THE AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE IN LATIN AMERICAN ART IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines contemporary art by Latin American diaspora artists in Canada, focusing on artworks that address trauma, displacement, feminist resistance, and anti-colonial perspectives in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and British Colombia. While drawing on extensive artists' interviews and exhibition histories, this dissertation intends to highlight the formation of an aesthetic of resistance specific to the diaspora in Canada.

By referencing key artists such as Alejandro Arauz, Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, Francisco-Fernando Granados, Claudia Bernal, Maria Ezcurra, Helena Martin Franco, Claudia Chagoya, Laura Barrón, Paolo Almario, and Monica Martínez, this study posits positionality as fundamental. The research also focuses on coalition building as a method of resistance with a close examination of the non-profit arts organization, Latin American Canadian Art Projects. Furthermore, recognizing "Latin American art" as a contested construct serving a geopolitical and economic purpose, this dissertation employs the term as a marker of shared displacement experiences and histories within the context of the diaspora.

The various case studies highlight resistance and critical consciousness, illuminating the geopolitical and economic structures that marginalize diaspora artists. The featured artists are united not by origin but by their reasons for leaving Latin America and their resistance strategies within a Canadian context. What ties these artists together is not necessarily their culture, ethnicity, race or language. Rather it is their shared interest and commitment to resist hegemonic systems of power. Their work challenges and critiques oppressive regimes, and subverts imperial patterns, offering what I term an aesthetic of resistance. Drawing upon positionality and oppositional consciousness as key concepts, this research investigates issues of representation

and erasure of Latin American art in Canada. Ultimately, this dissertation foregrounds the importance of coalition building and artistic renditions of resistance that respond to violence and oppression as a methodology and aesthetic. This knowledge offers not only historical insights but proposes a deeper understanding and contextualization of current phenomena of subjugation and how artists respond to oppression.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, this dissertation is dedicated to my children. The day I became a mother, my life changed radically. My sense of purpose, understanding of the world, and my responsibility within it became clear. Despite having an upbringing of collective consciousness and community wellbeing, it wasn't until small human beings were dependent on me for survival that I fully comprehended relationality. Furthermore, it wasn't until I had to think about how to explain our positionality within the context of living far away from our ancestral home to my own children that I could grasp its complexity.

To know how to navigate on my own terms in exile and then in the diaspora in Canada is one thing, but to unravel racism, exclusion, and lack of opportunities to our children, one needs tools, coalition building and formation, creative and organizational capacity, to overcome such barriers and oppressive systems. The day I became a mother, I embraced the resiliency inherited from past generations of women warriors and have tried my best to be an inspiration for those to come.

Subsequently, I dedicate this dissertation to my partner and best friend who has made me laugh since the first day we met twenty-eight years ago and has made life pleasurable, despite its traumas, difficulties, and challenges. He has given me strength, direction, advice, and the most precious gift of all, a family. Without his guidance, support, and countless hours of labour, this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you for the encouragement and belief that I would be able to accomplish such an endeavour.

In addition, I dedicate the following dissertation to the community of artists from the diaspora in Canada. Their commitment, resolve, and labour, despite the many challenges and barriers faced is admirable and has inspiring.

Finally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the most influential inspiration, my parents. Their life commitment towards social justice and the sacrifices made are both humbling and grounding. They have provided a sense of community, developing long-lasting relationships based on anti-oppressive frameworks and ethically dignified measures of respect and relationality. My siter and I were raised by survivors of tremendous hardship and trauma. However, both my mother and father have always kept hoping for a better future and fighting against those who deny the right to resist. The woman I am today and what I have been able to accomplish despite the perils of life, is due to the gift of having these parents. My life choices are informed by the lessons granted by both their mistakes and their wisdom. This dissertation is dedicated to those who dare to dream and resist against all odds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a settler on this land, I would like to acknowledge that this dissertation was developed and written in the traditional territory of Tkaronto, which is caretaken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, and the current treaty holders, the Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation. I am grateful for the opportunity to work and develop as a scholar on this unceded land. Despite fleeing my ancestral land due to violence and oppression, my privilege is not taken for granted and I embrace my responsibility as a settler. Thus, I take seriously the undoing and unlearning of colonial frameworks that perpetuate oppressive systems and this dissertation is one of other efforts within my capacity to change and resist.

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous guidance and support system I received as a York University student in the Art History and Visual Culture department, with special mention to my supervisor, Dr. Anna Hudson. Her academic guidance throughout my doctoral studies never ceased, despite the challenges of a pandemic and subsequent lockdown. My journey was often isolated, but I knew I could count on her unconditional support and wisdom. Secondly, my deepest gratitude to Dr. Tammer El-Shiekh who became an integral member of my committee, contributing with a global perspective, always providing insightful and thought-provoking questions while always offering encouraging words. Finally, I would like to thank my external committee members Dr. Camila Maroja and Dr. Dot Tuer. Without their knowledge on Latin American art, this dissertation would not have become what it is today. I would like to particularly mention Dr. Camila Maroja, whose expertise and insightful questioning allowed for further reflection on matters that were necessary to untangle, while also validating the strive to decolonize and reframe Canadian Art History.

I am also grateful for the financial support granted through the various scholarships, fellowships, awards, and grants provided throughout the five and half years of doctoral studies provided by the institution. I am deeply appreciative of the ongoing support I received, including the various opportunities which allowed for further academic development and growth. Courses, conferences, presentations, and outstanding fellow students and colleagues that I learned from, along with the exceptional professors that offered lessons and words of wisdom, helped me prepare for this tremendous milestone.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my family for their support and encouragement, for their ongoing patience and love. Without this type of support, my doctoral studies would have been challenging and much less enjoyable.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank all the contributors to this dissertation who graciously, generously, and openly shared their thoughts and experiences. I assume this role with great responsibility and have written this dissertation with the ethical care needed and deserved. I acknowledge that the following dissertation is one perspective with the hope that it will encourage others to continue the discussion and articulation of an untapped scholarship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines art by the Latin American diaspora in Canada from the early twenty-first century to the present, aiming to contextualize, theorize, situate, and describe artistic practices that embody what I term an "aesthetic of resistance." Drawing upon extensive artist interviews and my own work as a Latin American curator based in Canada, this dissertation aims to underscore the need for knowledge of an untapped scholarship. Exploring themes of resilience, transformation, and dissidence, and recognizing the body's power as a tool for critical engagement within a landscape that often erases their presence, these artists exemplify a visual language established by a diaspora largely unaccounted for in Canada and internationally. The dissertation highlights how diasporic artists' positionality determines aesthetic and methodological decisions while also dictating artistic relevance and impact. The aesthetic choices transcend traditional or contemporary media boundaries. These artists have developed a visual language that speaks directly to diasporic concerns of displacement, intergenerational trauma, and violence. The migration demographics of the Latin American diaspora in Canada, with many fleeing violence and upheaval, inform the elaboration, articulation, and concept of resistance for artists navigating systemic erasure within Canada's settler-colonial state. In response, these artists materialize an aesthetic that reflects their experiences and challenges.

This introduction intends to provide an overview of the dissertation followed by a more detailed description of each chapter. The dissertation is divided into five chapters: *The Politics of Art*, *Resistance within Invisibility*, *Displacement as a Point of Departure*, *The Body as a Combative Tool*, and *Representations of Trauma and Gestures of Mourning*. The first two chapters provide contextual information intended to communicate to the reader of the historical, political, social, and economic implications of the development of Latin American art in the

hemisphere, specifically in Canada, and how the theme of resistance for the diaspora is a categorical response to violent colonial, imperial and neoliberal patterns. Specifically, chapter two is dedicated to the advocacy work I have pursued for the past twenty years and how this has informed the need to continue pushing for spaces of representation within academic spaces. Both chapters aim to highlight the role coalition development can play to dismantle hegemonic patterns of subjugation and erasure, providing a space for resistance for diasporic subjects.

The next three chapters highlight a thematically based aesthetic of resistance particular to the Latin American diaspora in Canada. Ten artists including: Paolo Almario, Alejandro Arauz, Laura Barrón, Claudia Bernal, Claudia Chagoya, Maria Ezcurra, Francisco Fernando Granados, Helena Martin Franco, Monica Martínez, and Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo are thoroughly discussed, with a biographical account, including immigration journeys to Canada, and how experiences of displacement, trauma, loss, and violence contribute towards an aesthetic of resistance. Inscription as a mode and method to mark displacement, the absence and presence of the body within spaces of exclusion, and the act of mourning as both a healing and transformative tool are the sources that inform the research, observations, and theoretical development of artists and their artworks. Finally, the conclusion marks the site of reclamation. I dedicate an auto-ethnographic space of reflection, where I examine and understand the impact, context, and motives behind the development of the dissertation. The diasporic connections, aesthetic choices, and geo-political rationale manifest, for the need of the diaspora, in its process of finding its place within the settler colonial history of Canada, becomes evident.

Despite the presence of Latin American art in Canadian cultural institutions since the early twentieth century,[1] a significant invisibility of diasporic artists persists within prominent art establishments. Thus, this scholarship is in due course and must find its space within academia, particularly those offering challenging forms of social contestation who are often relegated to subaltern, grassroots spaces of discourse.[2] In response to this marginalization, many diasporic artists from Latin America have adopted strategies of resistance. They encode messages of dissent, question assertions of multiculturalism, defy hierarchical power structures, transform absence into representations, and challenge oppressive systems to dismantle preconceived notions of identity. Despite their significant contributions, these artists have been consistently overlooked by Canadian art critics, writers, and historians, creating a critical gap in scholarship that demands attention.

This doctoral dissertation aims to address this academic vacuum, drawing upon over two decades of professional experience in curating Latin American contemporary art and advocating for Latin American artists within both grassroots organizations and institutional spaces in Toronto. This unique perspective bridges the gap between scholarly inquiry and practical experience in the field, offering a comprehensive examination of the complex dynamics shaping the representation and reception of Latin American diasporic art in Canada. The research employs a positionality-centered and auto-ethnographic methodology, drawing on firsthand experiences as a Chilean exile and Latin American curator in Canada. This insider-outsider stance provides invaluable insights into the nuanced realities of diasporic artists, illuminating the

[1] Alena Robin, "Mapping the Presence of Latin American Art in Canadian Museums and Universities," in *Hispanic Studies Publication* (2019): 35, https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/hispanicpub/9

[2] Analays Alvarez Hernandez, "An Auto-Ethnographic Entrée En Matière and Mise En Contexte: Latinx Canadian Art(Ists) in Montrèal," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2022): 102, https://doi.org/10.1525/lavc.2022.4.1.101.

intersections of personal, historical, cultural identity, and artistic practice. By weaving together academic rigor with lived experience, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the challenges and strategies employed by Latin American diasporic artists in navigating the Canadian art landscape. This approach not only enriches the scholarly discourse but also provides a model for more inclusive and reflexive art historical practices, potentially reshaping how diasporic art is perceived, studied, and integrated into the broader narrative of Canadian art history.

Throughout this dissertation, I emphasize that Latin America is not a monolithic entity, but rather a tapestry of diverse cultures, ethnicities, traditions, histories, experiences, and economic classes that often create divisions within the diaspora. However, uniting this multiplicity is the common legacy of colonialism, and for many, the enduring effects of imperialism and neoliberalism, which have catalyzed mass migrations northward. Notably, the term "Latinx," while gaining traction elsewhere, finds little resonance among the artists interviewed for this research. Instead, I employ "Latin American diaspora" as a more apposite signifier for the community under study. A recent survey across Canada revealed that a mere 0.02% of respondents identified with the term "Latinx."[3] This designation is largely perceived as specific to the United States context failing to capture the nuanced realities and identity constructs specific within Canada, despite its gender-neutral intentions.[4] While "Latinx" aims for

[3] In 2023, Sur Gallery produced a digital archive of over 130 visual artists across Canada, inquiring about how they would like to be identified within ARCHIVO. The question of ethnic background was posed, and the findings were as follows: 13 identified with their birth nationality (Mexican, Colombian, Costa Rican, Cuban); 12 identified as Latin American; 5 as Mestiza/o/x; and 4 as Latina/o; 2 as Latinx; 2 as Hispanic. The results also included many who abstained as well as one in each of the following categories: Latino Caribbean; Afro Peruvian Afro Indigenous; Hispanic Sephardic Jew Amazigh Mapuche; Jewish; Latin American of Indigenous European and African origin; Mixed race Indigenous American and European; Mestiza Chinese European Andean; European Latin American; and Mexican and European Mix.

[4] The term 'Latinx' is not adopted by any of the interviewees who participated in this dissertation.

inclusivity and non-gendered classification, most artists in Canada have consciously opted against its adoption, preferring to maintain their national or hemispheric identifications. This linguistic choice reflects a broader negotiation of identity within the diaspora, highlighting the complex interplay between personal heritage, migration experiences, and the socio-cultural landscape of their adopted home.

This dissertation critically examines the construction of Canada's multicultural myth, unveiling the discrepancies, nuances, and layers underlying its systemic flaws.[5] It exposes decisions that perpetuate neocolonial perspectives and neoliberal economic structures, which mediate and pathologize the production of Latin American diasporic art in Canada. The research emphasizes the crucial role of geopolitics in the dissemination of Latin American art, delineating the vertical axis of inequalities and violence that renders Indigenous, Black, and racialized individuals as disposable. This observation is most recently exemplified with the sudden departure of the first curator of Indigenous art from the Art Gallery of Ontario after a letter was sent by Israel Museums of Arts Canada (IMAAC) accusing the curator of hate speech due to their advocacy work against genocide and colonialism. However, the principal focus of providing a geopolitical context is to understand Latin America's position within coloniality. It is seen as a site of extraction, enabling a politics of commodity both within the region and globally. By interrogating intersecting issues, this dissertation aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the production and reception of Latin American

[5] Please see Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung in *13 conversations about art and cultural race politics*; Day Richard J.F. in *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*; Patricia Landolt and Luin Goldring in "Immigrant Political Socialization as Bridging and Boundary Work: Mapping the Multi-Layered Incorporation of Latin American Immigrants in Toronto;" Arlan Londoño in "Una mirada a las organizaciones y movimientos artísticos latinoamericanos en Canadá;" and Slavoj Žižek in "Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism."

diasporic art in Canada, challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for a more equitable and inclusive artistic landscape.

The chapters developed in this dissertation intend to demystify Canada as a multicultural haven, a hospitable, equitable, accepting place, and rather expose its exclusionary and racist system within the arts, foregrounding its genocidal history with Indigenous people. But rather than solely focusing on the numerous challenges both historical and contemporary, this study emphasizes the transformative capacity for hope that exists within oppositional consciousness, even in the face of such adversity. This hope manifests in movements and coalition formations within diasporas, empowering initiatives that transcend victimization and tokenization. These methods of resistance in Canada gained momentum throughout the past four decades, building upon the labor and examples set by past generations. The 1980s and 1990s with its vibrant "period characterized by a proliferation of events and works by artists of colour and First nations artists in the visual arts, film, and video" however turned into a "nostalgic, burn-out phase of the early 2000s."[6] Yet, for the Latin American diaspora, the momentum began to surface in the early 2000s where artists began to mobilize and initiate their own sources and platforms of dissemination within the visual arts sector, at a time when most institutional spaces had lost interest in cultural diversity or politically-engaged artistic practices.

Within the context of Canada, resiliency and resistance dates to centuries of oppression of Indigenous people across Turtle Island facing genocide. In the so-called state of Canada, artists that understand this past and present history, and carry this knowledge into their work offer a site of resistance to a long-lasting legacy. The promise of change lies in the work created by those

[6] Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung, *13 conversations about art and cultural race politics* (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 10.

mentioned in this dissertation, along with countless others who remain in obscurity. Their ability to continually offer alternative ways of seeing and doing enriches artistic historical discourses in Canada and serves as the inspiration for this research. By illuminating these narratives of resilience and creativity, this dissertation not only critiques existing structures but also celebrates the enduring spirit of Latin American diasporic artists who continue to shape and challenge the Canadian artistic scene.

Throughout this dissertation, language is employed with intentionality and critical awareness, engaging directly with colonial and imperial systems of exclusion and subjugation. The narratives of oppression and liberation that have shaped artistic practices, both in Latin America and within its diaspora, form a crucial framework for this study. The final three thematically based chapters, which examine ten diverse artists, serve as a foundation for further in-depth research, inviting deeper exploration of individual artistic practices and their resonances within broader contexts. This approach represents an initial effort to spark discussion and develop theoretical frameworks. Rather than focusing on just one or two artists, this dissertation adopts a thematic structure, encompassing a wide range of artists and mediums, all linked to the overarching concept of an *aesthetic of resistance*. Moreover, for the purpose of its argument, it is imperative to highlight the diverse places of origin within the diaspora, illuminating the varied migration patterns to Canada while simultaneously exposing the geopolitical and historical relationships of extraction and intervention throughout the region. This approach serves to underscore the active role and complicity of the Canadian government and Canadian corporations in these geopolitical dynamics. By weaving together these multiple threads, the dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive yet nuanced understanding of Latin American

diasporic art in Canada, challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for a more inclusive and critically engaged artistic discourse.

I will now provide a detailed summary of each chapter, clarifying how each one contributes towards the objective of this dissertation.

To frame, understand, and position diasporic artists and their work in Canada within a larger conversation of Latin American art, it is important to highlight the colonial, imperial, and geopolitical structures that have influenced Latin American art globally. Thus, chapter one entitled *The Politics of Art* is focused on providing a historical and a contextual account of Latin American art in the United States and its relationship to Canada. Additionally, by contextually positioning Canada's economic interests in Latin America, the study exposes its interconnections and close relationship with the United States' geopolitical praxis and interventionist policies. Chapter one also offers an understanding of the diaspora's social, political, and economic relation to the settler colonial state as well as its migration patterns and brings to light some of the factors for its invisibility in both Canada and abroad.

This framework, which brings together sociological, political, cultural, and historical analysis, provides a road map to further understand subsequent chapters that focus on artistic practices of the diaspora in Canada. Chapter one discusses the faulted premises, resonance, and proliferation of equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts within the arts, that have resulted in superficial and cosmetic attempts that do not yet address the need to truly embark on transformative change. For example, it is not enough to offer sporadic exhibitions with a few racialized artists programmed by museums and institutions while its staff does not uphold the

same EDI measures.[7] This chapter highlights how and why artists of the Latin American diaspora continue to remain at the margins of discourse and participation as a demographic that lacks power and visibility. While this same marginality enables the development of an aesthetic of resistance, it also becomes a critical vantage point in today's international centres of contemporary art, with many embracing socially and politically engaged practices today. However, the main concern within this study is the lack of engagement with the Latin American diaspora in Canada and the need to record its relevance, impact, and contribution.

Chapter two, *Resistance Within Invisibility*, examines positionality and invisibility of Latin American diasporic artists in Canada within the settler colonial state. It offers an auto-ethnographic methodology adopted to foreground the non-profit arts organization I co-founded, Latin American Canadian Art Projects (LACAP), an organization that has supported the collective agency of diasporic Latin American art for the past twenty years in response to the lack of opportunities and visibility. As co-founder, along with dozens of other colleagues, we have spearheaded two decades of intense labor and dedication, which for the purpose of this dissertation, serves as an example of organizational resistance against systemic erasure within the arts in Canada.

LACAP's advocacy work serves as a case study and speaks to the active role coalition development plays and how this is used as a form of resistance within the settler colonial state. By examining the various projects developed throughout the decades –from its initial stages of organizing a multi-disciplinary festival, or opening a physical space for exhibition, to its most recent digital archival initiatives– LACAP has garnered financial and community support,

[7] There is one Black curator, Julie Crooks, at the Art Gallery of Ontario among a curatorial staff of eleven people, who joined in 2017.

facilitating its ability to develop hemispheric relationships and allies. Chapter two emphasizes the impact this organizational capacity has had over the span of two decades and is presented as a need and an outlet for the diaspora within the Canadian artistic milieu. Existing as a form of resistance under precarious subaltern conditions, leveraging government funding to nurture and harbour artists of the diaspora who have been historically overlooked, LACAP has become a tool to create change in the arts in Canada using its projects to dismantle the colonial condition of subordination.

The emphasis of the next three chapters shifts to begin to discuss specific artists and artworks under thematically based subjects under the premise of an aesthetic of resistance. While I focus on displacement and journeys of belonging, I also engage in distinct themes to identify and contextualize artistic practices within the diaspora in Canada. Anti-oppressive research and an ethnographic methodological approach is adopted as a tool to expose subaltern subjects and the power they hold to develop forms of resistance.[8] Furthermore, as outlined, I reflect on my own positionality,[9] embodied experience, and knowledge, which serves as the foundation of the analysis. Focusing on artists whose practices are shaped by oppression, the study integrates this auto-ethnographic methodology and is mediated through a series of interviews of artists that have been conducted with critical care and ethical attention.

Their migratory journeys and the historical accounts of places of origin provide insight into the development of the themes and subjects they explore in their work, and the

[8] Please see Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005).
[9] I use the term *positionality* throughout the dissertation as a social, political, and relations signifier, one that intersects within various categories, power structures, and identities, which shapes how to engage with the world. Moreover, positionality held depends on cultural, political, social, and familial degrees of power and privilege, and is examined throughout the dissertation.

interconnections between their ancestral land and Canada. The study encompasses ten artists of the diaspora from three provinces: Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. In addition, the investigative analysis stems from multiple sources of archives, research from catalogues, exhibitions, press articles, and critical reviews. As indicated, the common thread linking these artists is an *aesthetics of resistance* in which layers of agency, defiance, and critical/oppositional consciousness are at the core of each artistic practice. The study includes artists from different countries across Latin America: Colombia, Mexico, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, reflecting the multiple places from which the diaspora in Canada originates. These Latin American countries have a geopolitical and economic direct connection to the United States interventionist policies. However, as previously emphasized, what is crucial within this dissertation, is Canada's complicity with its extractivist and interventionist structures, and how this serves its settler colonial project that favours a white supremist narrative.

Chapter three entitled *Displacement as a Point of Departure* discusses the work of Alejandro Arauz, Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, and Francisco Fernando Granados under the theme of displacement and the act of mark-making as a tool of resistance. This chapter considers the work of artists, all from Central America, and how they adopt the act of inscription (text-based work, drawing, and printmaking) as an instrument to identify the gaps within Canadian art. Using various disciplinary forms and aesthetics, they contest the challenging position of the diasporic subject within Canada by exposing their stories of migration. These artists position their artistic practices and reveal the nuances, arbitrariness, and subtleties of the diasporic subject. Alejandro Arauz's practice traverses the complexities of migration while expanding the boundaries of printmaking by using his own body as a printmaking tool to expose the pain and trauma inflicted on the physical self during and after migration. The intricately detailed drawings

of Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo share intergenerational stories of trauma while also exposing the beauty and the transformation that lies deep beneath all difficult knowledge. Francisco Fernando Granados offers conceptual frameworks to envision alternative outcomes for the refugee body that is so often rendered silent, even though it is obliged to narrate and prove its authenticity. These artists all share a past of traumatic experiences of migration to Canada as either children or adolescents but most importantly they mark an intergenerational trauma to inscribe it within a diasporic collective narrative. The artists' experiences of loss and forced migration inform and define their artistic practices, returning to the essence of their journeys and their aftermath. Their work chronicles diasporic resilience, it defies hegemonic conceptions of assimilation and denies subjectivity all the while in dialogue with the myth of Canada as their saviour.

Chapter four highlights Claudia Bernal, Helena Martin Franco, and Maria Ezcurra and examines how these three women artists use the presence and absence of the female body as a form of contestation and decoloniality under the title *The Body as a Combative Tool*. To decolonize their subaltern presence as diasporic subjects, these artists question and challenge Eurocentric Western epistemologies and aesthetics by dismantling preconceived notions of subjectivity offering different sites of identification. Bernal, Martin Franco, and Ezcurra understand manifestations of coloniality of power, coloniality of being, and coloniality of gender and apply this knowledge to their artistic practices. Their positionality, upbringing, geopolitical contexts, and personal experiences inform their artistic practices and narratives. These artists navigate their erasure by developing an aesthetics of resistance, defined by either the female body's presence or absence within a settler-colonial and patriarchal state. They propose strategies of radicality and use their in-between diasporic state to facilitate a relationship of solidarity and allyship with Indigenous peoples in Abya Yala and Turtle Island. Patriarchal systems of power

and the politics of representation provide contextual material as they negotiate within a system that perpetuates marginality and exclusion. This chapter discusses the lives and migratory trajectories of these women artists, all of whom codify forms of subaltern agency, question hetero patriarchal Western epistemologies, and leverage the presence of the body. This female diasporic body is presented as a site of strength, resistance, agency, and contestation and defies the rhetoric of vulnerability and precarity.

Finally, chapter five, under the title *Representations of Trauma and Gestures of Mourning*, with artists Laura Barrón, Claudia Chagoya, Paolo Almario, and Monica Martínez, explores the concept of mourning, and offers this theme as a site of resistance, of healing, and of transformation. This third form and tool of defiance proposes to highlight consciousness and transformation as a definition for resiliency, one that is embedded within the artists' work, and subjects, navigating physical and emotional disruption. Rather than engage these artists in conversation with foundational psychoanalytical scholarship such as that of Sigmund Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, which would entail a different approach, I instead discuss how these artists deal with loss as diasporic subjects that have experienced violence and displacement, and how they respond by exploring the possibilities of an aesthetic of resistance and propose transformative renditions. Adopting a decolonial feminist approach drawn from Gloria Anzaldúa, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Judith Butler, Carmen Cariño, and Sayak Valencia, I ground my analysis removed from divergent typecast colonial tendencies and modern Western humanist discourses of melancholia, refusing to pathologize these artists or their artworks. I instead reframe melancholia into transformative acts of resistance that have the potential for growth and the ability for change. These renditions become responses to an open wound but clearly acknowledge that it is a colonial and an imperial one. Inspired by Hema'ny Molina Vargas,

Camila Marimbio, and Nina Lykke's "Decolonising Mourning: World-Making with the Selk'nam People of Karokynka/Tierra del Fuego" article in which they claim to "transgress the effects of white humanist melancholia and establish a relational ethics apt for unlocking congealed power matrices, and opening towards alternative futurities,"[10] I search for the ways artists explore mourning of intergenerational loss. A loss that has been generated through dispossession and displacement, and the artistic actions and renditions explored reclaim and subvert melancholia towards a process of healing and of transformation. Since time immemorial artists have rendered death and have found ways to mourn lives lost through and with their work. Not only have they shown us alternative representations and understandings of various cosmologies and belief systems, but also how mourning can become an act of survival and of resistance. As such, the artists in this final chapter offer insights into the challenges faced by diasporas far away from home. I have decided to end my dissertation with this theme as a homage to the 3 million global deaths during the recent COVID-19 pandemic and to the criminal acts of genocide that we are currently witnessing in Palestine today whilst completing my doctoral studies.

In the conclusion, I reflect on the development of forms and aesthetics of resistance, alluding to modes of solidarity and advocacy. Drawing from local and global events, I share personal anecdotes of my own experiences with resistance. I contemplate the meaning of seeking freedom against oppression while residing on unceded land, acknowledging our complex positions as settlers and diasporic people. Throughout, I remain acutely aware of my own privilege on the ancestral lands of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Petun, Seneca, and the Mississauga's of the Credit River First Nations. I critically examine my

[10] Molina Vargas et al., eds., "Decolonizing Mourning: World-Making with the Selk'nam People of Karokynka/Tierra del Fuego," *Australian Feminist Studies* 35, no. 104 (2020):186–201.

positionality and the privilege inherent in pursuing doctoral studies in Canada. Employing decolonial frameworks, feminist philosophies, critical race theory, subaltern studies, and curatorial practices, I map out a colonial, modernist, developmentalist, white supremacist, and imperialist project that systematically erases dissenting voices in art, confining them to subaltern spaces of discourse. However, this marginalization is met with resilience; the very act of existence enables resurgence. Words of resilience are shared even as we witness the destruction of humanity.

I conclude with a message of hope for future generations, encouraging them to persist despite ongoing censorship and a global resurgence of fascist ideologies. The focus is on our capacity, through art and as artists, to overcome challenges by adopting modes of oppositional and critical consciousness, aligning with a visual construction of resistance. This dissertation thus serves not only as an academic contribution but also as a testament to the enduring spirit of Latin American diasporic artists, their struggles, and their transformative impact on the artistic landscape in Canada.

THE POLITICS OF ART

Apolitical art is still political art, it serves the interest of someone.
Luis Camnitzer

I will begin this dissertation by contextualizing the emergence of Latin American art in the United States to then focus on Latin American art in Canada. The information provided will give sufficient contextual background to highlight the various shortfalls and challenges faced by the diaspora, particularly within Canada. Contexts of migration, neoliberal economic agendas imposed within the region, imperial impositions and interventions, and the colonial legacies of extraction will determine the multiple themes diasporic artists follow which will be discussed in future chapters. Furthermore, diasporic positionality will challenge the myth of a receptive accepting multicultural place in Canada. This dissertation highlights how both Indigenous and racialized artists navigate spaces of erasure and exclusion. In particular, this chapter discusses Canada's role within a larger geopolitical structure, its international affairs and relationship with Latin America, and its interconnections with US imperial interests including those within art circuits. All of this will provide insights into understanding the various themes artists of the diaspora address in future chapters. My intention with this chapter is to offer relevant information to understand links between geopolitics and the aesthetics of resistance that the artists included in the dissertation develop as diaspora within the settler colonial state called Canada.

History and Context

The study of Latin American art begins in the early part of the twentieth century in universities and museums in the United States. Arguably, it is a construct based on an institutional project of post WWII imperialist politics, which fulfilled the geopolitical and economic interests and initiatives of the United States government since it facilitated its influence and growth throughout the region. After the Great Depression, "relations with Latin America helped the United States recover…Asia increasingly off limits and Europe headed for war, Washington looked south for economic relief, both as a market for manufactured goods and a source of raw material."[11] American corporations invested heavily with a developmentalist, and modernization agenda and two policies facilitated this process. These policies influenced relationship building between Latin America and the United States: the anti-fascist *Good Neighbour Policy* (1933) developed and implemented by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration and the *Alliance for Progress Policy* (1961-1969), initiated by President John F. Kennedy. Under Roosevelt's leadership, the United States emphasized cooperation and trade rather than military force to maintain stability within the hemisphere. The policy lasted until the end of WWII followed by the anti-communist policy of 1961. Both policies facilitated economic exchange with Latin America with the end goal to expand economic capitalist interests and homogenize a region of over twenty different countries with diverse cultures, traditions, backgrounds, histories, and ethnicities.

[11] Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007), 35.

The curator and art historian Mari Carmen Ramírez argues that the "homogenizing bias of modernism was at work from the start in the use of the controversial term 'Hispanic.'"[12] She states that it is a construct or "illusion of the West's own making, a product of the hegemonic stance of modernism which has never produced anything but the fatal misappropriation and misrepresentation of other people' cultures."[13] There exists no single identity for a vast region, despite its common colonial and imperial legacies, and a current neo-colonial region that is guided by U.S. interventions, exploitation of resources, financial manipulation, and racial discrimination. Despite acknowledging that Latin America is not a monolithic entity, art historians in both the Global North and the Global South speak and discuss, articulate, and theorize Latin American art and develop discourses around its avant-garde movements, its influences and impact both within the region and in diaspora.

The implicit geopolitical and economic agendas with its imperialist interests provide a contextual understanding of where and why Latin American art has developed, why it is relevant, and what questions can be raised to determine its future. This dissertation aims to contribute to the development of Latin American art in the diaspora, specifically in the context of Canada. How the diaspora navigates forms of exclusion and the ways in which they respond to a history of imperial and colonial intervention. But to dig into this analysis, it is important to begin with the reasons behind the construction of Latin American art.

[12] Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Beyond the Fantastic: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art," *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (1992): 64.
[13] Ibid., 66.

An Imperial Legacy

The Panamerican Union (PAU), formed in 1890, was an intergovernmental organization of national and state delegates whose primary objective was to promote regional solidarity and cooperation among the countries of Latin America and the United States. It is dedicated to fostering commercial relationships, facilitating economic, social, and cultural exchange, and as Dr. Claire F. Fox argues "culture was the very medium through which diplomacy was supposed to occur."[14] Mexican-born Concha Romero James was the assistant chief and later became the chief of the Division of Intellectual Cooperation of this transnational agency. She began to promote a continental canon formation throughout the United States within art institutions during the Good Neighbour Policy years, favouring the Mexican school of art.[15] Art historian Anna Indych-López observes that Mexico played an important role in shaping popular U.S. conceptions of Latin American art, because of the cultural exchanges organized by the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and other institutions during the 1930s and 1940s.[16] MoMA was the first institution outside Latin America to collect and exhibit the work of Latin American artists, starting with an exhibition by the Mexican muralist painter Diego Rivera in 1931, only two years after the Museum's founding. The "presence of Mexican muralists in the U.S."[17] and the exhibitions at OCIAA and MoMA during the 1930s and 1940s facilitated a widespread Latin American art circulation throughout the United States.

[14] Claire F. Fox, *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 2.
[15] Fox, *Making Art Panamerican*, 9.
[16] Ibid., 216.
[17] Fabiana Serviddio, "Exhibiting Identity: Latin America Between the Imaginary and the Real," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (2010): 482.

This cultural and geopolitical strategy of promoting Latin American art in the Global North also influenced decision making within Canada's art institutions. For example, the exhibition organized by the Philadelphia Museum with the collaboration of the Dirección general de educación extra-escolar y estética, *Mexican Art Today* (1943), toured throughout Canada. The one-month exhibition was presented at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, during the summer of 1943 and toured to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.[18] After WWII, the PAU played an important role in shaping notions of Latin American art during the period of the consolidation and hegemonization of U.S. modernism, with an imperial, extractivist, and settler colonial intention.

Romero James was replaced by Cuban-born curator and critic José Gómez Sicre– a protégé of the MoMA's director Alfred H. Barr Jr. – becoming the Director of the Visual Arts Section for the next three and a half decades, which later became known as the Organization of American States (OAS). Gómez Sicre would become a key person in the cultural and artistic promotion of Latin American art with obvious U.S. imperialist objectives. Under his leadership, the focus of the Visual Arts Section shifted to support the construction of a Latin American art that reflected concepts of universalism, developmentalism and youthful aesthetics.[19] In essence, Sicre followed Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s commitment to abstraction and the development of modern art, reinforced by Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art Diagrams*. Sicre's projects at the OAS and his anti-communist rhetoric towards the Cuban Revolution, planted a conception of modernity, and marginalized Latin American artists from the Left. After WWII, exhibitions began to focus on art that had no social or political references, cultivating an inter-American arts network. Gómez

[18] Robin, 48.
[19] Fox, *Making Art Panamerican*, 4.

Sicre was dedicated to "defining the contours of 'el nuevo arte nuestro' (our new art) in relation to postwar and economic realities and pointed opposition to social realism."[20] This ideological conception laid in tandem with U.S. economic development objectives for Latin America. Comparable with Clement Greenberg's anti-communist position, Gómez Sicre insisted on the separation between art and politics and this aesthetic framework, as will be discussed later in the chapter, had an imperialist intention.[21]

The postwar years brought a surplus of cultural activity with the foundation of various art institutions and museums dedicated to promoting modern art in large cities throughout Latin America, with the support of foreign investment and the implementation of developmentalism. However, during the Cold War, the geopolitical climate and economic agendas shifted. The interest in Latin American art in the United States gradually faded in mainstream institutions and museums. Latin American art went through a process of segregation. In fact, art historian Eva Cockroft "has pointed out that the establishment of the OAS's exhibition program marked the beginning of the 'ghettoization' of Latin American art in the U.S. because of its exclusion from the main exhibition venues."[22] However, at the same time, " the development of art biennials, particularly the Bienal de São Paulo (1951), the San Juan Poly/Graphic Triennial in Puerto Rico (1970), and the Bienal de La Habana (1984)" led to a renewed interest in Latin American modern and contemporary art among international collectors, with international exhibitions circulating,

[20] Ibid., 12.
[21] The most influential art critic of the 20th century, Clement Greenberg was a fervent supporter of artists such as Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Willem de Kooning, and Kenneth Noland. He influenced an entire generation of artists, critics, and art historians and viewed Abstract Expressionism as a method to resist politics in art. Prior to the United States involvement in the war, he had supported socialist ideologies. After WWII, he became an anti-Communist and was part of the CIA-sponsored American Committee for Cultural Freedom, creating a forum against Soviet Communism. Please refer to Caroline Jone's *Eyesight Alone* for more information on Clement Greenberg.
[22] Serviddio, 486.

including fetishized interpretations of Latin American art within the international art scene, and the expansion of an academic field of research emerged.[23]

The Cold War Era

For this dissertation, it is important to historicize and contextualize the Cold War era to understand the relationship it has over the life and work of many artists of the diaspora in Canada. The fact that the region underwent a series of economic, political, and military interventions aided by the United States due to their economic interest in the region is as critical and as relevant as the aesthetic choices and materials used by these artists. Artists included in this dissertation come from Guatemala, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia, countries that have been affected by the Cold War and have felt the impact of U.S. interventionist policies. In fact, many artists of the diaspora have fled military dictatorships or have escaped violence due to an imposed neoliberal system which has led to innumerable social, political, and economic problems throughout the region.

Historian Greg Grandin argues that the Guatemalan violence from the 1950s to the 1990s was driven by a redefinition of democracy during the Cold War. The United States and its repressive allies in Latin America undertook a “savage crusade” to reverse democracy’s meaning into an individualistic, free-market driven society known today as neoliberalism. Grandin concludes that "Cold War terror ... fortified illiberal forces, militarized societies, and broke the link between freedom and equality."[24] Moreover, in his analysis he states that politics “became

[23] Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda, “Encounters with ‘Latin American Art’ in Canada: From Toronto to Vancouver, 1999-2021,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Cultural* 4, no. 1 (2022): 123.
[24] Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xiv.

polarized throughout the continent, as one side increasingly saw revolution as the only way to give birth to a new world and the other embraced terror as the only way to abort it."[25] During and after the Cold War era, artists have been responding to terror and polarization they have directly experienced and have kept these subjects alive within their artistic practices.

As previously mentioned, the U.S.'s imperialist agenda and its intention to expand its influence over Latin America became evident. Like the Good Neighourhood policy, the anti-communist Alliance for Progress Policy, aimed to establish economic cooperation between the U.S. and Latin America and lasted until approximately 1973. Although some sources argue that it ended much earlier, once the U.S. sent troops to the Dominican Republic in 1964, planning and implementing military interventions in Brazil in 1964, in Guatemala in 1966, and in Chile in 1973. In fact, "by the decade of the 1960s, interventions in Latin American countries were taking place on an average of one every thirteen months, and the body count continued to rise well into the Reagan-Bush era."[26] Between 1963 and 1990, eleven major countries in Latin America fell under military rule[27] and Washington's support of dictators, while conveniently expanding its wealth and global dominance, became unethical and controversial, giving ample reason for an international movement to emerge against its capitalist intentions.

For many Latin American artists and intellectuals, the Cuban Revolution, rather than WWII, had a deeper impact and relevance to their own realities. As Andrea Giunta and Flaherty argue, the Cuban Revolution not only "renewed notions of utopia but…redefined notions of international culture in the 1960s, with the revolutionary Cuban project of self-representation."

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[25] Ibid., 14.
[26] Fox, 31.
[27] Ecuador, 1963–1966 and 1972–1978; Guatemala, 1963–1985 (interlude from 1966–1969); El Salvador, 1979 to 1984; Brazil, 1964–1985; Bolivia, 1964–1970 and 1971–1982; Argentina, 1966–1973 and 1976–1983; Peru, 1968–1980; Panama, 1968–1989; Honduras, 1963–1966 and 1972–1982; Chile, 1973–1990; and Uruguay, 1973–1984.

In contrast to the Cold War, "the Cuban Revolution, at least in its early years, declared the abandonment of state control of culture."[28] Hope spread throughout the continent with the promise that the Cuban Revolution could inspire other Latin American countries to follow its footsteps. In his book *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910-1990*, David Craven describes Cuba's cultural relevance and states "Casa de las Américas, the Cuban Institute of Art and Film (ICAIC), and the National Ballet, played a major cultural and ideological role during the 1960s to the 1980s in fostering a Pan-American identity for artists throughout Latin America."[29] He argues that Cuban art emerged as a "distinctive nexus for diverse cultural practices."[30] It was not until the 1980s that visual arts began to play a role within this utopian construction. The emergence of the Havana Biennial provided a platform for works unknown beyond their local contexts and its ground-breaking role was an important precedent at a time when artists from the peripheries were ignored by international mainstream art circuits.

Wilfredo Lam's death in 1982 triggered the *Bienal de La Habana*'s foundation and was suggested by Fidel Castro. As described by one of the founders, Gerardo Mosquera explains that it became an ambitious international cultural event focused on Latin America and the so-called "Third World." The *Bienal* was conceived as a space for contemporary artists, critics, curators, and scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East, including the diaspora from Europe and North America, to meet and network, exchange ideas and theories, and learn from each other's artistic practices, all with an educational impact and a deep involvement with the city itself. The Bienal's impact on art and artists from the Global South, including those

[28] Andrea Giunta and George F. Flaherty, "Latin American Art History: An Historiographic Turn," in *Art in Translations* 9 (2017): 129-130.
[29] David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 81.
[30] Ibid., 92.

living in diaspora in the Global North, found a space for critical engagement with socially and politically relevant topics which were often excluded within Western art circuits, while also providing an international space of dissemination.

Imperialist Strategies of Censorship

During the Cold War, the U.S. administration adopted an active role of propaganda and of censorship. During the McCarthy era for example, Washington openly engaged in ideological warfare to combat the radical left in the United States and the Global South, with the end goal to defeat and eradicate Marxist ideologies that were growing throughout the Americas. Not only did the U.S. government facilitate this process of eradication but with the help of American corporations with deep interests in the region, organized themselves into the Business Group for Latin America. They incorporated with the intent to control and influence this interventionist policy to the extent where "multinational corporations, including Ford, Coca Cola, Del Monte, and Mercedes-Benz have been accused in recent years of working closely with Latin American death squads."[31]

It is also relevant to foreground that while the United States was undertaking secret service operations throughout the region during the 1960s and 70s, its administration was also boosting Abstract Expressionism in the international art market, an aesthetic that rejected any relation to social realism or political social narratives. The CIA's involvement in the cultural life of Western and European countries had long-term consequences throughout the globe since many intellectuals and artists were rewarded for operating within the ideological parameters of

[31] Grandin 2007, 14.

the CIA. British journalist and historian Frances Stonor Saunders explores the impact and conundrum of this power dynamic in her book *Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* exposing provocative fieldwork and demonstrating how the CIA countered Soviet propaganda of socially explicit content and representational aesthetics, by financing propaganda of its own and promoting Abstract Expressionism as a symbol of a free society. Saunders provides helpful information regarding the ways in which Western and European artists and intellectuals with a CIA payroll defended U.S. imperialist interests; how the CIA subsidized journals that criticized Marxism, Communism, and revolutionary politics; and how they subsidized institutions with the expectation of preventing leftist artists from receiving recognition. All of this with the end goal to fight a cultural Cold War, eliminate the radical left, and create apolitical art and scholarship. These CIA campaigns created a prototype for apolitical artists who became distanced from popular struggles, social commitments, political convictions, and completely detached from the working class.

However, art for art's sake and this detachment from current socio-political issues, did not resonate within Latin America which had been empowered by the Cuban revolution, with southern cone countries living under dictatorships aided and supported by the United States, and artists from the Global South developing counternarratives through conceptualist strategies with discourses of defiance. In fact, many Latin American artists were linked to leftist and radical ideologies and had deep commitments to social and political struggles. The CIA's campaign of anti-communism terror did not ripple onto the practices of artists who had been directly affected by the violent legacy of U.S. imperialism. This became one of the reasons for the expansion of a ghettoization of Latin American art, influenced by an imperialist strategy to fulfill a geopolitical

agenda of erasure.

Latin American Conceptualism

The economic and political issues during the Cold War differed substantially in comparison to the early decades of the twentieth century. As curator Julieta Gonzalez states, artists alongside intellectuals voiced their critique through a "profound investment in negotiating the complexities of modernity and its conflictive relation to underdevelopment."[32] The promise of modernization and the rise of developmentalism in the region, and its resulting failure, gave rise to a wave of avant-garde artists who challenged the hegemonic status quo, engaging with popular traditions, embracing local communities, and adopting radical pedagogical frameworks.

Beginning in the mid 1960s various southern cone countries were under military rule, and artists began to adopt strategic political actions which led to the development of Conceptualism in Latin America. They came up with new methodologies of defiance and protest and a

[32] Julieta González, *Memories of Underdevelopment: Art and the Decolonial Turn in Latin America, 1960-1985* (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2018), 31.

Fig. 1. © Alfredo Jaar, *Studies on Happiness: 1979-1981*, public interventions, 1981.

"substitution of object with idea-based art paved the way for the elaboration of a practice suited to both the political immediacy and economic precariousness of Latin America."[33]According to Mari Carmen Ramírez "the origins of conceptualism in Latin America stand out as one of the most brilliant chapters in the history of 20th century art on the continent."[34] Its first manifestations began in the early 1960s in Brazil, as artists rejected the modernist canon of

[33] Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 68.
[34] Ibid.

geometric abstraction, which they associated with developmentalism. Instead, Latin American conceptualism is positioned along ideological causes, inspired by context-driven realities, and follows dependency, cybernetics, communications, and anti-colonialist theories and are detached from Western conceptual art.

During a period of rupture and crisis these propositions addressed the repressive regimes that had spread throughout the region through various semiotic and ideological strategies. Artists of the 1960s through the 1980s critiqued imperialism and capitalism as systems that oppressed and limited personal and collective freedoms and developed strong ties with the Havana Biennial. They adopted various strategies: new media technologies such as video, television, and the printing press; language and the social sciences through polls, maps, and statistics; photo montage and photo-collage, all used to manifest their discontent and express their solidarity and defiance against imperialism while also aligning to Left wing ideologies.

Military regimes repressed and censored any type of opposition to eliminate subversive Marxist ideologies. In response, artists developed tactics, strategies to bypass censorship, to gain collective agency. Their political, social, economic, and cultural concerns regarding developmentalist policies and the brutal dictatorships they faced could not be openly discussed or exhibited, they had to communicate in discreet ways. Limited by institutional censorship and state terror, human right abuses and repression, counter-narratives had an immediate urgency to fulfill, and artists were willing to sacrifice and send their message of rebellion and resistance. For example, art historian Shifra M. Goldman discusses the various stages of cultural production

during the dictatorship in Chile.[35] Chile's cultural movement had been brutally eradicated during the first few years of its dictatorship.

It was a period intended to destroy the cultural model under Allende's Popular Unity government. The destruction entailed the burning of books, the whitewashing of murals, and the censorship of any type of political critique as well as the "direct repression of artists and intellectuals, many of whom were expelled from the universities and art schools…jailed and exiled."[36] Goldman explains that within a few years after the coup, an alternative cultural movement arose and "art provided a symbolic substrata of basic identity."[37] However, artists had to find ways of avoiding censorship and "a more complex visual language was required: one that undermined the precepts and structures of the dictatorship, that was more opaque but whose message was available to reasoned viewing."[38] Artists seeking new ways found within structuralism, semiotics, mixed media, film, happenings, and conceptual art, an alternative means of visual communication to critique a regime within code.

