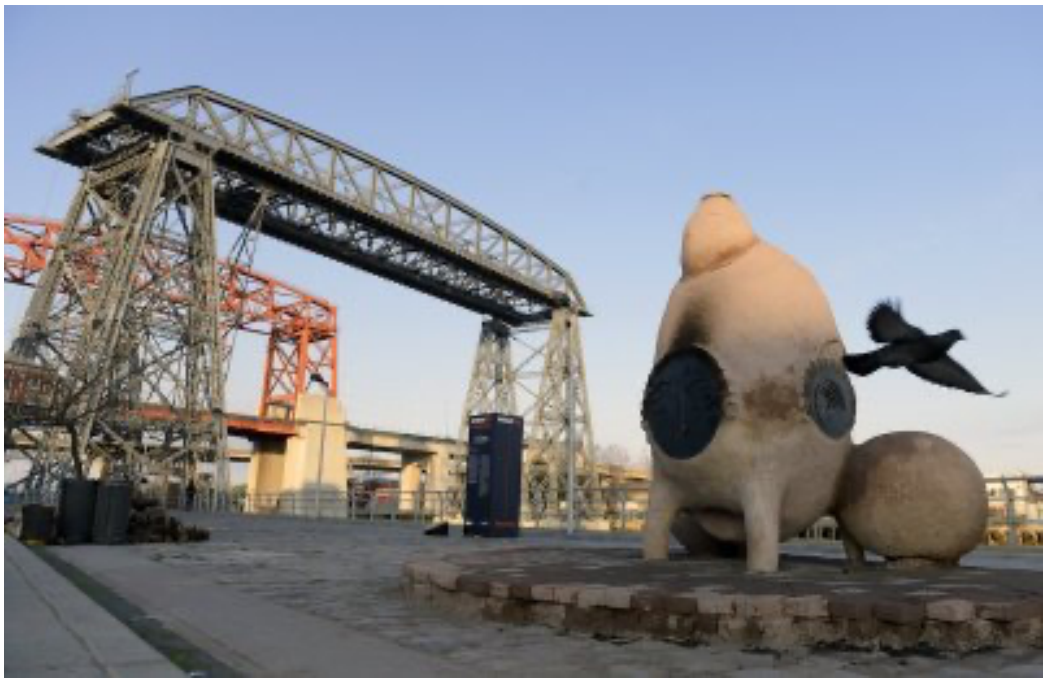
Despite having so much visibility, Chaile maintains an unassuming presence that seems at odds with the enormity of his sculptures. The 40-year-old artist arrived slightly late to our interview, having been delayed by an Uber en route from Jersey City, where he and members of his Lisbon-based team were staying during installation. He apologized politely, explaining that he needed a fresh haircut in advance of his upcoming opening, and excitedly walked around the show, which features five of his adobe sculptures surrounded by a vast drawing of tapirs.

Chaile named those sculptures after the Aguada tradition, the Candelaria culture, and other Indigenous people that have little recognition, both in Argentina and beyond. The titles are deceptively simple. *Candelaria* (2025), for example, resembles a bird without a face or talons; the crayon markings on its backside do not, in fact, derive from the Candelaria culture. Chaile told me that in titling his works this way, he was asking a thorny question: "What is identity?"

The search for an answer to that query has led Chaile to burrow far into his nation's past. Valeria Pecoraro, a director at the Bueno Aires–based Barro gallery, which has shown the artist since 2019, said, "He's really moved by something that goes beyond his own time. He is always looking for an origin of things, an origin of ideas, an origin of cultures."

Chaile was born in 1985 in San Miguel de Tucumán, a city in northwestern Argentina, and went on to attend art school nearby before gaining a scholarship to study in Buenos Aires. While he was in school, he was trained to paint in oil and sculpt in clay. Only later did it dawn on him that adobe, the material his family had used practically during his childhood, could be redirected for more conceptual purposes.

His first sculptures were based on objects seen at the Museum of High Altitude Archaeology, a Salta institution that holds artifacts that are more than two millennia old. "I was copying those objects, and then, afterward, I slowly started moving away from them," he said. He ended up sketching what he described as "combinations of animal forms and human forms. They are supposed to be hybrids."