Cultural theorist Nelly Richard uses the term *Escena de Avanzada* (Avant-garde Scene) to describe the experimental art movement of the time that developed in Chile. During the period of 1977 to 1982 with its alternative formats, media, and techniques, and in opposition to traditional fine arts, which questioned *el arte de compromiso* (art of compromise) that the orthodox left claimed it as the only route to oppose the dictatorship, Richard asserts that with the introduction of photography, artists began to develop a series of new codified strategies. Artists

[35] Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), see chapter on "Dissidence and Resistance: Art in Chile under the Dictatorship," 249-266.
[36] Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas*, 256.
[37] Ibid., 255.
[38] Ibid., 257.

such as Catalina Parra, Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Leppe and Carlos Altamirano examined photographic codes, constructing visual imagery by using photography, graphics, and text to deconstruct ideological functions.[39] Conceptualism became a methodological and epistemological form and an aesthetic of resistance. During the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, Eugenio Dittborn for example introduced his airmail painting series where he used graphics, paint, stitching, photography, and other elements onto different surfaces, folded and placed the works into envelopes, and sent them to various places around the globe. His messages accounted for globalization and traced the political situation of censorship, repression, and precarity occurring in Chile at the time.

In 1934, Walter Benjamin summoned artists "to side with the proletariat" in his evocative text "The Author as Producer." He called upon artists to become a "revolutionary worker, in the means of artistic production–to change the 'techniques' of traditional media, to transform the 'apparatus' of bourgeois culture."[40] For artists in Latin America suffering constant oppression and censorship, this call became a transformative possibility and option that enabled artists to work within the confines of state control. As argued by Ramirez, artists chose a path of "encoders" and "organizers" of meaning, using various information outlets to respond to ongoing state repression and censorship.[41]

The U.S. sponsored coups throughout Latin America, backed-up dictators, supported counterinsurgencies, and protected death-squads to eliminate any threat to the bipolar world that

[39] Nelly Richard, *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation, and Poetics of the Crisis*, trans. Alice Nelson and Silvia Tandeciarz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[40] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 302.
[41] Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 65.

had been imposed by the two superpowers during the Cold War. As several historical documents prove, Latin American dictators were equipped, trained, and funded by the US government and by the end of the Cold War, hundreds of thousands had been killed and tortured, and millions fled into exile. Artists responded during this time of overt violence, with their own tools of liberation and resistance, with the production of art as dissent and as a means of proliferation of critical consciousness.

Anti-colonial and Anti-imperial Formations

As mentioned, during this time, many Latin American intellectuals and artists followed Marxist and anticolonial theorists. Such was the case with the writings of African diaspora thinkers linked to the literary theory movement Négritude.[42] Founding members Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and Léon Damas raised consciousness across Africa and its diaspora with their literary contributions against French colonial rule and assimilation. Philosopher Franz Fanon's seminal works inspired the region, particularly within Latin American countries with large activist African descent populations conducting decolonization struggles of their own. In the arts, as mentioned, critical forms of knowledge and new artistic aesthetics such as that of Latin American conceptualism developed amid post war *desarrollismo* of 1950 to 1970, influenced by Marxist cultural theory.

The artist Ferreira Gullar for example, became an important influence in the establishment of conceptualism with his Neoconcrete Manifesto in 1959, the same year of the Cuban Revolution, focusing on the belief of spectator participation. Julieta González claims that

[42] Julieta González, *Memories of Underdevelopment: Art and the Decolonial Turn in Latin America, 1960-1985* (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2018), 30.

"the re-evaluation of the popular under ideological terms in the 1960s led to a renewed interest in the cultural production of the poorest regions of Brazil"[43] with Paulo Freire's teachings at its forefront. Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, advocated for a critical pedagogy, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), which became a foundational text that delinked "from the colonial model with ideas on conscientization and deschooling."[44] Freire's teachings involved an "epistemic disobedience" emphasizing the process of *conscientização* (critical consciousness or the process of making others aware of political and social inequalities) rather than a rhetoric of developmentalism. To become aware and act upon knowledge was the methodology used to empower people and work towards re-evaluating Western epistemologies while resisting the colonial condition.

The same year and a few months after Che Guevara's assassination in Bolivia, Peruvian critic Juan Acha writes *Vanguardismo y subdesarrollo* (Avant-gardism and Underdevelopment) and his cutting-edge ideas of forming "cultural and artistic guerillas" to combat the inequalities established by developmentalism that had spread throughout the continent. This continental awareness is also seen in Argentina during the mid 1960s, with the formation of CAyC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación (Art and Communication Centre). Founded by Jorge Glusberg, professing a mandate that esteemed information technologies and mass media as essential. For example, artists such as David Lamelas "dematerialized practices, in accordance with their use of information as medium, invested in the creation of situations that could be mobilized through the use of mass media." Its most iconic exhibition, *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano* (Towards a Profile of Latin American Art) in 1972, was easily disseminated for its low-budget

[43] Ibid., 51.
[44] Ibid., 27.

and reproducible format allowing for its dissemination, an intentional choice as it served the reality of Latin America. Glusberg highlights the significance of conceptualism and uses a system's thinking approach detached from linear narratives of Western art history, and instead advocates for arts' social, political, and ideological role.[45] The idea of raising awareness, *conscientización/conscientização*, associated with Freire's pedagogical frameworks, about the realities of the region, emphasized the ideological objectives of the exhibition and its forward thinking transformed the imagination of those that followed.

In 1977, Enrique Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation* challenged and critiqued structures of exploitation and alienation and paved the way towards Latin American liberation and a rupture from Euro-American philosophy. New avant-gardes developed throughout the region, which responded to an earlier model–based on the art and theories of David Alfaro Siqueiros, Joaquín Torres García, Oswaldo de Andrade, and others–but one that changed to adapt to its new political, social, cultural, and economic reality, and one that would be influenced by philosophers of the time. From concepts of hybridity, coined by Nestor García Canclini, to Anibal Quijano's influential writing on coloniality, various critical thinkers from the Global South have influenced the development of an era and of multiple artists. Walter Mignolo's writing on decoloniality, Nelson Maldonado Torres' explanation on the coloniality of being, María Lugones' development of the coloniality of gender followed by Julieta Paredes' urgency around communitarian feminism, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's feminist and sociological theories embedded with knowledge from Quechua and Aymara cosmologies, Arturo Escobar's investigations against extractivism with a pluriverse perspective, Sayak Valencia's transfeminist theories, Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval's writing around transformative ways of emancipation and

[45] Ibid., 42.

resistance, are among countless other critical thinkers that have not only impacted the work of artists and intellectuals throughout the region but also influenced those throughout the diaspora. Their impact will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

The Diaspora in Canada

I will now shift my attention to Canada. I will begin by providing further information on the diaspora and its migratory patterns as well as highlight the social and economic contexts in which the diaspora developed. The Latin American population in Canada is a relatively recent immigrant community compared to its counterpart in the United States. Immigrant waves from Latin America in Canada are less in numbers but much more representative of the region's diversity.[46] Social research on population movements from Latin America to Canada are recent[47] and the demographic profiles can be divided into four basic waves that are closely tied to for the migratory movements that followed during the early and mid-1970s and 1980s."[48] In addition, Canadian scholars have recently pointed to a fifth major wave called the Technological-Professional[49] which rose in population around the mid-1990s.

It is important to highlight that the Latin American diasporic community within Canada today consists of over 1 million people according to a recent 2023 Statistics Canada data

[46] Fernando Mata, "Latin American immigration to Canada: Some Reflections on the Immigration Statistics," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 10 (1985), 17-42; Alan Simmons, "Latin American Migration to Canada: New Linkages in the Hemispheric Migration and Refugee Flow System," *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (1993): 282-309; and Archibald R.M. Ritter, "Conference Proceedings: Prospects for Latin American and the Caribbean to the Year 2000" (Ottawa: Canadian Association of Latin American and Caribbean Studies 1990), 391-40 and 403-17, respectively.
[47] Please see V. Armony, A. Simmons, F. Mata, P. Landolt and L. Goldring, among others.
[48] Please see Mata.
[49] The period between 1995-2012 is comprised of a mixed group of individuals ranging from professional and highly skilled workers drawn from the STEM industries to individuals of lower educational profiles who have regularized their status after being initially admitted as visitors, temporary workers, students, and/or refugee claimants from Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, and Venezuela.

estimate, many of which, as mentioned, have arrived in various waves responding to crisis, political turmoil, and violence.[50] These communities that have faced displacement, often share a history of civil war, violence, and struggle, escaping the same interventionist agendas and policies that privilege large corporations throughout the region mentioned above. They have fled economic precarity and or political persecution, and have been disempowered upon arrival to Canada, for lack of resources, economic precariousness, labour inequalities, language barriers, and difficulty navigating systems of knowledge. Not all have had this fate, for language, ethnicity, gender, class, and education determine the future of many diasporic subjects. Nonetheless the two major waves that arrived during the 70s, 80s, and 90s have arrived in Canada from war torn countries enduring traumatic experiences of loss and displacement. Thus, several within this demographic lack power and privilege. Many do not engage civically. Families raise their children immersed within a language that is not their own and rely on their own children to manage financial and educational responsibilities and decisions. Poverty, access to information, parental involvement, and a lack of a sense of belonging and cultural identity are pointed as some of the identified complex social challenges faced by this community. A community struck by trauma finds themselves in a system that neglects, erases, and disempowers racialized people. They are not considered "profitable resources" to large corporations and institutions that seek to benefit, invest, and extract. The Latin American diaspora lacks the privilege of power, resources, and infrastructure that warrants neoliberal profit, especially within a settler colonial state that is designed to subjugate Indigenous, Black, and racialized peoples.

[50] Isabel Inclan, "New Statistics reveal Canada's Latin American Community Includes More than 1.1. million people," *New Canadian Media*, November 27, 2023.

It is pivotal to also analyze and understand the impact caused by the diaspora's marginalization within Canada.[51] For example, most recently Toronto Public Health found that the community was seven times more likely to contract COVID-19 than white Torontonians.[52] A 2021 report from the Peel District School Board[53] showed that Latinx, Black, and Indigenous students were two to five times less likely to graduate within five years, when compared with the average Peel student, and the 2008 TDSB also reported a 40% drop-out rate of students of Latin American descent.

Systemic problems that develop during high school for the Latin American diaspora repeat within the post-secondary educational system. There have been EDI[54] efforts within institutions to remediate this outcome. For example, the University of Toronto, McMaster University, and Western University have created new access pathways to address and help under-represented students successfully insert themselves into the system. OCAD University has worked on a five-year Transformation Academic Plan to prioritize a decolonization framework for its institution and implement EDI measures in meaningful and transformative ways.[55]

York University has also prepared a recent *2023-2028 Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy* report prepared by The President's Advisory Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Division of Equity, People and Culture. This report indicates the strategic directions and recommendations necessary for best practices of representation, leadership,

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[51] Stacy Creech de Castro, Shanti Morell-Hart, and Rodrigo Narro Pérez, "Canada's Latin American Community is Growing, and Universities Must Improve Teaching About the Region," *The Conversation*, November 10, 2022.
[52] Jane Gerster and Jessica Ng, "Toronto's Latino Community – 7 Times More Likely to Contract COVID-19 than Others – Wants More Support," *CBC News*, April 21, 2021.
[53] Peel District School Board, *Directive 9: Annual Equity Accountability Report Card: Baseline Data on the Equity Gap in Student Outcomes,* Item 14.2 (a) Board Meeting, September 30, 2021.
[54] EDI: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
[55] OCAD University, *Academic Plan*, *Transforming Student Experience 2017-2022*, https://www.ocadu.ca/Assets/content/governance/Academic-Plan-2017.pdf.

capacity building, campus climate, teaching and learning, and research and innovation within the institution. The 'Decolonizing' added to EDI efforts, is based on an understanding of colonialism and the ways in which university culture and processes systemically reproduce systems of oppression and discrimination.[56] These are recent efforts, and data has yet to prove whether these recommendations and strategic reports result in transformative change within these academic institutions, and improve the realities of Indigenous, Black, and racialized students.

However, recent events indicate otherwise. Students' encampments throughout various campuses across North America, including at York University have been faced with repressive and violent tactics to dismantle its organizational capacity and effectiveness. Instead of establishing a dialogue with students, York University's administration called the police and violently dismantled the encampment within the same day. These encampments stand against genocide in Gaza and their demands include that their universities disclose and divest from investments in companies profiting from Israel's offensive. This aggressive response counterposes an atmosphere of free speech and the right to stand against settler colonialism. Rather than create a climate for learning and leadership, students' coalition and solidarity building faced an administration that censored and reprimanded their efforts.

Latin American Art in Canada

Connected with the United States history and context, focus will now be drawn to what was happening with Latin American art and its dissemination in Canada. Latin American art was

[56] York University, *The President's Advisory Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Division of Equity, People and Culture. Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028* (2023), https://www.yorku.ca/dedi-strategy/wp-content/uploads/sites/854/2023/05/22-201_DEDI-Strategy-2023-28_EN_r5.pdf.

brought to the forefront of Canadian public consciousness in the early twentieth century. Dr. Alena Robin from Western University conducted a thorough study of institutional presence within galleries, museums, and universities, of exhibitions and specialists within the field of Latin American art and observed that the first temporary exhibitions were "organized in the early 1940s and universities started hiring specialists in the field in the 1970s."[57] Robin's investigation included not only contemporary art practices – which is the focus of this dissertation – but also subfields such as Pre-Columbian, colonial, nineteenth century, and modern art. Despite this pioneering attempt to establish hemispheric relationships with the rest of the Americas, Dr. Robin concluded that Latin American art today remains largely invisible and untapped within Canadian museums and universities.[58] It is also relevant to mention that these early twentieth century expressions of interest towards Latin American art did not result in ongoing research of the field in Canada nor did it evolve into diasporic scholarly research or writing.

Unlike in the United States which has an abundant and thriving institutional support system, with academic researchers and expertise in the field within both academia and museums, Canada has very few examples of investment in scholarly research and institutional representation of Latin American art from the region and the diaspora. Currently in the United States, there are a myriad of collectors, publishing houses, academic fellowships, and critical theorists that have created a local and global impact. Canada on the other hand, has not invested resources nor devoted expertise to analyze temporary Latin American art exhibitions

[57] Robin, 35.
[58] Ibid.

thoroughly.[59] There are no systems in place to support scholarly research on Latin American art, nor are there an array of courses offered in Canadian universities of Latin American content.[60]

The differences between these two North American countries are vast in terms of presence and impact and it would be arbitrary to compare both nations in respect to their Latin American diasporas, for their histories and demographics are enormously different. According to the data of a 2020 census, the U.S. has over 62.1 million Hispanic/Latino Americans. Furthermore, the United States has institutional wealth incomparable to Canada's, with its museums and universities thriving in corporate sponsorship and support. However, these differences do not dismiss the fact that Canada has yet to define and imagine hemispheric contributions to Canadian discourses and aesthetics, which are long overdue considering that the diaspora has increased exponentially in the past fifty years with over one million of its diasporas living in major cities across Canada and with artists actively contributing to the art scene, changing its course and its international relevance.

Dr. Robin has identified two main points that result in the invisibility within the field. She has determined that the "first factor that has made the study of Latin American art and visual culture in Canada challenging is its relatively late and decentralized beginnings."[61] To clarify, she reminds us of Canada's colonial position and relationship with the English and French and Canada's proximity to the United States, an imperial power which in itself renders them invisible. The second element that influenced this lack of interest is that the "Spanish-speaking

[59] Ibid., 34.
[60] Concordia University offers a *Special Topics in Art and Architecture: Contemporary Latin American Art* course and a *Studies in Contemporary Art and Architecture: Brazilian Art* course; Western University offers an *Art from Latin America in Canada* course; and OCAD University offers two separate courses: *Latin American art* and *Latin American Contemporary art*. All of these are undergraduate third- and fourth-year courses.
[61] Robin, 35.

immigrants to Canada"[62] arrived at a much later date than in the United States, with a wave of Southern cone refugees and immigrants coming during the 1970s, mainly escaping military dictatorships as highlighted above. This wave cast a much larger impact in other academic disciplines but not to visual art or culture.[63]

There is a third element that has not been factored into Dr. Robin's conclusion, but that I believe explains the lack of interest for Latin American art in Canada and why it has slowly begun to shift in recent years. Artists from Latin America that arrived in Canada during the 70s, 80s, and 90s, those who escaped turmoil due to war, were engaged in politically driven artistic practices and were attached to critically conscious discourses. Their social justice charged narratives led to non-canonical aesthetic decisions, during an epoch when Eurocentric conceptual art, theoretical based art, as well as Abstract Expressionism dominated in Canada.[64] Institutional agendas avoided politically framed artistic practices, and they expressed little interest in Global South positions of dissent and resistance. The role some artist-run-centres played addressing the need for space, exhibition, dialogue, and collective engagement, became critical, for being spaces that embraced politically engaged practices. For example, in Toronto, a few culturally diverse artists were able to exhibit their work at artist-run-centres such as A Space and the Women's Art Resource Centre, but these opportunities were vastly limited.

North America's interest in Latin American art, which began in the early twentieth century as described, was an economic one of expansion and resource extraction that seeped into

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[62] Ibid., 36.
[63] Hugh Hazelton, *Latinocanadá: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 3-27.
[64] In Toronto, very few artist-run centres and galleries exhibited Latin American artists of the diaspora during the 90s and 2000s. In Montreal, artists from the diaspora predominantly found spaces of inclusion within cultural centres and artist-run-centres.

the politics of museums and institutions. It is worth mentioning that it was not only the United States that had imperialist expansionist intentions, but many benefactors were Canadian companies that had deep financial investments in Latin America and benefited immensely with the geopolitical extractivist neoliberal economy that escalated with the rise of globalization. Utilizing culture and art to legitimize global financial accumulation, corporations donated major art collections of Latin American art to the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). One of its prominent collections donated in the 1970s by the Canadian mining company, Brascan Limited, had significant investments in Brazil. At the time of its donation, Brazil was under a military dictatorship, and foreign investment was widely encouraged under its repressive government which opened its doors to the initial stages of neoliberalism. This donation focused on abstract modernist paintings[65] far removed from any social justice undertones. In fact, the collection did not include many prominent artists of the time that were developing avant-garde discourses against the dictatorship using Latin American conceptualism strategies. For example, the artist Cildo Meireles was not included in this roster of artists from Brazil. Developing various ways to bypass censorship, with his intervention *Inserções em ciruitos ideológicos,* Meireles exploits the factory system for bottle returns, to circulate various messages such as "Yankees Go Home," stamped on Coca-Cola bottles. The anonymity of this intervention challenged not only the myth of the author and copyright, but it also served to conceal his identity who would otherwise be persecuted by police. Despite Meireles and other avant-garde artists of the time who have now become internationally renowned, most of the collection donated to the AGO included abstract

[65] Artists in the collection include: Rubem Valentim, Antonio Maia, Yutaka Toyota, Osmar Dillon, Ivan Freitas, Tomie Ohtake, Arcangelo Ianelli, and Paulo Roberto Leal.

artists. The artists of the 1960s through the 1980s who opposed Brazil's developmentalist project were not part of the AGO's donation.

Interestingly, another major donation to the Art Gallery of Ontario was given by one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba, Sherritt International Corporation.[66] This Toronto based mining company contributed to the largest museum collection of Cuban art in Canada.[67] Many of the artists represented in the collection are currently internationally renowned artists, known for their anti-Cuban revolution stance and use their artistic practices as a place of defiance and critique. At the time of the exhibition *As if Sand were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection* (2017), which included both Sherritt and Brascan collections, a geopolitical change had occurred. Fidel Castro passed away on November 25, 2016, and the United States and Canada had its eyes on the island with the expectation that Cuba would embrace a capitalist and a neoliberal economic model once the leader was gone.[68]

The donation by Sherritt had a political agenda, one that served an economic interest for the company, with artists publicly denouncing a communist government that kept its citizens under financial duress. Economic precarity in Cuba cannot be denied, but this rhetoric often does not acknowledge the United States' blockade that has isolated the island for over sixty years enabling this condition. Political repression and censorship are also undeniable, yet these prominent issues were never in consideration when the AGO's Brazilian collection was donated despite the fact that the country was under an extremely repressive dictatorship. In fact, the

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[66] Artists include Glenda Leon, Wilfredo Prieto, Tania Bruguera, Los Carpinteros, and Carlos Garaicoa, Gabriel Ororzco, José Bedia, Vik Muniz, and Erik García Gómez.

[67] *As If Sand Were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection*, exhibition overview, Art Gallery of Ontario, https://ago.ca/exhibitions/if-sand-were-stone-contemporary-latin-american-art-ago-collection.
[68] Tim Padgett, "Former Cuban Leader Fidel Castro Dies at 90," *Time*, November 26, 2016. https://time.com/4582628/fidel-castro-cuba-dies-90/.

artworks collected did not question capitalist agendas as do the anti-communist Cuban artworks from the Sherritt collection. These assertions are not intended to underestimate the relevant and important work of all the artists presented in both collections. On the contrary, they merit recognition, for they offer significant international artistic and market value. Instead, it is meant as an observation of the ongoing interventionist policies of the United States and Canada over Latin America and how economic interests override humanitarian, environmental, social justice, and even artistic priorities. Furthermore, it is also intended to outline that during the 70s, 80s, 90s, and to a certain extent far into the 2000s, artists who considered a critically conscious anti-colonial and anti-neoliberal rhetoric within their artistic practices were left within peripheral spaces of dissemination and discourse, within spaces of invisibility.

In fact, Canadian institutions fall complicit to the cultural Cold War dynamic, following the United States' lead, not only in the 1960s as demonstrated by the Brascan Limited collection at the AGO, but continue to do so as exemplified by its 2017 donation. Major institutions play an instrumental role, promoting exhibitions that fulfill certain political and economic agendas that function as propaganda as noted by Saunders. This agenda is exemplified by Canadian companies' deep interest in the resources that are extracted in both Brazil and Cuba. Sherritt is the largest independent energy producer in Cuba and focuses on the mining, processing, and refining of high-purity nickel and cobalt. Brascan Corporation can be traced back to the 20th century in South America, where Canadians played a crucial role in the early development of hydroelectric power generation, streetcar lines, and gas and telephone systems in Brazil.[69] Brascan Limited, currently called EdperBrascan today holds "major stakes in Noranda Inc.,

[69] Further information on Brascan Corporation history can be found in the following website: http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/brascan-corporation-history/

Falconbridge Ltd., Nexfor Inc., Brookfield Properties, Great Lakes Power Inc, Canadian Hunter Explorations Ltd, Trilon Financial Corp, and Brascan Brazil Ltd."[70] The interest in Latin American art in Canada during the 60's was defined by the financial investments that Brascan Limited granted to the institution. Sherritt International Corporation, in consultation with the Toronto-based Cuban curator Magda Gonzalez Mora, also followed a propagandistic role with the selection of artists who defied the Cuban revolution, defining a contemporary Cuban art worthy of attention. Notwithstanding, that the Cuban artists selected for collection and purchase merit artistic acknowledgement, but it is also noteworthy to highlight, an often-neglected fact, that the economic interests of corporations and private funders determine the course of art in this country as it has in the United States.

Funders priorities, influence the trajectory institutions undertake. For example, the Art Gallery of Ontario received 33% of government funding, 28% in self-generated (admissions, retail, food & beverage), 27% from private sector support (memberships, donations, sponsorships), and 13% amortization of deferred capital contributions, according to an annual operating budget of $71.83 million in 2014/15.[71] Even though most of their support comes from government funding, private funders continue to be of great financial influence and apparently possess guidance in decision making processes, which in turn provide direction for institutions. This is most recently exemplified with the departure of the first Curator of Indigenous Art at the AGO, Anishinaabe member Wanda Nanibush, after a letter was sent by Israel Museums and Arts Canada (IMAAC) alleging that Nanibush was guilty of "hate speech." The letter stated that Nanibush "has resumed posting inflammatory, inaccurate rants against Israel" and that her

[70] Duncan McDowall, "Brascan Ltd," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/brascan-ltd.
[71] *A General Information Fact Sheet*, Art Gallery of Ontario, https://ago.ca/general-information-fact-sheet.

"stature and position at the AGO validate her hateful opinions" saying that it was "disgusted by her dedication to repeating that Israel is involved with genocide and colonialism."

Even though this event concerns the current genocidal state in Gaza (claimed plausible at the International Courts of Justice) and is a personal political position that a curator has taken, the actions of an elite have affected the curator's livelihood and have seemingly influenced decision-making. Donors and patrons of the arts in this country have been silent after the letter was leaked.[72] With Nanibush's legal obligations preventing her from addressing the public, she cannot speak her truth. Despite many calls from the arts community, there has been little to no action since its occurrence in November of 2023. The Latin American diaspora, many of which adopt critical consciousness and systemic defiance as a framework for their own artistic practices, conflict with these hegemonic structures that censor Indigenous and politically charged positions. In a statement by Stephan Jost, Director and CEO of the AGO, claims "Incorporating historical narratives that have been long excluded in institutions like the AGO is very hard work." This statement only emphasizes and reiterates the ongoing position of a system that cannot change for its sustainability and structure depends on an economic model that benefits a status quo and will always punish the most vulnerable.

Ongoing Canadian investments and extractivist corporations' benefit of a neocolonial, neoliberal model. They benefit from the resources in Latin America and as demonstrated above, determine the course of museum collections. Diasporas that live and work within this geopolitical model and structure do not reap the benefits and instead remain marginalized,

[72] The leaked IMAAC letter was signed by Sara Angel who is also the founder and Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute (ACI). Sara Angel and ACI have yet to make a public statement concerning her involvement in Nanibush's departure. Over 3,400 Canadian artists, writers, and cultural workers have signed three separate letters criticizing the AGO over this incident with a call to boycott the AGO and the Art Canada Institute.

rendered invisible, often censored, and ghettoized within art circuits in Canada, and often become targets due to their critically conscientious discourses.

In the past decade Canadian institutions have unprecedented and consistently been showcasing contemporary art exhibitions of Latin American artists such as: *Jonathas de Andrade* (2013) and *Teresa Margolles: Mundos* (2017) at the Musée D'Art Contemporain de Montréal (MACM); *As if Sand were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection* (2017); *Jonathas de Andrade: On Fishes, Horses and Man* (2017) and *Paulo Nazareth: Stroke* (2022) at The Power Plant; *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Winter* (2022) at the Museum of Contemporary Art; and *Xicanx: Dreamers + Changemakers/Soñadores + creadores del cambio* (2022/23) at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Unfortunately, Latin American diasporic artists from Canada have not shared the same institutional exposure. Canadian corporations, institutions, museums, and private collection acquisitions have not shown the same interest towards art of the diaspora, nor are major institutions exhibiting their work.

There are few theoretical frameworks that explore the vast range of artists that live within diaspora and the few protagonists that exist remain in peripheral spaces of engagement and dissemination.[73] Scarce academic research has been conducted or written about artists from the diaspora, with only a recent development of panels for UAAC[74] and CAA[75] conferences in 2020, 2021, and 2022 that have been led by Canadian scholars of the Latin American diaspora. The Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History and Film Studies at the University of

[73] *Latin American & Latinx Visual Culture*, University of California Press, vol. 4, no. 1 (January 2022). This Dialogues Section highlights scholarship on Latin American art in Canada. Six contributions from coast to coast offer case studies, data, and analysis. See Analays Alvarez Hernandez (Montreal), Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda (Vancouver), Tamara Toledo (Toronto) for information on contemporary artistic practices that remain in peripheral spaces of exclusion.
[74] Universities Art Association of Canada.
[75] College Art Association.

Montreal, Analays Alvarez Hernandez's research focuses on public art with a recent interest in curating exhibitions of the Latin American diaspora. Her contribution to the University of California Press *Latin American & Latinx Visual Culture* journal describes her scholarly interest in the field and development about the art scene in Montreal highlighting the challenges faced by the diaspora in the city. In particular, she describes an "epistemological vacuum" in Canada, with few inventories of exhibitions, residencies, and acquisitions of Latin American and Latin American diasporic artists.[76] In her text, Alvarez Hernandez highlights the previously mentioned Professor of Hispanic Visual Culture at Western University, Dr. Alena Robin with her pioneering article contribution, as well as the book with collections of essays *Vues transversales*, edited by Mariza Rosales Argonza.[77] This collection offers a view on Latino-Québécois cultural production, and offers insights into other artistic disciplines such as literature, music, film, and dance. Paying close attention to the Montreal art scene, Alvarez Hernandez points to an increase of Montreal based artists of the diaspora that are now included in exhibitions, and curators that have contributed towards an increase in visibility. However, she questions the extent to which this phenomenon perpetuates its "condition of subalternity."[78]

As described above, I discuss how this condition exists, for the systemic parameters marked by a colonial and neoliberal pattern favours a white supremist neoliberal ideology that only benefits the subaltern subject until it is no longer profitable or necessary. However, resistance stems from this state of subalternity and has the capacity to develop future pluriverse methods and ways of transforming oppressive ideologies of subjugation.

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[76] Analays Alvarez Hernandez, "An Auto-Ethnographic Entrée en Matière and Mise en Contexte: Latinx Canadian Art(ists) in Montréal."
[77] Mariza Rosales Argonza, ed., *Vues transversales. Panorama de la scène artistique latino-québécoise* (Montreal: Fondation LatinArte/Les Éditions du CI-DIHCA, 2018).
[78] Alvarez Hernandez, 102.

Latin American diasporic artists and cultural workers do not share the same resources and visibility compared to that in the United States, for the demographic population is much greater in the latter. Chicanx and Latinx[79] artists in the United States are also marginalized in institutional art circuits, however, there is a growing system that is beginning to increase its support towards this often neglected and peripheral demographic[80] and Canada has yet to manifest its long-term substantial commitment towards supporting art and the artists from the Latin American diaspora.

The artists that will be discussed in chapters three, four, and five provide a critical lens that will foreground their relationship to the Global South and to Canada as diaspora. Engaging in difficult knowledge, experiences of displacement, and lack of identification and presence, expose deep colonial and imperial wounds that define their aesthetic proposals. Many of these artists have experienced violence and uprooting, exiles from southern cone countries fleeing political persecution in the 1970s, refugees from civil war-torn countries in Central America in the 1980s, and others escaping drug related conflicts from the 1990s and 2000s. However, what all of them share is a common narrative of resistance against oppression and erasure and offer a visual interpretation as a site of transformation.

Resistance in the Canadian Context

Despite Latin American Art having cultural institutional presence across Canada since the early twentieth century[81] as Dr. Robin has brought to our attention, diasporic invisibility within

[79] "Chicanx" and "Latinx" are terms that have been commonly adopted in the United States.
[80] For example, Marcela Guerrero was appointed as its first Latinx Associate Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art and curated the first scholarly exhibition focused on Puerto Rican art organized by a United States museum in more than fifty years.
[81] Robin, 35.

prominent art institutions is gravely noticed and those who offer challenging forms of social contestations are often left within subaltern grassroots spaces of discourse.[82] In response, various diasporic artists from Latin America adopt strategies of resistance to counter their invisibility. They encode messages of dissent, question assertions of multiculturalism, defy hierarchical structures of power, transform absence into representation, and challenge oppressive systems to dismantle preconceived constructions of identification. These artists have been consistently ignored by Canadian art critics, writers, and art historians, yet deserve their long-awaited research and scholarship.

Various artists of the Latin American diaspora in Canada often reclaim strategies employed by Latin American conceptualism from the Cold War era, oriented towards social change, submerged in violence and trauma, but that allude to a space of contemporary resilience and resistance, with personal and collective experiences that speak to their positionality with and in diaspora. The artists that will be discussed in chapters three, four, and five, have developed distinct aesthetic vocabularies that address their position as racialized diasporic artists in Canada, developing discourses about the life they left behind with their present state as settlers in Canada.

Until recently, Canadian art spaces, art institutions, and museums began to move beyond their exclusionary practices by offering spaces to underrepresented artists. This shift in mandates

[82] Refer to Arlan Londoño's text regarding what type of spaces of representation have been allocated to the Latin American diaspora in Canada. Arlan Lodoño, "Una mirada a las organizaciones y movimientos artísticos latinoamericanos en Canadá," *Arte Por Excelencias* online magazine, July 7, 2009. https://www.arteporexcelencias.com/es/noticias/2009-07-07/una-mirada-las-organizaciones-y-movimientos-artisticos-latinos-en-canada.html.

flourished with Idle No More,[83] the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action,[84] UNDRIP[85], and the racial reckoning of George Floyd's murder and subsequent Black Lives Matter[86] insurgence. Art institutions found themselves accountable for systemic racism within their spaces and many adopted cultural difference and decolonization as terms of reference to change privileged systems of exclusion. Black and Indigenous artists that were once ignored by museums and art institutions began to be exhibited, discussed, and recognized as important contributors to Canadian art. Yet, there is still a long way to go, and recent events, including the departure of Wanda Nanibush from the Art Gallery of Ontario along with the rise of the alt right not only in Canada but globally, indicates that it will be very challenging for artists from the Latin American diaspora to enter this space of recognition or inclusion.

Art historian, curator, and art critic Gerardo Mosquera describes cultural difference as a commodification which has been homogenized and tolerated with globalization through paternalistic political correctness. Art critic and curator Carolina Ponce de León takes it a step further and describes the global art world as "a colonizer captivated by the strategies of decolonization."[87] The "language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences"[88] and as Ponce de León reminds us, the art world adopts the term

[83] Idle No More is a movement that protests Canadian government's disregard of environmental protection laws, endangering Indigenous lives throughout Canada. They honour Indigenous sovereignty and protect land, water, and sky. Idle No More was established in 2012.
[84] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action are a list of 94 actionable measures that are meant to heal the relationship process between settlers and Indigenous peoples by acknowledging the brutal history of the residential school system in Canada and to prevent these from happening in the future.
[85] United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
[86] Black Lives Matter is a decentralized social and political movement that raises issues of racial inequality experienced by Black people with a particular concern on police brutality and racially motivated violence and advocate for Black liberation and criminal justice reform.
[87] Carolina Ponce de León, "Encounters and Dis-encounters: A Personal Journey through Many Latin American and U.s. Latino Art Worlds?" in *Over Here International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 147.
[88] Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization, Indigeneity & Society* 1 (2012), 2.

"decolonization" to navigate safely within a changing social landscape. This tokenized approach to decolonization and cultural difference does not change systems and cycles of erasure and exclusion. In fact, Unangax̂ scholar in the field of Indigenous studies and educational research Eve Tuck, and professor and scholar in Indigenous organizing and critical pedagogy K. Wayne Yang prompt us in their essay *Decolonization is not a metaphor* to think deeply about what decolonization entails and how to adopt the sentiment from being a metaphor and representational to concrete forms of change. Their essay also questions white innocence as a settler colonial strategy which benefits and preserves oppressive colonial systems. Tuck and Yang state that "when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it settles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future."[89]

And the neoliberal model of temporality privileges the site of decolonization as metaphor for it offers a space to perpetuate colonial frameworks, i.e. the protection of white innocence and the imposition of a settler future. Feminismo Comunitario[90] (Communitarian Feminism) counterposes this futile and counterproductive interpretation of decolonization as metaphor. It understands neoliberalism to be an economic and political domination tactic that benefits patriarchal and colonial systems of power, and that all three systems work in tandem.[91] Economic systems with colonial and patriarchal legacies dominate our current neoliberal

[89] Ibid., 3.
[90] Julieta Paredes explains *Feminismo Comunitario* as a process which began in 2003 by social movements of Indigenous people from the Andean region, known today as Bolivia. *Feminismo Comunitario* proposes a radical shift and understanding of feminism from an Indigenous perspective and ways of being. It is seen as an organic practical way of organization that replaces hierarchies with responsibilities and is considered a political struggle since it recognizes patriarchal systems as oppressive and violent. Most importantly, it recognizes that its struggle is locally based and emerges in opposition to Euro-Western gender categorizations emphasizing the particularities of the region and its histories.
[91] Nataly Guzmán and Diana Triana, "Julieta Paredes: hilando el feminism comunitario," *Ciencia Política*, 14, no. 28 (2019), 32.

Canadian structures, including those within museums and art institutions. These are not interested in defining an epistemological, ontological, and much less cosmological meaning to decolonization for it would alter the status quo and uproot its primary capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal modernist intention. The cosmetic interest in expanding audiences and representation within art institutions and museums in Canada has still not benefitted or privileged Black and Indigenous artists to the extent it does white artists. Nor has it provided spaces for other racialized artists in Canada. The current inequity is perfectly demonstrated in the discrepancies delineated in the *Statistical Insights on the Arts* research study based on data from the 2016 census.[92] It is evident that the resurgent interest in decolonization does not translate into factual opportunities for subaltern artists and we continue to witness inequitable standards for racialized and Indigenous artists in this country.

Despite the barrier of a neoliberal and neocolonial model that benefits and assures a white settler future, artists in this dissertation along with other Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists, resist manifestations of erasure. An exemplary manifestation of this desire to change absence into presence was witnessed during a guerilla performance intervention in 2019 where the artists Claudia Bernal, Marilou Craft, My-Vam Dam, Jannick Deslauriers, Stanley Février, Nuria Carton de Grammont, and Julie-Isabelle Laurin "dragged 50 years of the MAC's annual reports shackled to their ankles, before shredding them and launching a collective call for a new chapter

[92] Hill Strategies Research Inc shares statistics in their report "Demographic Diversity of Artists in Canada in 2016." The report is based on data from the 2016 census which focuses on four demographic groups of artists: women, Indigenous people, members of racialized groups, and members of official language minority groups. Please see: https://hillstrategies.com/resource/demographic-diversity-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/

Fig. 2. © Stanley Février. Guerilla performance intervention at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal by artists Claudia Bernal, Marilou Craft, My-Vam Dam, Jannick Deslauriers, Stanley Février, Nuria Carton de Grammont, and Julie-Isabelle Laurin, 2019.

in Québec art history"[93] at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, challenging "museums to recognize < invisible > Québécois artists that have been long ignored by the art establishment."[94] Black and brown bodies questioned patriarchal and colonial systems of power, proposing new ways of thinking and doing, and counter attacking with the strength of their practices. As the philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres states, decoloniality "is not so much about obtaining recognition from the normative subjects and structures, but about challenging the terms in which humanity is defined and recognition takes place. This necessitates the formation of new practices and ways of thinking."[95] The legacy of the artists reinstates the possibility of change by questioning historical agendas. These artists are not seeking recognition nor necessarily to be

[93] Stanley Février explains the performance intervention in his website. Please refer to: https://www.fevrierstanley.com/itshappeningnow.
[94] Refer to Stanley Février's website.
[95] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," *Frantz Fanon Foundation* (2016): 22, http://fondation-franzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/.

accepted in the house of a colonial institution that has historically marginalized them. Rather, as semiotician and literary theorist Walter Mignolo describes, it is a "delinking" choice, a decolonial option of entering the debate…working in the "entanglement and differential of power."[96] Beyond disrupting the museum space, they announce their intentions by disrupting colonial public spaces and operations, dismantling the past to build alternative futures.

Postcolonial and Third World feminist theorist Chela Sandoval's work is concerned with developing a methodology of the oppressed in opposition to dominant structures of power and is known to criticize Western feminism that leaves women of colour within subsidiary sidelines. Sandoval's "oppositional consciousness" emerges as a type of ideological consciousness that opposes the dominant order and structures of power while questioning, rewriting, and decolonizing theory under the current neocolonial globalized world. She develops five categories around oppositional consciousness to transform dominant power relations: equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, separatist, and differential forms. Differential consciousness functions "within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology" [97] and is adopted by diverse social and liberation movements that sought forms of resistance outside of the social order and is a crucial aspect for shaping effective and ongoing oppositional struggle.[98]

This form of consciousness generates coalitions, decolonizing movements of emancipation, and associations, it provides "a structure, a theory, and a method for reading and constructing identity, aesthetics, and coalition politics that are vital to a decolonizing postmodern politics and aesthetics."[99] For this dissertation, I adopt oppositional consciousness as a

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[96] Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonial options and artistic/aestheSic entanglements: An Interview with Walter Mignolo," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 1 (2014): 206.
[97] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 43.
[98] Ibid., 44.
[99] Ibid., 44.

methodology. I identify coalition and artistic formations where they have not previously been noted or studied. I contextualize, theorize, and provide a space to generate knowledge of grassroot movements and of underrepresented artists to understand and analyze the context for which the Latin American diaspora generates aesthetics of resistance, where discourses and agency form community, and where the myth of a multicultural paradigm is exposed. Sandoval's method of oppositional consciousness reframes race, sex, class, gender, and identity, and inspires activism within current social and liberation movements of resurgence, developed by subaltern subjects within Canada, and for the sake of this dissertation within the Latin American diaspora.

The Myth of Multiculturalism within the Settler Colonial State of Canada

Canada has benefitted from an international reputation for welcoming and offering opportunities to immigrants and refugees, promoting its multicultural haven to the world. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that this reputation is guided by economic interests to capitalize on the labour of immigrants and has not been as welcoming to many diasporas, especially to those from racialized backgrounds. The Canadian model of multiculturalism, adopted as federal policy during the Cold War in 1971, welcomes in theory cultural diversity, equality, and antidiscrimination. But it also serves to disempower, marginalize, and separate communities from canonical formations and Canadian historical narratives.

Despite Canada's self-image as a progressive and diverse place, marginalized artists of racialized backgrounds continue to face systemic barriers to enter a predominantly white settler art world. Throughout Canada, artist-run-centres with a mandate to showcase politically and socially engaged work have granted few opportunities for the Latin American diaspora, and other public art spaces have offered token exhibitions to fulfill a quota established by public art

funders.[100] The diaspora's artistic practices and histories are seldom discussed in academia and rarely critiqued within academic publications. Even though this lack of representation has been currently criticized–with a present willingness to address the problem–tokenism, episodic exhibitions, and power structures that continue to promote economic agendas, are at the root of the problem, and serve to underscore the lack of inclusivity and diversity in this country. This contradiction only emphasizes Canada's exclusionary art system as it continues to disempower, overshadow, and neglect. It has historically implemented its racist agenda since the 19th century when the first art association was established in Montreal in 1864.[101] At the time, art and cultural institutions grew steadily to establish and advance the settler colonial project, in which privileged white settler colonial dominance–with its rhetoric of superiority–has been ingrained in Canada's institutions and narrative, leaving no space for other voices to thrive.

Undeniably, and as previously mentioned, there is a current wave, a shift within museums and institutions to reckon with their systemically racist agendas and some have made significant efforts in changing its flawed idiosyncrasies that exclude, erase, and oversee the contributions of racialized, Indigenous, and Black artists. Today, there is a demand from subaltern communities to see themselves represented, and changes have been made within institutions towards equity, diversity, and inclusion measures despite its limitations. But it is important to acknowledge that this is the result of decades of Indigenous and racialized artists demanding spaces of inclusion and representation. The 1980s and 1990s garnered a movement of activists who advocated for culturally diverse practices. As described by Monika Kin Gagnon "communities self-organized as coalitions, collectives, and caucuses, to stage numerous events (including conferences,

[100] A few examples of artist-run centres include: A Space Gallery and Gallery 44 in Toronto; Grunt Gallery and Western Front Gallery in Vancouver; and La Centrale and OBORO in Montreal.
[101] Art Association of Montreal.

festivals, screenings, readings, workshops, and art exhibitions), as well as the publication of exhibition catalogues, chapbooks and special issues of magazines and journals."[102] Cultural race politics became the impetus for such a movement of coalition building that took place in various cities across Canada. The Latin American diaspora's process, as will be described in chapter two, began in the early 2000s.

Regardless of the vast differences that separate the Latin American community in Canada, what they do share is the common denominator of invisibility along with its migratory history of displacement manifested through their status as diaspora in Canada. However, this invisibility can be of choice or of imposition. For those Latin Americans of white European background, in particular the diaspora that has grown up in North America, and share either a francophone or anglophone accent, become invisible to white Canadians, adopting this positionality as privilege. This invisibility can also come by attribution negatively and imposed on racialized people from Latin America. They can become unaccounted/unacknowledged, invisible to a predominantly white privileged demographic that erases brown, Black, and Indigenous bodies.

Despite this imposed invisibility, the Latin American artist diaspora, although a relatively recent community, has been actively involved in Canada for the past fifty years. The artists that this dissertation discusses articulate themes of displacement, polarization, and precariousness; they study notions of rupture and crisis; they represent manifestations of economic exploitation and social justice; many of which are tied to experiences of loss, trauma, and displacement. Their work and subjects resonate within our current times of global uncertainty, anxiety, and upheaval.

[102] Kin Gagnon and Fung, 12.

Furthermore, these issues are nothing new to this diaspora for their objections to neoliberal and neocolonial systems of power manifested not only within their work but from lived experiences. Themes and concerns against systems of oppression are embedded in the life's work of the first wave of refugees who set foot in Canada in the 1970s. "For the Chilean exiles, 'cultural' meant 'political,' and the repudiation of the military dictatorship – *la denuncia* in Spanish – was an overarching goal of all community activity."[103] Chileans who fled political persecution continued their anti-capitalist struggle in Canada, and art spaces of camaraderie and solidarity were created as a tool to denounce and create awareness.[104] This sentiment, particular to the demographic that arrived during the 70s and 80s in Canada, cast an impact on various artists that developed their artistic practices and studied in Canada. The need to develop consciousness and denounce political and social inequities became fundamental ideological motivators for the development of their artistic oeuvres.

Canada, as a systemically white supremacist state, has privileged white artists, scholars, and practitioners, and as outlined above, have not in the past been receptive to social or political concerns of the Global South. In fact, Canada's own genocidal history with Indigenous peoples, and its colonial intention to eradicate their existence, has also been avoided as a subject in Canadian art history until quite recently. Only in the past two decades have Indigenous perspectives that challenge the status quo, been exhibited, and collected in museums and institutions. It took the task force and activism of countless Indigenous artists, curators, and activists to transform long-held hegemonic institutional discourses and practices and there is still

[103] Francis Peddie, "Culture for la denuncia: The Chilean Exile Community and the Political Goals of Cultural Expression, 1973-1980," in *Latin America Made in Canada*, ed. Maria del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin (Ottawa: Lugar Común Editorial, 2022), 161.
[104] Ibid.

a long way to go. In the essay *Anger and Reconciliation: A Very Brief History of Exhibiting Contemporary Indigenous Art in Canada*, Lee-Ann Martin describes how a sequence of exhibitions and events during the late 1980s and early 1990s neglected to include Indigenous curators and contemporary realities, as if Indigenous people had only existed in the past, perpetuating a Eurocentric colonial version of history.

In response, a 1988 conference was organized by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association to debate the range of concerns, bringing together over 150 academics, artists, curators, museum professionals, politicians, and Indigenous knowledge keepers to discuss sponsorship, representation, access to collections, and training. *Preserving Our Heritage: A Working Conference Between Museums and First Peoples* resulted in a series of recommendations made after a two-year period of consultations and research. The final report, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museum and First Peoples* (1992) stipulated guidelines and recommendations to represent Indigenous history and culture ethically within institutions.

The beneficial changes of today are the result of decades of mobilization, resistance, and activism taking place for decades throughout Canada. For example, the third National Native Indian Artists Symposium was organized at K'san, British Columbia in 1983, where Kwakwaka'wakw and Haida artists had worked on museum projects in Victoria and Vancouver during the previous two decades.[105] Following this symposium, the group called the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA) addressed the ongoing exclusion of Indigenous art by mainstream art institutions working throughout the 80s and 90s and lobbied to increase

[105] Lee-Anne Martin, "Anger and Reconciliation: A Very Brief History of Exhibiting Contemporary Indigenous Art in Canada," *Afterall* 43, no. 1 (2017), 111.

visibility and recognition of contemporary Indigenous artists. At the same time, First Nations artist run centres were emerging during the 80s throughout Canada, a movement providing alternative spaces for artists. Parallel to this art movement, land claims and actions against corporate development invigorated Indigenous struggles, creating networks of solidarity across Canada. These forms of oppositional consciousness and activism from countless efforts have generated change through acts of resistance, providing the structure needed to construct identity, aesthetics, and coalitions.

In the summer of 1990, the Kanesatake Resistance took place, also known as the Oka Crisis, a 78-day standoff between Kanyen'kehà: ka (Mohawk), Quebec police, the RCMP, and the Canadian Army. The Mohawk people defended their land after a proposed expansion of a golf course and the development of townhouses on sacred burial grounds. In response to this settler violence, the Canadian interdisciplinary Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore, created a powerful community interactive performance sound-based installation entitled *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother* (1991, 1992, 1996). Belmore invited Indigenous people in rural and urban spaces to address the land through a megaphone, a wooden amplifier made from leather and animal hide. As she outlines in her artist statement "I was particularly interested in locating the Aboriginal voice on the land. Asking people to address the land directly was an attempt to hear political protest as poetic action."[106] With her work, Belmore provides a platform for the community to call out injustices. Her efforts are one out of countless others that have been made by Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists that are in constant oppositional dispute with a hegemonic status quo that keeps them in the margins, detached from utopic concepts of multiculturalism. Multiple examples can be found within this history of

[106] See Rebecca Belmore's website: https://rebeccabelmore.com.

oppositional consciousness, and it is imperative that we learn, understand, and follow their legacy of resistance.

There is a long history and legacy of activism in Canada, yet an engrained settler colonial state privileges white supremacy and keeps the status quo intact. Natsu Taylor Saito explains that what perpetuates systemic racism and xenophobia is in fact international law. In her article "Race, Indigeneity, and Migration" she begins by stating that "genealogical inquiry makes it clear that the imposition of racialized hierarchies, the construction of indigeneity, and the restrictions placed (or not placed) on migration in international law have been, and continue to be, functions of a colonial world order"[107] concluding that "because the system remains structurally dependent on racism, xenophobia, and the systemic erasure of indigeneity a remediation of these problems will require the genuine decolonization not only of subordinated peoples, but of international law itself."[108] Furthermore, she explains that without decolonization "we will not be able to eliminate racism or xenophobia, or ensure migrants' rights, because states will continue to perpetuate the status quo by relying on the racial narratives, legal advantages, and dynamics of global economy skewed by its heritage of colonial exploitation."[109] Considering the context of art in Canada, the same colonial and neoliberal parameters are used to block genuine and profound systemic change. For example, Armando Perla and Yasmin Ullah wrote about the exhibition they organized and curated at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights entitled *Time to Act: Rohingya Voices*. In the essay they write about the museum's intentions of becoming more inclusive and democratic spaces yet challenge the lack of diversity of the

[107] Natsu Taylor Saito, "Race, Indigeneity, and Migration," *AJL Unbound* 117 (2023): 43.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 48.

museum's personnel, those involved in decision-making processes, and the absence of institutional anti-oppression and social justice frameworks, impeding real systemic change.

The structures that have and continue to erase Indigenous people for centuries and the white supremist ideological frameworks legally bound within the settler colonial state of Canada are the same used to marginalize and leave in subaltern spaces racialized people who are not of the dominant class or race. The lack of interest, visibility, and representational shortfall is not only an economic neoliberal consequence that stems from the exploitation and extraction of resources, land, and people, but is also due to a systemically institutional racist history with a legal and political structure that facilitates its longevity.

However, Chela Sandoval offers the hope for transformative resistance against the state apparatus by adopting a differential mode of consciousness, utilizing a methodology of the oppressed that make decolonizing activities possible. She emphasizes that differential consciousness "is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void – some no-place – to claim their due,"[110] much like Belmore's megaphone piece giving the space for Indigenous voices to surround the land. It is this space of gestures, actions, images, and community building which this dissertation intends to explore, through the work of artists from the diaspora who have settled on Turtle Island.

To conclude this chapter, it is worth mentioning that various organizations and individuals from Latin America have adopted strategies of resistance to counter their invisibility and address the lack of representation, colonial erasure, and demystify Canada as a multicultural

[110] Sandoval, 139.

haven. The ground-breaking work of artists, curators, and community activists have found within this absence, a site of contestation and resistance, finding transformative ways to build community and alternative representation built from their own efforts. They have been able to defy racist systems by questioning the very premise of multiculturalism as a construction of identification in the context of the settler colonial nation state of Canada, one that is also gravely misleading as a land of opportunity, inclusivity, and diversity. The following chapter will delve into some of those efforts of individuals, collectives, and organizations that have built community.

RESISTANCE WITHIN INVISIBILITY: THE POWER OF COALITION BUILDING

Following the teachings of Chela Sandoval's differential approach of oppositional consciousness[111] with the forming of alliances and coalition politics that are crucial to a decolonizing postmodern politics and aesthetics, chapter two highlights an organization instrumental to the dissemination, articulation, inclusion, and elaboration of projects of Latin American diasporic art in Canada that emphasizes this need. The non-profit arts organization, Latin American Canadian Art Projects (LACAP) that I co-founded with my partner Rodrigo Barreda,[112] will serve as an example of the role collective participation, coalition building, and community action plays in the development of the diaspora and will foreground the various ground-breaking projects LACAP has developed throughout the years. This chapter will serve to contextualize my own positionality and research methodology as a curator and activist and how resistance lies within the work of the projects developed. Despite resource deficiencies and financial precarity, the organization addresses a significant gap within Canadian art circuits and fulfills a purpose for the diasporic community. It has become an outlet of resistance against forms of systemic erasure and an example of coalition building.

Instigators of Agency

During the 1990s, prior to the development of organizational capacity within the Latin American diaspora, the Latin American arts community was largely isolated and fragmented. A

[111] Please see Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*.
[112] LACAP's letters patent have Alejandra Bravo, Leonel Leiva, and Humberto Toledo as first directors of the non-profit arts organization. Others involved in the initial stages of LACAP include Rodrigo Barreda, Lautaro Fuentes, Lani Gozlan, Gene Long, and Tamara Toledo.

few efforts were made to remain connected through print. During these pre-internet times, several Spanish community newspaper publications helped keep the community informed including an arts and culture magazine, *Hispanos*. This publication became a space for critical engagement with culture in Toronto but due to its precarious financial state it only ran for a year and online archival history is untraceable. I know of its existence as I have copies stored in boxes.

During this time, critical race and postcolonial theory had influenced artists and activists, especially within art-run-centre culture throughout Canada. Since its inception in the late 1960s, artist-run-centres played a critical role in the development of contemporary art practices, thus, became a hospitable place to disseminate and embrace these concepts. However, they offered limited opportunities and spaces to racialized and Indigenous artistic practices, particularly Latin American diasporic artists. To a greater degree, mainstream institutions, museums, and within academic spaces, the diaspora and its artists were non-existent.

However, beginning in the early 2000s, community organizational efforts began to overcome invisibility. Many organizations and collectives developed in response to the lack of opportunities within the arts and culture for the Latin American community and began to create their own platforms. Organizations that have dedicated time and resources towards the dissemination of visual arts of the diaspora include: aluCine Latin Film + Media Arts Festival hosting performances and new media installations, symposia, panel discussions, and talks since 2002; Latin American Canadian Art Projects (LACAP), a non-profit arts organization that has led various projects in Toronto since 2003;[113] Latino Canadian Cultural Association (LCCA),

[113] See LACAP and Sur Gallery websites: https://lacap.ca/home/, https://www.surgallery.ca and https://www.surgalleryvirtual.ca

established by local Toronto-based visual artists, programming various group exhibitions since 2004;[114] Efagia organization, a Toronto-based collective of media artists and writers created in 2004;[115] LatinArte, a non-profit cultural organization that organizes annual art festivals since 2008 in Montreal;[116] Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre (VLACC) established in 2012, working towards building a physical hub for Latin American artists and audiences;[117] Colectivo Toronto, a small group of artists and curators dedicated to the development and presentation of contemporary art since 2014;[118] Espacio México, a cultural space of the Mexican consulate in Montreal, curating exhibitions of Latinx Canadian artists;[119] and Mujer Artista, a Winnipeg-based collective of women artists that formed in 2014 to support each other through various projects, talks, exhibitions, mentorship, and networking opportunities.[120]

According to Alena Robin, networks such as LACAP, LatinArte, and others "exist in a gray area between museums and academia and fulfill not just an intercultural function but also an interdisciplinary and interinstitutional one."[121] However, these networks, driven by the volunteer efforts and commitment of individuals –who respond to the scarcity of opportunities, platforms, and resources available for the dissemination, articulation, theorization, and professionalization of diasporic practices– lack financial, human, and political resources to ever become institutional. With fewer resources than other proportionally similar organizations, these initiatives remain within peripheral spaces of constitution, despite their ongoing efforts to expand their reach. Furthermore, many organizations throughout the decades have folded while others

[114] Refer to Latin Canadian Cultural Association website: https://www.lcca-toronto.com/
[115] See E-Fagia website: https://www.e-fagia.org/
[116] See LatinArte: https://latinarte.ca/
[117] For further information see Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre website: https://vlacc.ca/
[118] See Colectivo Toronto: https://colectivotoronto.ca/
[119] See Espacio México: https://www.facebook.com/espaciomexicomontreal/
[120] Refer to Mujer Artista website: https://www.mujerartista.ca
[121] Robin, 50.

continue their precarious labour. Their admirable intentions can be easily erased within the history of art in Canada as they remain within the margins.

During the early 2000s, the city of Toronto became a hub for the elaboration of Latin American grassroots artistic development and networking, influencing the diaspora in various other cities to join its apogee such as LatinArte festival in Montreal (2008) and Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre (2012) in Vancouver. In Toronto, aluCine Latin Film + Media Arts Festival became the pioneer to program visual and media art exhibitions in 2002 followed by the Allende Arts Festival (2003-2011) which presented annual curated visual art group exhibitions. In 2004, Latino Canadian Cultural Association organized festivals with art exhibitions as a central part of their programming. E-fagia, an organization which also began in 2004, introduced various new media exhibitions and art publications to its programming contributing to the articulation and discussion of media and visual art production. All these contributions generated spaces of visibility, activation, and representation for visual artists of the Latin American diaspora through the vision and efforts of various artists, curators, and writers.

Many of the individuals involved in this advocacy movement were university and college educated individuals who found themselves isolated upon graduation during the late 1990s and early 2000s, at a time when few spaces and platforms existed for many Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists. It was only through collectivity and active engagement that they found the potential to change absence into presence and build their own tenets to support their artistic practices.[122] It is within this framework of organizational activism how I will approach the development of chapter two. Keeping in mind my own positionality as a community advocate

[122] See Alberto Gomez on "Where the South and the North Meet: Latino Identity and Cultural Heterogeneity," *Fuse Magazine* 22 (2000). This article, written in the year 2000, explains the social and artistic landscape of the time and discusses the generation of artists who began to mobilize.

and curator who works towards projects that empower diasporic artists of Latin American descent. My intention is to embrace the concept of an *aesthetic of resistance* as one that has been developing not only through the work of artists, but through the advocacy done for and by artists.

Submerged within Eurocentric and mainly white mainstream art spaces and institutions that ignored their value, artists of the diaspora developed their own platforms through festivals, symposia, publications, workshops, and exhibitions. These individuals volunteered their time and labour towards the objective of being seen, heard, and understood. The artist, writer, and community activist Arlan Londoño exemplifies the tireless efforts of many in this milieu, to disseminate knowledge and an understanding of art from the diaspora, and to build community and critical thought, despite the overall indifference towards Latin American art in Canada. Working with LACAP and then co-founding E-fagia with the artist Julieta Maria, Londoño foresaw the capacity, value, and impact the diaspora had over the arts in Toronto. He helped establish a local and international network that facilitated a multitude of valuable exhibitions, lectures, and online initiatives such as: *Disfagia Magazine* (2005), *Subversion Project* (2006), *Digital Event* (2006/2007/2009), and *Symposium on Decolonial Aesthetics* (2013), which unfortunately became the last project he would contribute with before his passing in 2013.

But for chapter two, my focus will be placed on the work of LACAP, an organization that I co-founded and has led various initiatives for over two decades. I will introduce its politically and ideologically driven projects from the perspective of an activist, someone who has resisted erasure and has built spaces and platforms for fellow colleagues and artists. I will also position myself as a curator of Latin American art, someone who has contributed towards the changing artistic landscape in Toronto. As such, I will draw on the personal and professional experiences gained throughout the years and how this knowledge informs the development of a study of an

aesthetic of resistance in Canada. I will delve into the politics of art and its capacity to activate discourse as well as discuss the work of artists who contribute actively towards an articulation of resistance through LACAP, an organization that contributes with coalition, recognition, and space formation.

As mentioned above, there are other organizations that evolved during this time but a few of these instead adopted a multicultural platform, detached from political and social discourses, a tendency that perpetuated the multicultural myth discussed previously of which LACAP resists. Organizational unity based on the premise of ethnicity as a "multicultural and multiethnic community"[123] does not coincide with LACAP's ideological framework of social consciousness and advocacy. For us, to merely act on the unification of multiculturalism is naive, and in fact only perpetuates the myth constructed by the settler colonial state of Canada with its system of exclusion. Instead, we adopted a project driven model throughout the course of two decades that would respond to the needs of the diaspora and address the many barriers faced.

The praise of multicultural discourse fundamentally ignores that the underlying method of exclusion is to keep the subaltern subject at the sidelines, within otherness, separate from canonical frameworks. My intention with this dissertation is to not fall into racial, ethnic, or even cultural paradigms, but to situate Latin American art in Canada within spaces of geopolitical contexts, imperial, and colonial histories as common denominators that unite artists in their aesthetic and thematic decisions despite there being immense differences as well. Furthermore, my personal investment placed on the work of over two decades continues today, and now within

[123] LCCA's mandate is available on their website.

the space of academia. Within this space of scholarly rigour, I intend to widen the outreach of resistance.

Alberto Gomez's essay "Where the South and the North Meet: Latino Identity and Cultural Heterogeneity" explains how we as diaspora are "in the north, but we dream and imagine in the South" thus creating a neocolonial condition of dependency and domination.[124] Gomez analyzes the context in which artists of Latin American descent grow and develop in Canada at the turn of the century, acknowledging the limitations and Eurocentrism that surrounds their professional existence. I was part of the cohort of artists mentioned and discussed by Gomez of recent graduates from OCAD during the late 1990s, and thus find myself reflecting on what happened two decades after the article was written for *Fuse Magazine*. He asks " how can one synthesize the collective experience of being in between worlds through artistic expression?"[125] And answers himself at the end of the analysis, it lies in the creation of a "space for both collective and individual expression in which dialogue and exchange across cultures emerges."[126] Even though it wasn't until recently that I read this article, LACAP has become this catalyst space of collective expression and fulfills this role within the Latin American community, asserting Latin American diasporic presence as active creators within Canadian art and culture.[127]

[124] Gomez, 28.
[125] Ibid., 29.
[126] Ibid., 31.
[127] Ibid.

Latin American Canadian Art Projects

Rodrigo Barreda and I co-founded the non-profit arts organization LACAP which evolved from the implementation of two prior iterations of the Salvador Allende Arts Festival for Peace. The festival became the impetus to establish a non-profit arts organization in 2005 and access government arts council funding to implement the annual event for nine consecutive years to follow, among various other projects LACAP developed throughout the years. We became known for implementing socially and politically engaged events and projects at a time when others were rejecting such categories.[128] We were interested in anti-oppressive and socially oriented themes of engagement with the community through the arts from the initial stages of development and have since inception developed a track record developing projects that address the gaps and needs within the diaspora in Toronto.

LACAP's lesser-known projects that Barreda initiated, include the civic community engagement initiative and naming of *Victor Jara Lane* within the proximity of the Arauco Housing Coop, a neighbourhood where exiled Chilean families established their homes in the late 1970s. Barreda also developed The *Museo Solidaridad Museum Project* in which archival research resulted in the documentation and visual exhibition and presentation of the Chilean exiled experience at Harbourfront Centre. His foresight also led to the establishment of The *Art of the Americas: Knowledge Series for Young Audiences,* in which dozens of workshops and lectures were offered to primary and secondary school students for over eight years to address the alarming drop-out rate of Latin American students within the municipal educational system.

[128] During an Ontario Arts Council gathering, along different Latin American arts organizations, fellow colleagues categorically emphasized the distinctive nature of our work as being "too political" with a political agenda, and not focused enough on the arts. While in the early and mid 2000s, there was an emphasis placed on detaching art from political and ideological frameworks, this mentality has shifted in the past 5-10 years and are now embraced as essential by those who once rejected its framework.

LACAP's advocacy also led to a municipal and provincial arts council change of policy, which resulted in the acceptance of applicants with pending immigration status. While LACAP worked on these projects, we continued with the forum initiated by Alucine called *Aconsejate* (meaning to seek advice), actively seeking participatory community engagement[129] which in turn facilitated the implementation of the *IMAGINE* project in 2013. *IMAGINE,* was a one-month Latin American pop-up art centre in midtown Toronto that became the impetus and example of what a future art centre could mean for the community.

Under the direction of LACAP, I developed the *Latin American Speakers Series* in 2008, an event which brings internationally renowned "artists, critics, thinkers, and curators to Toronto, building bridges to engage with, articulate and discuss issues of identity and intercultural dynamics in contemporary Latin American art"[130] allowing the articulation, dissemination, and exposure of Latin American contemporary art to a wider Canadian audience. All these projects have built the backbone for LACAP's most challenging and recent initiative, Sur Gallery.

Sur Gallery

During the 2015 Pan Am Parapan Am Games in Toronto, LACAP leveraged the opportunity to embark on opening a physical location for the implementation of its projects. LACAP's objectives in its 2005 letters patent stipulate the following:

[129] These participatory activations were intended to hold space for community discussion and engagement. These activations came from a political organizational training framework with the intention to establish a physical space for the community.
[130] See Curatorial Projects section on the LACAP website: https://lacap.ca/curatorial-projects/latin-american-speakers-series/

a) Studying the reality and needs of Latin American artists, performers, designers, and cultural workers living in Canada.
b) Cultivating an understanding and appreciation of art in relation to social issues within Canadian society.
c) Promoting the work and visibility of artists from the diverse cultural backgrounds of Latin America living in Canada through festivals, cultural events, concerts, exhibitions, lectures, literacy events, seminars, theatrical performances.
d) Establishing and administering (or maintaining) a center for cultural activities for Latin American artists living in Canada.
e) Establishing and administering an archival Chilean/Latin American museum project in Canada.
f) Participating in and promoting local, provincial, federal, and international activities that protect, nurture, and develop the work of artists of Latin Americans living in Canada.
g) Engaging the Latin American community and Canadian society in specific art projects.
h) Establishing contacts, networks, partnerships, and exchanges with other artist communities.
i) Establishing a Latin American arts fund project.
j) Raising funds for the achievement of these objectives and such other complementary purposes not inconsistent with these objectives.

This list clearly stipulates our intention of increasing agency for Latin American diasporic artists: actively engaging with the local arts community, offering opportunities for growth and development, and opening a physical space to harbour the development of projects with a

mandate to prioritize self-governance, self-representation, self-advocacy, and self-determination. Actively engaging with the local arts community, offering opportunities for growth and development, and opening a physical space to harbour the development of LACAP's projects. Sur Gallery has become such a space, and since 2015 it has provided Latin American and Latinx diasporic artists and practitioners the opportunity to showcase their work with a critical space for dialogue. For example, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sur Gallery hosted several Portfolio Potlucks for artists. This was an open and safe space for Latin American artists to showcase their work to their fellow colleagues in the format of a presentation/artist talk. Artists had 15 minutes to showcase a series and themes they explored to receive feedback from their peers. Participants and attendees shared food at these informal gatherings prior to presentations. These informal portfolio reviews continued online during the pandemic which allowed for artists from coast to coast to participate and meet other peers from the diaspora, network, learn from each other, and find a welcoming and constructive space to engage with their artwork. During a critical precarious financial time for many artists, LACAP offered CARFAC artist fees[131] for participation as well as invited curators from Canada to offer valuable feedback and networking opportunities.[132]

LACAP's achievements have addressed the lack and erasure of its community within the arts sector and industry in Canada. However, it has not been an easy task to endeavour with over twenty years of commitment towards changing the Canadian art landscape that continues to

[131] Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens, CARFAC, was established by artists in 1968. CARFAC defends artists' economic and legal rights and educates the public on fair dealing with artists.
[132] Invited curators included Sally Frater, Noor Alé, Claudia Arana, Tamara Toledo, Mariana Muñoz Gomez, and Lisa Deanne Smith.

ignore the diaspora and its contributions.[133] LACAP and Sur Gallery are possible due to the relentless persistence and determination of various individuals who insisted on the possibility of pursuing what was seen as an impossible vision and task. City Councillors advised Barreda, and I that our community lacked political representation and economic resources that would facilitate and enable such a space.

When the Pan American and Parapan American Games were announced to take place in Toronto, Barreda and I leveraged the opportunity for financial support. LACAP was selected to activate the Pan Am Path[134], a multi-use 80 km in length path that connects Toronto trails and neighbourhoods as part of the legacy of the 2015 Pan American and Parapan American Games and was granted $50,000 from Pan Am Path to activate a section by opening the first space of contemporary Latin American art in Canada.

We launched the space with the exhibition *Sportsmanship Under Surveillance*. Since then, future exhibitions have covered topics such as critical perspectives on national and fascist systems;[135] ideas of belonging, in-betweenness and displacement;[136] activism and resistance;[137] trauma, mourning, and memory;[138] identity politics;[139] Indigeneity and Afro-futurism;[140]

[133] After twenty years of LACAP's involvement in the Toronto's art scene, its exhibitions and projects have seldomly been recognized as relevant contributions within art circuits. A handful of articles, publications, essays, references, and awards can be researched.
[134] See PanAm Path website: https://panampath.com/maps/
[135] The exhibitions *True Patriot Love*, *From the Heroic to the Absurd*, and *STANCE: Design Against Fascism* include these themes.
[136] The exhibitions *Interstices*, *Life in Flight*, *Making Spaces*, *Overcoming Otherness, Rooted Knots/Blended Threads* discuss these concepts.
[137] *The People United* is an example of this theme.
[138] See exhibitions *Vehemence* and *Reimagining Mourning*.
[139] The following exhibitions explore these themes: *The Recipe: Making Latin American Art in Canada.*
[140] See *Power in Resistance* and *Overcoming Otherness*.

extractivism;[141] feminism and anti-patriarchal perspectives;[142] diaspora and representation;[143] counter-archives;[144] the impact of digital technologies in the construction of Latin American identity;[145] and the imperial relationship between the Global North and South.[146] Each exhibition is accompanied by public programs such as artist talks, workshops, and panel discussions that search for new ways of manifesting and discussing the ideas pertinent to the overall themes.[147]

Oppositional Consciousness: A Curatorial Approach

As the Director/Curator of Sur Gallery, my intention with the launch of the space was to clearly position the gallery as a site of contestation and inquiry, a space that would explore the issues that pertain to the Latin American diaspora. As such, the overarching theme that ties all its curated exhibitions is a shared history of oppression. I realized that what I had been working on since I began curating was the search for an *aesthetic of resistance*, articulations and manifestations against systems of oppression, erasure, and discrimination. This realization became clear as I began to articulate a framework for the dissertation. I have always been interested in the artists that search for forms of dissent. Critical responses to neocolonialism and imperialism, for prior to being a curator and scholar, I had also been a young artist attempting to navigate a white supremist system that ignored my existence.

[141] See *Extracolonial: Reflections for Action* and *Hilos Conductores*.
[142] See *In Your Shoes*, *Diaspora Dialogues: Archiving the Familiar*, and *Colour of Women*.
[143] See *Overcoming Otherness*.
[144] See *Declassified History: Archiving Latin America.*
[145] See *Latin@merica: Embedding Bodies and Localities.*
[146] See *Tracing Labor Territories*.
[147] All exhibitions can be found on Sur Gallery's website.

Sur Gallery has become a space for the reflection and engagement of this common thread and shared history. A history with waves of Latin American migrations to Canada that are linked to state violence and economic precarity. The colonized, the dispossessed, the marginalized, populate the programs that Sur Gallery explores, offering testimonies and stories of resilience and resistance, proposing a stage for oppositional consciousness to manifest with contemporary currency and relevance.

The first exhibition that I curated in connection to the launch of the Pan American and Parapan American Games, as mentioned, was *Sportsmanship Under Surveillance*. As state surveillance was rising in Canada during the conservative government of Stephen Harper, and new policies and technologies were redefining the relationship between public and private spaces, I decided this would be the link that would tie the Games with the politically informed artistic practices I was interested in showcasing. Drawing from this hypersensitive issue, as the curator, I questioned the celebratory tone of the PanAm Games as a distraction to the infringement of privacy and the impact of state surveillance in the name of national security. As the first exhibition for Sur Gallery, I curated a group of internationally renowned artists from the Global South: Jota Castro (Peru/Belgium), Minerva Cuevas (Mexico), Marcos Ramirez ERRE (Mexico), and Regina Silveira (Brazil) who presented their thought-provoking artworks along emerging artist Juan Ortiz-Apuy (Costa Rica/Canada).[148] All of the artworks presented in the space alluded to how policies and politics affect collective and individual freedoms, as an observation, a critique, or a response. It was a personal political stance, a conscious curatorial decision I took, to position the work at Sur Gallery not only of artists of the Latin American

[148] See Sarah-Joyce Battersby "Latin American art finds Toronto home in Sur Gallery," *Toronto Star*, June 27, 2015.

diaspora and from the region but also to highlight those who subvert notions of the status quo and use this platform as a form of resistance.

The Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas presented her project *Mejor Vida Corp* (Better Life Corporation) (1998-2015), an enterprise that provides free products and services such as subway passes, lottery tickets, and barcode stickers. For *Sportsmanship Under Surveillance*, the public was offered student ID cards, which were used for discounts at museums, Toronto transit systems, etc. to disrupt a neoliberal economy by using its own system of classification. Cuevas uses agency as a source for change, generating art objects into disruptive political manifestations. Her work sabotages the status quo by co-opting its means of distribution, by tampering with corporate and government identities, and by disrupting visual neoliberal economies.

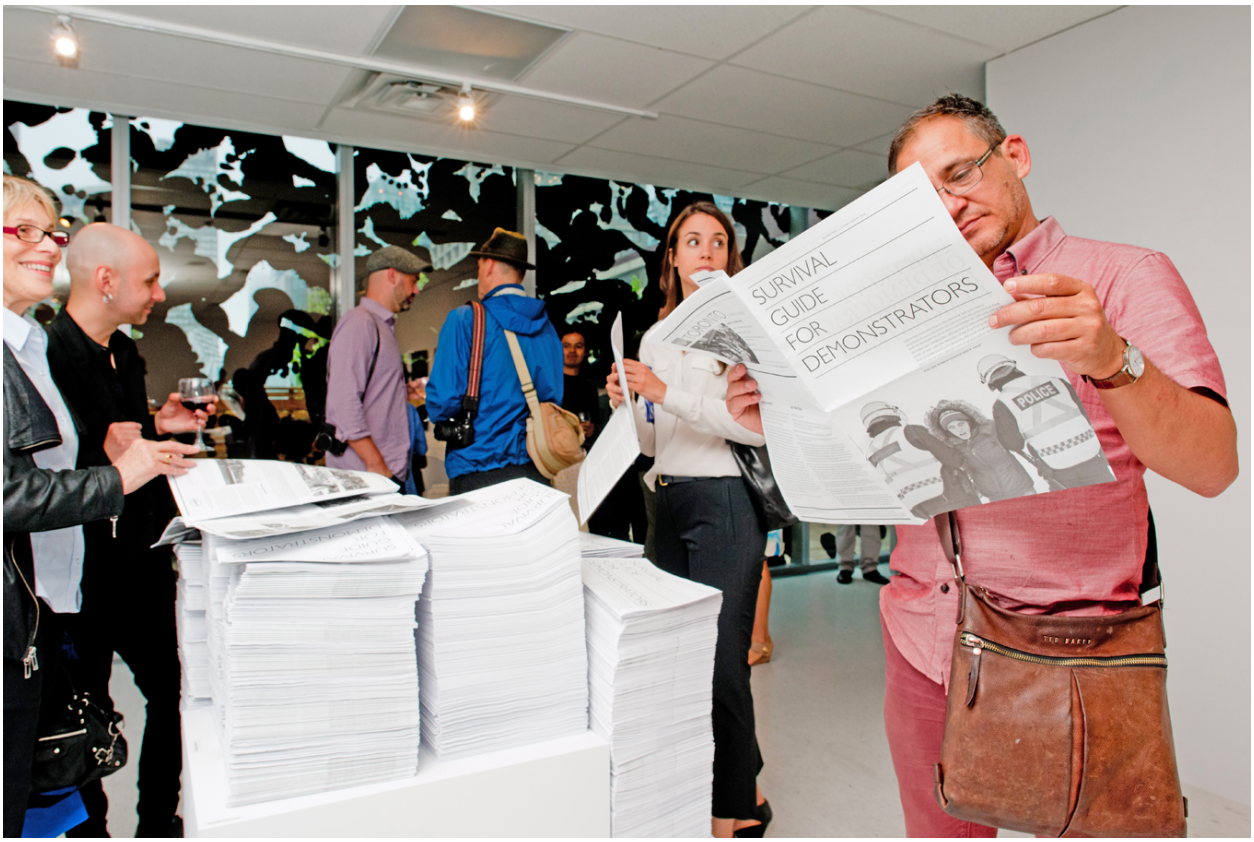

Fig. 3. © Jota Castro, *Survival Guide for Demonstrators*, 2015. Image courtesy of Sur Gallery.

Jota Castro exhibited *Survival Guide for Demonstrators* (2015) a newspaper he produced and distributed to the public at Sur Gallery. The printed newspaper included images and information with practical tips and reasons for which to demonstrate in the cities of Brussels, Istanbul, Havana, London, Dakar, Bilbao, and Treviso with an open space for audience contribution to the city of Toronto, offering the public an opportunity to manifest their own discontent. Marcos Ramirez ERRE presented *Eye Charts* (2015) and *Crossroads* (2015). In the

Fig. 4. © Marcos Ramírez ERRE, *Crossroads*, 2015. Image courtesy of Sur Gallery.

format of a Snellen optometry chart, the letters form quotes by philosophers and critical thinkers inviting viewers to question their ideas and positions in response to the criticality of the quotes. Regina Silveira presented two large-scale vinyl pieces that obstruct the light, indicative of the lack of clarity during oppression and conflict. The installation *Irruption* (2005-2015) consists of

large-scale black footprints that cover from ceiling to floor a 30'x 9' gallery window along with the installation *Quimera* (2003-2015), a black shadow that bleeds onto 3 gallery walls, from the source of a projected light bulb, eerily reminiscent of a torture chamber.

And finally, the emerging artist Juan Ortiz Apuy bluntly targeted imperialist intervention through the act of surveillance and presented his interactive installation, *The Freedom Fighter Manual* (2011). Ortiz-Apuy re-created a 17-page document designed by the CIA in 1983 that was

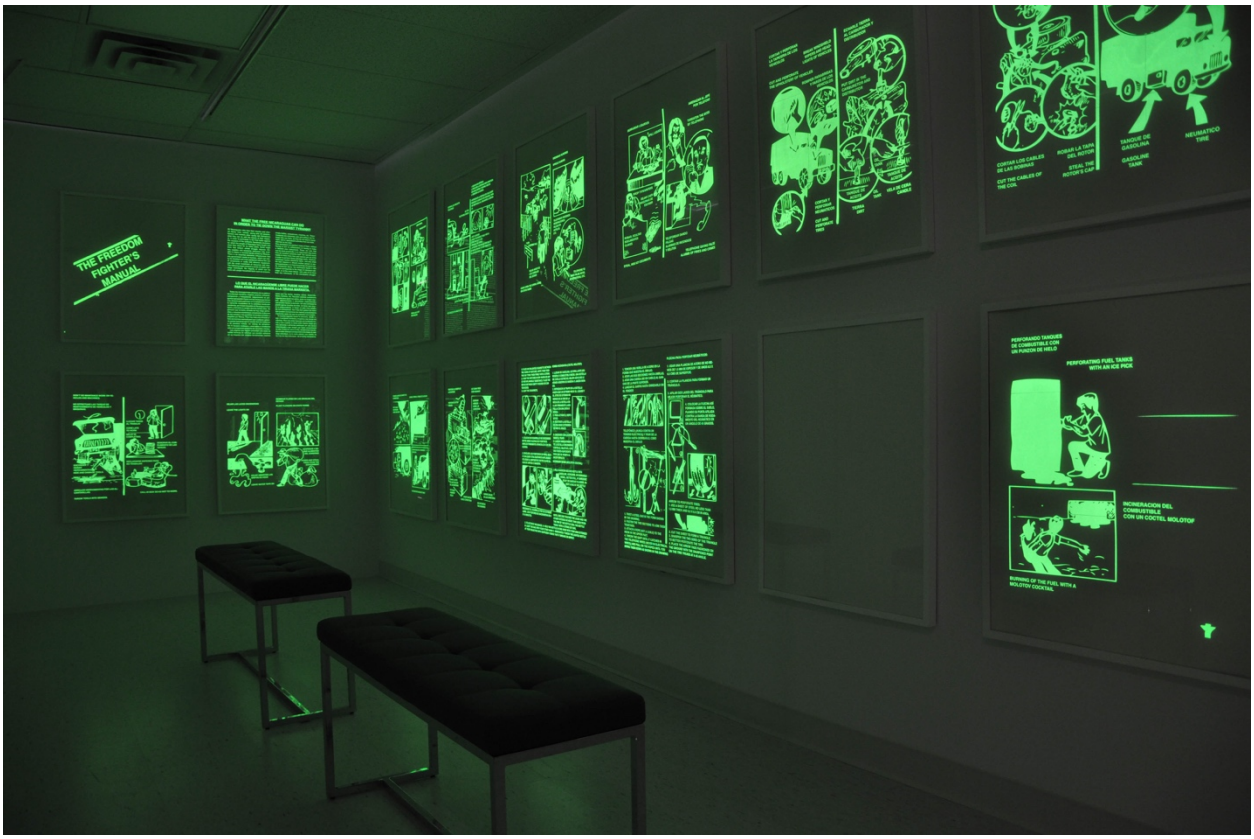

Fig. 5. © Juan Ortiz Apuy, *The Freedom Fighter Manual*, 2011. Image courtesy of Sur Gallery.

airdropped over Nicaragua with the intention to overthrow the elected government. The CIA document contained a series of instructions for public disobedience and revolt, ranging from seemingly banal actions such as ripping the pages out of books in public libraries, to more

violent acts such as how to make Molotov Bombs.[149] The installation consisted of framed posters on the gallery walls printed with glow-in-the-dark silkscreen ink. The room was set against 3 motion-sensor security lights. As audience members walked in the room, the lights were triggered, and the content of the manual became invisible. The audience had to stand perfectly still for a few seconds to view the piece and for the lights to shut down. The piece addresses ongoing US imperialist interventions in Latin America and explores the levels of state surveillance in the name of national security.

What is most appealing about this installation is the ability to expose in both subtle and overt ways a counter narrative against violence, corruption, and intervention in the form of resistance. Juan Ortiz-Apuy proposes resistance through light and image and counterattacks decades of imperialism while indicating how surveillance has been used to control, influence, and engineer a capitalist and neoliberal model within the Global South. This artwork and inaugural exhibition will become one of many that follow the *aesthetic of resistance* that I continue to explore at Sur Gallery.

Public programming enriched the exhibition's impact with Minerva Cuevas and Jota Castro's artist talk entitled *Art as Activism/Activism as Art*, moderated by Gerardo Mosquera; a film screening of *The Secret Trial 5* "an examination of the Canadian government's use of security certificates, a Kafkaesque tool that allows for indefinite detention without charges;"[150] online interviews of all exhibiting artists; exhibition tours; and a roundtable discussion that brought together lawyers, artists, curators and writers Francisco-Fernando Granados, Graham Hudson, Barbara Jackman, and Jayne Wilkinson, and moderated by Sally Frater to focus on the

[149] See Ortiz-Apuy artist statement: https://juanortiz-apuy.com/
[150] Refer to The Secret Trial 5 website: http://secrettrial5.com/

theme of *Art in the Age of Surveillance*. Drawing on migrant, international, and diverse artistic perspectives, the exhibition and discussion explored how surveillance and art are intertwined in the context of politics, law, and resistance. As I wrote in my curatorial statement:

> The growing level of violence at a global level and the ability of governments to watch over us create states of fear and suspicion amongst the general population. In this context, we can no longer rely on the assumption that our opponents (in the way we would refer to players in a game of sport) will 'play fair' under equal terms and conditions or that we completely understand the 'rules of the game'. When governments dismantle civil liberties or disrupt basic human rights in the name of national security it seems contradictory to ask civilians to follow the virtues of fairness, self-control, courage, and persistence essential during the act of a game. The artists in the exhibition offer an insight onto the dilemma of having to negotiate the terms of the game, they provide guides to demonstrate, they create alternative modes of identification, they expose relationships between hemispheres, they question historical references and offer philosophical insights that help us survive an age of surveillance.[151]

Fran Schechter wrote a *Now Magazine* art review of the exhibition entitled "Eye on Latin artists: Politics drive Sur opener," "Tamara Toledo brings together five artists from South and Central America who come from a cultural scene decidedly more politicized than ours…They may not be familiar names, but most have established international careers." She goes on to reiterate that the "focus here is more on surveillance than sports…exposing us to artists with a highly attuned political sensibility forged by life and decades of resistance in Latin America."[152] This interpretation perpetuates the "them vs us" paradigm from which Canada's multicultural system benefits, i.e., a problem that occurs elsewhere and not here. Most importantly, it does not acknowledge the fact that these histories and decades of resistance are interconnected throughout

[151] Refer to Tamara Toledo, *Sportsmanship under Surveillance* catalogue.
[152] Fran Schechter, "Eye on Latin Artists," *Now Magazine*, July 16, 2015.

the hemisphere. Not only is the presence of Latin American diaspora an integral part of the Canadian fabric but Indigenous resistance within Canada is as vibrant and politicized.

Moreover, at the time of the exhibition, Stephen Harper was imposing Bill C-51 and Bill C-24, two policies which would affect citizens in Canada. Bill C-51 allows obtaining warrants for the seizure and forfeiture of publications as well as ordering the deletion of all electronic materials that are considered "terrorist propaganda," Bill C-24 allows revocation of citizenship of dual citizens who are convicted of terrorism. These controversial federal government provisions raised concerns and opposition by immigration and refugee lawyers as well as Amnesty International Canada. Harper's conservative government between 2006-2015 had been proactively and arbitrarily stripping the rights of citizens, evoking a common sense of fear and politicization of the general population. All the artists in the exhibition *Sportsmanship Under Surveillance* had addressed relevant concerns to the Canadian context, not solely in the context of Latin America. The themes are not foreign or distinct to Latin Americans as Schechter had stated.

This first exhibition at Sur Gallery sets the tone for future programming, and LACAP's mandate along with its previous projects marked Sur Gallery's position as a space that would explore socially engaged politically relevant themes that aimed to highlight consciousness and resistance as a response.

Hemispheric Relationships

We identified early in the development of LACAP the need for hemispheric dialogue, as we increasingly became aware that we were one of the only spaces dedicated to contemporary Latin American art in Canada. Most artists of Latin American descent in Canada are marginally known within the Canadian art scene but most importantly, are seldomly represented internationally. Furthermore, networking opportunities are scarce for artists of the diaspora, especially with other diasporic artists in different regions of the world. Latin American art in Canada does not enter academic or artistic international conversations. Keeping this in mind, I have curated exhibitions of local artists alongside internationally renowned artists such as Regina José Galindo, Regina Silveira, Minerva Cuevas, Marcos Ramírez ERRE, Voluspa Jarpa, Iván Navarro, Iván Argote, Yoshua Okón, Sebastián Calfuqueo, and LASTESIS Collective to establish a relationship and further develop a hemispheric dialogue. The pairing of international artists with local diaspora exposes parallel connections, establishes aesthetic similarities, and offers the possibility of increased market value for the diaspora in Canada.

The lack of national exposure and the absence of international professional opportunities has been limiting for the diaspora in Canada. Many artists have reached their potential by moving back to their country of origin, finding the recognition they never were able to obtain by carrying their Canadian passports. For example, Naufus Ramírez Figueroa is an artist who was raised and studied in British Columbia. While living in Canada, he never was able to achieve the recognition and attention deserved regardless of his efforts to enter the art scene. He mainly exhibited in artist-run centres during his professional career in Canada, spaces that were known to showcase racialized artists, principally attaching his work to identity politics and the war in

Guatemala. He returned to his native country and currently lives in both Berlin and Guatemala City. Since then, has been recognized by the international arts community, exhibiting at the Guggenheim in New York City, Tate Modern in London, the S*ã*o Paulo Biennial, and the Venice Biennale, among many other recognized spaces and institutions. It wasn't until January 2020 that The Power Plant in Toronto granted and recognized the internationally renowned artist a space for his work within a Canadian institution. This lack of recognition is an ailment that occurs within and outside of Canada. Latin American artists of the diaspora from Canada are seldomly observed, discussed, acknowledged, or researched.[153] And when they are considered in mainstream circles, they are observed as foreign, detached from Canadian realities, emphasizing their ethnic and cultural background as critical to understanding their work, boxing them into concepts of identity politics.

This disregard as subjects living, working, and creating within the diaspora emphasizes otherness and sustains the multicultural paradigm and tokenization of artists.[154] As the artist Naufus Ramírez Figueroa disapprovingly argues when asked about his inspiration for an exhibition at Gasworks, London entitled *God's Reptilian Finger*, as one coming from his Guatemalan background and history, he emphatically exclaims "even though it really inspires me a lot since I have lived abroad since a child, it gets a bit tiring to explain details to people…I create works which give a sensation…but not try to tell people a history lesson on

[153] Tamara Toledo, "Now (Here) Represented," *Fuse Magazine* 32, no. 1 (2008): 14–20. This essay analyzes the lack of representation of artists from the diaspora based in Canada at a performance-centered exhibition at El Museo del Barrio that covers artists from across the Americas.
[154] James D. Campbell, "Hatching Furies: Auguries of War and Witchcraft in the Art of Osvaldo Ramirez-Castillo," *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art*, October 2019; Adam Volk, "Arts Gods and Monsters: Central American artists Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo mixes myth, memory, and the madness of war in Bestiaries," *Ottawa Xpress*, 17.05, February 4–10, 2010.

Guatemala."[155] His frustration is clear, especially in the context of this particular exhibition, of artworks inspired by The Book of Mormon, YouTube videos, and conspiracy theories.

Allende Arts Festival

Sur Gallery and LACAP, from its initial stages, foregrounded the importance of politically and socially engaged artistic practices, with its foundation stemming from the Salvador Allende Arts Festival for Peace founded in 2003 to commemorate a date of mourning for left-wing Chileans. This initiative consisted of an "ad-hoc group of artists joined together to organize the first festival to highlight the important role that the arts can play in healing a community that has suffered through a past of violence and uprooting. From the initial objective to commemorate Chile's 1973 military coup, the Allende Festival evolved over the next several years into a multi-faceted event featuring concerts, workshops, and exhibitions"[156] with critical and provocative work that addressed not only historical but local issues pertaining to diasporic subjects. As founders and organizers of the festival, we are the daughters and sons of political refugees and exiles that felt the need to not only commemorate the date but celebrate the life and work of those who survived systems of oppression. Thus, as diasporic artists working in the confines of the settler state of Canada, we began our journey of resistance as artists and activists. Agency and belonging replaced notions of otherness and displacement, providing an outlet for diasporic artists who at the time had very few opportunities to voice politically charged messages of dissent.

[155] Anna McNay, "Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa: 'I just create works that give a sensation of something'" *Studio International*, January 12, 2015.
[156] See "About LACAP" on their website.

The festival grew throughout the years and became well known within Toronto art circles, with theatre, music, dance, literary, and visual arts having its own platforms of representation. Hundreds of artists and dozens of organizers made the 9-year festival possible, growing and developing each year with not only artists from Chile but throughout the Global South as well as other oppressed communities that shared the same anti-imperialist and anti-colonial vision. Indigenous, African, and Middle Eastern artists of all disciplines joined in unison, chanting songs and slogans of solidarity against forms of oppression, acknowledging the histories of displacement that united them all, joined by art and hope for a transformed future.

The visual arts section of the festival had several group exhibitions from 2003 to 2011, at various locations: De Leon White Gallery, Lennox Contemporary, Harbourfront Centre, George Brown College, A Space Gallery, Gallery 44, Vtape, Artscape Wychwood Barns, and Theatre Centre. These curated group exhibitions offered a space for many emerging artists to not only showcase their work but to build community. For example, in 2004, artists Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano, and Ilyana Martínez met and formed the Z'otz* collective during the second festival, during a group exhibition, entitled *Alienation* at De Leon White Gallery. Following the festival, they began to meet regularly and currently exhibit their work as a collective at various institutions across Canada.[157] A few of the artists that have been part of the festival have moved back to the Global South, due to the scarcity of spaces of visibility and exposure in Canada, such as Oscar Camilo de las Flores, while others, including Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo who will be discussed in chapter three, have ventured to other provinces in search of educational and artistic opportunities in both Montreal and Vancouver.

[157] See Z'otz* Collective website: http://zotzcollective.blogspot.com/.

The curated exhibitions under the hospice of the multidisciplinary festival allowed for the exposure of diasporic voices to be heard and seen within a broader Canadian audience. However, the festival rarely received media attention during its nine-year period, mostly from Latin American print newspapers that no longer exist.[158] This lack of interest emphasizes the erasure and disregard of the diaspora's contributions to the arts sector in the city of Toronto.

During this time, it was evident to me that there was a lack of education around Latin American art in Canada. Therefore, I decided that I would organize a series not only to introduce it to Canadian audiences but also as an opportunity for local diasporic artists to engage actively with others from the Global South. To learn, discuss, and share knowledge. I curated the first Latin American Speakers Series during a one-year curatorial residency at A Space Gallery where I also implemented the visual arts section of the festival in 2008. The Canadian art scene's oblivion to what occurred south of the U.S. border had its detrimental effects on diasporic artists in Canada who remained outside of contemporary art circles.