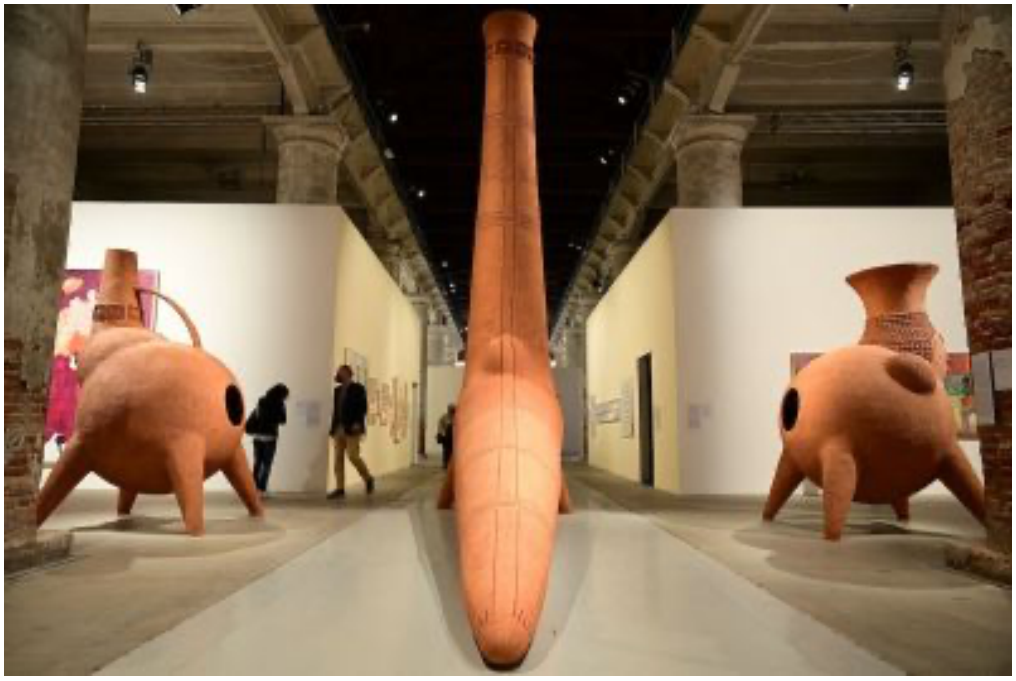


Gabriel Chaile's sculpture *Diego (Portrait of Diego Nunez)* at the 2018 edition of Art Basel Cities.
Photo: Juan Mabromata/AFP via Getty Images

The sculptures began to expand in size—and eventually, around the start of the 2010s even became usable as ovens. "My family was always making bread, and that influenced the idea to make ovens," he said. When he participated in a Cecilia Alemani–curated exhibition for Art Basel in Buenos Aires in 2018, he exhibited an imposing adobe form with breast-like appendages for legs. At certain points during the show's run, viewers could toast empanadas by sticking them into a fiery opening in its back.

Norton, the BAMPFA curator, said the Art Basel work epitomized the way that Chaile's works enlist the local community to achieve their full effect. "He's working with people in the production of the work, and also allowing the work itself to exist beyond the space of the gallery or museum where it's shown," she said. "It's about the experience that that sculpture can conjure. He's so generous." Three years after the Art Basel show, Norton included Chaile in her 2021 New Museum Triennial, which significantly raised Chaile's international profile.

Chaile has continued to surround himself with people of all stripes. He began doing so in the mid-2010s, when he mounted exhibitions for others at La Verdi, a project space in Buenos Aires's La Boca neighborhood that was run by artist Ana Gallardo. La Verdi "gave Chaile a place to work and also, for a while, secretly, to live," curator Manuela Moscoso has reported. And he has continued to foster an artistic network in Lisbon, where he got stuck in 2020, during the pandemic, and where he has remained ever since, employing local graffiti artists in his studio to help make his sculptures. "Each setup of a show or a sculpture is really a coming together of a community that he has built," said Pecoraro, the Barro director.



Works by Gabriel Chaile at the 2022 Venice Biennale.
Photo: Vincenzo Pinto/AFP via Getty Images

Was all that community-building function also a form of protest-minded assembly? I posed the question to Chaile, who pointed up at the untitled drawing of tapirs that rings the walls of Marianne Boesky. In the drawing, groups of tapirs can be seen congregating among reeds. Some fornicate, some stare at each other, and some simply bumble around. Tapirs like these are at risk of extinction in South America because of hunting and man-made interventions such as highways that run through their forests. Just like "persecuted" Indigenous communities in Argentina, Chaile said, the tapirs are "diminishing, going down in number. Scientists talk about them being peaceful animals—they avoid killing." He added that there was "protest in teamwork," and that he was reminded of an anti-Trump No Kings protest he witnessed in Montana this summer.

"People were not really looking to create animosity or chaos or anything," Chaile said of the No Kings demonstrators. Just like them, the tapirs are "protesting in a peaceful way."