Latin American Speakers Series

As highlighted in LACAP's website, "the series seeks to articulate and discuss issues of identity and intercultural dynamics in contemporary Latin American art that have evolved in the globalized art scene. Themes and questions of representation, international artistic-cultural interaction, power, and marginality have and continue to be at the forefront of each lecture."[159] For each series, internationally renowned artists and curators deliver lectures through audio-

[158] Reviews and interviews that disseminated the festival's impact include Spanish speaking newspapers such as *Correo Canadienese,* an article for *Canadian Immigrant* by Vivian-Sofia Mora, and an exhibition review written for *Canadian Art* magazine. The editor of *Canadian Art*, Richard Rhodes, commissioned Susan Douglas to write a review of the exhibition *Idiomática*.
[159] Refer to Curatorial Projects under LACAP's website.

visual presentations and are paired with local moderators to generate critical discussions after each lecture. In addition, I focused on the need to create professional development opportunities for the local diaspora due to its own marginalized position within mainstream Canadian art circles. Thus, I invited speakers to conduct studio visits, interviews, and community gatherings, to offer the chance for local artists to network with international guests. An extensive list of the past fifteen years of lectures has been archived in LACAP's website that include prominent Latin American artists, theorists, curators, art historians, scholars, and activists.[160]

My intention for the speaker's series was to contextualize Latin American art to a Canadian audience, expand its reach, relevance, and significance within Canadian art circles and open a space for dialogue and hemispheric encounter. I believe this has led to significant change within the contemporary Canadian art scene and has influenced decisions in programming within prominent institutions. For example, there has been a rise of art exhibitions of Latin American contemporary artists emerging in the past five years alone at various institutions across Canada.[161] Prior to this occurrence, very few institutions were showcasing and disseminating the work from the region. However, as it occurs in the United States with Chicanx and Latinx

[160] Guests include Alfredo Jaar, Tania Bruguera, Regina José Galindo, Coco Fusco, Humberto Vélez, Luis Camnitzer, Marcos Ramirez ERRE, Los Carpinteros, Rosângela Rennó, Pablo Helguera, Judy Baca, Regina Silveira, Alejandro Cartagena, Jota Castro, Minerva Cuevas, Alexandre Arrechea, Javier Tellez, Elvira Santamaría, Renata Lucas, Voluspa Jarpa, Iván Navarro, Gustavo Artigas, Marcelo Brodsky, Yoshua Okón, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Dora Longa Bahia, Colectivo LASTESIS, and Carolina Caycedo. Curators part of the roster include Gerardo Mosquera, Chus Martínez, Mari Carmen Ramírez, Alexia Tala, Rocío Aranda Alvarado, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, Agustín Perez Rubio, Julieta Gonzalez, Andres I.M. Hernández, Andrea Giunta, Tatiana Flores, and Claudia Calirman, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Kency Cornejo, Macarena Gómez-Barris.
[161] *Teresa Margolles: Mundos* (2017) at the Musée D'Art Contemporain de Montréal; *As if Sand were Stone: Contemporary Latin American Art from the AGO Collection* (2017); *Jonathas de Andrade: On Fishes, Horses and Man* (2017) and *Paulo Nazareth: Stroke* (2022) both at The Power Plant; *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Winter* (2022) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and Xicanx: Dreamers + Changemakers/Soñadores + creadores del cambio (2022/23) at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.

artists,[162] the diaspora in Canada continues to be outcast from this emergent interest in the region and is seldomly part of the current contemporary Canadian art scene.[163]

In addition, the Latin American Speakers Series filled a void for many diasporic artists who worked in isolation, removed, and detached from Latin American artistic references. For example, Francisco Fernando Granados had the opportunity to not only receive direct critique of his work from the artist Regina José Galindo, someone he deeply admired, but he also had the chance to interview her and engage in deep conversation around themes of migration, displacement, and intergenerational trauma inflicted on Guatemala, a topic he embodied. His admiration towards Galindo's work not only came from a space of collegial performance-based artistic practice, but also from a deeper personal level, as a Guatemalan refugee who had experienced displacement firsthand as will be discussed in chapter three.

In 2014, Mari Carmen Ramírez, a prominent curator who has helped elevate 20th century Latin American art globally, expressed an interest in participating in the series, and delivered a lecture at Hart House at the University of Toronto. She also granted a series of studio visits with local artists of the diaspora, offering an opportunity for all of them to engage in meaningful and artistically constructive conversations.

This constant engagement addresses the lack of professional development opportunities for diasporic artists of Latin American descent and taps into the need for cross-border hemispheric dialogue. Through the series, several local artists were given the possibility to engage with guest artists and curators who came to Toronto such as Gerardo Mosquera, Alexia

[162] Arlene Dávila, *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020).
[163] Please refer to next subtitle for three exceptions to this conclusion.

Tala, Chus Martínez, Rocio Aranda-Alvarado, Agustin Perez Rubio, and Cecilia Fajardo Hill who met with artists of the diaspora. This opportunity to engage with such renowned curators would never have been possible if this forum had not been set in motion. As mentioned, internationally renowned artists also offered guidance and mentorship and met with various artists of the diaspora through studio visits. I also curated these encounters, i.e. I matched artists with curators' interests in mind for there to be the potential of future collaboration.

Furthermore, the exposure to a wider Canadian audience to internationally renowned Latin American art was achieved by partnering with various Canadian institutions to host the series at their locations such as with the Art Gallery of Ontario, OCAD University, Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, Vtape, A Space Gallery, York University, among other institutions and art spaces. This allowed for a wider outreach to different audiences which otherwise would not have occurred. Evidently after over fifteen years, the series' pioneering effect of introducing artists from the Global South to Canadian audiences, shifted the perception and receptiveness. For example, Tania Bruguera took part in the series in 2008 –at a time when neither of the mentioned institutions were interested in partnering to present her work. Seven years later, Bruguera was invited to Toronto's Nuit Blanche followed by the purchase of her work at the Art Gallery of Ontario's permanent collection.

Artists of the Diaspora in Canada with International Recognition

A few rare cases can be observed where artists from the Latin American diaspora have found recognition within Canadian and international art circuits. This exceptional phenomenon commonly share the following: either they have left Canada to pursue their professional artistic

careers; identify exclusively with their non-Canadian national passports but are based in Canada (for example: Colombian artist based in Canada); or have adopted their Canadian citizenship and have not disclosed their origin until most recently when cultural and racial difference becomes an asset within contemporary art spaces.[164] For the purpose of this argument, I will discuss the cases of Luis Jacob, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, and Naufus Ramírez Figueroa.

Since his participation in documenta 12, Kassel in 2007, Luis Jacob has achieved international recognition exhibiting his work at biennials and prominent art institutions.[165] His diverse artistic practice includes video, installation, sculpture, and photography, as well as actions in the public sphere, that address issues of social interaction and the subjectivity of aesthetic experience, nurtured by his academic training in semiotics and philosophy, and derived from research on a wide variety of subjects. Jacob describes his work as a "collision of meaning that invite different forms of spectatorship"[166] which is seeded deeply within his artistic practice since the very beginnings. He is interested in colliding the meaning of systems and explains "because that collision produces a certain spark and energy that has the potential to loosen or disrupt something that we otherwise would take for granted as fixed and given."[167] He shares in an interview for this dissertation that for him an awareness of race and ethnicity was never of concern when growing up, in either primary school, high school, or even university and emphasizes "…it is not a lens through which I have experienced my life story… I assumed I had

[164] During interviews, artists disclosed their ability to use EDI measures implemented to access resources from art councils and institutions targeting BIPOC artists. These measures are intended to reduce the gap between BIPOC and white artists. These measures are often abused and currently resources are accessed by artists who were never affected by discriminatory practices.
[165] La Biennale de Montréal, 2016; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York City, 2015; Taipei Biennial, 2012; Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2011; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City, 2010; Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2008; and Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, 2008, among others.
[166] Interview with Luis Jacob, November 15, 2023.
[167] Ibid.

a right to navigate everywhere and was treated as such at least that is how I perceived it."[168] In fact, nationality is a signifier he rejects and rather identifies as a queer artist.

In 2007, when he represented Canada at Kassel for documenta, he noticed that his nationality was of relevance in both Canada and in Peru, both crediting respective nationalities to write about his work. Jacob disapproved of this fixed signifier that had little to do with how he navigated the world. He refused to participate when invited to the 2008 Latin American Speakers Series, feeling uncomfortable with being pigeonholed with his cultural background and classification. Currently, however, as Jacob has reiterated in his interview, he is comfortable with being introduced in his biographies as an artist born in Lima, Peru, that lives in Toronto, disclosing that the "framework of place is more useful." Today he states … "I identify with the term Latinx when I need to but it's not the lens with which I interpret my experience…"

It is important to understand his positionality within the context of Canada and as someone who is actively involved in the queer art scene. Without any expectation of being recognized or included, Jacob built his career within the queer arts community of the early 1990s but became discouraged when activism involved the right to join the system, such as getting married or joining the army.[169] Jacob found allied forms of resistance within the queer arts community of which he had much more to connect with than his cultural or national identifications, despite his political discouragement throughout the years.

Perhaps the detachment to cultural placement served him well to enter predominantly white art circuits and find spaces of representation at a time when the contemporary art scene in

[168] Interview with Luis Jacob.
[169] Ibid.

Canada had no particular interest in cultural or racial identifications and the few that were granted spaces were often tokenized, which he confessed also experienced at the time. Evidently, his last name did not denote a Latin American origin either, opening doors at a time where others would find them closed. Nor did he lack the dominant language, an often-subtle reason for rejection.

Today, EDI measures have opened avenues and opportunities for Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists within exhibition and financial institutions, and mentions of any ethnic, gender, and/or cultural background grants further opportunities. Today, Jacob openly admits to adopting these as signifiers to access resources to his advantage, outgrowing his earlier rejection. Although Jacob acknowledges he was interested in working outside of the system, since the early part of his career until this day, his conceptual "collisions of meaning" have been widely embraced by Canadian art audiences and is well immersed within the art canon of Canadian art.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is also an artist who has achieved significant international and Canadian notoriety and is considered one of the most prominent artists working in Canada today having received the Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts in 2015, the first to be granted to a Latin American artist, followed by Jorge Lozano, who received the medal five years later for his video art practice. Originally from Mexico, Lozano-Hemmer is a media artist who came to Canada to study in 1985, receiving his Bachelor of Science in Physical Chemistry from Concordia University in Montreal and has since developed an internationally reputable artistic practice. As described in his website's biography, the artist "creates platforms for public participation using technologies such as robotic lights, digital fountains, computerized

surveillance, media walls, and telematic networks. Inspired by phantasmagoria, carnival, and animatronics, his light and shadow works are 'anti-monuments for alien agency.'"[170]

Differently to Jacob, the Mexican artist Lozano-Hemmer achieved exposure and recognition as an international artist working in Montreal, detached from any affiliation with Canada.[171] Most of his exhibitions during the early part of his career took place in the United States and throughout Europe with multiple opportunities for international exposure, in art fairs, biennials, private galleries, and art institutions including exhibitions at MoMA and Guggenheim in New York City.[172] His notoriety was achieved later in Canada, based on the years of international accomplishment as a Mexican artist.

These artists also immerse their work within frameworks of social critical analysis, offering sites of resistance to hegemonic tendencies. They are perfect examples of an aesthetic of resistance that develops within diaspora. However, the recognition they receive does not reflect the overall experience of the diaspora, who have been often overlooked from artistic contemporary art scenes and academic scholarly writing.

This diasporic experience is remarkably most evident with the case of the artist Naufus Ramírez Figueroa whom I've already previously discussed. At the age of 6 years old, the artist and his family were displaced and came to Canada as refugees from Guatemala. He received a BFA in Media Arts from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, in 2006, followed

[170] Refer to Lozano-Hemmer biography on artist website: https://www.lozano-hemmer.com/.
[171] This is highlighted in the artist's 2018 mid-career exhibition survey at Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal as an "international artist working in Canada" therefore, does not designate a "Canadian" or "Mexican Canadian" status.
[172] Lozano-Hemmer has exhibited at the Tate in London, MAC and MBAM in Montreal, Jumex, and MUAC in Mexico City, DAROS in Zurich, SFMOMA in San Francisco, among many others.

by an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2008. His work explores the history and his relationship with Guatemala's civil war and consists mostly of performance, drawing, sculpture, and video, using folklore, science fiction, and theater. During his artistic career in Canada, he exhibited in a few artist-run-centres[173] but he became quite frustrated, always pigeonholed to identity-framed group exhibitions that did not consider the multiple layers and different perspectives he tried to share. I met Ramírez Figueroa during my curatorial residency in 2008 at A Space Gallery, and his frustration with the Canadian art scene was already noticeable.

Since leaving Canada, Ramírez-Figueroa's professional career has taken a turn, landing solo exhibitions in prominent art institutions and biennials globally.[174] While based in Vancouver, very few Canadian institutions were interested in his practice, and as previously mentioned, it wasn't until 2020, after he left Canada, that The Power Plant offered him a solo exhibition. Ramírez-Figueroa is an excellent example of the potency, strength, and criticality of an aesthetic of resistance that developed as a diasporic subject and how this positionality, as a refugee in Canada, becomes an impetus to create work. For example, Ramírez-Figueroa deals with issues of trauma through the performance piece entitled *The Sun is Crooked in the Sky; My*

[173] Grunt Gallery, A Space Gallery, Western Front Gallery, Gachet Gallery, Open Space, Blim Space, FADO Performance Art Centre, Neutral Ground Artist-Run Gallery, Pleasure Dome Festival, and Latitude 53 Gallery.
[174] Exhibitions include: Casa de América, Madrid (2011); Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart (2011); Gasworks, London (2015); CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (2017); Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City (2018); New Museum, New York (2018); Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf (2018); The Power Plant, Toronto (2019); Mendes Wood, Brussels (2019) Artspace, San Antonio (2021); Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf (2021); Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo (2022); M Museum, Leuven (2022); Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín and Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (2023); and Galeri Nordenhake, Mexico City (2024). He has participated in group exhibitions at Tate Modern, London; Gwangju Biennial; Lyon Biennial; São Paulo Biennial; and the Venice Biennale; among others. Ramírez-Figueroa has performed as part of the series "BMW Tate Live: Performance Room," Tate Modern, London (2015); *If I Can't Dance Then I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2016); and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's "Latin American Circle Presents" (2017). He is recipient of Akademie Schloss Solitude fellowship (2011), a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship (2012), a DAAD fellowship in Berlin (2015–16), and the 2017 Mies van der Rohe Award.

Father is Thrown over my Shoulder (2005).[175] This 100-hour performance deals with the violent colonial caste system that perpetuates class and race differences in Latin America and how these racist tendencies carry onto within diaspora. The artist sniffs powdered milk from the floor, exposing his body and his sexuality while also indicating a trauma embedded within centuries of colonization and racism.

Jacob, Lozano-Hemmer, and Ramírez Figueroa serve as examples of artists of Latin American descent who achieved international and Canadian recognition during their lifetime. Some would say that their artistic practices have exceeded their Latin American identities, but this misses the point. What I would like to foreground is how these artists achieved notoriety, and what has caused these exceptions. Jacob, Lozano-Hemmer, and Ramírez Figueroa all denote different modes of inclusion while also being tokenized. Their Latin American identities have been used either subtly or overtly within a settler colonial state that systemically erases brown, Black, and Indigenous bodies. Jacob, an artist who found a different support system, one that brought opportunities for growth within the queer community; Lozano-Hemmer who was embraced as a Mexican contemporary artist based in Montreal; and Ramírez Figueroa, tired of tokenization, left the settler colonial state, further developing their professional career. Different identities and experiences, all men who navigate the system in various bodies, with different resources and knowledge systems. Nonetheless, these artists are defined as diaspora within the confines of an art system that is systemically racist and exclusionary and yet have found a space of reception.

[175] Tamara Toledo, "Now (Here) Represented," *Fuse Magazine* 32, no. 1 (2008): 20.

As mentioned within the dissertation, there are multiple nuanced factors that play into whether artists receive the recognition deserved or not. Class, gender, education, networks, race, sexual orientation, identity, and even personality play into whether many "make it." Certainly, all these factors played in favor to their success, in addition to their remarkable artistic practices, and to the above discussed approaches, either adopted consciously or not. Despite all three artists being men, two are queer and neither "pass" as white. Favourably or not, their identities become classifiers within the diaspora. The intersectionality makes its classification even more complex and their positionality and status shifts as soon as they leave the space of diaspora.

There are approximately two hundred visual artists of the diaspora who have been overlooked since the 1970s in Canada.[176] Perhaps not all of them have the artistic capacity as do these artists, but certainly several do have the potential. Due to various outlined factors, many of them find themselves isolated within a settler colonial state which renders them invisible. The work accomplished through LACAP and Sur Gallery have filled a gap that exists for many of these contemporary artists across Canada who do not benefit from the same resources, support systems, knowledge, and background of these three rare exceptions.

Pathways for Community Engagement

In addition to introducing professional development opportunities through the Latin American Speakers Series, we were also actively involved in mentorship development, building pathways for younger generations to avoid various obstacles we faced navigating this exclusionary system. One of our first efforts towards this objective was to create the Osvaldo

[176] ARCHIVO research conducted by Luz Sierra in 2022-23.

Reyes Scholarship for Latin American Youth in 2004, granting it to high school students who had been accepted to study art at a post-secondary institution. Throughout the years we worked with countless youth and emerging artists, art administrators, scholars, and activists through various LACAP projects who within a relationship of reciprocity learned and offered their knowledge working collaboratively and generously. For example, we offered several grant writing workshops with art councils to navigate the granting system in Canada. We also became partners with the Toronto District School Board to offer art workshops at primary and high schools. This facilitated artists of the diaspora to teach workshops with Latin American content at schools throughout the TDSB. At Sur Gallery, we launched the first 8-month Mentorship Program for eight emerging curators and artists offering networking opportunities, professional development workshops, and the chance to develop, curate, and present an exhibition at Sur Gallery. We offered the program again in 2019/20 with eight other participants who went through the program, many of which have now immersed themselves in Canadian art circuits and are currently practicing artists and curators.[177]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sur Gallery's strategy quickly adapted to meet the needs of its community, pivoting to offer its programming virtually and address the critical needs of racialized diasporic artists in Canada. For instance, we hosted online studio critiques for local established artists with international curators such as Gerardo Mosquera and Cecilia Fajardo-Hill. We also organized Online Portfolio Critiques with emerging artists and invited Canadian curators Lisa Deanne Smith, Mariana Muñoz Gomez, Sally Frater, Claudia Arana, and Noor Alé to engage with their work. We continued to offer curated exhibitions at our physical gallery

[177] In 2024, mentees for this program such as Michelle Peraza had a solo exhibition at Cambridge Art Galleries and Camila Salcedo undertook an Ontario Culture Days creative artist residency.

space, but added a virtual navigational experience of each exhibition on our new website for those who could not attend due to restrictions or health concerns.[178]

As did for many other organizations and institutions, Sur Gallery's outreach expanded internationally with audiences joining online Zoom programs from various countries and therefore, widening local diasporic artists' reach to an international arena.[179] As a result of the pandemic, what was once a small grass roots local initiative, has now reached audiences globally and shares a prominent online presence. This expansion has led to further development of the Latin American artistic diaspora, facilitating research for scholars and curators to investigate their artistic practices.

Positionality

As a curator of Latin American art and of the diaspora based in Canada, and as the daughter of political exiles from Chile, I consider all this advocacy work I have committed to for the past twenty years fundamental and needed within the diaspora. I believe in the work and find purpose, not solely as an individual but as part of a collective. This positionality is instrumental to the understanding of this dissertation, it is at the core as a form of resistance, one that also requires a sense of purpose and belonging.

With the understanding that positionality shapes identities and access to social power structures, delineating power differences, it is critical to also acknowledge that positionality is a determining aspect for the diasporic experience. As such, it is important to analyze it through the

[178] Refer to Sur Gallery virtual website.
[179] Audience members joined from Ireland, Australia, Colombia, Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

lens available to me, with the resources I have as the Director/Curator of Sur Gallery, and the historical knowledge that I can share after all these years of working within the community.

During my doctoral studies I conceived, developed, and organized a symposium, *Positionality: Latin American and Latinx Art in Canada,* under Sur Gallery's programming to facilitate dialogue and further discuss the role positionality plays for the diaspora in Canada. I was looking at articulating the ways in which Latin American diasporic subjects' positionality within the settler colonial state of Canada affected their artistic practices. Concretely, the symposium addressed the systemic barriers faced by the Latin American diasporic community in Canada and identified common grounds from where to begin an analysis "with the intention to develop strategies of resistance, build networks of solidarity and exchange, improve the livelihood of art practitioners, and grant opportunities for an underrepresented community."[180]

The symposium consisted of a four-day virtual gathering with a range of voices from the diaspora in Canada and we partnered with various academic, artistic, and community organizations, making it a perfect example of coalition building.[181] Four key themes were addressed for the symposium:

1. The Power of Advocacy and Collectivity
2. Questioning Notions of Mestizaje
3. Intersectional Queer and Feminist Identities

[180] Refer to Sur Gallery virtual website under Positionality Symposium for further information. http://www.surgalleryvirtual.ca/sur-gallery-symposium-about.
[181] Partners include Hemispheric Encounters; York University's School of the Arts, Media, Performance & Design; Performance Studies Canada; Department of Visual Arts Western University; York University's Graduate Student Association; The Power Plant; Vancouver Latin American Cultural Centre; Institute for Creative Exchange; Vtape; Mujer Artista; and SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art.

4. Decolonizing Practices

The panels for each theme were moderated by the scholars and curators Diogo Rodrigues de Barros, Nuria Carton de Grammont, Salvador Alanis, Selena Couture, Laura Levin, Noor Alé, and I. The symposium also included a film screening of Diana Martinez Muñoz's *Becoming Cyborg* (2021); an in-person networking event; an online hemispheric panel entitled "Spatial Ecologies: Artistic Responses to the Pandemic Across the Americas" presented by Hemispheric Encounters;[182] artist talks; a book launch at Sur Gallery of *Latin America Made in Canada* co-edited by Maria del Carmen Suescun Pozas and Alena Robin; as well as invited keynote speakers, decolonial critical thinker and writer Nelson Maldonado Torres, and art historian and writer Kency Cornejo.[183] The virtual symposium reached every province and territory in Canada and had simultaneous translations in Spanish and Portuguese. A digital effort such as this had never been accomplished before and a precedent was established, inspiring future symposiums to continue discussions around art and the Latin American diaspora in Canada.[184]

The symposium raised and sparked an interest on a variety of different subjects, but the main framework, positionality, was at its core. How and why identity markers were established, how and when to identify as diaspora, which themes were summoned as relevant, shifting needs of the community, and the current state of a changing demographic. As a scholar and as a curator, my own interest and biases emerged, while also acknowledging the complexity behind such

[182] Refer to Hemispheric Encounters website: https://hemisphericencounters.ca/
[183] Sur Gallery virtual website under Positionality Symposium: https://www.surgalleryvirtual.ca/sur-gallery-symposium-about
[184] For example, filmmaker Cecilia Araneda organized a "National Gathering of Latin Canadian Filmmakers" in Montreal, May 2023, and aluCine Latin Film + Media Festival presented its first Latin American Media Arts (LAMAS) symposium in 2023 with the participation of a wide range of artists, filmmakers, critics, and academics that engaged in Latin American artistic production in Canada.

intersectionality. The focus had to be an aesthetic of resistance, a proposal for change and for moving forward, without losing track of past lessons. What the symposium clearly identified to me was the lack of representational tools within the diaspora, and the project that followed pretends to fulfill that void.

ARCHIVO: A Platform of Representation

The symposium demonstrated the need for a space of articulation, reflection, discussion, and theorization of artistic practices of the diaspora. The gathering also made evident that there was a gap in archival research and the historization of Latin American artistic presence and contributions in Canada. I proposed to develop ARCHIVO not only because it would facilitate my own doctoral research but most importantly because it would become a project that would follow LACAP's legacy and vision of responding to the needs of the community.

With over a hundred and thirty profiles and growing, artists from the 1970s to the present were classified, digitized, and archived and we launched ARCHIVO to the public eight months after conducting thorough research and investigation. The digital archival platform was executed by archivist and researcher Luz Maldonado Sierra. Maldonado Sierra and I collaboratively worked on the various aspects of how to develop this platform. We shared our concerns regarding historical gaps, ethical standards, representation, and how to preserve and allow continuity of all compiled data, and all of this informed the work we developed as we embarked on the task. One of the primary concerns was who would be included in this list at a time when concerns were raised regarding those who race-shifted[185] when it was convenient, benefitting of

[185] A pejorative colloquialism term used to call out a person who has falsely claimed Indigenous identity. This term can also be applied to racialized communities that face systemic inequalities.

government and institutional resources aimed for racialized and historically marginalized artists.[186] It was determined that ARCHIVO would include artists who could meet all the following requirements:

1. Visual Professional Emerging artists (5 years of consecutive exhibition trajectory), Mid-Career (over 5 years of consecutive work) and Established Visual Artists (10 years of consecutive work within the field).
2. Canadian citizen, have a valid resident, work permit, study permit or pending permit.
3. Identifies as Latinx, Latin American, Indigenous artist from the Latin American region, Latin Caribbean, i.e., those who have had an upbringing in the diaspora within the community and raised by Latin American parents.

As active agents shaping memory, it became obvious the relevance this archival work had for the diaspora and artists. Since the 2000s, there has been ongoing debate around the role archives play. Beginning with Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* and Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever*, both philosophers understood the archive as a metaphorical construct and its ability to understand human knowledge, power, and memory. According to Foucault, the archive contains certain parameters, within a system of what is said and cannot be said. For Derrida, the archive is not materially tangible but can also exist in a psychanalytic space. These philosophers drove science to a so-called 'postmodern turn' in the study of archives. The role of the archive was no longer seen within a static or passive lens, rather it became understood to be an active agent, capable of shaping cultural and collective memory.

Under this framework, we developed ARCHIVO. It became a source of knowledge, an accumulation of information, which would become helpful towards identifying social identities

[186] This became an evident subject of conflict and discussion within the diasporic community at a CALTAC *Coyuntura 2023 conference* in Vancouver entitled *Nationality, Ethnicity, and Cultural Competence: The Politics and Ethics of Self-Identification*. Artists and practitioners who appropriated cultural identification classifications to gain spaces of inclusion felt threatened by this proposed dialogue.

within power systems. We understood this concept as a living and breathing entity, a process rather than a final product. Functionality and activation of the archive was as relevant and important as the product.

A call for submission was sent to the community which provided primary resources for the database compilation. Artists filled out a self-intake form to disclose how they wanted to be represented, which information was private or public, and how to discuss their work within the archive. Over fifty institutions, organizations, museums, archives, and artist-run centres across Canada were researched. Examples of online databases in Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada, and the United States were also examined as reference. The intention for this archival research platform was to compile information that had not been gathered before to facilitate further scholarly and academic research, as well as establish a space for community building and engagement. For us, it was not only crucial to broaden accessibility, searchability, and discoverability of this platform, but to activate its collective memory within and for the diasporic community.

Conclusion

Since LACAP's focus has shifted from its initial multidisciplinary Allende Arts Festival, to concentrate and focus on the visual arts through its programming at Sur Gallery, it is important to highlight its intention "to protect, nurture, and develop the work of artists of Latin America living in Canada"[187] by improving its economic welfare and sustainability. This has been possible, despite LACAP's precarious situation, as it is primarily dependent on government arts

[187] LACAP's objectives in its 2005 Letters Patent.

funding. LACAP continues to be a small, underfunded arts organization, and all the mentioned projects would not be possible without the determination and volunteer work of dozens of people who have invested time, labor, energy, and knowledge towards this vision. The opportunities provided have been endless, furthering professional development, expanding educational reach, fostering career advancement for emerging practitioners, and facilitating networks of partnership, coalition building, and solidarity.

This non-profit arts organization, which has a history of programming of over twenty years, continues to circulate within subaltern spaces of the contemporary art scene in Toronto. Despite exhibitions of artists from the diaspora who exhibit along internationally prominent artists who are making waves in the global art scene such as Voluspa Jarpa and Regina José Galindo, those exhibitions did not receive media coverage, critical art review, or scholarly writing in Toronto. Even though the current tendencies of decolonial sentiment and anti-oppressive discourses within art and academic institutions, diasporic art from Latin America does not enter the discussion. Recent efforts of colleagues, scholars of the Latin American diaspora have taken up the task and are beginning to write about Latin American artists of the diaspora, leaving an imprint of the contributions on Canadian art circuits.[188] With other organizations from the diaspora and various projects that LACAP has developed throughout the past two decades, it is incumbent that future generations continue the path of resistance and move forward, learn and build off of what has been achieved thus far, while confronting different challenges, filling other gaps, and continuing to improve the futurities of the diaspora in Canada.

[188] Examples of scholars writing about Latin American art in Canada include Gabriela Aceves-Sepulveda; Analays Alvarez Hernandez; Nuria Carton de Grammont; Mariza Rosales Argonza; Sarah Shamash; Maria del Carmen Suescun Pozas; Alena Robin; Tamara Toledo; and Zaira Zarza.

My experience as someone who has helped achieve the above mentioned and those unaccounted projects that I have omitted, comes from a place of humility and has taken me a long time to share as it felt egotistical. Those who know me can testify that I am quite reserved, and at times timid. Nonetheless, my experiences and positionality, at times with less privilege and at others with more, has obliged me to find strength and take responsibility over my future. My lived experiences have informed the decisions I have made, the roles I have played, and the stance I assume as a politically and critically engaged subject.

As I have shown within the work I have embarked on for the past twenty years, the power of resistance lies in changing the narrative, adopting new processes, constructing further coalitions, inspiring future generations, taking up space, and becoming a catalyst for change. Following this advocacy work as a practitioner, curator, and activist, with the development of this dissertation I have also taken on the responsibility of a scholar. The next three chapters focus on the work of ten artists of the Latin American diaspora based in Canada who have developed discourses, aesthetics, and methodologies of resistance. The final three chapters of this dissertation will cover distinct themes explored by these artists such as: pain and trauma within displacement, the body as a tool of resistance, and the act of mourning as a step towards transformation. I will connect these themes to their biographical experiences as intricately tied and rooted to their critically conscious approaches. As shared from my own journey of coalition building, positionality is part of the diasporic experience, thus an ethnographic exploration of each artist becomes an integral component of the following chapters.

DISPLACEMENT AS A POINT OF DEPARTURE IN THE ART OF ALEJANDRO ARAUZ, OSVALDO RAMÍREZ CASTILLO, AND FRANCISCO FERNANDO GRANADOS

In this chapter, I examine the artistic practices of Alejandro Arauz, Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, and Francisco Fernando Granados, all of which come from Central America, to discuss how migration and displacement are at the centre of many artists' works within the diaspora. The artists in this chapter share a common migratory journey due to the U.S.'s involvement in Central American politics, its economic coercion, propaganda, and military force with an ultimate imperialist interest. Canada became a place of refuge for all three artists and their families, yet they are aware of settler colonial complicity within interventionist international affairs. All three families migrated to Canada around the same period, around the time following the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990s, as neoliberal hegemony spread across the Americas. It is no coincidence that many Central Americans fled economically precarious and politically violent lives at a time when neoliberalism had set foot over the continent.

I have chosen these artists as examples to reference the effects migration has placed over the aesthetic and thematic decisions of artists, particularly those who utilize the act of mark-making as an instrument of resistance and dissidence. By referencing their experiences of migration to Canada as children and adolescents, I dig into the underlying meaning behind Arauz's practice who uses his own body as a printmaking tool, Ramírez Castillo who references intergenerational trauma within his detailed intricate drawings, and Granados who activates the refugee body's agency and ability to overcome erasure with the act of mark making. Their experiences of loss and forced migration inform their artistic practices thus, they develop an

ongoing return through their work. Most importantly, what is emphasized in this chapter is their resiliency and capacity to defy conceptions of assimilation and subjectivity, and their ongoing questioning of the myth of multiculturalism in Canada.

The Printed Body: Alejandro Arauz

The Nicaraguan Revolution led by the left-wing Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to overthrow Somoza's dictatorship during the late 1970s led to its subsequent governing of the country from 1979 to 1990. Inspired by Augusto César Sandino who led a rebellion against the occupation of Nicaragua by the United States between 1927 and 1933, the hero's name, reputation, and admiration rippled throughout Latin America and the left-wing party adopted his name proudly. Sandino was a symbol of resistance, a guerilla fighter who was able to defeat the U.S.'s imperialist agenda and Nicaragua's pride spread throughout the region. Alejandro Arauz's mother participated in the literacy campaigns, during the early stages of the revolution, and was sent to Las Cuchillas, where she met Arauz's father in his family's coffee plantation farm at the edge of the Amazon Forest. Arauz's grandfather had set up a space within his plantation for farmers and employees to take lessons at a time when 75-90% illiteracy rates predominated in rural areas.

Alejandro Arauz was born in Managua in 1981 shortly after the FSLN victory and the artist recalls vivid childhood memories of the revolutionary Sandinista process. The music of Carlos Mejía Godoy[189], the landmark songs and chants of resistance, slogans, and colourful images of revolutionary silkscreen posters, the radio theatre broadcasting stories of defiance, the

[189] Carlos Mejía Godoy is a Nicaraguan musician, composer, and singer-songwriter who actively participated in the Sandinista Revolution, composing songs against the Somoza dictatorship.

anti-imperial newspaper *La Prensa* and *Barricada*[190] and the radio shows with pro-Sandinista stories of proletarians and campesinos against the imperial North. But Arauz also recalls this time as being one of upheaval and uncertainty. He remembers the tanks in front of their home and the long line-ups to receive food rations, his mother's distress, and his father's military training. This tumultuous experience led to the decision of fleeing the country and escaping the precarity involved during the revolutionary process.

During the mid 1980s, with its continued interventionist policies and tactics, the United States backed the Contras, a right-wing counter-revolutionary group that emerged after its victory. The Contras were trained at the border in Honduras to attack the revolutionary process. Enforced military listing was imposed within Nicaragua, and Arauz's father received military training to defend the revolution. His father would have been sent to fight in the frontlines, where people would lose their lives in the process, but instead fled to Canada. In Nicaragua, his father was a trained agricultural engineer who worked for an American sugarcane manufacturing company. Surveillance and threats against himself and his family, left him no choice than to find a way out, landing in Canada with a visitor's visa. Shortly after, Alejandro Arauz arrived in 1989 at the age of eight years old, with his two siblings and mother after his father established a home for his family in Montreal. Once the family reunited, his father claimed refugee status.

Even though his father wanted to leave Nicaragua, his mother resisted ever settling and refused to become a Canadian citizen for many years until finally accepting her fate of establishing roots with her growing children who formed families of their own in Canada. Alejandro Arauz's fathers' university credentials were never validated and had to instead work

[190] *Barricada* was the official publication of the FSLN during the Sandinista revolutionary period.

long hours at a factory for over 25 years to provide for the family. His mother became a stay-at-home parent and raised their three children. Once they settled in Kitchener Waterloo region in Ontario, the artist's family became involved with the Pentecostal Church, which had a stronghold of many Central American families during the 1990s. The dramatic change that came with migrating to Canada and living in government housing projects, confronting harsh winters, with language barriers and limited resources, and facing cultural differences, became a challenging adaptation process especially for those arriving with traumatic stories of survival.

The Arauz family, as did many others, found comfort in the church with a robust Latin American presence. The church became an anchor for many newcomer families to talk about the process of adaptation to Canada. It had over one hundred members and his father became a pillar of the church, opening other spaces of worship such as *La Hermosa*, *La Iglesia de Dios*, and *La Nueva Jerusalem,* spreading the gospel to other Latin American communities in Guelph, Hamilton, and London, Ontario. To recreate a sense of community and belonging, they would sing the gospel and read the bible in Spanish. They sang, shared familiar food, developed friendships, and attempted to reproduce a life they had left behind. The Arauz family shifted from a revolutionary stance in Nicaragua to an ecclesiastical one in Canada. Revolutionary slogans were replaced by religious songs, and their ideological convictions of a Sandinista Revolution changed to faith in the Church.

Family ties and the duality of being in-between two separate worlds (Nicaragua vs. Canada, Revolution vs. Church, community vs. individual) predominated in Alejandro Arauz's work at a very early stage in his career, using painting and drawing as a medium to communicate these sensibilities. The series of paintings entitled *Cantino* from 2008 is a clear reflection of his need to see familial representation of his cultural and family lineage onto canvas. Using collage,

photography, drawing, and painting, he depicts five portraits of individuals who are clearly related to him with similar features and postures. The word "Cantino" is an invented word claimed by the artist and is a reminder of his hybrid identity. By blending North and South together and claiming a non-U.S. label, "Can" *Canadian* and "tino" *Latino* – an identification marker that reflects the diasporic subject torn between two identities and two separate regions –

Fig. 6. © Alejandro Arauz, *Cantino*, collage and oil on canvas, 25 in x 125 in, 2008.

is a defiant one, not only within the history of Eurocentric oil painting portraiture but considers the differences between diasporic experience in the United States to that of Canada.

Arauz's parents in *Cantino,* pose as for a passport picture, frontal posture with direct eye contact directed towards the viewer. His siblings gaze, on the other hand, evade the camera as if avoiding a revelatory inscription of identification, while his own portrait is confrontational. A side posture looking and focusing on all those who are viewing his family at the far-right end of the series. The layered paintings composed of collaged images glued onto each portrait with thin gouaches of acrylic paint on its surface, offer hidden messages and histories. Brown skin, drips, and scars, all five portraits are staged on display yet only the artist will ever know what lies beneath each layer. This series is Arauz's initial attempt to explore a migratory process through family history and uprootedness. For Arauz, collage serves to build narratives, missing pieces that are tied to his collective memories of migration.

His title for the painting and woodcut, *Crossing* (2008), plays with the subjectivity and

Fig. 7. © Alejandro Arauz, *Crossing*, collage and oil on canvas, 45 in x 28 in, 2008.

scatteredness of memories. The artwork depicts a woman with three young children hanging onto her tightly as she crosses a body of water that covers her up to her waist, struggling to reach the shore. An immediate image association occurs when brown children and their mother cross a body of water. It is the Rio Grande with the North side of the border as its destination. Manipulating these preconceived assumptions, and choreographing a stage of migration, the artist reveals that in truth, this is a reproduction of a photographic image of his mother and siblings playing in a warm summer's day at a Canadian pool. Their photograph has been altered, collaged, painted over, and reprinted to present a different narrative, a sacrificed migratory journey to the North. Arauz entertains the idea of crossing the border –as heard by testimonies shared among church members– as a treacherous event, where his mother faces a difficult

Fig. 8. © Alejandro Arauz, *Crossing*, woodcut, 22 in x30 in, 2008.

journey in one that she becomes the protagonist saviour. Growing up within a community of refugees with many who did cross the border precariously and listening to the stories of trauma and survival of close friends, profoundly marked the artist. In truth, the artist and his family all travelled by plane, and he reveals a sense of guilt for not having this traumatic experience himself. As such, he intentionally replicates the image of the sacrificed and heroic depiction of migration, and challenges preconceived stereotypes by adopting it as his own.

The artist decided to study his undergraduate and graduate studies at both borders. First at the Canada/U.S. border at the University of Windsor for his BFA, and later at the U.S./Mexico border for an MFA at the Louisiana State University. This proximity allowed him to not only experience life at the epicenter of its conflict but access its people in migration. Living in Windsor allowed him to constantly cross the border and visit Mexican Town in Detroit, finding

familiar sounds, smells, tastes, and culture, an experience he did not grow up with in Kitchener Waterloo. On the other hand, while studying in Louisiana, the artist interviewed undocumented migrants who had experienced crossing the border illegally. They shared with him where to

Fig. 9. © Alejandro Arauz, *Border Exercise*, video still, 3 min, 2009.

access unguarded sites to cross freely. *Border Exercise* (2009) and *River Duality* (2009-10) are two video performances which he developed during this research process. Both allude to different migratory experiences.

In *Border Exercise*, Arauz arrives at a desolate, dry, and treacherous border between Mexico and the U.S. separated by a bob wire fence. He brings with him a lounge chair, two large water jugs, and his backpack. Wearing several layers, a cap and hoodie, he begins to stretch to prepare to jog along the border, moving back and forth. Mostly exercising on the Mexican side of the border, he slowly begins to perspire and removes clothing as he becomes warmer. Push-ups, lounges, weights, all become part of his repertoire of endurance, an hour of exercise to then rest on the lounge chair, to finally walk shirtless towards the South, leaving all his belongings behind him. This performance reverses the archetype process of migration and instead follows a path from North to South. Once again, inverting the narrative but this time referencing the stereotype of a better life in the North. The journey that the artist takes us on, is not necessarily a nostalgic navigation of migration, nor to necessarily emphasize the endurance needed, but to

claim defiance, to have an alternative outcome, a different observation, and intention, to move South. By switching the narrative, Arauz disrupts the North as a haven and instead proposes the South as a place of destination.

River Duality on the other hand posits the "wetback"[191] into a Canadian context and assimilates this derogatory harmful designation within its landscape. In the two-channel video performance, the artist swims in the Rio Grande between Mexico and the United States from darkness into light and on the other channel he swims in Grand River, a place he frequented with

Fig. 10. © Alejandro Arauz, *River Duality*, video still 1 hour performance, 2009/10.

[191] The derogatory term is used to refer to mostly Mexican and Central American migrants that enter the United States via the Rio Grande, swimming across the river and in the process, getting wet.

his family growing up in Kitchener Waterloo, from late afternoon into darkness. In both instances, he assumes the identity of the "wetback" crossing and positioning himself within a space of contestation, carrying a sealed plastic bag with his clothes to keep his belongings dry. This juxtaposition identifies the similitude in names of two vastly different landscapes, Rio Grande and Grand River, but most importantly it identifies a complicit association with Canada despite the physical distance from the border. The artist positions the "wetback" within a

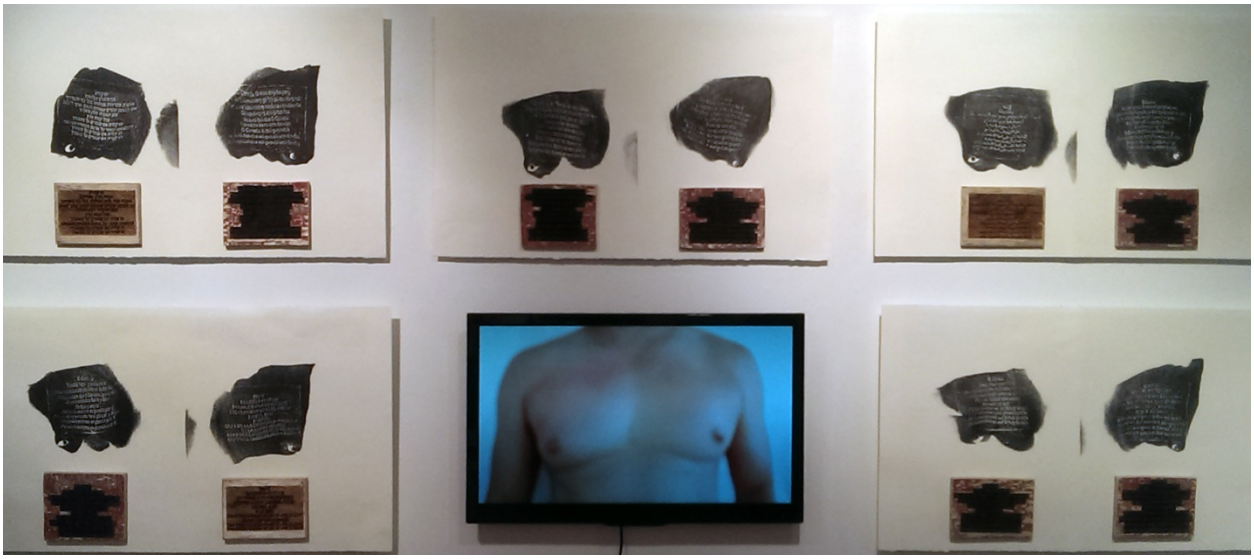

Fig. 11. © Alejandro Arauz, *Skin Anthem*, body pressed prints on paper, 22 in. x 30 in. Edition of 3 and 30-min video, 2013.

Canadian landscape, carrying his belongings/memories/culture/identity with him, and swimming into darkness, an unknown territory. *Border Exercises* and *River Duality* demonstrate Arauz's need to expand his medium to include gestural actions to form content and narrative of border thinking and aesthetics within the Canadian landscape.

As mentioned, Alejandro Arauz merges his printmaking practice with performance. For example, *Skin Anthem* (2013) is a series of body pressed prints on paper in which the artist has translated the Canadian national anthem, with the assistance of AI, into Spanish, Hindi, Ojibway,

Tagalog, Japanese, Hebrew, and Arabic. The words have been laser etched onto wood, pressed onto his chest, ink pressed/transferred onto paper, and exhibited as prints along the video of its

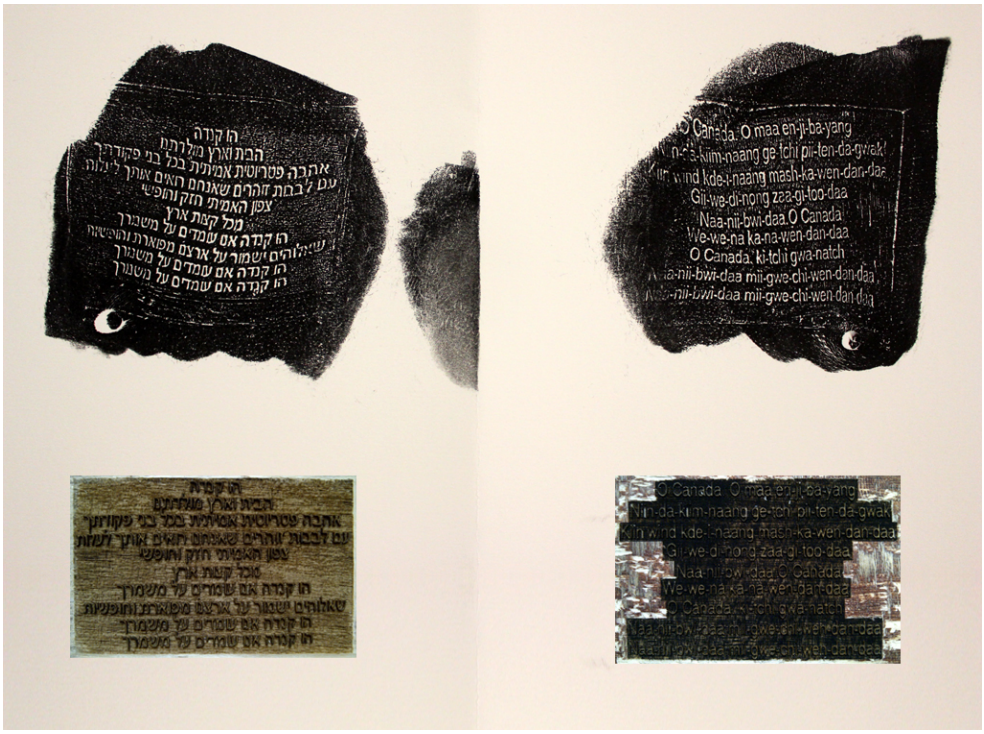

Fig. 12. © Alejandro Arauz, *Skin Anthem*, plates and prints, 2013.

performance. Arauz subverts the perception that anthems are fixed in stone, and offers to change, edit, translate, and add visuals to a national signifier. Three years after *Skin Anthem* was produced, the House of Commons passed a private member's bill that would replace the national anthem to a gender neutral one[192] opening a conversation around the possibility of changing out-dated patriarchal signifiers. The artist offers to challenge and rethink the role of anthems and their text within a multicultural state as well as alludes to Canada's imposition on Indigenous people with its policies of erasure by incorporating the language of Ojibway. Perhaps *Skin Anthem* touches on issues of integration more than of resistance. Many immigrants face this

[192] John Paul Tasker, "Senate Passes Bill to Make O Canada Lyrics Gender Neutral," *CBC News*, January 31, 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/anthem-bill-passes-senate-1.4513317.

conundrum, as they experience systemic racism yet feel gratitude for the opportunity of living in Canada. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui discusses the concept of internal colonialism of which she credits the Kataristas for their ideas formulated in the 1980s emanating from pioneering work developed by Fausto Reinaga in the 1960s.[193] In Arauz's *Skin Anthem*, the colonial words are etched onto brown skin –words repeated daily in schools across Canada–metaphorically pressed onto the surface of the immigrant/Indigenous body and fixed onto paper, internalizing its imposed coloniality. The constant conflicting juxtapositions present in Arauz's work present the challenges faced by diasporic subjects that continuously navigate fluid colonial spaces, subjects that are in constant adjustment and ambiguity, and who negotiate perpetual misrepresentation.

The labour involved in using his own brown body to print onto the page becomes an act of resistance. His body becomes the press and the means to disseminate ideas, images, ways of being, and of knowledge. In Véronica Gago's introduction *The Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui Principle: The Rebellion of Thought,* she explains that for Cusicanqui "to look with the whole body is to grope with the skin, to listen with the back, to sound out with the feet, because again it is a series of *gestures* that decenter the gaze…to move toward a multilateral notion of the image..."[194] By using the surface of his own skin to print on, Arauz's body becomes a device of activation, the "visual organ"[195] that reaches spaces of accessibility and understanding.

Arauz expands the intention of printmaking to also think about the alchemy and the ritual behind its process. Printmaking as an industry has been historically used to create multiples and to share information. However, Arauz searches to expand its potential and capabilities. He looks

[193] Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 63.
[194] Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa*, xviii-xix.
[195] Ibid., xix.

for the "poetic opportunities that it offers…for the principal element of printmaking is pressure"[196] which can be physical, emotional, and inevitably transferable. For him, the press and the process of printmaking are both as impactful and capable of resistance, including its aesthetics, its gesture, and the sensations conveyed. He inscribes his message metaphorically and literally. He embodies his country-of-origin, Nicaragua, a small state that goes against the mega empire of the United States, while his "othered" brown body is in constant dialogue with nationality and belonging.

Arauz explains that there are four areas in printmaking: planographic, stencil, relief, and serigraphy. Each one with its own aesthetic qualities, methodology, and alchemy and for him the range of all those processes speak to how he can etch memories onto the surface. In stone lithography for example, the principle of creating hydrophobic and hydrophilic areas is what casts the image, for the surface either retains or repels water. But he elucidates the possibility of etching and attracting both water and oil elements to create a hybrid image. Conceptually for him "the alchemy process in print becomes a metaphor, a parallel to think about the surface of the hybrid identity"[197] and has explored techniques within the method of relief to defy its properties to create images that deceive and instead appear as serigraphy. Similarly, altering preconceived ideas and assumptions, the narrative and image is altered to offer a hybrid identity within the realm of printmaking, a metaphorical strategy of resistance, nonetheless.

By exploring the multiplicity, manoeuvrability, versatility, and endless possibilities of print, Arauz pushes its boundaries and finds ways of building hybrid narratives that speak directly to the migrant experience. He draws on a plate or stone, he works from a photograph,

[196] Interview with Alejandro Arauz, September 13, 2022.
[197] Arauz interview.

scans images, collages historical and personal archives, digitally alters original prints, edits, re-prints, re-scans, shifts, to finally re-define the final transplantation, the final trace. Arauz embodies the print process leaving an impression, a lineage, and exposes the ripples of the migrant experience within a Canadian context.

Difficult Knowledge: Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo

Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo also arrived in Canada as a child in 1989, but from El Salvador with his two older sisters and parents. The small Central American country suffered a twelve-year Civil War fought between the right-wing government and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a coalition of left-wing organizations.[198] The war had devastating human rights violations with short and long-term effects that are still felt today. More than 75,000 people were killed and approximately 8,000 disappeared.[199] Paramilitary death squads and state security forces were backed by US administrations with resources, money, training, and military equipment. These counterinsurgencies were culpable of targeting non-combatant civilians and in fact the United Nations has estimated that the FMLN guerillas were only responsible for 5 percent of atrocities committed during the civil war while the rest were mainly counterinsurgent and U.S. backed government operations.[200] The war ended on January 16, 1992, with the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in Mexico City and a final ceasefire that promised a demobilization and reintegration of armed groups to society. This reintegration had its challenges and consequences. Men and women who had only known armed struggle were

[198] The coalition consisted of Farbundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), the National Resistance (RN), the Partido Comunista Salvdadoreño (PCS) and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC).
[199] Refer to Report on the UN Truth Commission on El Salvador: https://www.usip.org/publications/1992/07/truth-commission-el-salvador
[200] Ibid.

now left without other sources of income or professional prospects. This followed an uprising of drug cartels who began to recruit members that had military training from the civil war and led to future violence and precarity throughout El Salvador.

Three years before the peace accord, the eleven-year-old Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo and his family had claimed refugee status in Canada. His father had been targeted with death threats for not wanting to help the FMLN to use his land as a site of operations. The father was a landowner and benefited from his social class inheritance. He leaned politically towards the party which suited his financial interests the best, thus his interests were supported by the right wing conservative political party Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA).[201] His coffee *finca*[202] Santa Rita, in the eastern part of El Salvador, was burnt down after he did not help the FMLN when requested, and as a result he decided to seek refugee status in Canada. The artist's grandfather from his mother's side, despite also being a landowner from the Jucuapa-Usulutan region, did not share the same political convictions nor destiny and for helping guerilla fighters, he was killed by right-wing death squads.

Neither side of his family ever discussed their political inclinations or El Salvador's current state, either for fear of repercussions since it was extremely dangerous to voice opinions, or because of their own apathy and privilege as middle-class citizens despite being surrounded by an overarching politically tense environment. Ramírez Castillo's own political awareness did not surface until many years later when he attended art school, formerly known as Ontario College of Art and Design (O.C.A.D.) from 1998 to 2001. There he met the artist Oscar Camilo de las Flores, who had already graduated when he entered art school. De las Flores became a

[201] The Nationalist Republican Alliance.
[202] "Finca" is a land estate.

mentor as a fellow printmaker and compatriot, an artist who had been exploring the aftermath and trauma of the civil war in El Salvador for many years casting a deep impact and influencing the young artist's mind and imagery. Mesmerized by de las Flores' ability to capture narrative depictions of violence and trauma inflicted on the continent through intricate figurative drawings and lithographs, the young artist decided to follow this path and explore drawing and printmaking as a medium at art school. During this time, the young artist not only developed an aesthetic and a visual vocabulary of his own, but his memories of El Salvador began to surface on paper without a deeper understanding of its context. By the time Ramírez Castillo entered his master's program at Concordia University in Montreal in 2008, he felt the need to seek out fieldwork to understand where his haunting images were stemming from and search how to articulate these memories. He travelled to El Salvador visiting his old neighbourhood, massacre sites, collecting testimonials of people and family members, while realizing that his work was intimately tied to his personal and familial past.

Representations of mutilated injured bodies predominate in Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo's drawings. The suffered and injured body is represented on both sides of the spectrum, those who fall victims of oppression and those who perpetrate violence over them. Neither condemned nor pardoned by the Civil War's aftermath, Ramírez Castillo continuously unravels an unsettling past in El Salvador's recent history. Using watercolour, acrylic ink, and pencil crayons on translucent Mylar, the artist conjures images based on memories of the Civil War. Ramírez Castillo not only deals with the aftermath of a nation's past but an internal process of addiction recovery and of intergenerational trauma. Furthermore, he explores the many ways in which the body and the psyche have been affected by systems of oppression of imperialist and colonialist nature. By utilizing his impressive drawing skills, he juxtaposes Aztec and Pipil iconography, the

Salvadoran landscape, folklore and tradition, and flora and fauna, with the violence of gang culture and civil war, Western popular culture, religious iconography, newspaper clippings, ethnographic art, medical drawings, and neoliberal consumerism. His work posits a post-civil war narrative, where experiences of collective trauma, loss, and pain become trivialized, and naturalized into the national landscape, internalizing the violence as familiarly imminent and ordinary. The loss that is felt is not only of life, but also of dreams, ideals, and purpose, replaced by isolation, suffering, and negligence. However, the artist depicts hope within tremendous loss, through life that germinates from each crack and crevice with a multitude of colours of various flora that sprout from the site of despair.

Fig. 13. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *Scarecrow*, mixed media drawing, 2015.

The series of drawings entitled *Catastrophe, Memory, Reconciliation* (2015) depict this sense of hopelessness. For the series the artist created the works *Refugio/Refuge, Weight, Guardian,* and *Scarecrow* all with similar treatments and iconography, leaving large areas of negative space untouched with various images floating in mid-air. The black and white decapitated dog's head in *Scarecrow* (2015) is tied to three sticks. The dog barks and secretes black smoke from its breath, despite its presumed death, a bouquet of flowers with a rainbow of colours sprout out of the decapitated rabid dog's neck. The drawing *Weight* (2015) depicts an armed soldier who stands with the same three sticks holding his limbless upright torso, as he

Fig. 14. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *Weight*, lithography, 2015.

drags a rope with a large bundle of garbage. The bag exposes children's toys, their limbs,

Molotov bombs, single shoes, rifles, a mask, corn, and a conquistador helmet. The mixed media drawing *Refuge* (2015), seems to be a depiction of a broken-down roofless shack on a deserted island, enveloped by smoke with a nude child in a fetus position at the edge of the shack's

Fig. 15. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *Refuge*, colour pencils, acrylic ink, watercolour, 2015.

footings. The child is surrounded by a bed of colourful flowers native to El Salvador. The land on which the shack and the child rest radiate colours of all shades and intensities. Blue, purple, pink, orange, red, yellow, brown, and green, comfort and blend as they nurture the child that has

suffered abandonment and deep trauma. Another stray dog barks in the drawing of *Guardian* (2015). This time the dog has all four limbs intact, but its silent cry is projected with four

Fig. 16. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *Civil war blues in Soyapango city* (detail), mixed media drawing, 2010.

megaphones attached to its body on stilts. These unnerving images weigh heavily on the artist's sense of responsibility, who has the intention to make collective memory his duty while sharing testimonies of pain and loss. The outcry of unheard victims is projected onto a tired stray dog's back, symbolizing the need to never forget and find a space for healing within its madness while the same colourful flowers sprout out of megaphones. Despite the horrors and trauma, Ramírez Castillo finds his role within a legacy of silence, the violence he recalls as a child growing up in El Salvador and the hidden untold stories that were buried for fear, do no longer lie dormant, but

instead manifest onto paper where people and land project a loud permanent echoing voice.

Healing and regeneration do not come easily, nor does it manifest organically, quite the opposite. Images of dreadful frightening scenes based on historical accounts of horrific testimonies and archives surface abruptly and without censorship. In both series *Bestiaries* (2008-2009) and *Mad Soldiers* (2010-2012), the artist depicts the trauma on and by soldiers. Those who inflict pain over people are the same who also develop symptoms of severe mental health. Victimhood is mutual and cyclical. Post-traumatic stress disorder is not only developed

Fig. 17. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *Spring Cannibalism* (detail), colour pencils, acrylic ink, watercolour, oil paint on mylar, 2010.

by those who experience and witness intense violence but also those who cause it. Paramilitary death squads, insurgent and counterinsurgent groups, as well as gangs that developed post-civil

war,[203] also find a representational space within Ramírez Castillo's narrative, and their humanity is raw and visceral. Many of these soldiers are perpetrators of human rights abuses, drug trafficking, prostitution, and violent crimes. These gang members developed in the U.S. and spread throughout Canada, a generation of Salvadorans and Central Americans who suffered the long-term effects of the Civil War. The images tell a story, not only specific to the region, but to a universal common chronicle of the effects of war and violence, of U.S. imperialism, and the ongoing search for spaces of healing and comfort among collateral damages of war and difficult knowledge.

Ramírez Castillo feels he does not belong within a larger Canadian art context.[204] His aesthetic choices and narratives about the traumas of war do not fit within contemporary Canadian art canons and he recognizes that his work has been overtly exoticized, misinterpreted, sensationalized, and misrepresented by mainstream Canadian art circuits and critics, acknowledging that he might have more in common with diasporic artists in the U.S. than in Canada. The artist has lived in all major cities and despite having several writers and critics review and analyze his work, it has not been situated in a space of understanding in either Montreal, Vancouver, or Toronto. For example, the Montreal-based James D. Campbell wrote for the Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art the review titled *Hatching Furies: Auguries of War and Witchcraft in the Art of Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo*. Its references to European witchcraft, monstrosity, unholiness, medieval canons, mythology, sorcery, and apocalyptic narratives dismisses the fact that Ramírez Castillo's oeuvre is not necessarily an allegorical or mythical

[203] MS-13. Mara (gang), Salvatrucha (street-tough Salvadorans), MS-13 (M is the 13th letter of the alphabet). MS-13 is an extremely violent gang founded in Los Angeles in the 1980s by immigrants from El Salvador. Former paramilitary members of the civil war joined MS-13 to protect themselves from Mexican gangs that existed at the time in the U.S. MS-13 has become a powerful and extremely violent gang that has over 10,000 members in the U.S. and over 50,000 in Central America.
[204] Interview with Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo, October 3, 2022.

account. In fact, mythopoeia, as denoted by D. Campbell, is far from the artist's mind when viewing archival documentary photography, visiting memorial sites of genocide, and reading testimonials of survivors of the civil war in El Salvador. D. Campbell finds connections to twentieth and sixteenth century European artists George Grosz and Hieronymous Bosch respectively, prescribing that Ramírez Castillo's work "drives a stake through the heart of some sacred and not-so sacred orthodoxies."[205] While these Eurocentric references might have been a source for Ramírez Castillo during his early formative years as an art student, there are several others that have cast a much deeper impact on the artist and who are all too often ignored by Canadian art critics and writers.

Connections can be found in other sources that speak to his geo-political positionality to the Global South such as the most obvious being *Los tres grandes del muralismo*[206]*,* Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco. With Siquieros's mural *War Victims* at the Palacio de Bellas Artes and his painting *Echo of a Scream* (1937) Ramírez Castillo would have seen the potential of the human figure as a vessel to portray pain and suffering poignantly and viscerally at a young age during his formative years at O.C.A.D. In addition, the Ecuadorian Oswaldo Guayasamín, who also captured mass human suffering of the twentieth century, explored a common and familiar, if not aesthetic, thematic exploration. Guayasamín also depicted pre-Columbian forms, was inspired by folk art, Christian iconography, and developed a style of his own to express the sorrow and pain of his people. Guayasamín's skeletal flattened figures with mask-like faces haunt with desolation and desperation as do many of Ramírez Castillo's affect visceral drawings.

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[205] Campbell**,** 2**.**
[206] The three great Mexican muralists.

The artist claims he has been shaped mostly by Central American and Chicanx artists such as Salvadoran contemporaries Mauricio Kabistan, Ernesto Bautista, Melissa Guevara, and Crack Rodriguez with their collective The Fire Theory; the Mexican artist Damián Flores; and the Guatemalan artists Manuel Chavajay Moralez as well as Regina José Galindo. His inspirations with Central America are largely ignored for North American audiences and writers, despite its proximity and hemispheric ties. Poet Roque Dalton and writer Salvador Salazar Arrué

Fig. 18. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *My tyrant, my protest, my myth* (detail), acrylic ink, colour pencil, oil paint on mylar, 60 in x 62.5 in, 2012.

are Salvadoran intellectuals who have marked a place in the artists' imagery, both developing styles and modes of recalling the hardships of life in El Salvador. Unfortunately, these links have not been made in the dozens of reviews of the artist's work and there are yet to be scholarly essays that discuss his oeuvre and connections to place.

While war artists from Europe such the often-referenced Spanish artist Francisco Goya and his *Disasters of War* mentioned by D. Campbell and others to describe Ramírez Castillo's practice might be of relevance, the influence of art south of the border is all too often neglected and ignored. Hence, Ramírez Castillo's frustration regarding misrepresentation and trivialization of his practice and artistic subject formation is constant and bitter. The artist speaks to the power of memory rather than myth. His master technique and skill cannot be denied, yet the resilience that is captured within all his work, is all too often dismissed. The historical and geo-political context of the war and the U.S.'s responsibility over this conflict is also overshadowed by the aftermath of the Civil War, despite his attempt to unmask its history. For this, the artist is

Fig. 19. © Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, *Shipwreck in El Espino* (detail), colour pencils, acrylic ink, watercolour, charcoal, pastel, coffee, 2019.

constantly referencing archival newspaper clippings and books on the civil war in El Salvador, such as the documentation of photographer Jean Louis Clarinod and journalist Mark Danner.

Preoccupied by the allegory of war by Canadian writers when referencing the work of Ramírez Castillo, the frustration lies within the forgotten element that real people live and die, persist, and continue to resist despite the violence inflicted. This aspect is witnessed within the work, a testament to difficult knowledge that must be exposed and healed by its people within El Salvador as much as in diaspora.

Another writer who discusses Ramírez Castillo's work, Megan Bradley, points to the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano as an inspiration for the artist. Perhaps due to his proclaimed book *Open Veins of Latin America* which describes the uneven developmentalist strategies of world markets exposing systemic dependencies and imperialist interests of the North. The problem lies in the fact that she neglects to mention the source of "annihilation, rape, pillage, and war"[207] and those responsible. The U.S. 's intervention in Central America in its efforts to expand neoliberal economies globally and Canada's complicity,[208] sets the stage for the ongoing violence and migration. Instead, the focus for Bradley lies within the monstrosity, the unfathomable, portrayed as foreign and something that happens elsewhere.

Ramírez Castillo's images pertain to a story that translates perfectly in a territory that has suffered genocide and violence of its own with Indigenous peoples in Canada. Furthermore, the rise of fascism percolates throughout the Northern hemisphere and its people are not immune to its violence. Ramírez Castillo's work seems even more pressing and relevant at a time when Canada seeks to remediate its settler relationship with Indigenous people and find spaces of reconciliation. Intergenerational trauma is far too familiar to Indigenous communities and Ramírez Castillo shares the need for collective memory of difficult knowledge. He is inspired by

[207] Megan Bradley, *Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo* (Yves Laroche Galerie d'art catalogue, 2013), 8.
[208] Please refer to Tyler Shipley.

the work of artists such as Kent Monkman, Rebecca Belmore, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, and Annie Pootoogook who shape how this can be accomplished through art. It is within this space of familiarity and allyship that artists of the diaspora such as Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo can see themselves fulfill a role of resistance within a larger discourse in Canadian art history, for his and other stories that share narratives of trauma, violence, and migration do not grow within a silo and are in fact closely tied to systems and genocidal profits of the North. For the artist, the act of mark-making captures more than just context, it provides stories of survival, endurance, resilience, and the ability to overcome hardship to reach spaces of healing.

Who Claims Authenticity?: Francisco-Fernando Granados

Guatemala suffered a devastating civil war from 1960 to 1996. The right-wing government of its time caused widespread human rights violations in favour of foreign economic interests, especially of corporations such as the American United Fruit Company. Corrupt government culprits with aid of the U.S. state government, led to what is considered today to be a genocide against the Mayan population, and imposed a series of dictatorships to rid of equitable land reforms in the region. Prior to the United States-backed coup d'état in 1954, which resulted in a military regime with various right-wing dictators to follow, Guatemala had gone through a revolution also called the Ten Years of Spring between 1944 to 1954. It was a period of social, political, and agrarian reforms that aimed to favour locals who had been dispossessed by prior labour regulations and ruthless police states. After a pro-democracy movement led by university students and labour organizations that forced the dictator Jorge Ubico to resign, Juan José Arévalo won the elections and adopted a popular government that implemented a moderate program of social reforms, including a literacy campaign and a free

elections process.

In 1951, the progressive military leader, Jacobo Árbenz was elected and followed Arévalo's social justice mandate, who in addition expropriated large landholdings to redistribute them to agricultural workers, many of which were of Indigenous background, dispossessed since the Spanish Conquista. Fundamentally, these social reforms that placed local and Indigenous rights at the forefront, ran against U.S. foreign economic interests and in turn –as did in other Latin American countries– intervened and played a crucial role in the Guatemalan Civil War between 1960 and 1996, with its counterinsurgency military aid and U.S. intelligence operations.

The artist Francisco Fernando Granados was born eleven years before the armed conflict ended. His father came from a working-class family who went to university to become a psychiatrist working in the public mental health system. His mother studied accounting but became a full-time stay at home mother raising two children during the last decade of the Civil War in Guatemala City. Along countless others, the family had suffered the disappearance of an uncle and other family members who had also fled into exile. There were over 200,000 people killed according to the U.N.-backed Commission for Historical Clarification titled "Guatemala: Memory of Silence," of which most were of Mayan descent, and 93 percent of human rights violations were caused by state forces and military groups aided by the U.S. government with training of officers in counterinsurgency techniques. An overarching fear resulted in a deafening silence within the family. Neither of his parents nor close family members were involved in political activism. Despite not understanding the gravity of the political and social tensions they lived under, Francisco Fernando Granados knew from an early stage in his life that there were

certain things that could not be said nor discussed, for "they"[209] were listening and watching. He spent his childhood and formative teenage years without a deep understanding of the context of the Civil War and the atrocities that were being committed around him.

Granados did eventually suffer the inevitable consequence of displacement, when one of his father's patients was targeted for having paramilitary connections. Granados's father did not disclose his patient's whereabouts and therefore was threatened for an entire year suffering surveillance, receiving threatening telephone calls, and finally coerced with Molotov cocktails thrown to their home, which resulted in the family's decision to flee.[210]

The family left Guatemala to the United States with a tourist visa and claimed refugee status in Canada the day after arriving in Seattle. Luckily, they arrived five months before 9/11 which led to the closing of borders, increasing deportations, and a resurgence in racism. If they had fled after 2002, the Third Safe Country Agreement, a law adopted between Canada and the U.S., would have forced them to claim status within a country known for routinely detaining asylum seekers from Central America and for incarcerating them in cruel isolating prisons. His parents believed that immigration policies in Canada were humane in comparison, therefore, they decided to continue to move north of the border.

As constituted by the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an individual must explicate and prove their fear of persecution. Their status was contingent on the authenticity and plausibility of their story. Their ability to narrate their experience in credible ways, is how the artist and his family had to prove their status to stay in

[209] "They" meant an undercover surveillance system that threatened basic human rights of people.
[210] Interview with Francisco-Fernando Granados, November 15, 2022

Canada. Canadian immigration denied their first refugee asylum request but were granted a rarely given opportunity, a judicial review process. A second hearing granted them asylum on March 17, 2004. The entire process lasted three years and Granados posits this experience as traumatizing as the fear tactics they experienced while living in Guatemala City.[211] Granados explains that their eligibility during the hearing felt more like a criminal trial than a "certification of migratory status."[212] He remembers being encouraged to speak of his traumatic past in order to lend credibility to his family's claim for the Immigration and Refugee Board. Granados quite poignantly denounces and reminds us that "refugee trauma must be manifested and made official in order to be authenticated."[213] The inquisitorial nature of the immigration process involved hours of consecutive interrogations, lasting weeks on end, with the precariousness of deportation as evidenced by thousands of other refugees who did not share nor face Granados family's immigration outcome.

Language often falls short to explain the difficulties of the refugee experience, one that has endured pain, uncertainty, loss, displacement, isolation, and trauma. It is perhaps one that can never be understood by those who have not faced precarious nation-state status and Granados knows well the inability of words to communicate this incomprehensible experience. Despite its shortcomings, the artist balances both the word and the visual to create spaces of dialogue, writing critical essays and reviews while pursuing a conceptual and abstract artistic practice to compensate for the unfathomable. Fundamentally, understanding the demand for linear narrativity to claim status within the nation-state, Granados challenges its limitations to discuss the state of dispossession within his writing. In an arduous effort to defy its linear inefficiencies,

[211] Interview, Granados.
[212] Granados 2010, 32.
[213] Ibid.

his artistic practice becomes abstract, leaving no space for narration.

The Ballad of _____ *B* (2013), explores a dispossession not only of land but of narrative, where the refugee subject has been literally stripped of its own story. Granados explains that this performance is based on an experience where he granted an interview to the *Vancouver Sun* at the age of eighteen years old for an article entitled "Climbing Mount Canada" to archive the experience of leaving Guatemala to Canada. He later discovered that the interview had been appropriated word-for-word into a fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary exercise form for an ESL *Canadian Snapshots: Raising Issues* textbook targeted for newcomers to Canada. Neither granting permission to use his interview for this purpose, nor anticipating such an overt appropriation, Granados responds with a silent performance rather than a cry of protest. In Ricky Varghese's understanding of his artwork, he explains the dispossession as a scene of spatial and textual displacement "across the geopolitical (from Guatemala to Canada) as a subject seeking refugee status and across the textual (from an interview to an ESL exercise) as an object of study used for the purposes of linguistic training"[214] but emphasizes the temporal displacement that also occurs. The interview was conducted favourably for the settler colonial nation-state of Canada and has been objectified outside of its "original spatial and temporal context."[215] This in effect, manipulates the linear narrative by dismissing the refugee subject, and proclaiming a benevolent saviour identification, with a final utilitarian value for the nation state. Thus, the trauma inflicted on the refugee subject is economic, political, spatial, and temporal in nature. Granados applies this knowledge to his artistic practice to create work that speaks to this subordinate imposed condition, inverting, transforming, and repossessing it, resisting and

[214] Ricky Varghese, "Living in the Future Anterior: Trauma and Autobiography in the Work of Vincent Chevalier and Francisco-Fernando Granados," *Reconstruction* (Bowling Green) 15, no. 1 (2015): 11.
[215] Ibid.

defying imposed classifications.

The Ballad of _____ *B* (2013) is an hour-long multimedia installation which was performed at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. His colleagues Manolo Lugo and Maryam

Fig. 20. © Francisco Fernando Granados, *The Ballad of* _____ *B,* 2013. Performance for the camera. Photo by Manolo Lugo.

Taghavi were on stage along with the artist. Forty chairs faced the centre of the stage in two rows lined up alongside the front and back facing each other. The performers read out loud the lines of a script, repeating its lines in the style of a ballad. The paragraphs were redistributed "in the lyrical form referenced by the title with its quatrains of alternating eight and six-syllable lines."[216]

[216] Francisco-Fernando Granados, "The Ballad of _____B," *Canadian Theatre Review* 162 (2015): 43.

The text was projected on the screen behind the stage with the fill-in-the-blanks textbook while the performers introduced arbitrary words. With this work, the positionality of the refugee body is situated conceptually in the context of performance art in Canada. Its ambiguity is its strength. Granados explains quite clearly that when "the dominant paradigms of nationalism and capitalism fail to recognize the humanity of those who are not legible within structures, this kind of recognition provides not only an important political statement, but a necessary means of validation."[217]

Granados lived in Burnaby and New Westminster, two Vancouver suburbs during his teenage and formative years. He went to a community college, in South Vancouver where he attended the program for three years receiving a fine arts program diploma at Langara College. He later attended Emily Carr University of Art and Design while working part-time as an immigrant and refugee youth community development training facilitator to finance his art education for the following three years. This extensive foundation led to pursue a master's in visual arts at the University of Toronto, captivated by the prospects of working alongside performance women artists Lisa Steele, Johanna Householder, and Tanya Mars. Throughout this time, his interests in art were heavily linked to critical race, queer, feminist, and post-colonial theory. Along his artistic practice, Granados followed a critical writing pursuit and both practices fed and nourished each other. This other form of mark-making allowed him to critique the settler colonial nation-state of Canada with its multicultural myth, to counterbalance the abstract aspects of his artistic oeuvre.

In his essay entitled *Reciprocal Gazing: Reflection of an Ungrateful Refugee*, Granados

[217] Francisco-Fernando Granados, "Reciprocal Gazing: Reflections of an Ungrateful Refugee," *Fuse Magazine* 331 (2010): 32.

speaks directly to a system that perpetually invisibilizes its racism and inequities through a "one-directional gaze…way of looking."[218] Furthermore, he explicates the ongoing systemic white supremist project through the expansion of neoliberalism that has created the conditions for displaced individuals. He states that the "economic privilege of the tourist depends directly on the oppressive social and economic conditions that force many people in developing countries to flee. Refugees who reach countries of asylum are systemically kept in subordinate positions, continuing the legacy of European and North American colonialism."[219] This statement of course, stems from lived experience of his own.

It wasn't until Granados lived in Canada that he developed a political awakening and realized the context from which his family had fled. He describes this awakening in an interview where his social consciousness developed through the discovery of Rigoberta Menchú's mémoire[220] where he read about the unimaginable atrocities committed even after the supposed peace agreement had promised to end the armed conflict in Guatemala. At the time, his mother urged him to volunteer at a human rights organization in Vancouver, where he spent a year volunteering and translating various testimonies of survivors. This experience unsettled and marked his understanding of the aftereffects of the Civil War in Guatemala. He spent a year writing letters and participating in lobbying campaigns demanding Canadian elected government officials denounce human rights violations in Central America. His commitment towards human rights and activism continued but broadened conceptually through his artistic practice. For Granados, there is an underlying methodology and a need to portray the erased refugee body in

[218] Ibid., 31.
[219] Ibid.
[220] For Francisco Fernando Granados it is important to highlight that the English translated title of Menchú's memoir is racist. He would rather it be translated as it has been written, *My Name is Rigoberta Menchú and This is How My Consciousness Was Born.* Rigoberta Menchú is a K'iche' Guatemalan human rights activist, feminist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

his artistic practice –the body that has been erased, dismissed, and invisibilized– which is a space of protest that cannot be found within linear narrativity or text.

The self-portrait photograph entitled *portrait (I <3 Canada)* (2012), depicts Granados wearing a white tourist "I (heart) Canada" t-shirt. He is looking away from the camera and his eyes are covered with a red banner blocking his view. The heart is cut-out from the t-shirt, and his bare chest is fully exposed through the heart shape extraction. This erasure is an act of mark-making, but one that includes the imposition and extraction. In an interview, Granados describes that the portrait is "racially ambiguous, conventionally masculine…interested in refusing identification through the line obscuring my eyes in the photograph. I was trying to find different strategies for making something visible while holding something back."[221] In this case, Granados names invisibility explicitly. He blames racist systemic extractivist structures while tracing the shape of absence. The mark is not necessarily literal but is delineated through its omission.

This representation follows the legacy of politicized aesthetic practices of the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Artists who fought to gain collective visibility for women, queer, and people of colour.[222] But his intentions are not literal, abstract, nor gestural. Granados explains that to honor the legacy fought for representation by previous generations, contemporary artists must abstract themselves. During a time when overt nation and corporate state identification practices through social media and surveillance are used to control population, artists must conduct alternative forms of resistance. The strength and activism in his art practice lies within the degrees of

[221] See Christian Camacho-Light, "Interview with Francisco-Fernando Granados," *Pelican Bomb*, June 1, 2016, http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2016/abstracting-the-self-an-interview-with-francisco-fernando-granados.
[222] Ibid.

Fig. 21. © Francisco Fernando Granados, *portrait (I <3 Canada)*, 2014. Performance for the camera. Photo by Manolo Lugo.

abstraction, by naming accountability of the "fuzzy multicultural tropes"[223] embedded in a

[223] Ibid.

Canadian system. This becomes a political stance. Using his own body[224] Granados traces territories of erasure, denounces privilege, disputes authenticity as absolute, and redefines abstraction as a space of resistance.

Fig. 22. © Francisco Fernando Granados, *refugees run the seas…*, 2014-2016. Created with technical support of Kurt Kraler and Manolo Lugo. Installed as part of Nuit Blanche Toronto in 2015. Image courtesy of the City of Toronto.

refugees run the seas... (2014) is a spin on pop culture with a geopolitical statement. Granados uses the format of a billboard to imagine migrant and refugee spaces of representation, one that is not often granted to this demographic. Granados was invited to produce this artwork for Toronto's Nuit Blanche in 2015 by the Spanish curator Agustin Pérez Rubio.[225] The sky-blue

[224] Granados describes his own body as being racially ambiguous, which cannot be defined by a singular ethnicity or situated in a place. It can be perceived as privileged as he has also mentioned he can "pass as white."
[225] Nuit Blanche is the City of Toronto's all-night celebration of contemporary art. The event takes place on the first weekend of October from 7pm to 7am. Agustin Pérez Rubio curated *HTOUS/HTRON The New Coordinates of the*

billboard with white letters reads “refugees run the seas cause we own our own votes.” The text adopts the last line from Wyclef Jean's rap in Shakira's 2006 song *Hips Don't Lie* and changes the word “boats” to “votes”. The choice of words is not only significant due to its message, but because Granados uses a mass media platform for marketing purposes, with the lyrics of a popular and iconic Colombian artist of Lebanese and Spanish ancestry, who has become herself a pop star in the North American music industry. The message is clear, and it is directed to U.S. imperialism and neoliberal nation-states which have resulted in a sea of migrants and refugees who have had to flee their land. Granados’ message reaches a wide and all-encompassing audience using mass media, considering that the billboard is displayed during a night when over a million people from Toronto and out of town visit and seek to view the artwork.[226]

The artist’s voice resonates loud and clear, a refugee voice, who has found a platform of resistance to disrupt a Canadian landscape that has attempted to erase him. The “vote” becomes a possibility for changing an outcome, even for those who cannot claim citizenship. There are no borders marked on the blue sky during the darkest hour of the night, nor are there defined borders over the ocean. An ocean that has witnessed forced migrations. Borders metaphorically do not exist within this landscape and therefore cannot maintain, restrain, nor incarcerate displaced bodies. Instead, Granados offers the unthinkable possibility of agency for the displaced, one in which subjects decide their own destiny.

Granados’ family’s survival and admittance as refugee claimants depended on the need to send a translatable message for a Canadian state reception. This message had to fulfill the

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Americas with Joaquin Torres Garcia’s *Inverted America* as inspiration, inverting the Pan-American peninsula, removing boundaries, and introducing a new system that subverts geo-political ideologies.

[226] Raazia Rafeek, “Kick up your heels and paint the town white,” *Excalibur*, October 5, 2015, https://www.excal.on.ca/arts/2015/10/05/kick-up-your-heels-and-paint-the-town-white/.

expectations and categorization of a refugee claimant, and the statement had to be delivered in a linear, narrative credible way. The artist's response to this imposition of labeling, is a refusal to

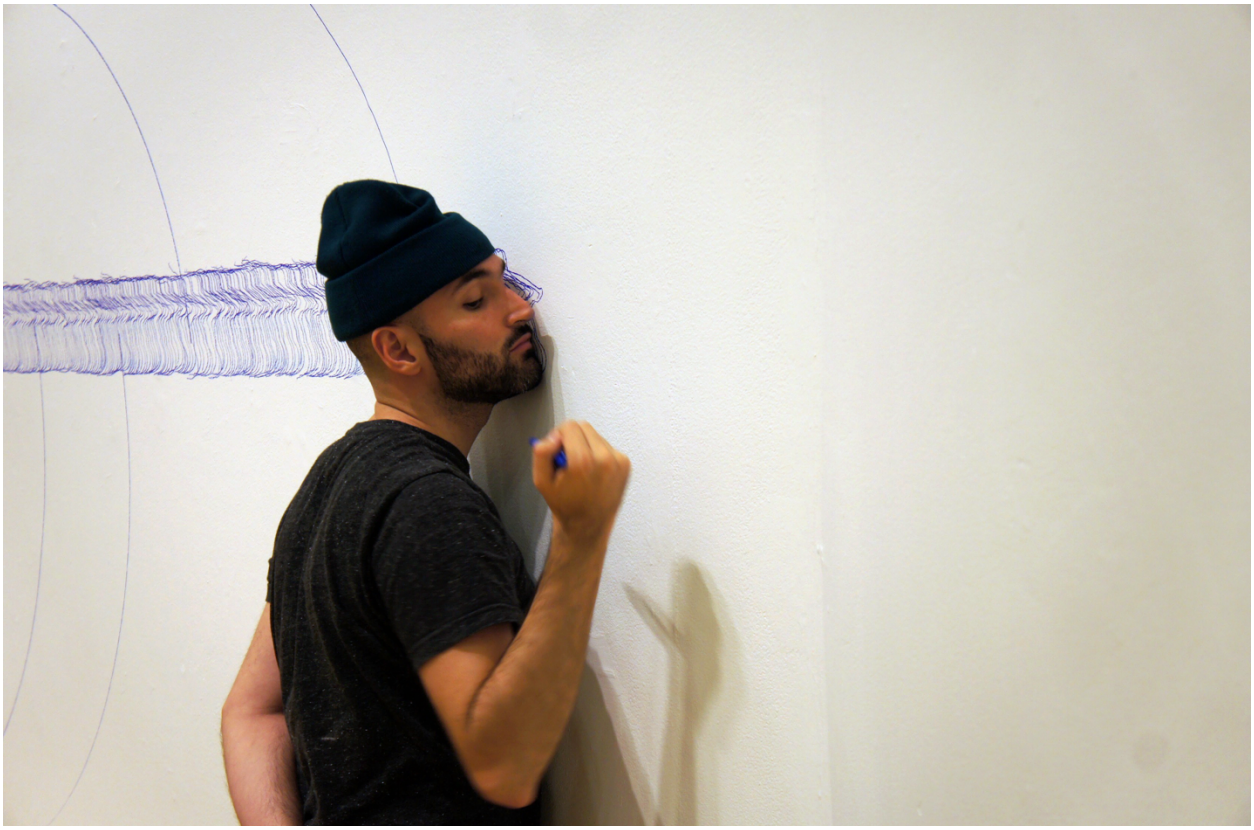

Fig. 23. © Francisco Fernando Granados, s*patial profiling...*, 2010-18. Photo by Rob Modafferi.

act linearly. Instead, it is an act of resistance to not reproduce narrativity within his own artistic practice. His performance-time-based practice, as stated by Granados himself, has become a "radical refusal to narrate" while concurring with the performance scholar and writer Diana Taylor who understands that performance functions as an epistemology. Taylor delineates performance as an "embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices"[227] and Granados clearly uses performance to offer new ways of knowing while also challenging

[227] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

authenticity. By adopting the strengths and limitations of his own body Granados provides depth of insight into a civic understanding of a system that perpetually casts him invisible. An example of his efforts to portray this structural deficiency through performance can be seen in the case of his work entitled *Spatial Profiling* (2013) exhibited at various locations with its first iteration as part of Vancouver's LIVE 2011 biennale.

The work consists of creating an abstract horizontal pattern in which he outlines his side-profile with a marker by taking small steps forward and tracing an endless undecipherable cell-like contour of profiles onto the gallery wall. As Carrie Dawson suggests, the performance "can be understood to reflect on the increasingly brutal process and increasingly invasive technologies designed to fix migrant identities."[228] For Granados, performance art has not only become a vehicle to overcome power dynamics within systemic forms of erasure but is also a way to directly preserve bodily traces of the refugee subject onto the structures themselves, through the act of mark-making. To embody the act of resistance, the refugee as a social conscious instigator, surrounded by a symbolic jail-like image representative of the structures that attempt to retain its subjectivity, manifests without the need of words.

After a decade, things began to shift for Granados, and he no longer could push the boundaries of his own body to perform such arduous long hour performance shifts. He returned to the first medium he ever explored as a young art student, drawing. Although he has never ceased to use the strategy, today Granados' art practice has evolved to focus solely on mark-making through the medium of digital drawing. His artworks are rendered within the form of pure abstraction and are tied again to authorship, agency, and recognition. With the open-ended

[228] Carrie Dawson, "The Refugee Body of Knowledge: Storytelling and Silence in the work of Francisco-Fernando Granados," *Topia* 29.29 (2013): 61.

query of who claims abstraction, Granados uses Modernist abstract strategies to interrogate

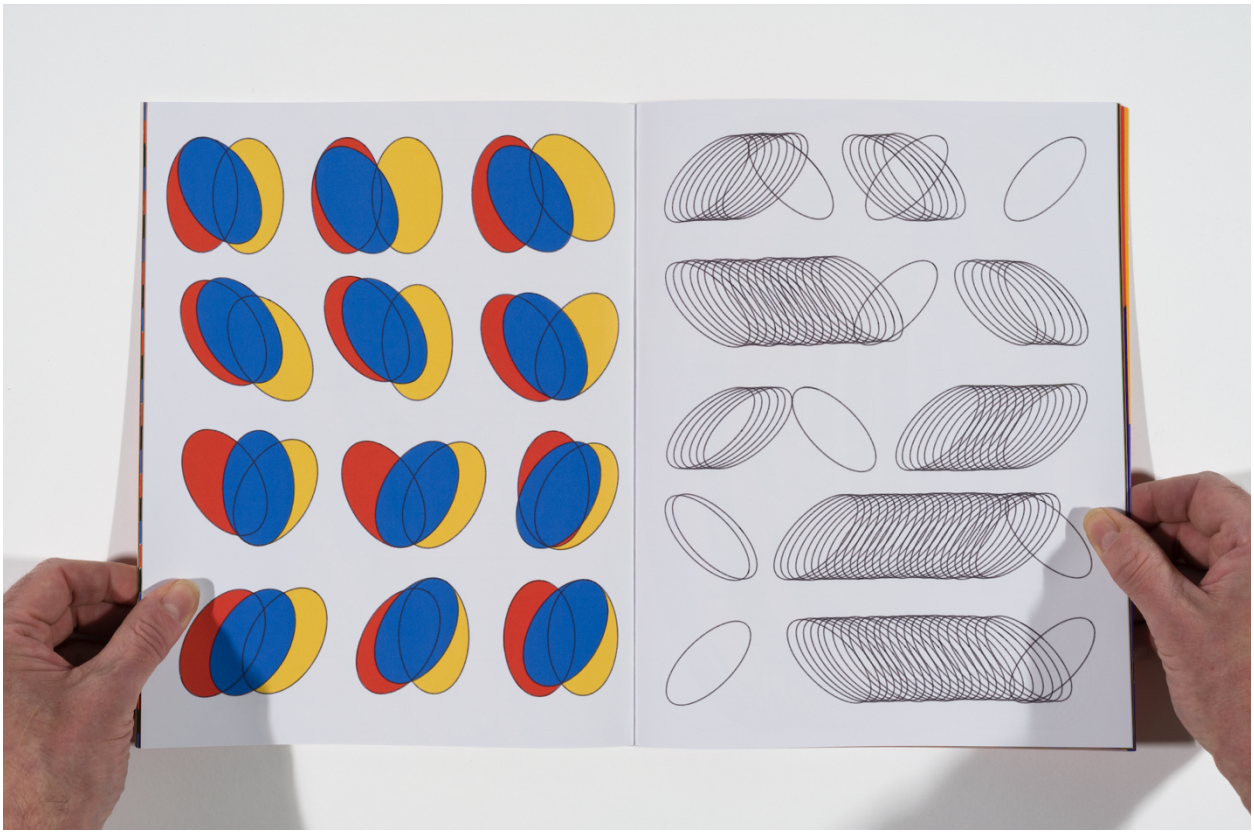

Fig. 24. © Francisco-Fernando Granados, *co-respondance- Version II*, mail art publication, 54 pages, limited edition of 200 copies, 8.5 x 11 inches, 2020. Photo by Guy L'Heureux.

twentieth-century claims of autonomy, purity, and sovereignty over line colour, and form.[229] Once again, authorship is challenged through his ongoing quest to shift linear forms of narrativity to rather understand the multi-layered complexities of geo-political bodies and spaces within Western art. His questioning defies colonial forms of understanding art history, its worth, and its meaning. Abstraction cannot be claimed nor assigned to a specific culture or geography, for abstraction has been used in Indigenous civilizations across the Global South and

[229] See Simon Fraser University Galleries, Teck Gallery, *Francisco-Fernando Granados: Who Claims Abstraction*, January 20, 2023, to February 10, 2024, https://www.sfu.ca/galleries/teck-gallery/past1/who-claims-abstraction-.html.

appropriated by Western and European artists during the 20th century.[230] Granados's search to challenge Western epistemologies led him to explore performance art as a space of epistemological resistance and a methodological lens to rethink the canon and he continues this quest today through questioning abstraction as a strategy.

Conclusion

Struggles against forms of oppression and violence do not occur in a silo and as Jennifer Ponce de León has argued in her book *Another Aesthetics is Possible*, "a constellation of connected histories form distinct socio cultural formations" demonstrate "how contemporary movements and uprisings and their allied artistic practices form part of an antisystem tendency that is rooted in transnational class struggles."[231] Ponce de León analyzes the concept of aesthetics in terms of the ways ideology structures perception, which is the framework I have adopted throughout this dissertation thus far. But I go beyond, to also include connected histories that manifest within the diaspora. For example, within the work of Arauz, Ramírez Castillo, and Granados and the various strategies adopted of resistance. In their case, the act of mark-making which makes their struggle evident and powerful and their aesthetic of resistance noticeable. To place importance within a space of absence and erasure. In diaspora their migratory experiences, political awareness, and geopolitical positionality manifests publicly through their art, as they critique hegemonic power structures, imperial and neoliberal ideological frameworks, and systems of representation and identification through the strategy of mark-making. Mark-making becomes not only a tool to delink and retell a narrative that has either been misinterpreted, mis-

[230] Pablo Picasso being the most obvious example.
[231] Jennifer Ponce de León, *Another Aesthetic is Possible: Art of Rebellion in the Fourth World War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), 15.

constructed, or appropriated, but to-re-configure its marginal space of existence within the diaspora to one of presence and empowerment. They deconstruct modes of recognition, satirize forms of multiculturalism, and subvert colonial cultural productions that not only sideline but exoticize and obscure their relevance. All three become co-conspirators with the collective mission to mark the wound visible.

ABSENCE AND PRESENCE: THE BODY AS A COMBATIVE TOOL IN THE ART OF CLAUDIA BERNAL, HELENA MARTIN FRANCO, AND MARIA EZCURRA

In this chapter, I analyze how three women artists use their own bodies or the absence of their subaltern diasporic bodies to contest coloniality within a predominantly white settler colonial state that renders them invisible. As Latin American diasporic subjects, Claudia Bernal, Maria Ezcurra, and Helena Martin Franco challenge Eurocentric Western epistemologies and aesthetics, and dismantle subjectivity to offer their own form of identification. By understanding the effects of coloniality of gender, they use their own bodies as a tool to combat patriarchal and oppressive narratives. These artists clearly demonstrate an aesthetics of resistance, proposing strategies of radicality, creating relationships of solidarity with Indigenous women, and use their in-between diasporic state as a strength and as a combative tool.

While I continue to investigate biographical journeys of each artist, this chapter includes artists who migrate under completely different circumstances than those artists that come from Central America in chapter three. They arrive as adults and adopt Canada as their home to study and develop their professional artistic careers. Nonetheless, the countries they leave behind (Colombia, Argentina, and Mexico) share histories of imperial intervention, nation state corruption, violence, and collective trauma, all which manifest in their work and how they position themselves within that history. Their subaltern presence impedes representation but Bernal, Ezcurra, and Martin Franco confront this obstacle as an opportunity to resist and gain agency. Specifically, these artists conjure ideas of presence and absence of women's bodies to disrupt canonical Canadian art constructions that neglect their existence as diasporic subjects while manifesting women's bodies as a site of resistance and not of fragility.

Creatively Oppositional Possibilities

Artists from the Global South[232] work in a state of *coloniality*[233] as expressed by the sociologist, influential in the fields of decolonial studies and critical theory, Anibal Quijano. These artists work within a matrix of power that is geopolitical, ideological, and epistemological.[234] It is important to foreground that Quijano introduced the concept of *coloniality* within the Latin American experience of the early 1990s – during the shift of Cold War geopolitics to neoliberalism – offering *decoloniality* as a space to delink from this matrix of power and hegemony. Furthermore, it must also be emphasized that *decoloniality* is a concept that stems from liberation struggles of the Global South and is not a concept born from Western European histories, realities, nor sensibilities.

Artists who contest Eurocentric Western violent legacies offer decoloniality and an aesthetic of resistance that defies homogenous views of neoliberal temporality and coloniality. This idea of resistance follows sociologist, feminist philosopher, and activist Maria Lugones's ideas of *creatively oppositional* intention and agency, not as the "end or goal of political struggle, but rather as its beginning, its possibility."[235] These artists work from a locus of enunciation[236] as

[232] I use the term Global South understanding it not only geographically but politically, and I include within this term diasporas who live and work within subaltern spaces in the Global North. See Alfred J. López's essay on how it informs this position… "the recognition by peoples across the planet that globalization's promised bounties have not materialized, that it has failed as a global master narrative…the mutual recognition among the world's subalterns of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization." Please read Alfred J. Lopez "Introduction: The (Post) Global South."

[233] Coloniality of power is a concept that Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano developed, and it identifies the legacies of European colonialism integrated into contemporary societies through hierarchical social orders and forms of knowledge. *Coloniality* refers to the classification of races between colonizers and colonized, the configuration of a system of exploitation where all control of labour is bound by the hegemony of capital and is racialized. (See Quijano 1995, Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, and Quijano 2000).

[234] Walter Mignolo states that "a politics of location can be in itself an epistemology" in *I Am Where I Think*, 237.

[235] María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 746.

[236] The importance of positionality and location cannot be underestimated in the process of knowledge production. Argentinian semiotician, Walter Mignolo writes about the collapse of identity in a philosophical way to explain that people are not only who they are but where they are located.

explained by Mignolo, creating and articulating knowledge from a specific subaltern location and space. Quijano explains that the "coloniality of power" with the rise of modernity created a world system of racialized capitalist exploitation. Lugones embraces this concept but reminds us that it is not only class and race that is in question, but that we must also consider gender to be inseparable and linked and thus coins the term *coloniality of gender*. *Coloniality of being,* developed by Nelson Maldonado Torres, delineates the process of dehumanization and Lugones adopts this while emphasizing that the "coloniality of gender is still with us; it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system."[237]

The artists in this chapter understand these concepts as a process and a possibility of resistance, an opposition to forms of coloniality of being and of gender and adopting feminism as a possibility and as a practice through the absence and presence of their diasporic bodies within their artistic praxis. They have developed an aesthetic of resistance that emanates from an understanding of coloniality of power, coloniality of being, and coloniality of gender as they navigate patriarchal, racist, and classist spaces of exclusion in Canada. Mignolo helps us understand that artists who adopt the decolonial option, don't necessarily want to create beautiful objects but to create in order to decolonize sensibilities.[238] As such, Bernal, Ezcurra, and Martin Franco work with aesthetics, through and with the female body, and mark the presence of a colonial wound[239] which for them is imperial "racial and patriarchal."[240] They work and live in Canada within a neocolonial neoliberal patriarchal systemically racist society that continuously scars colonial wounds making it difficult to heal. Their ability to create counter proposals

[237] Lugones 2010, 746.
[238] Gaztambide-Fernández, 201.
[239] Ibid., 206.
[240] Ibid., 201.

demonstrate a strength and resilience that supersedes obliteration. By using their own bodies and their absence, they offer a site of contestation to institutional erasure. Their position as racialized women artists from the Global South, not only challenge dominant narratives, but defy co-opted tokenized interpretations of cultural difference and decolonization within a neoliberal patriarchal art system. Their autonomy, agency, and efficacy become radically powerful. As such, these diasporic subaltern women artists who work within the confines of global economies and within diaspora, remain locally grounded, decolonizing systems of subaltern barriers and offering sites of solidarity and allyship.

By following Chicana queer and feminist cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, it is possible to not only claim the potential transformative power of Bernal, Ezcurra, and Martin Franco's artistic practices have over contemporary Canadian art but to also point out the inequities that persist within Canadian borders. The Chicana poet and writer proclaimed the transformative "power and medicine of art." She claimed that "this country's real battle is with its shadow–its racism, propensity for violence, rapacity for consuming, neglect of its responsibility to global communities and the environment, and unjust treatment of dissenters and the disenfranchised, especially people of colour."[241] Even though Anzaldúa refers directly to the United States, it is possible to argue truth within this statement to a Canadian context. Canada's complicity in Latin American global affairs perpetuate imperialist and interventionist positions based on economic

[241] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 10.

interests.[242] Canada has ignored its own genocidal practices for decades.[243] As outlined in Chapter One, its extractivist industry in Latin America has not only destroyed the environment but has terrorized Indigenous communities in various locations throughout the region.[244] Canada likes to think of it as developing positive relationships with environmental causes, but most Indigenous and community grassroots organizations that have fought tirelessly with extractivist companies from Canada could argue the opposite and in fact their presence in Latin America have had a detrimental violent outcome for the environment and communities.[245]

Canada has benefitted from an international reputation for welcoming and offering opportunities to immigrants and refugees, promoting its multicultural haven to the world. This myth[246]masked by its multicultural propagandistic agenda, disenfranchises instead of support, systemically undermining racialized and Indigenous people both within its borders and on a global scale. Richard J.F. Day claims that "Canadian diversity *has always been public*, it has always involved state-sponsored attempts to define, know, and structure the actions of a field of problematic Others (Savages, Québécois, Half-breeds, Immigrants) who have been distinguished

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[242] Tyler Shipley explains how the Canadian government is complicit to decades of imperialist economic interest, has supported countless military regimes throughout Latin America, and prioritized the interests of both Canadian and of United States corporations from the early 20th century to most recently with its backing of Bolivia's coup in 2019. See Tyler Shipley, "Canada support for Bolivian coup regime part of century long imperialist bent in Latin America," The Canada Files, October 23, 2020, https://www.thecanadafiles.com/articles/dsfes.

[243] It wasn't until June 2021 that members of Parliament gave unanimous consent in favour of a motion calling on the federal government to recognize Canada's residential schools as genocide. Leah Gazan, the NDP member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, brought forward a similar motion in June of the year before, but it did not receive unanimous consent.

[244] Please see *The Impact of Canadian Company in Latin America and Canada's Responsibility: Executive Summary of the Report submitted to Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, https://www.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_canadian_mining_executive_summary.pdf.

[245] See Maxwell Radwin, "How Canada's Growing presence in Latin America is hurting the environment," *Mongabay News*, September 22, 2023, https://news.mongabay.com/2023/09/how-canadas-growing-presence-in-latin-america-is-hurting-the-environment/.

[246] Richard J.F. Day argues that multiculturalism in Canada controls "…différance; it is more modern than even in its unwillingness to accept diversity in the social, political, and linguistic forms…." See Richard J.F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 12.

from unproblematic Selves (French, British-Canadian, European) through a variety of means (civilization, humanity, race, culture, ethnicity, ethnocultural origin)."[247]

It is important to understand these two factors of which diasporic artists resist, particularly artists that are in observation and are researched for this dissertation. Canada's geopolitical and economic complicity over the region and its people is a recurring subject of discussion for many of the artists and can be detected in the work of Bernal. Ongoing systemic racism and erasure that perpetuates levels of obscurity and neglect within the art system is also relevant for many if not all the artists discussed and is ever present in Martin Franco's practice. Within a Canadian multicultural myth, diasporic stories and the work of many artists are not shared, learned, recorded, theorized, or archived. This contradiction disempowers, erases, and neglects and this dissertation intends to expose the gaps while emphasizing the need to remediate.

Nonetheless, the artists in discussion have all settled in Canada and now consider this place their home. They build their lives within accentuated legacies of colonial genocide, they live within coloniality, and develop their practices surrounded by the myth of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Their practices have been vastly ignored by academia[248] and museums both nationally and internationally[249], despite their relevance and contributions to discourses within contemporary art. These artists began their work in the late 1990s, at a time when very few were

[247] Ibid, 5. J.F. Day refers to the term 'Self' as a group "constructed, possessing propriety, normality, and validity", with the promise that they do not pose the public problem of diversity. The term 'Other' is used to refer to the 'not-Self' problematic group perceived by the Self group for whom "various actions may be taken to change or eliminate their presumed problematic qualities."
[248] Robin, 55.
[249] See Tamara Toledo 2008. This Fuse Magazine article casts a light on the lack of representation within the international performance scene of Latin American Canadian artists. It is a critique on the shortfall of the exhibition of *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960- 2000* at Museo del Barrio in New York.

ready to listen. Today, geo-political and socio-cultural manifestations, as well as racial movements offer the possibility to change absence into presence, as we re-evaluate and question art history and its modernity exclusionary project.

In-between States of Violence

Place is relevant to practice because it grounds artists. As such, it is extremely important to understand the context behind violence inflicted upon people and land. Outlining the geopolitical context from which these artists come from, the conflict they endured, and their relationship to Canada, helps us understand interrelationships and how they manifest within the diaspora. Bernal, Ezcurra and Martin Franco have witnessed violence in their home countries due to government corruption and imperialist intervention. For over 50 years, an undeclared civil war between drug traffickers, soldiers, guerillas, and paramilitaries left Colombia in a state of turmoil and uncertainty and many people fled its violence in search of stability. Both Bernal and Martin Franco arrived in Canada in the 1990s during Colombia's conflict and stayed in Canada developing their artistic practices in their adopted homeland. Ezcurra's family escaped a military dictatorship in Argentina during the 1970s and fled to Mexico where she spent her childhood and formative years to later come to Canada in 2010, to pursue graduate studies. Ezcurra also left Mexico due to the ongoing violence of government corruption and the war on drugs instigated by the United States. Claudia Bernal spent her formative years in Colombia but travelled to Canada during a 1988 World Youth exchange program in Manitoba, casting a deep impact in her quest to return. The artist Martin Franco arrived in Canada in 1998 at the age of 30 years old as a result of a marriage with a Canadian artist of Lebanese origin whom she had met in Cartagena. These artists come from places of conflict; they have adopted Canada as their home but not necessarily

find the reception a haven nor a safe place. Instead, they view it as a liminal space that erases their presence and prolongs their state of violence and coloniality.

Anzaldúa introduced and adopted the concept of *neplanta*, a Nahuatl word, that refers to a psychological, liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future. For Anzaldúa, *neplanta* is the in-between state, it is "that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another; when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another; when traveling from the present identity into a new identity."[250] The artists Bernal, Martin Franco, and Ezcurra experience Canada's systemic racism, they are aware of the country's implications in geopolitical global affairs, and its genocidal history with Indigenous peoples, and find themselves in-between two borders that prolong systems of violence and oppression. As colonized mestizas they live in perpetual states of *neplanta*, neither forgetting nor erasing where they come from, the land and the people they left behind –despite its distance and evolving changes–while sharing their artistic language and commitment to resist fixed identities.

Forming Allyships through Common Threads: Claudia Bernal

The interdisciplinary performance artist Claudia Bernal came to study in Canada in 1991 and pursued a master's in French literature at the Université Laval in Québec after completing a Bachelors in Language and Philosophy at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá. Since then, she has not ceased to apply interdisciplinary and intersectional knowledge and has recently received her doctoral degree in Arts Studies and Practices at UQAM-Université du Québec à Montréal after pursuing a master's degree in Theatre, a bachelor's degree in visual arts,

[250] Anzaldúa 2015, 56.

and a diploma in Italian Language and Civilization, among other studies of interest. This quest for knowledge can be traced back to her upbringing.

The artist comes from a lower income family that migrated to the city during the 1950s in search for a better life and a better future for their children. Her working-class mother and father provided for a family of five siblings in a very modest house in the outskirts of Bogotá. Bernal experienced from a very young age social class inequalities, growing up in a precarious household. Nonetheless, both parents instilled the most valuable gift of knowledge and education, as the most important tool to overcome poverty. Her father was a construction-worker for the Universidad Nacional which provided free university tuition for the artist and her siblings. Her mother taught the artist embroidery and knitting, manual skills that were passed on through generations of women. This intergenerational knowledge is seen throughout her practice where she incorporates hair, thread, and wool into her performative interdisciplinary installations. The exemplary radical power of knowledge to overcome precariousness and poverty is a clear indication that her proposal as an artist responds to generations of imposed systems of oppression and structures of classism.

Fig. 25. © Claudia Bernal, *Made of the Same Blood*, 2008.

Hechos de la misma sangre[251] (2007) is an installation video performance Bernal shared with Toronto audiences in 2008 for a group exhibition I curated entitled *Pilgrimage of Wanderers*.[252] Her approach is interdisciplinary, and her theatre and dance background project a deep understanding of the craft both visually and performatively. Various elements surround the gallery space converting the white cube into a place of memory, entrapment, acknowledgement, and a tracing of a violent legacy. Inspired by Colombia's forced displacement due to armed conflict and extractivism, the artwork is eerily familiar on the land which it is performed,

[251] "Hechos de la misma sangre" translates to English as "Made from the Same Blood."
[252] Group exhibition at A Space Gallery with artists Claudia Bernal, José Mansanilla-Miranda, Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, and José Luis Torres.

Fig. 26. © Claudia Bernal, *Made of the Same Blood*, 2008.

Tkaronto.[253] Extractivism and displacement are common themes within Canada and its genocidal practices over Indigenous communities, making an evident interconnection between the Global South with the North. Bernal not only exposes the truth in Colombia but offers a bridge to denounce it in Canada as well. The images, elements, and body language that the artist shares resonate as an Indigenous experience that transcend borders, and the in-between state which becomes the locus of resistance[254] can override any dislocation or disassociation.

The traumatic aftermath of forced displacement is dramatically emphasized as the artist travels from object to object during the performance. Hugging the audience, rocking

[253] The City of Toronto originates from the Mohawk word "Tkaronto" meaning "the place in the water where the trees stand." Tkaronto is considered the original name, and today people have been adopting it to acknowledge and honour its Indigenous presence and history.
[254] Anzaldúa 2015, 49.

unconsolable on a rocking chair, searching for drips of water, trembling under a fishermen's red net, pointing the blame into the far distance. Sixty-two long black hair braids cover a wall from top to bottom. An empty wicker rocking chair with a round-ball of red wool placed on its lap stands still beside a long white rope hanging from the ceiling with the tips branching out into curly black hair. All these elements surround a large red fishermen's net that hangs from the ceiling. The net envelops the artist who lies flat on the floor. Her body slowly moves realizing her entrapment and frantically but graciously finds a way out as the net slowly ascends to the ceiling and she dives into the performance interacting with an attentive gallery audience.

When the performance ends, a large screen projects a 25-minute documentary style video of three women sharing their testimonies of how they have survived incredible hardship, death, and violence. Three generations of women: a 14-year-old girl who survived an attack by paramilitaries; a trade unionist who shares the experience of the murder of her brother; and an Indigenous elder leader who fights to reclaim land taken by armed forces. These are brown women that embody the resiliency of generations, surviving colonial legacies and imperial extractivism, all the while reminding us of the capacity to transform this violence into art and resistance.

The installation and performance acknowledge their pain, their strength, and resiliency, and becomes a gateway to understand the need for decoloniality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres claims that since "aesthetics is so closely connected to embodied subjectivity and this subjectivity is at the crux of the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being, decolonial aesthetics very directly challenges, not only each basic coordinate of modernity/coloniality, but

its most visceral foundations."[255] Claudia Bernal's work encapsulates this visceral potential – the body, the mind, and all the senses – respond viscerally, ontologically, impacting the terrain of coloniality. The "rituals that seek to keep the body open as a continued source of questions, as a bridge to connect to others, and as prepared to act"[256] is employed as a method by Bernal, a decolonial aesthetic that is both critical to the aftermath of displacement and empowering within spaces of solidarity and allyship.

Bernal spent two years investigating and returning to Colombia to develop this performance video installation. An auto-ethnographic attempt to materialize the outcomes of displacement faced in the region along the Magdalena River. This river crosses Colombia from north to south and carries within it not only gold and oil, but the blood of thousands of victims. Art critic and historian Hal Foster cautions the dangers that involve the artist as ethnographer, of "ideological patronage."[257] In some cases, he claims this patronage becomes a case of self-othering that easily passes into self-absorption becoming the practice of philosophical narcissism.[258] British art critic and historian Claire Bishop declares the social turn in contemporary art which has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism.[259] She explains how artists have become increasingly judged by their working processes… and criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to 'fully' represent their subjects."[260] However, in the case of *Hechos del la misma sangre*, the use of ethnographic sources does not invoke an outsider's perspective nor does the process completely assume to represent the entire region. In fact, the

[255] Maldonado-Torres 2016, 27.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 303. Foster also alerts the dangers behind assuming the role of native informant of the artist perceived to be other.
[258] Ibid., 304.
[259] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum International Magazine* 44, no. 6 (2006), 180.
[260] Ibid.

artist has an entangled autochthonous history with its place, the land, and its people. The artist is of "the same blood" and states this fact very clearly in the title. The story is not foreign, and she is reminded when an Indigenous elder states "*we are all of the same blood*." Bolivian feminist, activist, sociologist, and subaltern theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui proposes an included third concept with the term *ch'ixi*, an Aymara word for the color grey. This alternative to the lexicon of mestizaje, proposes that the colour grey is composed of a multiplicity and coexistence of colours, which may consist of white but is not white, it is both white and its opposite, black, and the artist embodies these differences, as she positions her own white, black, and brown body on the land. [261]

Bernal's work is re-coded as difficult to understand and site-specific to Colombia's reality, foreign to Canada. As already indicated, it is not difficult to point out connections with Canada's own history and present common threads that link both colonized histories from the North and the South. Genocide, forced displacement, and violence against Indigenous women, resonate as strongly in Colombia as it does in Canada. The Americas share a common history of colonization and perpetuate state of coloniality. Bernal's intention is not simply an artistic gesture, nor an anthropological study, it is rather a relationship-based practice established between her past and her present as a diasporic subject. Bernal is explicit in stating "art must consist of action rather than objects…as an artist, I have a role to play in the process of social and political transformation."[262] Bernal actively and intentionally builds a bridge between the North and the South, a strategy inspired by the teachings of Chicana feminist theorists and writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Chela Sandoval.

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[261] In addition, please refer to Javier Sanjinés's views on the concept of mestizaje. See *Mestizaje Upside-Down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004).
[262] Claudia Bernal, "Performance as an Act of Survival," *Canadian theatre review* 150 (2010): 22–25.

Bernal's "efforts at rehumanizing the world, to break hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities"[263] of which is an underlying framework for decoloniality. She offers us a transformative way of understanding the world with her counter-narrative of decentering a dehumanizing narrative which tends to only benefit a hegemonic status quo, while lending a space for new ways of engaging with land, place, and women, re-centering power by giving voice to those who are silenced.

Claudia Bernal's knowledge of avant-garde theatre, performance, language, text, dance, philosophy, sociology, art, and aesthetics merges with the complexities of geo-political and socio-cultural dynamics present in contemporary life while embracing her connection to land both familiar and foreign. Her proposal is a decolonial one, in which her third self, the *chi-ixi* identity, is manifested through her body, her movements, the elements, the land, the water, and living beings. Systems of domination and racist dogmas are a transnational issue and weigh heavily in the Global South. Bernal exposes this truth beyond any type of border and claims complicity and responsibility. The artist points her finger at all Canadians, those who deny violence and those who stand complicit. Through *Hechos de la misma sangre*, we are reminded of the resiliency of people to surpass the effects of coloniality, of our connection to ancestral knowledge, and to our responsibility to land and other beings. The artist's brown body becomes a thread that weaves Abya-Yala from North to South and back.[264] As Anzaldúa poetically states "We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that alienated us from others. When the wound forms a cicatriz, the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split

[263] Maldonado-Torres 2016, 10.
[264] The term Abya Yala has been adopted to describe the region of the American continent. Abya Yala in the Kuna language means "land in its full maturity." The Aymara leader Takir Mamani has suggested adopting this name and renouncing colonizer designations. For further information please see Emilio Del Valle Escalante, "Self-Determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala" *E-International Relations*, accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/self-determination-a-perspective-from-abya-yala/.

apart."[265] Bernal exposes this wound but attends to it by addressing its cause, suggesting we should not only learn from mistakes but adopt new ways of being and doing.

Rupturing Coloniality with a Politicized Body: Helena Martin Franco

The multidisciplinary artistic practice of Helena Martin Franco on the other hand adopts a different approach from Bernal, but still within the tradition of performance and installation art using her own body to manifest her decolonial approach, vision, and proposal. Raised in the Caribbean region of Colombia, the artist left her hometown to study at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá and later returned to Cartagena to continue with her pedagogical and artistic pursuits. Her work at the time was exhibited widely in Colombia and in 1994 she was invited to participate in the Dominican Republic Biennial. Her first artistic renditions were paintings, a medium which dominated upon her arrival to Canada. Using religious and cultural symbolism, inspired by her upbringing, Martin Franco used the medium of painting to question sacrificial pain present within Catholicism and its violent colonial legacy. In Canada, her work quickly merged to become a practice of predominantly performance and video-based work. Martin Franco realized that launching a career during a time when painting and narrativity was not embraced, would be a self-defeating pursuit within mainstream Canadian art circles, not only as a chosen medium but as a racialized immigrant woman artist within a predominantly white settler art circle.

Rather than attempt to enter mainstream art spaces in Montreal, she found support back home, establishing a wide network of collectives with annual visits to Colombia. Redhada-Red

[265] Gloria Anzaldúa 2015, 13.

de Mujeres Artistas del Caribe Colombiano;[266] CAVCA-Comunidad de Artistas Visuales de Cartagena y Bolívar;[267] and Las meninas emputás! all became collectives she co-founded. Spaces of representation and opportunities to position herself as a practicing feminist decolonial artist. Las meninas emputás![268] for example was "a performance project consisting of disruptive interventions online and in public spaces during the Biennial of Contemporary Art Cartagena de Indias (BIACI). The group takes its name from Diego Velázquez's famous 1656 portrait of the Spanish infanta Margarita de Austria surrounded by her servants—the *meninas*"[269] calling into question sovereign patriarchal colonialism and ridiculing its position.[270] Developing a practice with familiar spaces in Colombia allowed Helena Martin Franco to continue her praxis as a professional artist when few opportunities were available to her in Canada.

As mentioned, the artist's work is heavily influenced by her religious and patriarchal upbringing. Her French great grandfather immigrated to the Llanos Orientales region at the border of Venezuela in the late 19th century. He had a son with Antonia Urriola, a Guaibo Indigenous woman from the region. The grandchild's French grandmother took the child away from his mother and raised him in the Arauca region in the town of Tame, Colombia. This side of the artist's family lived at the border of Venezuela and had no connections with their Indigenous roots. In fact, her grandfather never reunited with his mother. Her father left the town at the age of twelve and never returned to the zone due to the dangerous conflict that continues to cause mass displacement and violence. Raised in a family of liberals and suffering displacement, her

[266] Web of Women Artists from the Colombian Caribbean.
[267] Community of Visual Artists in Cartagena and Bolívar.
[268] Translated as "The Bitchy Meninas."
[269] Natalie Alvarez, Claudette Lauzon, and Keren Zaiontz, "'CAVC Buries BIACI': Activating Decolonial Tools in Cartagena de Indias," in *Sustainable Tools for Precarious Times* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 225.
[270] "Emputá" is slang for the word "prostitute," but it also can be interpreted as someone who is furious.

father pursued a career in the military as a marine and the artist was raised within a military household. The artist's maternal family is conservative and right-wing, attached to Opus Dei with extremely religious ideologies which resulted in a strict upbringing. The violence that surrounded the nation was reproduced within the family home, an inherited dynamic of denial perpetuated by religious, military, and elitist dogmas, gender violence, and trauma. As such, it is evident that through her work, the artist tells the stories of abuse, violence, and pain, stories that her Indigenous great grandmother could never share for fear, surrounded by imposed colonial stigmas, classist and patriarchal ideologies, and inherited racism.

The artist's work denounces a violent history, seeking opportunities to heal scars placed by racial, social, and gender roles while also combating patriarchal and religious oppressive dogmas with her own body. Afro-Caribbean political philosopher Franz Fanon observes that the colonized subject "manages to lose sight of the colonist through religion."[271] Nonetheless, Martin Franco's awareness of her colonized position and repressive upbringings, allows her to critically denounce the abuse of oppressive idiosyncrasies. Thus, her critical observation explores the concept of religion and ideas of race as human identifiers placed by colonial systems of representation. Maldonado-Torres posits the study of religion and how it can contribute to the rethinking of ethics/politics and the decolonization of the modern/colonial world.[272] For Martin Franco, the role of Christianity and its effects on gender and race is quite explicit and obvious, for it has imposed constructions of inferiority, ontological positions of dehumanizing otherness, and patriarchal preservations as demonstrated within her artistic oeuvre.

[271] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 18.
[272] See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, no. 4 (2014).

Regarding gender, Maldonado Torres explains that within modern/Western paradigms, "the male and female binary is informed and informs the division between the subject as freedom and the subject as body."[273] That is to say, the rational and active male body is compared to the irrational passive female body. Furthermore, within this modern/colonial binary perspective, the colonized subject is perceived as non-human, and as María Lugones explains, the female colonized body seems to share more characteristics with animals than with humanity.[274] As such, Maldonado Torres explains that the condition of the colonized subject and its naturalization to animality perpetuates a state of war and conquest over colonized bodies, they become enemies who are both threatening and suspicious.[275] As such, Martin Franco uses her own brown body as a confrontational tool to defy colonial and patriarchal impositions of fragility and animality. She embodies the personification of fictional characters to redefine aspects of religion, tradition, colonial, and institutional norms that have so heavily impacted her throughout the course of her upbringing and migration to Canada. She embodies the hybridity of mestizaje, questions its origins, its limitations, and its nuances while exposing the hidden effects of colonial epistemic racism and sexism on individual and collective knowledge.

The fictional characters of *Corazón desfasado*[276], *Fritta Caro*[277] and *Una mujer elefante* [278]adopt identity codes that refer to her position as a Colombian woman from the Caribbean navigating spaces of erasure and invisibility. Lugones defends embodied impure diversified fragmented multiple selves all of which resist institutional structures that are used to control

[273] Maldonado-Torres, *Outline of Ten Thesis*, 15.
[274] Refer to María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (2007), and "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" (2010).
[275] Refer to Maldonado-Torres, *Outline of Ten Thesis*.
[276] "Corazón desfasado" is difficult to translate but can be interpreted as "Out of Touch Heart."
[277] This character is a spin on the iconic name Frida Kahlo. The word "Fritta" also means 'bad luck', one that is bound to encounter difficulty, and "Caro" means expensive in Spanish.
[278] "Mujer elefante" means "Elephant Woman" in English.

Fig. 27. © Helena Martin Franco, *Elle se trompe,* 2015-2017.

them.[279] M*ujer elefante,* for example, is one of those threatening impure selves that defy any form of unified homogenous persona. Through performance, the diasporic woman artist adopts the elephant's trunk as an animal metaphor for transmission and transformation. Using a construction tube to imitate its animal characteristic, the artist manipulates and uses its long phallic shape to manipulate its structure and elongate its potential to her own liking. Thus, Martin Franco, is a feminist artist who defaces herself with the tube, has her body attached to the structure but refuses to be the victim. There is an undeniable struggle, but she is not dominated, she constantly wrestles to detach from the conformities bound by gender and patriarchy. The artist resists normativity and identity politics and is in complete control of her actions and position as half elephant and half woman. Sonia Pelletier writes about Martin Franco's *mujer elefante* in her essay *Identité hybride, ou la mise en vie des personnages* and understands the auto-fictitious persona as a protean character that hides a state of pain and sadness. She states

[279] Ofelia Schutte, "Border Zones, In-Between Spaces, and Turns: On Lugones, the Coloniality of Gender, and the Diasporic Peregrina," *Critical Philosophy of Race* (Penn State University Press, 2020), 103-104.

that the artist "reappropriates the expression by transforming it into a mechanism of self-mockery that figures her own suffering to the dimensions of an Elephant."[280] But instead of this assumption, it seems *mujer elefante* is the animal personification that resists normativity, fights passiveness, confronts pain, and struggles against the perpetual war imposed on the colonized woman subject. The elephant is a highly resilient animal, intelligent, nurturing, and strong. It is the creature that best exemplifies her connection to life in resistance, a constant confrontational dialogue to defy Otherness, fragility, and precarity.

The character of *Fritta Caro* also becomes an outlet for the artist to activate resistance as an "autofiction that aims to point out certain inconsistencies in government discourse and policies on the integration of immigrants, particularly with regard to the issues of identity and difference."[281] Appropriating identity stereotype classifications – the character adopts a diasporic-Canadian personification of Frida Kahlo –redefining a production and semiotic translation of her own position within a Canadian systemically racist landscape, adopting a transformed vision of what a racialized artist is and can be. Maldonado Torres explains that decolonial aesthetics emerged in discussions of the modernity/(de)coloniality network, introduced by the Colombian artist, activist, and scholar Adolfo Albán,[282] and explains that "decolonial visual art directly impacts the terrain of the coloniality of place and space…Decolonial aesthetic creation, including decolonial performances of self and subjectivity are, among other things, rituals that seek to keep the body open as a continued source of

[280] Sonia Pelletier, "Identité hybride, ou la mise en vie des personnages d'Helena Martin Franco," *Spirale* 261 (2017): 7.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Maldonado-Torres, *Outline of Ten Thesis*, 27.

questions, as a bridge to connect to others, and as prepared to act."[283] Such is the case with *mujer elefante* and *Fritta Caro* who become the outlet to take space, to name invisibility, to rupture

Fig. 28. © Helena Martin Franco, *Altero(s)Filia o los Juegos de Fuerza de Fritta Caro,* 2018.

stereotypes of identity, and to examine colonial modes of existence. With the act of using her own body, the artist places *Fritta Caro* in public space to make connections and question what has become the norm.

Altero(s)Filia o los Juegos de Fuerza de Fritta Caro[284] (2018) is a video performance intervention in public space presented at Le Parc des Hommes-Forts in Montreal. The location is strategic, not only because it is situated at the Monument of Louis Cyr, a "Quebec weightlifter said to have been, in his time, the 'strongest man in the world'"[285] but because it is placed with the backdrop of a mural hidden in between an abundant tree foliage that states "White

[283] Ibid.
[284] *Altero(s)Filia or Strength Games of Fritta Caro.*
[285] See Art Public Montréal for a full description of the monument commissioned by Robert Pelletier to commemorate Louis Cyr: https://artpublicmontreal.ca/en/oeuvre/monument-a-louis-cyr/

Fig. 29. © Helena Martin Franco, *Altero(s)Filia o los Juegos de Fuerza de Fritta Caro,* 2018.

Supremacy is Killing Me" painted by the American-Colombian muralist Jessica Sabogal. It is difficult to decipher the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist message of the mural, but *Fritta Caro* embodies the sentiment for all to witness with her public intervention. Her petite body steps into the space as a courageous athlete would at the Olympic Stadium. With red and white sports attire, and a red maple leaf cap, *Fritta Caro* sweeps the dirt in-front of the monument and uses yellow caution tape and white fragile tape to write the words RACIALIZED, DIVERSITY, and MINORITY in large bold letters to a predominantly white francophone audience on the concrete floor. *Fritta Caro* skips the ball with a rope wrapped around her ankle as the ball sweeps and the tape slowly detaches from the floor. The tape sticks together and becomes bigger, heavier, dirtier, and tangled, camouflaging the words into one big sphere. Those who follow a decolonial path "tend to approach ideas and change in a way that does not isolate knowledge from action. They combine knowledge, practice, and creative expressions, among other areas in their efforts to

change the world."[286] The ball not only becomes a symbol of all that must change and disintegrate but it also transforms into something different, a powerful weapon. It accentuates the white fragility of those who witness *Fritta Caro* in her effort to disrupt history markers in public space, she becomes an agent of social change.

Maldonado Torres argues that "since aesthetics is so closely connected to embodied subjectivity and this subjectivity is at the crux of the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being, decolonial aesthetics very directly challenges, not only each basic coordinate of modernity/coloniality, but its most visceral foundations and overall scope."[287] By challenging a white spectatorship, judging and equating Canadian national identity markers with racism, Helena Martin Franco embodies strength not with muscle or mass, but with the potential of change and transformation of history and knowledge. She posits a threatening view with her petite body, as a subject of difference. She demonstrates the potential of the fragmented self, the *impure mestiza* self that María Lugones speaks of to move from a "focus on ethnicity-nation-race to a focus on gender-race-ethnicity."[288]

Helena Martin Franco leads a path of decentering, altering, reconfiguring, and constructing counter-hegemonic narratives that defy traditional canons with her decolonial methodologies and frameworks. Her actions project agency and currency, a knowledge-based artistic practice with a combative spirit that constantly questions the status quo of a predominantly white settler colonial and patriarchal art scene in Canada. Martin Franco replaces patterns of erasure and exclusion with the presence of the female diasporic brown body as she defies the heteropatriarchal systemically racist structures of power with her actions,

[286] Maldonado-Torres 2019, 7.
[287] Ibid, 27.
[288] Schutte, *Border Zones*, 104.

performances, and public interventions.

Power In the Absence of Bodies: Maria Ezcurra

The artist Maria Ezcurra follows a path similar to Claudia Bernal and Helena Martin Franco in her search for ways to dismantle and uncover histories and legacies of patriarchal violence through her artistic practice. In her work, Ezcurra foregrounds centuries of Western Eurocentric gender violence, referencing issues of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, femicide in Mexico, and the disappeared in Argentina, but in contrast to Bernal and Martin Franco, through symbolic gestures of the absence of bodies.

Prior to immigrating to Canada, Ezcurra had been teaching at the Universidad de Cuernavaca located in Morelos and commuting from Mexico City to a town that was experiencing high levels of violence[289] where many feared for their lives and protected themselves with walls, fences, and gates. Even though she had completed her MFA in the United States, she never felt welcomed, and the competitive nature of the program deterred her from staying in the US after graduation. She had never meant to leave Mexico, but after having small children she soon realized that she could not raise her family surrounded by the threat of violence. Therefore, she decided to pursue a PhD in Canada to flee her country's precarity. In Canada, she felt welcomed upon arrival, surrounded by an arts community that supported her studies and work. Ezcurra had a very different immigration experience than Martin Franco and Bernal, two brown mestiza women from the Global South that spoke directly of their

[289] Interview with Maria Ezcurra, May 9, 2022.

disenfranchisement and marginalization. For Ezcurra, her whiteness and her education[290] implicated a layer of privilege and opportunity. Even though Ezcurra is a non-native French nor English speaker, her European background, access to resources within academia, and migrating over a decade later, granted her the support within a Canadian art system that Bernal and Martin Franco could perhaps never attain. Nonetheless, starting from zero after having the experience of exile from Argentina, her journey was a difficult immigration adjustment and a source of internal conflict that has made it challenging despite the evident privileges.

When the artist was a child, her father fled Argentina with his name on a search list during the dictatorship and went to the United Kingdom to pursue graduate studies as a way of starting over. A violent process –with the United States, civil, and ecclesiastical sectors complicity – the right-wing coup d'état of 1976 in Argentina left over 30,000 murdered, tortured and disappeared[291] opponents of the military regime. Los desaparecidos cannot be forgotten, and Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo[292] remind us of the harmful outcomes of fascism. It is women like them who defy and denounce structures of power, and it is the artist Maria Ezcurra who, inspired by these and other women's strength and resiliency, activates historical memory to empower future generations through her art practice. Ezcurra's father eventually found work in Mexico where he was reunited with his family–the artist's mother and sibling–who at the time were the same age of her own young children when they arrived in Canada. The family quickly adapted and set roots. Both parents divorced and remarried Mexican citizens, establishing a sense of

[290] Ezcurra completed an MFA at the San Francisco Institute in California, USA, and an MA in Visual Arts at the Chelsea School of Art and Design in London, UK.
[291] Referred to as "los desaparecidos".
[292] The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo is an association that was formed during the Argentinean military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla. During a time of severe repression, women (mothers of the detained and disappeared) gathered weekly in the public square in front of the presidential palace to petition the reappearance of their loved ones, wearing white headscarves with the embroidered names of their disappeared children.

belonging to the place, uncommon for many Argentine exiles who longed to return to their homeland. Ezcurra's family settled, forming lives and eventually establishing a family of her own in Mexico. The artist's migration to Canada was quite different, it was a conscious decision of staying rather than being forced to leave. Her ambiguous sense of belonging and relationship with Argentina, juxtaposed to her formative years of adopting a Mexican identity, allowed her to come to terms with the idea of settling in Canada.

There has been a steady increase in femicide against girls and women with a more recent statistic indicating that there have been over 56,000 femicides in Mexico since the mid 1990s to 2019.[293] The reality and fear of gender violence weighs heavily on Ezcurra's practice since the early 2000s. Drawing on her fear and her outrage, she uses the materials of women's nylon stockings for its maneuverability, high heal shoes for its reference to gender control, and metal

[293] See report on femicides in La Cadera de Eva: https://lacaderadeeva.com/actualidad/mas-de-56-mil-feminicidios-en-mexico-desde-1990/2526

Fig. 30. © Maria Ezcurra, *Ni una mas*, 2003.

hangers as a symbol of restriction and submission. Unlike Bernal and Martin Franco, Ezcurra's body is absent in the sculptures of *Ni Una Más*[294] (2003) and *Invisible* (2005). *Invisible* was first commissioned in 2005 by Firstsite Gallery, Colchester, UK, for *Nostalgia of the Body* in homage to Brazilian pioneer artist Lygia Clark and has since been shown in various international locations, including her first solo exhibition in Canada at Sur Gallery entitled *In Your Shoes*.[295]

The commemorative installation *Invisible* consists of an assemblage of delicate translucent multi-tonal nylon stockings carefully seamed together, stretched to their limits, and fully exposed from all points of view for us to witness and penetrate. We are easily lured by its beauty –its pleasant shapes, translucency, shadows, crevices, gaps– yet uncomfortably torn by its obvious resemblance to skin and

[294] "Ni una más" translates as "Not One More."
[295] This was the first solo exhibition I curated for Sur Gallery, Toronto in 2016.

exposed orifices, stretched to capacity. The painful analogy to femicide envelopes the larger-than-life sculpture, as we witness the trauma inflicted upon bodies and minds. Yet, it is also important to remind ourselves that this vulnerability and precarity can also be interpreted as strength and agency when placed within a community. The capacity to resist an imposed rupture and maintain form, metaphorically and physically. To resist violence with our own bodies. According to Julieta Paredes, an Aymara Bolivian decolonial feminist and activist who with other women introduced the work of *Mujeres Creando*[296] bodies are connected to nature and form part of *Pachamama. Feminismo comunitario* counterposes patriarchal capitalist systems that focus on individualism. They offer a different ontological configuration that instead emphasizes the relationship of body with community which serves as a bridge between men, women, and nature. In *Invisible*, the elasticity of the stretched nylons symbolizes the resilience of women to endure pain and the sculpture itself relies on the collectivity and the collaboration of all bodies sewn together to form a solid unifying structure.

For the Aymara perspective, *Pachamama* is composed of men, women, intersex, animals, vegetation, and minerals. They all complement each other, they form part of *Pachamama*, and share the same skin of this same body, which is defined as *ontologia de la piel*[297]. Ezcurra uses this analogy – expanding it to critique patriarchal systems of neocolonialism – through an artistic gesture, placing stockings as the symbol of skin, stitching them together to create a complete visualization of a community. Vulnerability reconfigures into resiliency, continuity, and the strength of collectivity liberates women from all static violent structural and patriarchal confinement.

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[296] *Mujeres Creando/Women Creating* is an anarchist feminist movement created in 1990 in La Paz, Bolivia. Founded by María Galindo, Julieta Paredes, and Mónica Mendoza, they use creativity as an instrument of resistance, for social participation, and the recuperation of public space.

[297] In *ontology of the skin,* consciousness is not individual such as in the case of relational ontology. Rather, it considers skin as an element that every living persona, animal, fauna, flora, and mineral share. This unity brings to life the essence of community.

Fig. 31. © Maria Ezcurra, *Invisible*, 2016.

Maria Ezcurra employs nylons as it relates to the elasticity of the human body, much like the sculptures of the African American avant-garde artist Senga Nengudi. Nengudi's most well-known work, the *R.S.V.P* series "like many others by Nengudi, conjures humans whose bodies are no longer there."[298] Purchased pantyhose nylons are stuffed with sand, knotted, and elongated, stretched onto corners, walls, and floors with uncanny disfigurements of shapes and sizes. The series resemble limbs and genitalia with its skin stretched to its maximum capacity referencing the artist's experience of giving birth. For Maria Ezcurra, her nylon sculptures also symbolize the

[298] See Alex Greenberger article on Senga Nengudi's artwork. Alex Greenberg, "Pulled Bodies, Fabric Spirits, and Celebration: Senga Nengudi's Elusive Art Finds Joy in the Everyday," Art in America, April 28, 2021. https://www.artnews.com/feature/senga-nengudi-who-is-she-why-is-she-important-1234591161/

ability of the female body to stretch beyond its limits, its adaptability to change, and its capacity to endure trauma. The installation *Ni Una Más* consists of seventy-five hanging stockings with high heel shoes, weighing heavily inside of stretched nylons, all hanging suspended within a circular shape denouncing systemic femicide in Mexico. The absence of bodies, of those who once wore these shoes, declares a relationship between violence and indifference. Ezcurra allows space for the memory of forgotten subjects and exposes the violent truth of patriarchal, imperial, and colonial systems that choose to dismiss and render these bodies invisible.

The same can apply to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada, a reality that has cast a deep wound for its destructiveness and ongoing legacy of colonization.[299] "Reconciliation has been extensively critiqued by Indigenous scholars and allies who have dismissed the term as a romantic attempt to smooth over Indigenous-settler relationships while leaving the status quo untouched."[300] Through the lexicon of equality, inclusivity, diversity, and *reconciliation*, it is a challenge to 'unsettle the settler within,'[301] to question roles and privileges. White Canadians are beneficiaries of injustices committed and perpetuated over Indigenous bodies who are rendered invisible in an attempt to erase a violent colonial heteropatriarchal history. Instead of *reconciliation*, Ezcurra's work speaks to the resiliency within those absent bodies, the multiplicity of voices, and the strength that lies within collectivity and community. As scholar and playwright Jennifer Joan Thompson argues, "any artistic act of resistance is inflected

[299] Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) has been described as a Canadian national crisis and a genocide. Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately the victims of violence.
[300] See Victoria Freeman, "In Defence of Reconciliation," *The Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 27, no. 1 (2014).
[301] See Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

and shaped by that which it seeks to resist, just as it reflects and shapes that which it resists"[302]. Ezcurra accentuates this resistance, as it crosses borders from Argentina, to Mexico, to Canada.

Fig. 32. © Maria Ezcurra, *Reflections*, 2016.

The violence that has formed her journey through life, place, and people is the subject for her own resistance.

A third installation, which was part of the exhibition *In Your Shoes* at Sur Gallery was the commissioned *Reflections* (2016). Once again, this work speaks to the relationship of complicity and the need for *truth* rather than *reconciliation*. The labyrinth shape composed of emergency blankets hanging from the ceiling outlines a journey that must be faced by spectators as live agents. The mirror reflection of those who navigate the labyrinth exposes the legacy of genocide

[302] Jennifer Joan Thompson, "Each/Every: CADA's Radically Democratic Dramaturgy of Dissent," *Theatre Survey* 61, no. 1 (2020): 6.

that has not yet been fully acknowledged. Rather than perpetuate a settler colonial state's superficial intention of temporal remediation –with emergency blankets that do not offer long term solutions– Ezcurra exposes conversations around settler complicity and responsibility with Indigenous peoples. Its urgency is obvious; however, its temporality is what causes, among other things, skeptic mistrust between relations.

Ezcurra observes violence through the absence of the female body. A body which has been rendered invisible yet has the collective strength to manifest as resistance. The elongated, mutated, and transformed materials that allude to the distressed body emphasize its durability, and force. Ezcurra reminds us of the collective power of women who together have overcome patriarchal and colonial forms of oppression for centuries.

Conclusion

Bernal, Martin Franco, and Ezcurra embark on a path of decentering, altering, reconfiguring, and constructing counter-hegemonic narratives that defy traditional canons with their decolonial methodologies and frameworks. They resist identity politic classifications and redefine their own production with an auto-semiotic and personal translation. Most importantly, they suggest that diasporic bodies instead project agency, currency, and find strength from community, resisting the classification of fragility. They share knowledge based on experience, collaboration, community engagement, knowledge sharing, activism, and a combative spirit that accompanies each of their practices. Their work suggests sites of contestation to the status quo and their counter-perspectives provide a voice to diasporic female peripheral identities using the body. Their position as immigrant settler women within a predominantly white art scene, find within that subaltern space a source that feeds their proposal and act accordingly by defying

heteropatriarchal structures of power by denouncing acts of genocide and violence in both the Global South and North. They inspire an understanding of the power of decoloniality and use their bodies and their absence to decolonize existing patterns of erasure and exclusion. Transformation and regeneration of their artistic practices – influenced by their place of origin and life experiences – transcend local identities and offer a space of connection within the territory they inhabit. They use their position as women to personify empowerment through their own bodies and manifest them with power, agency, and dignity. The politicized present and absent body become powerful tools, an outlet to form structures of allyship, and a position to further its transformative potential.

REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA AND GESTURES OF MOURNING IN THE ART OF LAURA BARRÓN, CLAUDIA CHAGOYA, PAOLO ALMARIO & MONICA MARTÍNEZ

This final chapter was written during a difficult time in history when Western governments aid, finance, and justify a genocide perpetrated by the settler colonial state of Israel. During these past eight months, we have witnessed the loss of life and a sense of humanity, where children and mothers are buried under the rubble as thousands of bombs fall from the sky. Courageous Palestinians have had to live-stream their own families' deaths as the rest of the world stand complicit. Millions of people have chanted calls for ceasefire and boycotted companies that finance the bloodshed all the while witnessing the devastating loss, massive destruction, and relentless dehumanizing violence over the people of Gaza and the West Bank. Emotionally and professionally affected by this horrific slaughter, I have decided to end with a chapter dedicated to the work of four artists who explore concepts of mourning as a transformative act of resistance.

Chapter five focuses on the artistic practices of Paolo Almario, Laura Barrón, Claudia Chagoya, and Monica Martínez. As diaspora they respond to loss in different ways through their work but are linked by their ability to transform pain and trauma into manifestations of change and defiance. Their open wounds unlock the possibility of alternative futures, by healing loss, transforming emptiness into resistance, and envisioning a world where care and love have the potential to transform futures. This last chapter is dedicated to the over 3 million deaths humanity recently experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic; to the present-day children, women, and men that have been subject to a catastrophic genocide in Gaza; and to those who continue to resist and fight against coloniality despite ongoing unfathomable and inexplicable

violence and oppression. This chapter intends to understand artists ability to decipher, learn, unlearn, defy, dissect, mitigate, and alleviate the pain and traumas of humanity while searching for transformative manifestations of defiance and resistance through art and care.

The Healing Ritual of Textiles: Claudia Chagoya

Despite her young age, the artist Claudia Chagoya projects emotional acuity and courage. The wisdom she has gained, and the tragedy experienced is well beyond her years and she shares that with me during our interview.[303] Through the exposure to pain, she understands the power of compassion and care, the role and need for community, and the capacity of ritual to reach a place of healing. Chagoya has found ways to transform her painful past and her deep afflictions with acts of care for others and for herself. The artist was born December 14, 1991, in Zacatecas, Mexico and completed a BFA at the School of Arts Instituto Allende located in San Miguel de Allende, associated with the Universidad de Guanajuato. It is here where she received an expansive amount of skill training in different disciplines specializing in sculpture and painting. In 2017, she decided to pursue an MFA in Canada in sculpture installation and went to study at the University of Calgary. It was during her MFA that her work took a turn, and she began exploring gender violence, a reason for deep sorrow, a taboo within her own family, and an alarming statistic in her native Mexico.

In 2019, the artist's mother shared with her that her aunt had been a victim of femicide by who her mother believed was a close acquaintance who never received trial for murder. The artist was only six years old when the tragedy occurred and even though a child, she already had

[303] Personal accounts of the artist and her experiences of femicide and mourning are taken from an interview conducted for this dissertation.

suspicions that something terrible had happened to her aunt. She did not discover the truth until much later since the family kept the tragedy hidden. The unbearable and forbidden subject was not discussed, and the artist grew up surrounded by a grieving family that had experienced tremendous trauma. As the artist claimed, "…you could feel it everywhere, but no one shared their pain."[304] The artist's mother, a single parent of two, took her sister's children, who at the time were teenagers, and helped with their upbringing and growing up with the artist. Despite knowing the truth, her mother never took the case to trial, for fear, lack of resources, and time. She instead took care of those left behind, her grieving parents, and the responsibilities of a single mother. Until this day, the artist's mother lights five candles for five consecutive days each year, representing the days of which her sister disappeared. It was challenging for the artists' cousins to overcome the loss of their mother, and in the early 2000s, one of them moved to Calgary, followed by the artist's brother who joined with his wife and young child. Claudia Chagoya followed their lead after graduating from Instituto Allende knowing well that as a woman her artistic career would be difficult to pursue in Mexico.

Despite not knowing the family's hidden tragedy, the artist was already exploring the theme of gender violence and had been deeply inspired by contemporary Colombian artist Doris Salcedo. Chagoya films herself during the production of *Unweaving Foundations* (2018) and quotes Salcedo at the end of the video with the following… "Our very humanity resides within the devotion or contempt that we assign to our practices, processes, and rituals of mourning. An aesthetic view of death reveals an ethical view of life, and it is for this reason that there is

[304] Interview with Claudia Chagoya January 29, 2024.

nothing more human than mourning." This becomes the precedent for the young artists' choices and future projects that underscores the urgency of ritual and mourning.

The work *Unweaving Foundations* (2018) refers directly to the ongoing femicide and gender violence that occurs in the state of Mexico. In a ritual, time-consuming repetitive action, the artist unravels a black hanging and stretched rebozo, slowly revealing the shape of the map of

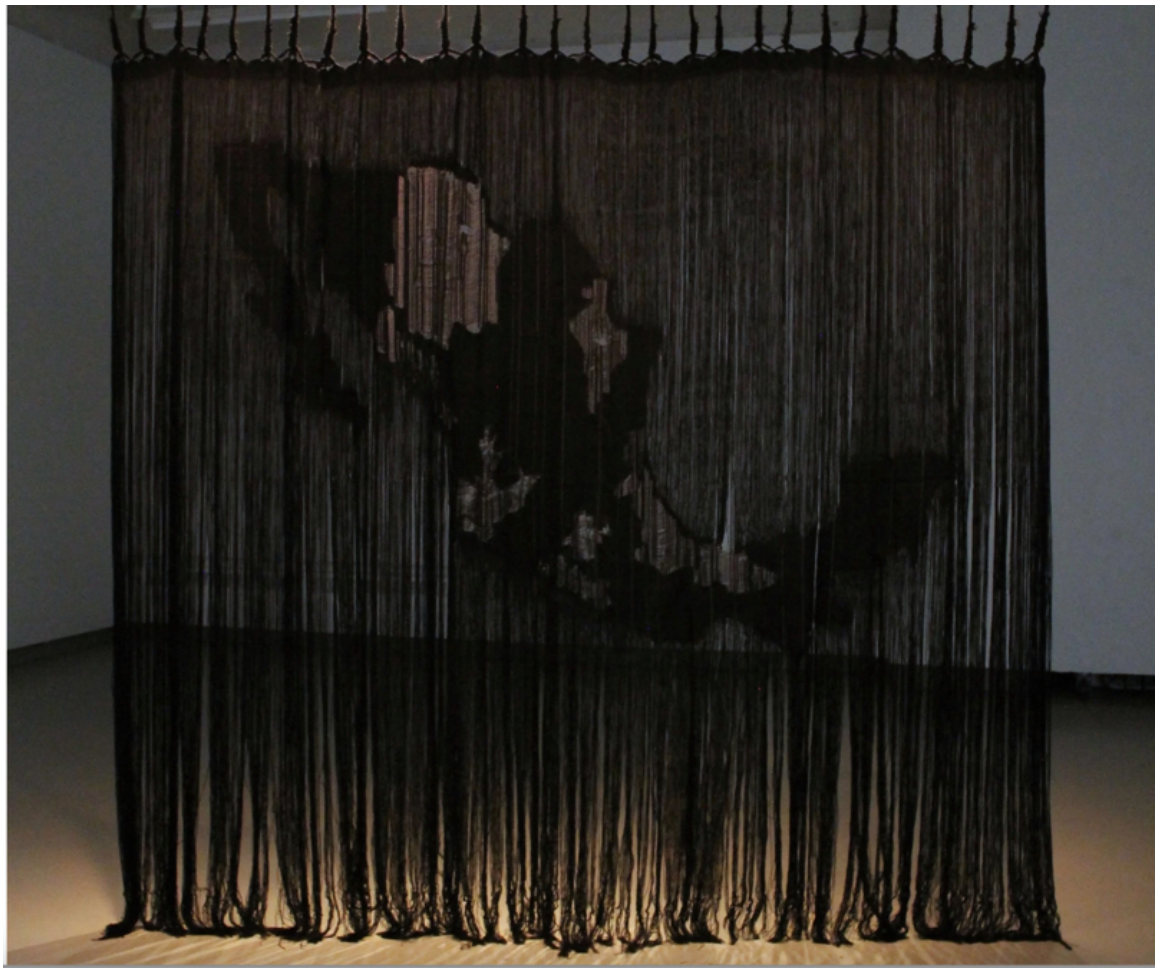

Fig. 33. © Claudia Chagoya, *Unweaving Foundations*, 2018.

Mexico with the untying of knots, while also highlighting the states in which gender violence predominates with its absence. The artist unravels the tenets of gender violence onto a black rebozo which is highly affiliated with female protective and nurturing symbolism. The hanging

threads of the unwoven black rebozo, loses its purpose and meaning as a warm comforting blanket, becoming instead the trace of a translucent frail map, detached of any patriarchal nationalist markers, and instead highlights the vulnerability of land in the hands of violence. Furthermore, the artist sprays the smell of opal onto the shawl to take us to a transcendent contemplative grieving space where the scented "rebozo" serves as the portrait of death and not of protection.

In Mexico, the rebozo is used to comfort people from birth to death. It is used to carry babies, nourish injuries, protect from harsh weather, and accompanies the dead in their graves. Chagoya disrupts this cultural and traditional purpose by unweaving its representation, demonstrating the deep impact gender violence has over not only the life of the victim but on the entire nation. The silence embedded in gender violence shatters and weakens entire families while the lack of truth destroys any aspiration for balance or for justice. Chagoya replicates the collapse of hope with the symbol of the rebozo that is traditionally worn by mothers, sisters, and daughters, all of whom suffer ongoing gender violence since birth. Furthermore, the artist refers to the "luto de aroma," a black rebozo from Tenancingo, Mexico, which is known to keep its embedded aroma for a lifetime. The combined aromatic formula composed of various spices imbued within the rebozo's fibres is achieved by a nine-step intricate process, a significant number that is repeated in Chagoya's artistic practice in future artworks. However, for *Unweaving Foundations* the artist sprays the scent of opal, a scent used in services throughout Mexico transporting those familiar with the smell to either a funeral or ceremonial site.

Unsettling grief is intensified by the evident inability of the shawl to nourish and protect, for the dismantling of a once comforting rebozo can no longer wrap the dead. Tijuana-based trans-feminist scholar Sayak Valencia coins the term Gore Capitalism as an extreme

ultraviolence over human bodies, as a product of capitalism which includes kidnapping, human organ exchange, torture, assassinations, drug economies, and rising rates of feminicide, a phenomenon occurring particularly at the border.[305] Valencia explains that women, and all those who are considered subaltern or dissidents of heteropatriarchal categories, have lived under physical and psychological violence throughout history, and more recently media violence.[306] This is why Valencia claims, subaltern subjects are the ones who respond in defiance to Gore Capitalism, and Chagoya exemplifies this manifestation, offering a gesture of resistance to a violent neoliberal patriarchal system that perpetuates and fosters gender violence.

In 2019, once Chagoya heard the devastating revelation of her suspicions about her aunt, her exploration of gender violence in Mexico became personal and she began to unravel the deep and conflicting feelings she experienced with this knowledge. To understand the grief without appropriating the pain felt by her family was difficult and is still a subject of internal conflict. However, the artist continues to find ways to inquire and expose femicides' atrocities and complexities along with the trauma inflicted upon families, moving beyond the personal anecdote to a manifestation of collective consciousness and social critique condemning its implications.

The installation *Novem* (2019) uses the same article of clothing–the rebozo–and replicates the ritual aspect of *Unweaving Foundations* while introducing another fundamental symbolic element, salt. Here, Chagoya produces nine sculptures made from black rebozos with the mineral. The installation of nine hanging sculptures exposes the corporeality and decomposition of the object/subject. In *Novem*, Chagoya soaks and dips black rebozos in a tank

[305] Sayak Valencia, "Capitalism Gore," *Debate Feminista*, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudio de Género, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, vol. 50 (2014): 51.
[306] Ibid., 61.

filled with water and salt, maneuvering, and changing the shawls shapes into skeletal formations, while also feeling the pain on her own bare hands soaked in the salted watery mix during the process of creation. The once black fibres of the shawls, reminiscent of women's hair, become scarcely visible under the hard skin of crystallized frozen in time salted objects. A clear indication of the artist's condemnation of the perpetual violence implicated over women's bodies, reference the *gore* aspect and abstract representation of femicide.

Salt as a symbolic ingredient is full of contradictions, it can be used to decompose and preserve, to cleanse and freeze, purify, and disintegrate. Salt has also been historically used as a commodity, with monetary value, thus is in relation to gore capitalism as manifested by Valencia. When referencing Gore Capitalism, Valencia explains "…the destruction of the body becomes the product, the commodity and the accumulation now is only possible through the number of deaths, since now death has become marketable."[307] Salt is also used universally and is seen as an essential nutrient of human health but is also associated with causes of severe illness, dangerous for individuals with high blood pressure. For Chagoya, salt is the perfect element and embodiment of pain. Furthermore, it is also used on altars during the Day of the Dead in Mexico preventing the corruption of souls when visiting the realm of the living. Ultimately, salt is an element that can both destroy and rejuvenate. It has the properties to heal and destroy and Chagoya exposes the power of life and of death.

For the artist, the title of the artwork *Novem,* meaning "nine" in Latin, also has a deep connection to her Catholic upbringing. In Catholicism, when someone passes, the grieving family and friends pray for nine consecutive days in a monotone repetitive manner. The

[307] Ibid., 52.

repetitiveness element is captured within the installation in a constant water dripping sound heard throughout the gallery space. The sustained whispered prayer “ruega por nosotras”[308] over directional speakers can also be heard if approached within a limited radius around each hanging sculpture. With increased volume and with a much more distressed and intensified voice, the prayer surrounds the last disintegrated skeletal sculpture, a round pile of fractured bone-like forms on the floor, with a few exposed underlying black threads reminiscent of hair. These viscerally haunting depictions appear to evoke not only the violence inflicted upon women’s decaying bodies but the permanence of its scar.

Fig. 34. © Claudia Chagoya, *Novem*, 2019.

[308] This sentence means “Pray for us” in Spanish.

Within the cosmovision of the Aztecs, the number nine is also significant for there are nine levels in Mictlán, the underworld or land of the dead. The dead must traverse Mictlán to end in a resting place and depending on how souls perish is how and where their final journey's end. This process takes four years, and the dead go through various challenging stages, aided by deities, creatures, and spirits who help along the way. Thus, the symbolic journey that the artist takes us on, with nine sculptures that have endured transformations of slow disintegration, with a

Fig. 35. © Claudia Chagoya, *Novem*, 2019.

final circular undecipherable form, comments on the inevitable mutation of memory and the indescribable impotence marked by violence and trauma. Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of an herida abierta, an open wound "of genocidal colonization and marginalization that have never formed

scabs because they've continued to bleed for centuries."[309] It is in this space of discourse and pain where Chagoya evidently refers to gender violence inflicted upon brown and Indigenous female bodies, alluding not only to women in Mexico but also Canada's own complicity with Gore Capitalism evidenced by hundreds of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), a neglected urgent problem within the settler colonial state of Canada.

Audience engagement and participation have become an instrumental part of Chagoya's practice in the past two years where she invites spectators to become live agents and witnesses to collective memory in the creation of her artworks. Her first step towards engaging the public was by including the same tank with a rebozo submerged in water in the installation *Novem* beside a black chalice full of salt, with a black spoon and a hand-written poem detailing instructions for the audience to follow on how to perform the offering. This final resting place, after witnessing such horror within the rebozos, allowed audience members to repose and reflect. A site to make a symbolic gesture of their own, perhaps a meaningful prayer or an action to add strength to the overall artwork and experience. According to Macarena Goméz-Barris meaning behind collective memory is located not by individuals but by the resources shared and states that it is "through the gathering of individual memory threads and reconstituted social experience that symbolic memory repertoires accrue and inscribe meaning to negotiate the past in contemporary society."[310] Chagoya grants us a space of reflection, where individuals gather meaning through collective engagement of a horrific societal ailment, exposing a painful wound with a gesture that symbolically allows us to mourn an imposed violence.

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[309] Anzaldúa, 10.
[310] Macarena Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile* (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008): 7.

The second project in which the artist actively engages with the community is the powerful piece entitled *A Rose for Remembrance* (2021). As described in her own words the artist explains in her artist statement:

> *A Rose for Remembrance* is an artistic project and a flower offering that commemorates murdered women, girls, transgender women, Two-Spirit People, and people who identified as female. It consists of rose petals individually encased in resin, each containing a name and dates carefully incised on them. These rose petals are pink, which signify the everlasting love and memory we bare for these people. The objective of this project is to name and commemorate those whose lives have been cut short due to gender violence.[311]

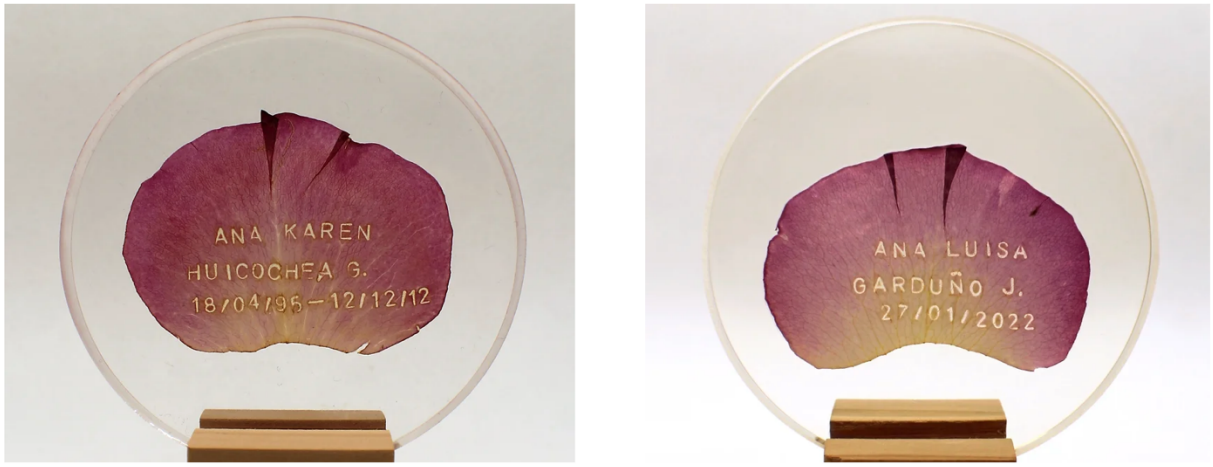

Fig. 36. © Claudia Chagoya, *A Rose for Remembrance*, 2021.

Chagoya elucidates that it was important for her to establish a dialogue, find shared connections between femicide occurring in Mexico and in Canada, thus establish a cross-cultural and border understanding of grief and loss. But for her, it was also important to find meaningful ways to do this work in a respectful ethical manner, and as such pursued mentorship from traditional knowledge keeper Cheryle Chagnon-Greyeyes of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation.

[311] From the artists' website https://www.claudiachagoya.com/a-rose-for-remembrance.

Chagnon-Greyeyes is an activist and spokesperson who has led the fight for justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S). Guided by her traditional knowledge and methodology, Chagoya learned the importance and need for a place of healing and care which had been absent prior to her encounter with her mentor. The project consisted of collaborating with individuals who could share the name of a person along with a story of their loved ones who was a victim of femicide and then inscribe those names and stories onto individual rose petals. This effort was a difficult task, reaching out to others that had also been subject to trauma, for this request could bring out further pain. Thus, the guidance and mentorship she received from Chagnon-Greyeyes was crucial, and the process was as important as the final objects mailed to each participant and relative of victims. Her intention to pursue a past and make itself felt in the present[312] became an attempt to transform spaces and remind us of the power of creation and our capacity to resist violence and despair with love, beauty, and care.

Through her work, the artist addresses collective wounds caused by gender violence, acknowledging her own bereaved family's pain, commemorate other victims, and keep collective memory alive with meaning and intention. Twelve engraved pink rose petals encased in round plexiglass frames placed on cedar bases read the names of women and girls from Mexico and Canada that have been victims of gender violence. The stories vary in amount of detailed description, relationship to victim, and type of information disclosed, but they all share the memory of each woman and girl. The artist was deeply affected by the recent murder of one of the contributors who had shared the information of her daughter in the project. As a result of this tragedy, the artist dedicated the project in memory of Ana Luisa Garduño, inspired by her years

[312] Please refer to Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Meditations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

of activism, resiliency, and strength to advocate against femicide. Garduño was murdered in Temixco, Morelos on Thursday January 27, 2022, after over 10 years seeking justice for her own daughter Ana Karen Huicochea Garduño, and for all the victims of femicide in Mexico through her lobbying and activism. By visibilizing the tragedy and the wounds that remain intergenerationally by scaring the roses themselves with inscriptions, the artist emphasizes the power of remembering through community participation and involvement. The care placed of engraving the names of twelve women and girls on rose petals, the communal aspect of sharing stories, and the final act of mailing these as gifts to contributors, provided a communal space for healing, thus adopting a decolonising ethics, a shift in epistemological perspective, understanding Indigenous cosmovisions of relationality, protection, care, and guidance.

Inspired by Doris Salcedo's installations and sculptures that "often employ minimal forms that subtly evoke the fragility of human life,"[313] the work *A flor de piel* (2011-12) is a perfect example of how the notorious Colombian artist has had a deep impact in Chagoya's thought process. *A flor de p*iel is a large red textile stitched together from 250,000 rose petals, invoking the burial shroud for a female nurse who was tortured to death in Colombia. Her dismembered body has never been found and Salcedo describes how this work serves as an offering to all of those who have been victims of torture and violence. Salcedo's work does not offer reparation or redemption, nor does she necessarily proclaim an act of denunciation through her installations. Instead, as Rebecca Comay claims she "regards her work as a form of mourning and as a kind of testimony: the artwork functions as a funeral oration, tomb, offering, shroud, witness, reminder and remainder of a death otherwise threatening to go unmarked."[314] Although

[313] Please visit Guggenheim's *A Flor de Piel* description and image https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/31379.
[314] Rebecca Comay, "Material Remains: Doris Salcedo*," Oxford literary Review*, 39, no. 1 (2017): 43.

employed in a different manner, there are similarities between Salcedo's *A flor de piel* and *A Rose for Remembrance* by Chagoya. Just as Salcedo, Chagoya employs the rose by exposing its fragility, but for the young artist, the gesture of the offering becomes as critical as the object itself, and the act of encasing the rose for its longevity, proclaims the urgency behind the act of memorializing. The artists' gesture of offering this gift, rather than for public display at a museum, transforms the potency of art to an act of resistance, adding sensorial and emotive value for a grieving family that has lost a member and gained the pain of indescribable violence.

Chagoya's first exploration with roses began with her project entitled *Rosas* (2019-2020) a few months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. She embroidered ten roses, each day beginning in the month of October 2019, and once the pandemic hit in March 2020, it increased to eleven per day, a number based on the statistics of femicide in Mexico. Within the span of one year, she had embroidered 3,855 red, pink, and white roses onto a six by five-foot fabric. The number of flowers she had stitched onto the pale brown cloth in the end came close to the registered cases of femicide in Mexico. Femicide cases increased with a global peek in domestic violence during the pandemic due to self-isolation and quarantine measures. However, more than highlighting the immensity and the abstraction of numbers, the artist once again played an active role in finding a space to commemorate the individual lives lost, their relationality with one another, and to nature.[315] The roses are sewn in a centrifugal shape that scatter around in all directions, with no particular pattern. Chagoya's flower choice and placement throughout the frame, are embedded with meaning during the ritual act of embroidering, stitching every day of the year, honoring the victims while undergoing isolation restrictions of her own. By the end of the year, a visual

[315] Relationality within Indigenous knowledge considers the multiple relationships that humans share with each other and the natural world.

representation of life, violence, and disease is depicted onto the frame. The final image encapsulates both life and death. While death is illustrated as a microscopic form of disease, the symbol of life is depicted as a seed that germinates, spreading multiple lives from its core.

Judith Butler writes about how certain lives are supported differently, where some are highly protected and others do not even qualify as grievable.[316] She states "if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?"[317] These lives are esteemed *unreal* and she emphasizes that they "cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never 'were,' and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness."[318] As mentioned, Canada has a genocidal history with Indigenous people who succumb to a dehumanizing system that perpetuates state violence under neocolonial rule. Indigenous women are targets of extreme gender violence with a complete disregard to Indigenous grief.[319] *Rosas* is a visual representation of this neocolonial contamination, a representation of the lives that are esteemed unworthy of mourning. It also serves as a reminder of the widespread gender violence during the pandemic. Butler's "unreal" lives and their deaths spread throughout the immensity faced by the global pandemic that affected mostly vulnerable and marginalized segments of society.[320] Thus, the symbolic gesture of stitching a collective wound, acknowledges those who have been forgotten, and is Chagoya's attempt to heal with an offering, for others and for herself.

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[316] Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4, no. 1 (2003): 20.
[317] Ibid., 21.
[318] Ibid., 22.
[319] See Claudia Beaudoin, "Canada's disregard for Indigenous Grief: How Canadian Healthcare Dismisses Indigenous Cultural Approaches to Well-Being" *The Link*, vol. 45 (October 31, 2023), https://qcna.qc.ca/canadas-disregard-for-indigenous-grief/.
[320] Experts and advocacy groups describe the violence against women and girls throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as the "shadow pandemic" where incidences have escalated due to the social and economic impacts during the global health public emergency.

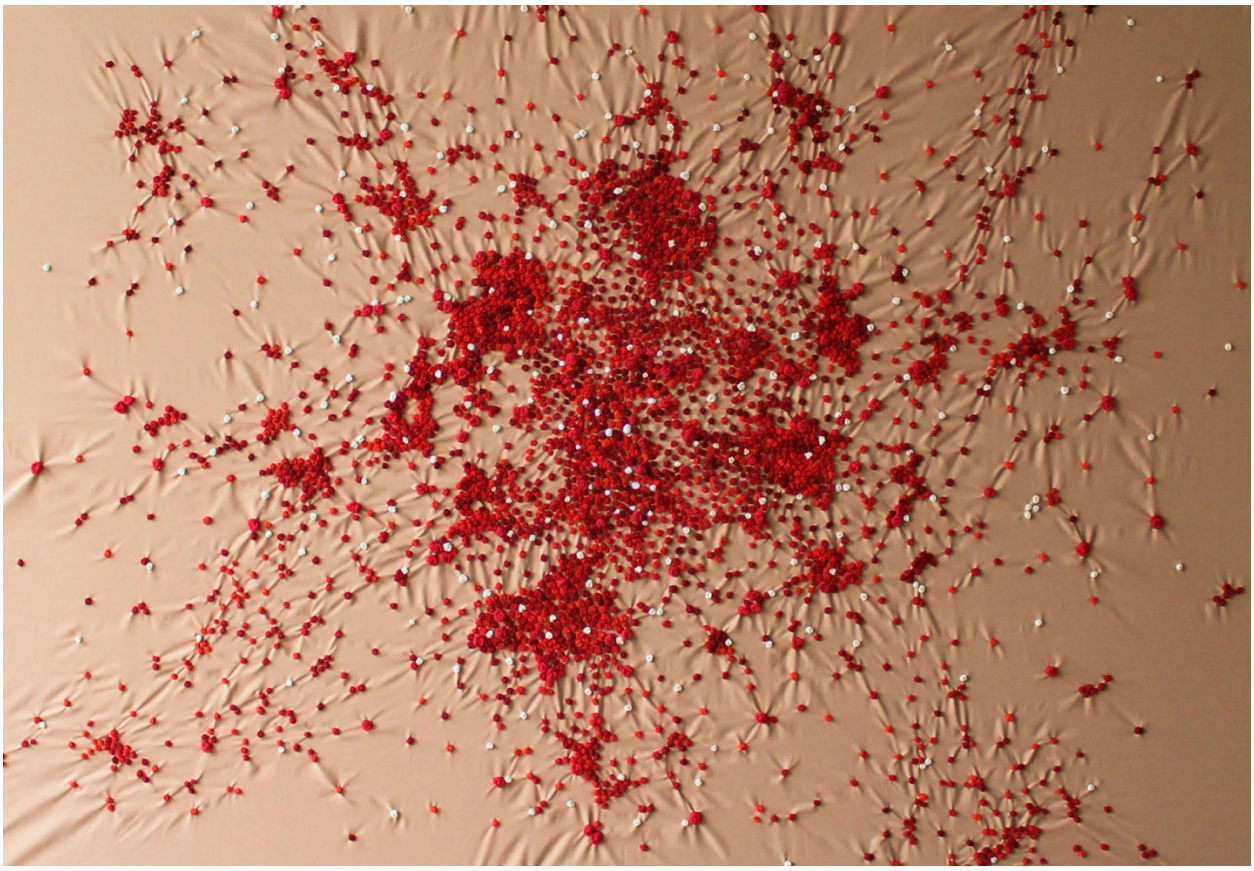

Fig. 37. © Claudia Chagoya, *Rosas*, 2019/2020.

Chagoya's repetitive ritualistic gestures are not performative nor inconsequential. These gestures of unweaving a rebozo, embroidering thousands of roses, cleaning and scrubbing rebozos with salt, mumbling prayers, spraying herb scents, seeking Indigenous wisdom, and engraving fragile rose petals, all emphasize the meaning of healing and the role of mourning through delicate and repetitive process. The importance of taking time, and our relationality with nature. As Anzaldúa reminds us "we can transform our world by imagining it differently, dreaming it passionately via all our senses, and willing it into creation."[321] If Judith Butler claims that "mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation" then Chagoya enters the

[321] Anzáldua, *Light in the Dark*, 20.

terrain of the transformative effect of loss.[322] For the artist, the importance of community and the visceral connection to her work is critical. By incorporating the visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory, Chagoya reaches us sensorially in "unexpected raw ways."[323] Most importantly, she uses art as a tool to cope with tragedy while also denouncing pain caused by femicide.[324] By triggering the act of memory, the artist emphasizes tangible ways art can play a role in mourning. Through materiality and gestures, Chagoya exposes the visceral abilities of objects. The absent body associated with trauma gains power without the need for its figuration.

Mourning as Testimony: Laura Barrón

As a practicing emerging artist from Mexico City, Laura Barrón visited Canada to attend an artist residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Alberta in 1999, thus, had already established an impression of the country prior to immigrating. In 2002, at the age of 36 years old, the artist attended another residency, but this time the invitation was a partnership between FONCA[325] and the Canada Council for the Arts, again at the Banff Centre. The partnership consisted of an exchange program with a cohort of ten writers and ten photographers from Canada and Mexico, working together on projects in Merida and Banff. Hurricane Isidore had recently hit the Yucatán peninsula a week prior to the artists' arrival for their first encounter, and it was there where she met who would become her husband, the Canadian writer José Teodoro. The following year, the twenty Canadian and Mexican artists gathered at Banff.

[322] Butler, 11.
[323] Interview with Laura Barrón January 29, 2024.
[324] For further information on femicide see Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L Bejarano *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[325] The National Endowment for Culture and Arts (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes) is a public agency of the Mexican federal government.

Coincidentally, the 2003 Okanagan Mountain Park Fire had recently occurred, a tragedy in which the burning of more than 250 square kilometers of forests devastated the region. The land destruction she experienced in both the North and the South, was eerily reminiscent of her previous imagery which captured land desolation. Her first depictions of the theme of mourning are explored during this residency where she takes photographs of the devastated landscapes affected by global climate change, an aftermath result of neoliberal economies that disregard the protection of flora, fauna, water, land, and people. Her photo-based work navigates themes of destruction, isolation, precarity, and displacement all of which point to the need for mourning.

Following the exchange program, the artist and her husband moved to the cities of

Fig. 38. © Laura Barrón, *Absentia*, 2014-2018.

Edmonton and later to Victoria, where they settled for eight months. For Barrón, the adjustment from a large metropolitan mega city such as Mexico City with over 22 million people to a less-dense Canadian conservative and anglophone environment, was a dramatic shift and challenging for the artist to cope and adapt to.[326] Hence, the couple decided to move to a larger and more cosmopolitan city, Toronto. It is in this highly immigrant populated place where the artist established various networks and long-life friendships, embarking on a journey of self-discovery. Most of these friends are artists from various disciplines of the Latin American diaspora. Until that point, she had never thought of the concept or "idea" of being part of a Latin American diaspora, a community with which she collaborated and was inspired by. However, after living in Canada for ten years, marrying and becoming a Canadian citizen, the artist began to contemplate a return to the South, longing to learn about the places and people she met throughout the years, and developed a photo-based project of self-discovery. A temporary departure, looking towards the South, while experiencing the land of the people she had grown to care for and admire.

Absentia (2014-2018) is a project which, as the artist describes, "narrates a returning journey to my home country after being an immigrant in Canada for more than a decade,"[327] and resulted in a special edition of fifty handmade books by the artist. *Absentia* was developed by The Photo-Book Incubator Program at Hydra in Mexico City and was co-published by Inframundo. The artist has presented the book at several photo festivals and art book fairs such as: Les Rencontres de la Photographie, Arles 2018 and 2019, Unseen Amsterdam 2018, Paris Photo 2018, LA BOOK FAIR 2019, and Printed Matter's NY Book Fair 2019. The project consists of seven colour coded small books contained within a box, all of them placed in

[326] Interviewed artist February 5, 2024.
[327] Refer to artists' website: http://www.laurabarron.ca/absentia.html.

sequence with the combined spines that read the title of the project. Inside each book, the cities are explored with different formatted photographs, handwritten notes, sketches, collages, and individually stitched white paper strands in between pages that describe the journey. Ultimately, the project became a reconstruction of her own journey as a diaspora and a way to understand land from the perspective of a "return."

With the absence of home and the nostalgia of a return, the artist decided to embark on a journey to work and live in the cities she had been exposed to in Canada through her friends, visiting Cali, Quito, Lima, Buenos Aires, Havana, La Paz, and Santiago. The Latin American friends she had met during her life in Canada, shared their customs, traditions, foods, idioms, and

Fig. 39. © Laura Barrón, *Absentia*, 2014-2018.

idiosyncrasies, and the artist longed to witness those for herself with a romanticized and fetishized sentiment. This clear nostalgic understanding of a place she had no ancestral

connection to, became less of a concern than the exploration and depiction of loss within space and territory. According to Mieke Bal, this idea of nostalgia is often criticized as unproductive, escapist, and sentimental, and considered "regressive, romanticizing, the temporal equivalent of tourism and the search for the picturesque."[328] However, rather than exploring an idyllic landscape for the reader to contemplate, or approach the project as a tourist depiction of a foreign place, the artist discloses, ruptures, and exposes the deep hidden crevices that often fall unnoticed within cities while also finding a place for herself within them as a diasporic subject in search for the loss of her own place. She creates a different relationship for herself to the land of those who are now situated far away. All landscapes are void of human presence, only the memory of the places lost in time, with glimpses of the artists' limbs that often poke into the frame. Portrayed as memories, sketches, moments, the artist appears in a search of inquiry and identification, not in a state of temporal romanticization.

The last book of the series consists of black pages with small white text, a sentence or two that describe the relationship to land and to bodies of water. Its white font slowly fades within every other page to reach the final that reads, "I am facing where I am not." This in-between relationship state highlights the memory of a land lost and that of an adopted one, the liminal state which Anzaldúa alludes to where subjects who "inhabit different cultures…shift into and out of perspectives."[329] The stories of the diaspora are seen through the eyes of the photographer's journey of discovery, not only of herself but of those who impacted her journey as a diasporic subject, with a nostalgic portrayal of their past. The conundrum of absence which is beautifully displayed by the void of people within landscapes and buildings, signal the idea of

[328] Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in Present* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 1999), xi.
[329] Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 3.

detachment often experienced by diasporic subjects. The photographer who returns in their absence, allows for its sentimentality to linger throughout the pages without the risk of romanticized fetishism.

Fig. 40. © Laura Barrón, *North*, 2017.

The project entitled *North* (2017) is a photo-based installation consisting of a 3:20 min video projection of photo portraits of friends and acquaintances the artist interviewed and photographed. The edited video is a depiction of participants facing the camera while gradually fading into one another. This apparently physiognomic portrayal of the diaspora is far from a scientific exploration of facial recognition or necessarily a critique on scientific racism. Rather, it is a haunting rendition that captures diasporic subjects and their relation to land. The video projection is coupled with a series of handheld c-type digital prints, forty portraits of participants, all aligned horizontally on each side of the projected wall, with their backs facing the camera.

Similar to *Absentia*, the artist is again inspired by her diaspora, and invites individuals to walk towards Lake Ontario, a beach situated at the southern part of Toronto. During the 30-minute walk, the artist casually interviews each person, asking questions about their migration journeys to the North and how it has altered their relationships, their upbringing, and their perspectives on life, how they envision their futures in Canada, and whether they plan to return to their homeland. Upon arrival at the beach, the artist asks them to face the South where they meditatively observe an expansive pool of water and infinite sky. The artist photographs them facing the South with their backs towards the camera.

Their longed homeland and adopted one both become unattainable places. Their homeland will always be part of their past and the memories of those spaces fade with time. Their adopted land will forever be foreign and anchorage to belonging becomes impossible within a system which renders them invisible. Grieving a life lost, facing unpredictable spaces, while looking towards what is gone, becomes a sentiment for mourning, a personal battle the artist struggles with and shares. *North* encapsulates a sense of haunting rather than of transformation. The lack of connection to land, to species, and to others, is rendered visible by the portraits' disconnection and detachment to each other and by their nebulous depiction. The stories shared are kept confidential, within the memory of the moment shared between the artist and the subject. Mourning stays stagnant within a space of loss, haunted by only memories.

However, the artist also manifests sentiments of transformation through her photographic series *Palimpsest* (2012). In this series she explores the difficulty of mourning while living far away from home and confronts her father's death metaphorically and spiritually. The artist did not have the opportunity to see her father before he unexpectedly passed away. After attending her father's funeral in Mexico City in 2011, she returned to Canada to an unaltered daily routine,

Fig. 41. © Laura Barrón, *Palimpsest*, 2012.

except for her, everything had changed. She felt the need to confront her father's death within her adopted home, thus initiating her own process of mourning with his ashes. The artist utilized landscape photographs of past projects that she had taken in Canada and spread his ashes onto those surfaces. The artist photographed the off-white powder that covered her work to form cloud-shaped images onto the prints and photographed the result. Her father's ashes witness the territory she now inhabits while also embodying those spaces. This gesture bears new meaning to place, it provides a space to endure the difficult mourning process of grieving her father's passing.

In the essay "Coloniality of Power and Coloniality of Gender: *Sentipensar* the Struggles of Indigenous Women in Abya Yala from Worlds in Relation" Carmen Cariño explains that within the ontologies of Indigenous peoples, separations do not exist. She emphasizes that the

"body is not separate from the spirit, nor is the mind from the body…it is imbricated with the earth and connected in turn with the four directions of the universe, and with the sun, the moon, the water, and the wind."[330] Through this series, Barrón acknowledges the existence of different worlds that coexist together. Her photograph is no longer within a singular timeframe but has been reimagined within another space, embodied by multiple selves and multiple terrains. This series provides the possibility of new life and form and connects the body to land, air, and water. By converging the past loss with the presence of her father within the frame, the artist demonstrates the possibility of longevity, connectivity, and relationality. As the title alludes, *Palimpsest* refers to the reused and altered nature of its subject. Her father transforms and becomes her artwork, a symbolic gesture that helps the artist mourn his loss. The ashes still bear visible traces of death, and this knowledge reveals the tragedy as a site of mourning and dispossession. Rather than spreading her father's ashes in the ocean, Laura Barrón grieves her father's passing by imbedding him directly onto her life's work in Canada, connecting his organic matter to her personal continuous search for identity and belonging.

Barrón individualizes and centres her grief in *Palimpsest* yet is also able to reach a space of transformation through her understanding of relationality. Void of words and of figuration, *Palimpsest* offers a poetic testimony and the capacity of art to resist death. Her collective approach with *North* and *Absentia* facilitates an understanding of loss within diaspora and its abysmal sense of belonging in Canada.

The emptiness portrayed both within Barrón's landscapes and the portraits allude to the experience of displacement of those who leave their ancestral homes and are in constant

[330] Carmen Cariño and Alejandro Montelongo, "Coloniality of Power and Coloniality of Gender Sentipensar the Struggles of Indigenous Women in Abya Yala from Worlds in Relation," *Hypatia* 37, no. 3 (2022): 551.

nostalgic searches for belonging. Tension and the inadequacy of describing loss is captured through her staged images, opening a discussion on mourning. The search for identity and her own disconnection to land in the North offers a site for questioning. Places that can no longer be seen are left outside of the photographic frame, symbolically alluding to this ongoing conundrum of diasporas. The absence of human life within desolate dispossessed landscapes reminds us of her endless exploration of everything that has been lost and left behind, a place of mourning.

Art as Activism: Paolo Almario

Saguenay-based artist Paolo Almario came to Canada in 2011 to study and pursue a master's degree at the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi (UQAC). The artist was born in 1988 in the region of Caquetá, Colombia, and was raised in the cities of Florencia and Bogotá. Almario's father was a congressman, and the artist recalls growing up under heavy surveillance and scrutiny, to protect the family from potential violence, for his father was a representative of the government during Colombia's civil armed conflict.[331] The Colombian government, far-right paramilitary groups, far-left guerilla groups, the United States government, along with the interference from multinational corporations, and the drug trafficking industry, made it an extremely violent time in Colombia's history resulting in arbitrary killings and detentions, extreme abuses and violence, government corruption, and forced displacement. Described as the

[331] Online Studio Critique with Gerardo Mosquera and artist Paolo Almario. Sur Gallery programming: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98P_D2mGNSo&t=6s.

most prolonged civil war in centuries, over 200,000 people in Colombia have been murdered in the last five decades.[332]

At the age of 6-years old, the artist's family left to live in Bogotá while his father continued to work in government in Florencia commuting an eight-hour drive to Bogotá to visit the family on weekends. By the end of the 1990s, the conflict in Colombia had become increasingly hostile and dangerous and in 2001 the family's home in Florencia was attacked during the night while his father, aunt, and cousin were sleeping. It is reported that fifty men with machine guns, grenades, and bazookas left the house in ruins, yet the members of the artist's family managed to survive the attack. As a precaution, the artist fled with his younger sibling and mother to Spain while the father and daughter who at the time was studying Law stayed in Bogotá in a building compound to avoid a similar attack. The artist returned to Bogotá at the age of 15 years old and began his bachelor's degree in design and architecture followed by an invitation to pursue his master's degree at UQAC. Within a year after arrival in Canada, his father was sent to prison with accusations of conspiracy as a member of the revolutionary guerrilla group, FARC.

The artist decided to research and focus all his attention to an artistic project that would revolve around his father's case, which in turn facilitated the release from prison nine years later. His focused research led to legal accountability after years of research. For the artists, his work had a purpose, to expose and denounce an unjust judicial system that perpetuated corruption. In

[332] According to the 2013 report published by Colombia's National Centre of Historical Memory, 220,000 people died between 1958-2013, while more than five million civilians were forced from their homes between 1985-2012.

the case of Almario, his work as resistance had an immediate role to fulfill, and the artist embarked on its potential.

For his project, Almario received funding to go back to Colombia and conduct a thorough research investigation based on the premise that his father was not involved with FARC. Almario returned to the different households his family had lived in, including the house that had been destroyed. He managed to gather information about his father's case, documenting every square meter of every house they had lived in, including his father's 12'x 12' prison cell. In his search for answers, the artist discovered that all the witnesses that were put forward as evidence for his father's imprisonment, were fake, and in fact one of them shared an archived recording of a meeting with an official who had bribed him to falsely testify. Through his art project, Almario managed to uncover a corrupt justice system that enabled not only the violence inflicted upon his father and in effect his family but exposed the state of Colombia.

As an artist who develops his own software, electronics, and robotics to create his work, the artist speaks to global issues of corruption, violence, and displacement with the metaphor of destruction. Thus, mourning is not necessarily tied to the act of grieving but to the state of humanity. Through his work Almario commemorates loss with the possibility to change processes. His installation entitled *formé* meaning 'formed' in English, gathers research during a thorough investigation of his father's trial and the outcome is an intricate, meticulous, and technically savvy installation that captures the destruction of a system. It consists of a series of four art installations with different prefixes and iterations: *deformé* (2013), *transformé* (2014), *paraformé* (2014), and *fauxrmé* (2015). All iterations are shown in the white gallery space and

Fig. 42. © Paolo Almario, *déformé*, 2013.

includes a large metal structure that is mounted from floor to ceiling to support seven portraits of magistrate judges of the supreme court in Colombia.

In *déformé* (2013), the first of the series, the audience is allowed to walk inside the u-shaped metal structure room which is the same 12' x 12' size of his father's prison cell. The portraits are composed of 4,800 ¾" x ½" photos, a mosaic that gives a pixelated quality to each portrait. Each miniscule photo captures documentation the artist gathered of the home that had been left in ruins after the attack, and each photo is organized into 120 columns by 40 rows. With an attached pierced pin, photos hang on a 62" x 33" plexiglass surface, anchored onto the metal structure. The plexiglass has a numbered grid of laser etched holes that hold each pinned photo with a corresponding number in sequence to form the final portrait. From behind each portrait, a rectangular robotic machine moves horizontally from top to bottom to slowly drop each image.

The device is the size of the frame, and a head protrudes moving horizontally across the metal structure from left to right, making the sound of a slow-motion typewriter. The machine slowly

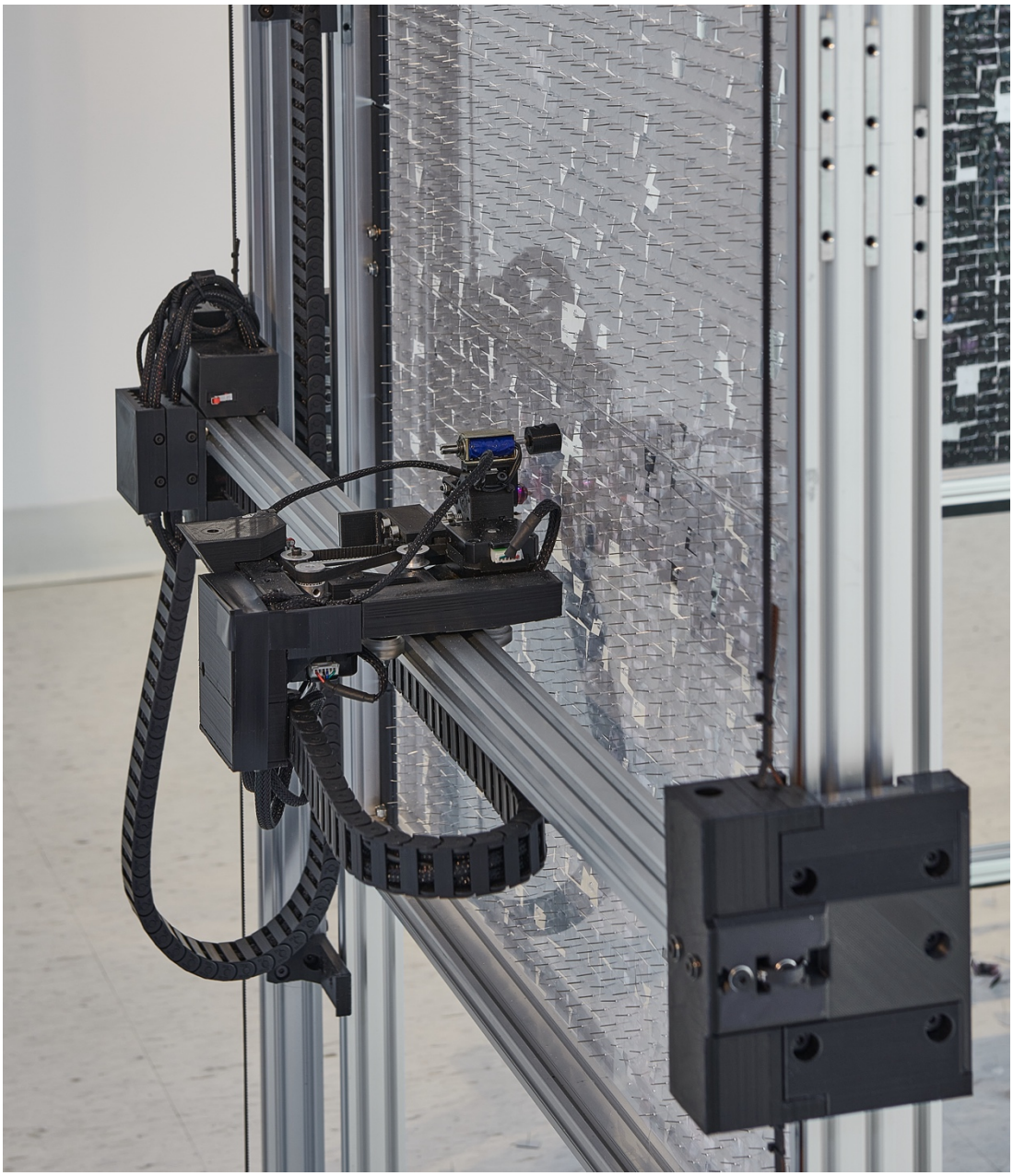

Fig. 43. © Paolo Almario, *déformé*, 2013.

moves and taps each pin with its head to remove the small photos throughout the course of the exhibition. One photo at a time, the portrait of each judge disappears, and their image destroyed.

The photos scatter and form a pile on the gallery floor in front of a slowly disfigured portrait. The experience of the work is never the same, enduring an ongoing, highly organized, and structured dismantlement. Provocatively, the artist alludes to the unfolding violence that stems from corruption, the violence that manifests and affects those directly involved and those who are not.

The attack on the artist's home is displayed in miniscule photographs that cannot be seen from afar. Instead, what is noticeable, is a legal state, symbolically portrayed through portraits of representatives of the law. The representation of the attacked home is once again dismantled, as each photograph drops on the gallery floor during the span of the exhibition. The destruction of the artwork, metaphorically, alludes to the impossibility of any legal accountability. The artist thus not only uses the installation as a site of denunciation but mourns any possibility of justice within a corrupt system. Theirry De Duve refers to the photograph as "natural evidence" and a "live witness of a vanished past" asserting that "reality is not made out of singular events; it is made out of the continuous happening of things…the event is carried on by time"[333] and therefore, the photograph, whether a snapshot of an event or a portrait picture of time, becomes a paradox, bringing about an unresolved psychological response to time. This is the case for Almario's installation. The paradox lies within the frame and the act itself, where the snapshots taken of the house left in ruins also fall to the ground, destroying the portraits of all judges that have become the oppressors. Unlike within the frame, time is not frozen, for the event captured continues to develop, with the release of his father from prison as the result of the artists' work and activism. His activism becomes as important as the work itself. He shares the case publicly on his website, as well as includes iPads beside the installation that hold key documents

[333] Thierry De Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox," *MIT Press* 5 (1978): 115.

including audio recordings exposing the bribe. The installation uncovers a dark and corrupt system with a clean and precise technologically clever installation that reveals violence and chaos.

The outcome of the installation is destroyed by the same artist that builds its mechanism and the artwork becomes a symbol of mourning. To uncover state corruption and negligence, or the possibility to mourn all it has destroyed, is an all too great of a task and its possibility is far reaching. Almario's mourning encompasses the loss of his home and sense of security, the loss

Fig. 44. © Paolo Almario, *déformé*, 2013.

of his own childhood and of a family structure. This sense of loss and mourning is familiar and recurrent within diaspora who flee state violence.

Most compelling, of such an elaborate installation is its ability to facilitate his father's court case. The artist shared his findings with his father's lawyers, and in 2015, used it as evidence, resulting in the release of his father a year later. Unfortunately, by directly exposing the seven magistrates of the supreme court of Colombia who signed for the father's arrest, the artist received death threats. Almario used his status as an artist in Canada to advocate for his own legal protection and claimed refugee status. The project functions not only as an artwork, but in the process became a tool and a weapon of combative force that served a tangible purpose, the release of his father. It transcended beyond its limits, successfully changing the course of his father's destiny.

Almario's installations mimic the legal system he criticizes, calculated and cold-hearted. Perceived on the surface as an obsessively researched forensic project, the artist's work uncovers a family tragedy that has left a scar on the artist for over a decade. He has endured pain and stress and the expense of exile in order to seek accountability and used his artistic practice as conduit towards justice. The artists' work may not seem on the surface like a raw response to loss, but it cries of sentimentality and floods with chaos. Scenes of violence engulf the documentary photographs, and the outcome is of a destroyed installation. Despite the trauma inflicted by the attack, the conviction, and the unveiling of the truth, the process of developing this project has helped Almario mourn the loss of his home, his father, and his own inability to return. The act of researching, constructing, and lobbying for justice alleviates the chaos and the unfathomable uncertainty of exile. As an artist who becomes an activist, he not only destroys and faces a corrupt system but symbolically transcends and transforms the mechanism of resistance. The process of dealing with difficult and traumatic knowledge allows the artist to heal and to come to terms with the embedded scars of his present reality. His life experiences become woven

into his work and objectives. His acts and objects are no longer gestures but statements of intention and of action to open a path towards a different future.

An Unsettling Return: Monica Martínez

Originally from Quillota, Chile, the process-based artist Monica Martínez arrived in Saskatoon, Canada at the age of three years old. Martínez was born a few months after the military coup d'etat in Chile which overthrew socialist Salvador Allende's government, placing the dictator, General Augusto Pinochet as head of state. Threatened by Chile's elected socialist government, as "a living example of democratic social reform in Latin America"[334] President Richard Nixon's administration aided the dictatorship. Over the next three years, "Washington spent millions of dollars to destabilize Chile's economy"[335] resulting in a U.S. backed military coup with a seventeen-year-long brutal regime. Thousands of people were killed, disappeared, many raped, tortured, machine-gunned at the edge of pits, thrown from helicopters into the sea, and many fled into exile.

Monica Martínez's family is one example of those who had to flee. Her mother crossed the mountainous border to Argentina with her 6-month-old baby after the artists' father had been arrested by the military. The family reunited in Mendoza six months later where the artists' sister was born, and later sought refugee status in Canada. Upon arrival, they faced a harsh Canadian winter in Saskatoon and settled with friends who had been living in the city. Three years later, the family moved to Edmonton, during the economic boom of the 1980s, searching for

[334] Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 60.
[335] Ibid., 59.

employment opportunities. The artist grew up in a poor working-class household, with a mother who had to work night shifts, and lived in government housing, where most immigrants raised their families.[336]

The Martínez family was constantly moving and never settled in one location, casting a deep impact on how the artist related and connected to the place. The artist shared that she had never felt anchored to one single place since her exiled family had become nomads in Canada, never settling, always in transition, in search of belonging. It took the artists' mother 35 years to return to Chile after escaping the dictatorship and has never gone back since. Continued fear haunts intergenerationally and healing has not reached several for those who fear the scars of the past. The artist herself has only been to Chile twice in her lifetime, once at the age of twenty-five and later as an artist at the age of forty-two.

On this last occasion, Martínez worked collaboratively with collective CONSTELACIONES to bring a performance installation/monument *Return Atacama* (2016) to the desert during Hemispheric Institute's 10th Encuentro, exocentric: dissidence, sovereignties, performance, which took place in Santiago, Chile from July 17th to 23rd, 2016. Gómez-Barris explains "The exilic experience has very much shaped the political landscape of the Latin American diaspora and the broader histories of struggle… this historical period has informed social identities that are activated through cultural memory."[337] For the artist, this becomes evident within her praxis, an underlying sense of mourning for what has been lost with exile, displacement, and the suffering of those left behind.

[336] Interview with Monica Martínez conducted June 10, 2023.
[337] Gómez-Barris 2008, 151-52.

The artists' work is informed by her family's violent history as refugees who escaped a violent and oppressive military dictatorship. She embodies a generation formed by rupture. Her connection to Chile is based on the stories she heard growing up in exile, the values and lessons instilled from her parents, and the knowledge that she did not belong to the land in which she currently lived. The first time she visited Chile, the language barrier and culture shock affected her ability to navigate comfortably and confidently with others, disconnecting her to the place of her ancestors even further. It was through her art practice that the artist found a space for connectivity and dialogue, sharing in an interview: "I was trying to understand the roots of my foundations through the lens of my own reality."[338] This thirst for understanding became the impetus to find a lexicon that she recognized as her own. The visual languages that gave her meaning was also determined by her choice of medium as a manifestation of her social class. She states, "poverty has always been part of the fabric of my existence" and that awareness of a constant hustle is reflected as defiance. As an art student she regularly scavenged supplies to produce work, which allowed her to talk about materiality in terms of social and economic inequality, delve into the subject of power and labor, as well as colonization and the politics of race. She found strength and resiliency within wreckage and strife, politicizing the essence of her artistic discourse.

The title of her installation *Everyone is fallen except for us fallen…* (2012-ongoing), comes from a poem by Chilean artist and poet Raúl Zurita. This installation which consists of a large-scale pile of over 400 hand-sized porcelain and terracotta crosses is perhaps representative and indicative of her artistic practice since she is in constant mourning. Zurita's poem

[338] Interview with Monica Martínez, June 10, 2023.

Fig. 45. © Monica Martínez, *Everyone Is Fallen Except for Us Fallen*, 2012. Photo by Larry Glawson.

entitled *Song for His Disappeared Love* "is a resounding response and a testimony to humanity that etches out its survival by accepting life amid atrocity and deprivation…Zurita recounts his arrest and imprisonment during the 1973 military overthrow as General Pinochet came to power in Chile."[339] As does Zurita, Martínez attempts within the limits of her own medium to decipher meaning from overwhelming trauma. Her entire life had been informed by her parent's journey to Canada, and Chile had become a symbol of state oppression and unhealable suffering.

Martínez understands the significance of what Gomes-Barris explains on how memory "operates through gatherings, mourning, collective witnessing, remembrance, intergenerational

[339] See Steven Karl's review of Raúl Zurita's book: https://sinkreview.org/reviews/song-for-his-disappeared-love-raul-zurita-translated-by-daniel-borzutzky.html

dialog, and historical understanding of what occurred, enlivening the practices of democracy."[340] The artist intentionally offers this site of remembrance as an urgent and needed ritual. Her installation *Everyone is fallen except for us fallen…* becomes an offering to confront inherited grief. A homage to the detained and disappeared in Chile and to their loved ones, who continue to search for remains.

Her installation is inspired by Patricio Guzman's film *Nostalgia for the Light, a* documentary that takes place in the Chilean Atacama Desert which follows the stories of astronomers who look for answers in the immensity of the cosmos, and women who look for the remains of their disappeared loved ones in the driest most desolate desert in the world. The artist spent weeks making porcelain crosses wrapped in the centre with terracotta cloth, holding the white crosses together, staining the artists' hands with the dark red pigment of the earth. Both Guzman's film and Martínez's installation are representations that counteract hegemonic projects of amnesiac closure and forgetting. Instead, they become what Gómez-Barris advocates for live "cultural and political practices, aesthetic representations that bear witness and heed advice about future directions."[341]

In 1991, an unmarked burial site was found in the desert. Ribs, skulls, and knuckles poked out of the ground, uncovered by the wind, 13 km at the outskirts of Calama. The mummified bodies were wrapped in burlap and the fabric impressions were found printed on victims' skin. For the artist, the red terracotta cloth used in the crosses for her installation,

[340] Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 155.
[341] Ibid., 157.

Fig. 46. © Monica Martínez. CONSTELACIONES, *Return Atacama*, 2016. Photo by Cassie Scott.

symbolized the effort of keeping the disappeared alive and whole, with the help of Mother Earth who had revealed their resting destination for the world to witness. The discarded shards of porcelain spread on the gallery floor symbolize the remains of loved one's so desperately searched for, sifted inch by inch across the desert by women who are robbed of their right to mourn.

Once placed in the kiln, these competing materials – porcelain and terracotta – fight with each other to take on new forms. These bone-like cross objects that reference the detained and disappeared, experienced extreme heat and came out of the kiln with sharp splintered edges that could easily harm those who held them. Perhaps for the artist these crosses which became sharp weapons represent the resiliency of bodies buried. Bodies exposed with the help of nature. Those

left behind in search have become warriors that never give up, despite decades of denial and silence.

This installation laid the foundation for the performance/action piece by collective CONSTELACIONES, where the artist decides to return to her ancestral land and offer the installation at the site where the mass grave was found. Drawing from interdisciplinary practices that include sculpture, performance, theatre, ritual, installation, sound, and video, the members Roewan Crowe, Doris Difarnecio, Christina Hajjar, Monica Martínez, and Helene Vosters came together with the intention to find connections and possibilities for generative encounters between artists and scholars. The group's intention was to connect and address the site of trauma in the North of Chile with the North of the continent, where Martínez and the others had settled, adding another layer of complexity with the genocidal histories in both hemispheres. During Hemispheric's Encuentro, members of the collective invited scholars and colleagues from the Canadian Consortium on Performance and Politics in the Americas and the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, to travel with them in a van from Santiago to the Atacama Desert to complete Martínez's wish and place the crosses at its final resting monumental spot.

This project and journey entitled *Return Atacama*, became a ritual of remembrance and witness[342] to the retracing of the Caravan of Death[343] with invited guests: Shannon Bell, Jarvis Brownlie, Smaro Kamboureli, Cassie Scott, Alexei Taylor, Dot Tuer, Kimberley Wilde, and Marcelo Andres Valdez Perez who drove the group 1,076 km. Dot Tuer writes about the traumas

[342] Roewan Crowe and Helene Vosters, "Introduction" *Return Atacama*, HemiPress, 2019, https://returnatacama.hemi.press/chapter/introduction/.
[343] The Caravan of Death was the dictatorship's death squad following the orders to execute Allende supporters after the coup d'état between late September to October 1973. The death squad stopped in various towns such as La Serena, Antofagasta, and Calama, picking up detainees in helicopters who were imprisoned in military cuartels, many of which were thrown into the Pacific Ocean, never to be found.

the group bear witness to throughout the journey. Personally, Tuer experienced ghostly sensations that hovered over them, and she writes "phantasms conjured by performative actions and ceramic bones being laid to rest; spirits of the disappeared anchored to the sea and land; the long shadows cast by Pinochet's reign of state terror; the residue of repression and denials, fear, and silences."[344] For Tuer, the journey cast a deeper impact than the durational performance itself. Taking the same route as the Caravan of Death, the group stopped at La Serena's sandy beach, where they were asked to write the word "Return" on its shore. Hesitant to "engage with a history of repression and terror" that wasn't hers, Tuer experienced the magnitude and presence of unsettled spirits that haunt Chile. At their destination at the Atacama Desert, Diana Taylor joined the group to witness the 3-hour durational performance/action prepared by CONSTELACIONES where the members communally unpacked and unwrapped the crosses and left them in a pile in the heart of the desert. This time, the pile of crosses became more evidently the bones of the disappeared. Wind whistling through the crevices and holes of each bone, spirits wailing and screaming the names of each person disappeared by state violence, giving voice to the voiceless and bodies to the disappeared. Traces of shards were left for mothers and widowers who will return to the site as they continue to search for their loved ones.

Indigenous people throughout the continent of Abya Yala are in a relationship of reciprocity and understanding, the interconnections that bond and sustain the web of life allows for an interrelation of existence.[345] Cariño explains "The earth gives to the people and the people also give to the earth. Whether in ceremonies or in daily life, earth is celebrated and thanked, and

[344] Dot Tuer, "Ghostly Traces and the Memories of Passage: The Journey to the Atacama Desert and the Ritual of Return," *HemiPress*, 2019, https://returnatacama.hemi.press/chapter/ghostly-traces-and-the-memories-of-passage-the-journey-to-the-atacama-desert-and-the-ritual-of-return/.
[345] Javier Lajo, *Qhapaq ñan: La Ruta Inka de Sabiduría* (Quito: Abya Yala, 2006), 120.

in this way the bond that enables the web of life is sustained."[346] For the difficult healing journey the group embarked on, it became evident that for Martínez it was as important to go back to her ancestral land and leave the offering to Abya Yala, not only to mourn the lives lost but as a ceremonial relational offering, a journey of healing and of reciprocity. Healing was taking place through her connection to people, land, sea, wind, and to the sky. Mother Earth had revealed the whereabouts of the disappeared in 1991, and Tuer's understanding of Chile's haunting past perhaps could also conjure aspects of reciprocity and gratitude towards the land that nurtured and protected the lost souls murdered by state violence.

Fig. 47. © Monica Martínez, CONSTELACIONES, *Return Atacama*, 2016. Photo by Cassie Scott.

[346] Carmen Cariño and Alejandro Montelongo, "Coloniality of Power and Coloniality of Gender: Sentipensar the Struggles of Indigenous Women in Abya Yala from Worlds in Relation," Hypatia 37, no. 3 (2022): 555-56.

This multilayered, relational, and poetic response to trauma, references the body without having to render it visible. Processing loss is reached without the need of human figuration with fixed identities. Unlike the much needed and incessant denunciation of widowers and mothers that march with placards of the detained and the disappeared, Martínez's offering although also denouncing in nature, has a multidimensional aspect. The ceremony implemented by Martínez and the collective speaks to a need for transformation.

Four decades passed for this action to take place since her family escaped the horrors of the dictatorship. Physically detached but emotionally burdened by the violent memory, the artist fulfills her need for closure. Everyone at the desert is there due to rupture, to offer a ceremony for the souls that wander the desert. Martínez's own nomadic trajectory in the North signals a return, a site in which the process of mourning completes full circle. As Tuer claims, "Monica becomes the conduit between worlds and histories, between ghosts and the living…in the vastness of the desert, the bones speak for her. The bones also "speak" to those of us who witness her intermediary role as creator and custodian…"[347] The open monument is left for the barren elements to consume it, and only time can deal with its period of gestation. The artist uses clay to anchor herself to the earth, to the place she left and to the one she inhabits, physically and metaphorically, merging landscapes of the North with the South, and acknowledging both its traumas. The landscape of Chile, with its diverse ecosystems of mountains, deserts, ocean, lakes, rivers, and forests, is a vertical map of the equally diverse landscape of Canada. The artist bridges these two places. However, unsettled by the knowledge that her own safety is at the

[347] See Dot Tuer, *Ghostly Traces*.

expense of genocidal and colonialist expansion of the settler state of Canada, mourning for her demands for it to take place in both hemispheres.

Conclusion

Chagoya, Barrón, Almario, and Martínez decide when the act of mourning can take place. Closure is not necessarily their intention but rather an emphasis on the cyclical process of mourning. Process and approach are as essential for their methodology as is the interactivity of the work. It is about collectivity, community, reciprocity, and alliance formation. These artists offer vulnerability. They open their wounds to process pain. Their work bears strength, determination, and resiliency, unruly and admirable, considering their own traumatic losses. Deprived of the possibility of collective commemoration far away from home, these artists suffer a second death through a type of symbolic effacement, finding within their artistic practice a liberating space for transformation. The non-figurative depiction of trauma and the various poetic gestures and actions they conjure compound the cruelties of our contemporary times. As they face difficult knowledge, they embrace the burden and need for memory during times of atrocity and war. Their mourning is an act of resiliency and resistance that wages against oppressive states, patriarchal and extractive systems, and to the loss of loved ones. Finding the space to defy silence, erasure, and disappearance makes the confrontation even more powerful and brave.

CONCLUSION

The range of contemporary critical theories suggests that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history–subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement–that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.[348]

Homi Bhabha

The sentence of oppression is met with resistance with the capacity to also dream, create, and imagine. This dissertation dives deep into the forms of resistance that emerge within the Latin American diaspora of artists in Canada over the past two decades. They have developed an *aesthetic of resistance,* adopted as a tool to confront a system that has ignored their contributions to the artistic landscape. Metaphorically, narratively, through the medium itself or through their bodies, these artists have developed a language that speaks to the particularities of the diasporic experience from Latin America. Those who deal with intergenerational trauma, displacement, and systemic erasure find a space of representation, transformation, healing, and resistance in their artistic proposals. Ten artists from various regions across Latin America, with different migratory journeys, find within the diaspora reasons to resist, looking back to where they came from and its connection to their current location. This dissertation ultimately poses the question of how and why these tendencies of resistance sprout into existence within art in diaspora and discusses over two decades of artistic creation.

This dissertation was written during challenging world events. The global pandemic, the rise of the alt-right across the globe, and the current atrocities committed in Gaza all have influenced the course and direction of this study. Cognizant that my past informs my personal and academic decisions, and that my positionality, as stated throughout this dissertation, is as

[348] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 172.

relevant as the subject discussed, the following text acknowledges this premise. My own capacity to use writing as a tool for social change and stride beside fellow artists who use critical and oppositional consciousness as a transformative method of resistance, is what provides purpose and meaning to the work done. It recognizes the strength and legitimacy that lies within embodied knowledge, ultimately serving as a conclusion for the dissertation.

Reflections

I am writing the conclusion at an artist residency in Havana, Cuba in April 2024. It is odd to be in the island of utopian aspirations working on my dissertation, as I attempt to find avenues of representation and visibility for the Latin American artist diaspora in Canada. Cuba continues to represent hope for a transformed Latin America for many, yet the island presents itself to me physically and metaphorically as slowly crumbling, full of contradictions and disillusions instead of mimicking expressions of pride and fulfilled dreams. A few still hang on to the ideals of what was accomplished with the Revolution but far too many now face the bitter truth of an exposed corrupt government where artists are targets of censorship and oppression and the voices of dissent of large masses of people are disregarded. There are now many who once defended the Revolution –despite decades of economic challenges due to an embargo and the Período Especial[349]– but now cannot fathom how the socialist objectives of a once triumphant guerrilla

[349] A period of economic depression in Cuba that began in 1991 lasting an entire decade after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) was dissolved as a sovereign state. During the presidency of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela became Cuba's primary trading partner and ally, and in the year 2000 Cuba-Russia relations improved under the presidency of Vladimir Putin helping restore the country's economy.

led by Fidel Castro who defeated a vicious Goliath,[350] could somehow find its way, and dismiss the needs of its people.

As I walk through the streets as a tourist of El Vedado and La Habana Vieja, I cannot help but notice the tired unfulfilled promises of the Revolution and the disillusionment of its population. Everywhere I turn I see antiquated symbols of the Left with the images of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro portrayed on postcards and t-shirts for tourists to purchase. I stumble upon an archival treasure, a shop that sells vintage posters, catalogues, and art books of a utopic time. I'm reminded of Cuba's legacy and role within liberation movements around the world. I purchase an offset poster designed by Faustino Pérez, affectionately known as Fausto, printed by OSPAAL, Organización de la Solidaridad de los Pueblos de Asia, Africa y América Latina (The Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) for a Day of Solidarity with the People of Palestine on May 15, 1968.[351] This solidarity legacy rendered on paper, portrayed by artists and designers, collects dust with the hope that tourists, like me will find value in it and continue to archive its history.

Palestine has been a place that has been in my thoughts and prayers since October 7th and even though my solidarity and their struggle are a familiar issue for me, it has engulfed my everyday actions and thoughts for the past six months, delaying the process of creativity and intellectual ability to function as normal. Seeking updated news, disseminating as much as I can, learning from others, boycotting products, attending rallies, and wearing my keffiyeh in public,

[350] Imperialism, specifically, the United States, is considered a Goliath to the Cuban Revolution. It was adopted as a metaphor inspired by Jose Martí's famous words "viví en el monstruo y le conozco las entrañas–y mi onda es la de David" (I lived inside the monster, and I know its guts–and my slingshot is that of David). The struggle of Cuba against the imperialist power is comparable to that of the biblical story.

[351] In 1968, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) adopted the Palestine National Charter that stated: Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian people, the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine are null and void, Palestinians have the right to determine their own destiny, among other amendments to the PLO Fundamental Law. The same year, an Israeli invasion of Arab territory took place, involving Jordanian and Palestinians forces.

while also losing friends along the way. With the purchase of a poster from the 1960s in Cuba, an empowering effect projects onto my destroyed soul, for future generations to continue the legacy of solidarity as I think of bringing it back home to my son as a gift.

For the past six months, Gaza has been bombarded to the ground and the Western world has done nothing to prevent it. It has been South Africa that stands as an example in its attempt to stop such massacre and has delivered proof of Israel's genocidal intent at the International Court of Justice.[352] Cuba, Palestine, South Africa have all accompanied my journey as places of struggle and solidarity, and I continue to admire their resistance against unfathomable oppression. The world has ignored the embargo imposed on Cuba decade after decade, as they have with the Palestinian struggle against occupation. Today, it is harder to avoid and ignore social media posts that expose not only the blatant violence over innocent civilians but the exemplary resiliency of a people whose lives have been destroyed in Gaza. The poster I purchase and bring back home with me, reminds me of my childhood, where these types of resistance images filled our family living room walls.

For the first time in my life, Chile poses less of a threat than Canada, for those who are pro-Palestinian. Chile has the largest Palestinian diaspora[353] outside of the Middle East. Pro-Palestinian solidarity is embraced, and Palestinian suffering is felt as their own. Canada no longer represents a safe place to support victims and voices of dissent against Israel's actions. For the past six months, I have witnessed censorship towards Pro-Palestinian solidarity in Canada, where artists, scholars, and curators have been vilified and reprimanded for voicing their opinions and stating the obvious. They have risked their livelihoods, their academic reputations

[352] For further information see International Court of Justice Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).
[353] Approximately 500,000 Palestinian people live in Chile.

and positions, to speak out against the dehumanization of the people of Gaza. The keffiyeh is seen as a symbol of the liberation movement, worn to convey one's sympathy towards Palestinian resistance. Since October 7th I have worn my 50-year-old keffiyeh passed on from my mother, who had received the headdress as a gift from a Palestinian couple she met in the 1970s, when we first arrived in Canada and both my parents, and the couple began solidarity movements for their people. I have worn this scarf with pride almost my entire life, but it hasn't been until now that I fear its strong symbolism. I do not know how my neighbours, many of whom are Jewish, and Canadian Israeli's will react or denounce such allyship and have been shocked by the dehumanizing rhetoric and colonial narrative of mass media.

I turn to references and examples of resistance. Cuba, Chile, South Africa, and Palestine, seem to be places that are all intertwined, where colonial and imperial regimes continue to find ways to extract and destroy transformative processes. Nonetheless, I remind myself that resistance will find its way, and that global networks of solidarity have a long history and a standing relationship with one another. Five hundred thousand Palestinian people live in Chile where resistance thrives against Israeli occupation. When deemed a terrorist by the international community, Nelson Mandela was hailed by Cubans as a freedom fighter. Every effort is implemented by colonial and imperial structures of power to annihilate networks and alliances of solidarity, and its most horrific example today is the attempt to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from the region.

Here I am, in Cuba, where the island seems to be in the process of joining a global neoliberal economy. A deceiving economy that many Cubans desire, only benefits a few. Expressions of resistance throughout the Global South rise the resurgence of movements and

networks of solidarity throughout the globe bring hope. In Mexico, Chile, and Colombia,[354] future generations generate alternative liberation movements that follow a legacy of solidarity and ideological defiance against power structures. They possess potency and capacity as they adopt a decolonial, feminist, and Indigenous path of resistance, creating a new proposal for transformation. Countless university encampments have erected throughout the globe, with the demand for institutions to disclose investments and divest from companies contributing to Israel's genocide in Gaza. These encampments began in the United States, spreading quickly to other Western countries, including Canada, where today, McGill University, Concordia University, University of Toronto, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Québec in Montreal, University of Ottawa, University of Victoria, Vancouver Island University, University of Saskatchewan, Thompson River University, University of Manitoba, People's University, and McMaster University thus far have joined the long outstanding list of student resistance.

These movements demonstrate people's capacity to overcome ongoing forms of censorship, their ability to empathise with the suffering occurring thousands of kilometres away, and their innate desire to transform the inequities of humanity. This type of resistance provides hope towards futurities of transformation, with young people leading the way. These young minds look back at the successful examples of the past where student encampments demanded divestment from South Africa during the Apartheid and seek to continue this legacy. Leah Hunt-Hendrix and Astra Taylor, scholars who discuss the capacity of solidarity to change economic and political systems as well as people state:

[354] Following the uprising in Chile, other mass insurrections followed in the Global South, demanding change of neoliberal and corporate systems that benefitted only a small sector of society.

> Connecting previously disorganized or divided people into new coalitions and common struggles can help us remake our shared world–a project that requires creating a political majority that can effectively challenge entrenched structures. Solidarity, in this transformative sense, isn't a feeling, affect, or fuzzy sense of connection; it is a form of power rooted in the acknowledgement that our lives are materially intertwined.[355]

At the time of my birth in 1973, Cuba had been an example of resistance, inspiring many liberation movements throughout the region. My young parents named my sister and I after Tamara Bunke, an Argentine-born East German feminist revolutionary, who followed Che Guevara to participate in the Cuban literacy campaigns and the Federation of Cuban Women. She followed him with the intention of spreading liberation throughout Latin America but was killed under her alias as Tania in 1967 in Bolivia. My life and work are informed and inspired by my parents who resisted and survived a military coup d'état. They instilled in me the mechanisms needed to cope with displacement, trauma, and confront ignorance and apathy with a critical consciousness. A consciousness that has been informed by a legacy of critical thinkers, inspiring the writing and analysis of this dissertation, to think about art within diaspora in the context of Canada, its impact and role within a larger global network. I cannot stop but think of my parents teachings in striving for a more just society, yet, I am overwhelmed by the dehumanizing reality we face today, with the death of Palestinians buried in rubble, and a Western world that chooses to ignore it while justifying a genocide.

[355] Leah Hunt-Hendrix and Astra Taylor, *Solidarity: The Past Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2024), 33.

I was born in Chile a couple of months after a military coup took over Allende's socialist elected government. My parents are exiles and we arrived in January of 1974 to Toronto. I was only 20 days old when my 22-year-old mother was granted a spot to travel with me on the first military airplane that was sent by the Canadian government to provide refuge for Chileans escaping a brutal dictatorship. She had been detained within six months of her pregnancy, tortured, and dumped in a shantytown, experienced a traumatic birth three months later with dozens of other women at a hospital that had lost most of its personnel, nurses and doctors with left wing affiliations, killed and disappeared by the military and replaced by those in power. We were joined in Toronto by my father shortly after who arrived via Panama by jumping the embassy's wall days after the coup.

As a child, I grew up during the 1970s in Vancouver among a Chilean cohort of exiles, all equally traumatized, nostalgically dreaming to return to Chile. During the early 1980s my parents moved to Toronto but in both cities our lives were occupied by solidarity movements. Boycotting Chilean products, attending protests, party meetings, all collective actions with the objective to denounce Pinochet's dictatorship, a return to democracy, and being able to go back to our ancestral land.[356] My family appeared on lists that were published by the Ministry of Interior and were granted the ability to go back during the dictatorship along with over 3,000 other exiles, returning to their homeland without hesitation.[357] Ten years had passed since my parents left their beloved Chile and we spent the next five years living in a country under complete repression, censorship, and fear. The high school student movement had a tremendous

[356] Boycotting as a form of resistance and peaceful protest was historically effective with movements against Pinochet's dictatorship and South Africa's apartheid state. Today's BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement against Israel has been increasing its power and momentum, with over eighty universities in the United States and other Western countries joining student encampments, demanding universities divest.
[357] The dictatorship announced a list of 1,160 exiles who were allowed to return. My father's name appeared in one list followed by my mother and uncle's names in another.

impact in Chile's return to democracy and helped with the insurrection of many to join the resistance and rebel against the oppressive regime. These were my formative rebellious years as a teenager, without the fear of death, as did so many others willing to give it all for justice and freedom. However, the imminent threat led to the decision of once again fleeing, and my family returned to the place that had granted us dual citizenship. This brief recount of my first fifteen formative years is shared to bring some insight into the choices I have made within my personal, professional, and academic pursuits and why resistance is a theme of choice.

Since returning to academia to complete a PhD, I have been confronted by wave after wave of catastrophic events that have made the journey even more challenging. A chain of personal, local, and global turbulent events has triggered a series of reflections I write in my divergent non-traditional academic conclusion. My PhD began in September of 2019, a month that is both celebratory and of commemoration for left-wing Chileans.[358] Only a month had passed as a PhD student when the Estadillo Social (social outburst) filled the streets of Santiago, with over 1.2 million people taking over the streets, followed by mass protests in various cities throughout the country. The outburst came to a halt with the global imposed health restrictions on the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020. The Estadillo began in the capital city led by high school students and grew within days. Other sectors of society joined the insurrection in response to the cost of living, high rate of unemployment, precariousness, privatization, and ongoing inequality. [359] The once claimed "example of economic well-being" in Latin America, Chile became a site of resistance and protest against the neoliberal economy. People from every

[358] September 4, 1970, Chile's first Socialist President was elected, Salvador Allende Gossens. September 18, Independence Day. September 11, 1973, military coup d'état.
[359] High school students' insurrection was in response to public transportation fare hikes, with mass student fare evasions and protests throughout Santiago, Chile. These blossomed into general strikes throughout the nation and various sectors of society joined the uprising.

corner of life took to the streets to demand immediate change. Spontaneous takeovers of subway stations, vandalizing public infrastructures, resulted in a state of emergency and an authoritarian repression led by the Chilean Army.

Chile experienced once again civil unrest, much like the uprising that took place during the last few years of Pinochet's military dictatorship. Protesters demanding for the constitution written under Pinochet to be revoked. A national referendum voted 78.28 percent in favor of the development of a new constitution. The Estadillo Social triggered within me an emotional response, stress related anxiety, and impotence for what was occurring in my homeland, keeping me distracted from the challenge of remaining focused with coursework, assignments, and academic demands. The reminder of a traumatic past and the impotence of an uncertain future was joined by a feeling of pride for a people who stood up and resisted structures of power that kept them in subordination for far too long. I tried to keep my focus on the task at hand, and my scholarly work naturally led me to what became a dissertation on the aesthetics of resistance. It became obvious to follow this path, for it had not only shaped and informed my existence and interests but had now enveloped my everyday concerns during its development. An aesthetics which would take different modalities through performance, installation, sculpture, drawing, painting, coding, printmaking, photography, and video, while utilizing a multiplicity of strategies including, figurative, narrative, poetic, and political dimensions of resistance.

The pandemic that followed, almost seems like a dream, perhaps even a nightmare one tries to forget. Despite the restrictions and the physical and emotional labour endured, it allowed me to take the retrospective time to analyze and reflect on the state of humanity. The privilege

we had as a family, which many of my diaspora did not[360] allowed me to work from home and support my young children through school while studying and writing my comprehensive exams.[361] Two years passed with social and physical restrictions, impeding a natural formation for my young growing children. My daughter who as a child had been free-spirited, active, social, and had self-proclaimed to be a feminist at the age of seven, slowly turned inwards during those difficult two years. By 2022, she was diagnosed with chronic persistent depression and generalized anxiety disorder. Any hope that had slowly come to resurface after three and a half years, dealing with both personal and global events came to an abrupt stop when the world became silent to genocide.

As I write this conclusion that has now become more of a reflection, a testimony, it is only now evident as to why my dissertation is about resistance and art within the diaspora. For me to build collective action, from the ground up, in a place where I witness an unequal power distribution, and struggle with the lack of opportunity for fellow diasporic colleagues, provides the impetus to seek change. Perhaps the comparisons that one might assume as I refer to the Estadillo Social in Chile and an attempt to change the course of contemporary Canadian Art seems absurd - I must reiterate that these connections are both personal and global and must find a space of validation to begin to understand the diaspora. There is a direct interconnection between those of us who navigate political and/or aesthetic resistance, and the spaces that cause its defiance. It is evident in both my own testimony and that of the artists explored in this dissertation. It is evident in all the chapters, captured within the biographies and artworks,

[360] The Latin American community suffered the second highest mortality rate among immigrant communities in Canada during the pandemic.
[361] Please refer to the online article in the Canadian Mental Health Association, "An unequal burden: The pandemic experiences of Latin Americans in Toronto," February 7, 2024. https://cmhato.org/news/an-unequal-burden-the-pandemic-experiences-of-latin-americans-in-toronto/.

described in the geopolitical contexts within settler colonial states, and analyzed within exclusionary art circuits. I disengage from pathologizing artists of the diaspora who find within forms of trauma and displacement an aesthetic of resistance that aim towards transformation. My quest for knowledge and critical consciousness is where I find strength and is what drives the course of the following three and half decades of my life. The groundwork that brings this dissertation to life.

But now I'm back to where this reflection began. On this island, where utopic dreams were born, where my friends have opened an artist residency, Unpack Havana, that has allowed for me to take the needed time and space to write. A space they have opened to cultivate the production of art in the Caribbean, a place of belonging for both of my diasporic friends who also call Canada home. They provide the opportunity for those from the Global North to be able to engage in meaningful ways with the art scene in Havana, but above all grant the opportunity for future generations of Cuban emerging artists to network with international artists and curators as well as a safe space for them to exhibit their work at their gallery, La Casa de la Salamandra. Their connections, relationships, and decades of experience is priceless as they generously share with others. Many of those who have the privilege of receiving this gift must also find ways to begin to decolonize their own preconceived notions and perspectives to be able to embrace it as intended. The exchange must always be reciprocal and cannot come from a colonial position of knowledge imposition, rather of attention and receptivity.

Yet, it is difficult for those of us that come from the Global North to ignore our preconceived ideas and concepts of place and definition. My family history, my ideological upbringing, inform how I see the island, and my utopian aspirations are difficult to ignore. It is also challenging for those from the Global North to take responsibility and assume complicity

over the ills of global economic inequalities. The flux of mass migration towards the North, and the financial and professional precariousness that follows upon arrival is what many from the diaspora face as they take on the labor others don't want. They seldom achieve the intended economic well-being they desire, and very few find their sought-after recognition as artists.

My own positionality in Cuba is different from what it is in Canada. It is of privilege within this economic hierarchy, despite the disadvantages of also being a woman. However, even in Canada, I am privileged in comparison to others of the Latin American diaspora. I have lived in the Global North for over forty years and have the resources and knowledge to pursue a PhD. As such, the advantage has granted the much-needed time and space away from the everyday distractions, the responsibilities of labor both as an active citizen and as part of a family structure. Moreover, the global neoliberal economy led me to the financial decision to dedicate time to writing in Cuba since it was economically more beneficial to travel than to commute by car a couple of hours north of Toronto. I assume and proclaim culpability for using this to my own advantage, of being able to do such a trip, disregarding further emission pollution that allows for my journey here.

I find myself adjusting my distorted utopian notions of Cuba, and my privilege is evident with the reminder of unrealistic state-managed salaries of those needing to creatively find other means to achieve financial sustainability. I have not seen starving children wandering the streets of Havana as would be recurrent in the capital city of the place of my birth, but I have seen the elderly beg on the streets who must live with miniscule pensions, insufficient with today's inflation, as do impoverished Chilean seniors. I acknowledge that inflation has invaded us globally. Cuba and others in the Global South are just experiencing it at a much higher intensity and rate but it will eventually catch on to us all. And thus, I cannot stop but think of our own

reality in Canada, facing similar challenges, deprived of work, affordable housing, and a crumbling public health and educational system with a conservative objective to privatize. The local church of my neighbourhood in Toronto has been offering a food bank since the start of the pandemic, and the line-up grows longer each week with seniors, immigrants, students, and families in need.[362] The economy of disaster has reached every corner of the globe with only few that hold on to financial stability. The privilege I have today may no longer exist tomorrow. As I grow older, my future is in the hands of a system that is turning once again conversative, a party that is increasingly shifting towards an extreme Right. A resurgence of fascism is noticed globally and those of us who work within the lines of social justice and anti-oppression are never safe.

My Cuban friend, an artist I admire and who is disillusioned by the Revolution, struggles with its contradictions, compares what he denotes a "Cuban dictatorship" as the same as Pinochet's,[363] just without the murdered and disappeared. A bold statement, that I disagree with but do not argue, for his experience of oppression is different and is as valid as mine. As I dwell on the comparison, I cannot stop but think of Rodrigo Rojas, a young photographer who was killed, burnt alive by the police as punishment for opposing Pinochet's dictatorship, while Carmen Gloria Quintana survived second and third degree burns to over sixty percent of her body. My experience as the daughter of political exiles who had the fortune of not only fleeing once but twice will never compare to the suffering experienced by Rodrigo or Carmen, let alone of those in Gaza today. Nor does my friend's pain, who compares Fidel Castro with August

[362] See Muriel Draaisma and Tyler Cheese, "100,000 People Expected to Turn to Food Charity in Toronto for 1st Time This Year, Survey Finds," *CBC News*, February 27, 2024, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/second-harvest-hungry-for-change-1.7127447.
[363] The dictator Augusto Pinochet Ugarte overthrew Salvador Allende's socialist government on September 11, 1973.

Pinochet, but has never been tortured or exiled. Oppression and uncertainty must rely on solidarity movements as they build momentum, alliances, and strength with other oppressed people throughout the world. We must not dwell on comparisons, but humanity lost in the process. This is what links those of us who are oppressed and our experiences together. This is what brings South Africa to voice out loud its bold and brave denunciation and criticism of Israel, not the intensity or severity of people's pain.

It is my intention, through this dissertation to conceive of what today seems a "utopic quest" as quoted by my dear friend and colleague Omar Estrada, an artist who in Cuba is regarded as one of the contemporary greats and is the co-founder of Unpack Havana and La Casa de la Salamandra. Estrada has been offered to exhibit along with others of his experience and prestige for a group exhibition that addresses the African influence in Cuban art and has participated in various global biennials including Havana's upcoming in 2024. Despite his professional career that spans over four decades, a career that began in 1984 with a national painting prize, in Canada he remains obscure and overlooked, even though there have been ample opportunities to expose his talent to Canadian audiences. He has only exhibited his work in Toronto at Sur Gallery and has been constantly rejected by academic and art institutions.

Estrada has been travelling to Canada since the late 1990s and tried to settle there to launch his career in 2012. Despite his vast academic experience and extensive exhibition record, he was denied financial support several times from the Canada Council for the Arts to travel as an invited artist to the Biennial of Curitiba in Brazil (2017), the Biennial of Asunción in Paraguay (2015), and The Havana Biennial in Cuba (2015). In addition, he had proven to be an extremely rigorous and inspirational art professor in both Cuba and Barbados, where he taught prior to moving to Canada, teaching drawing, painting, printmaking, and new media for a

decade. Unfortunately, in Canada, he was only offered a few occasional sessional positions at the University of Toronto, and when the opportunity came to hire him with a tenure track position, it was granted to someone else. He never achieved financial stability in Canada which led to the initiative of co-founding an artist residency allowing him to divide his time to both places and continue with his art practice.

If Cuban renowned artist Omar Estrada who works within the discipline of new media and addresses the geopolitical state of the world does not receive the recognition and attention deserved as a diasporic artist in Canada, what hope do others that I discuss in this dissertation have within the confines of a settler colonial state? Even more so, when faced by an increasingly censored system, shifting towards the Far Right, in a place that has defended an unfathomable genocide. What future does this diaspora have? The diaspora that this dissertation intends to map within academia. What future does it have in Canada with its own history of genocidal intent with Indigenous people? How can the diaspora of Latin American artists who define their work in terms of resistance, continue to change the ways in which visual culture is understood? How can scholars develop new modes of interpretation, articulate discourses, and register the work and life of artists from the Latin American diaspora in Canadian art history?

As noted in the dissertation you have read, this is my own attempt to begin to remedy the ills of a settler colonial state that has chosen to ignore the Latin American diaspora and the contribution of its artists. My scholarly research intends to include our history with an anti-oppressive lens and is written by a person who follows an agenda against genocide, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and racism; combats classism and patriarchal systems of power; contests imperialism and neoliberal economies that benefit only a few and marginalize most; and a person

who defies and denounces hegemonic structures, offering a human biographical account of the lives behind art production.

By weaving together historical and contextual information, lived experiences, curatorial projects, advocacy work of coalition formation efforts, and current global events that affect both the Global South and the North, I attempt to reflect on their commonalities to understand that nothing happens within a vacuum and is susceptible to change, their interconnection is evident.

Although at this point there are further questions to resolve than answers, and this dissertation only alludes to the initial stages of an extensive new field of practice, there are many alliances and solidarities that can be outlined as oppressed peoples, not only alongside our martyred Palestinian brothers and sisters but with Indigenous peoples of which we as settlers on their unceded land, benefit from. We must follow their example and join their struggle to reach recuperative and transformative futures. Perhaps my objective of transforming Canadian Art History is a utopic mission but one that needs to be addressed and has been long overdue. I believe Indigenous scholars, writers, artists, and intellectuals along with those of various diasporas are already finding their way and space within a historically exclusionary racist colonial system that has denied them presence for far too long.

Censorship prevails in academia after Israel has declared a war on Palestinian civilians and its allies. Israeli attacks on Gaza have claimed the lives of over 37,000 victims, have wounded over 85,000 civilians, over 10,000 missing, and more than half of those are women and children. I'm reminded of my own mother who thought she had lost her baby during childbirth because the military personnel never told her that I had survived after a c section, with my umbilical cord wrapped, strangling my neck. And again, during our long and turbulent trip to Canada, on a full military plane, my mother thought she carried a small dead corpse by the end

of the journey, for I had stopped breathing and was rushed to Sick Kids Hospital upon arrival in Toronto, left in an incubator for weeks with no one to update my health status to my distressed mother. We had the fortune of surviving, unlike many of her own friends, University classmates, and professors from her art school. It is because of her resiliency, determination, and will that I find the strength and wisdom, one that stems from a long matriarchal lineage, to find inspirational words and continue to look for avenues of resistance, to write the stories and artistic practices of the diaspora onto these pages. It is the strength of the Palestinian people today who have unequivocally assumed the symbol of resistance worldwide. The suffering of its people and the resilience of the children and babies we witness each day are met with global outcry, massive manifestations, grassroot embargo actions, collective forms of media dissemination, boycotts, and demands for ceasefire, with the hope that these expressions of solidarity have an impact to change tragedy into a humane future.

As I end my conclusion, and what now seems to be a therapeutic existential exercise, I have opted to share a life experience as it relates to ongoing and perpetual resistance to hegemonic discourses and actions and how these relate to my current efforts of mapping Latin American artists of the diaspora in Canadian Art History. A diaspora which I highlight throughout the dissertation, left at the margins of art circuits, which nonetheless, persist, and find within coalitions the ability to rise above erasure. Artists who despite not having the support systems and recognition continue to bear the task of developing an aesthetic of resistance and a purpose, remaining true to their ideologically and critically conscious positions within a settler colonial state. Their disruption lies within resisting a monolithic entity, for within their art lies a multiplicity of people from different regions, who explore a variety of mediums, and with a multitude of ways to describe their experiences of displacement and interpretations of

oppositional consciousness. The defiance is against the multicultural myth present in Canada that has denied their existence and relevance and continues to define their contributions as ethnographic, questioning its style and authority.

To end, rather than summarizing what has already been noted within the dissertation, I have taken the platform of the conclusion to fully understand and reflect on a history that has brought me to where I am today, personally, professionally, and academically. I have chosen to make an analogy between Cuba's current political state and Canada's geopolitical position to outline the inter-relationality between global economies and how they affect the course and futures of diasporas. My embodied experience, as is the case for so many within the diaspora, is cast by a multitude of ruptures, all of which have become an impetus and a stimulant to strive for change. An inspiration and a motivation to persevere, to resist while finding purpose within loss. To overcome these ruptures in such a way is an act of resistance and defiance. Sowing relationships and networks of solidarity bring life to a diaspora percolating with stories and experiences.

As I respond to the effects of global events that mark the direction of this dissertation, what is left is to end by emphasizing what I have done since the day of my birth, which is to exist and to never give up hope as a form of resistance. While I'm inspired by the teachings of Gloria Anzaldúa who remind me that "only a small percentage of the world's six billion people have achieved a high level of awareness, this collective consciousness has the power to counterbalance the negativity of the rest of humanity. Ultimately, each of us has the potential to change the sentence of the world."[364] Inspired by these words of wisdom, I combat erasure and

[364] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 20.

invisibility. Despite the many challenges and obstacles diasporas of the Global South face, I believe there are possible futures that prioritize care over profit, love over war, and relationality over apartheid. Most importantly, to look towards the teachings and seeds of our past, to develop actions towards a transformative future. As Anzaldúa wisely shares, the healing of "our wounds result in transformation, and transformation results in the healing of our wounds."[365]

As I search for the teachings of my own ancestors, those within my own community who are now my elders, I turn to my mother, who at the age of 29 years old went on an 18-day hunger-strike in solidarity with the Association of the Families of Detained and Disappeared in Chile.[366] Her bravery, determination, convictions, and knowledge are an embodiment of how I view my own capacity to expand the ways writing can be used as a tool for social change as well as the underlying ability of artists to use critical and oppositional consciousness as a transformative method of resistance.

This dissertation engages with how the concept of an aesthetics of resistance –particular to artists of the Latin American diaspora– emerges, develops, manifests, and disrupts within various artistic practices, within three provinces, and by artists from across Latin America. This scholarly contribution not only marks an interest in the subject but emphasizes the importance of positionality and the need for its own diaspora to write and articulate its stories of struggle and resistance.

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[365] Ibid., 19.

[366] The hunger strike in solidarity with the Association of the Families of Detained and Disappeared in Chile took place between May 22 to June 8, 1978. It was conducted by Chileans and allies in various cities around the world creating a global impact.

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