

Isthmus

*Isthmus:
inbetweenness as centre*

Wyndham Art Gallery
24 August–16 October 2022

We acknowledge that this gathering of people, voices, creative works and discourses, takes place on the Sovereign unceded lands of the Kulin Nations, in particular the lands of the Boonwurrung and Wadawurrung people. We honour and pay respects to their Elders, past and present and to all First Peoples of colonised and occupied lands. We acknowledge the lucha for self-determination and liberation unique to estas tierras.

CONTENIDO

8	Resumen de la exposición
10	ISTHMUS, el espacio en medio como el centro, Tania Cañas
23	Obras
67	Tania Cañas, Luis González Serrano and Andrea Mendez, in Conversation
83	Opening night images
93	Exhibition. Reflective piece, Glenda Mejía
98	Contributors

CONTENTS

9	Exhibition Summary
11	ISTHMUS, inbetweenness as centre, Tania Cañas
23	Works
67	Tania Cañas, Luis González Serrano and Andrea Mendez, in Conversation
83	Opening night images
93	Exhibition. Reflective piece, Glenda Mejía
98	Contributors

RESUMEN DE LA EXPOSICIÓN

Como una masa de tierra estrecha que conecta dos masas de tierra y cuerpos de agua, istmo es un término que se ha convertido en sinónimo de Centroamérica.

El istmo, en el contexto de Centroamérica, conecta los hemisferios norte y sur, el oeste y el sur del mundo, el Pacífico y el Atlántico, y el conjunto de las Américas como Mesoamérica. Sin embargo, un istmo no se limita a una mera descripción geográfica.

ISTMO mira las múltiples configuraciones de los imaginarios del istmo resistiendo directamente las conceptualizaciones hegemónicas de América Latina, tanto a nivel regional como reproducidas en la diáspora. ISTMO pregunta qué podría significar centrar el puente, la zona fronteriza, el punto intermedio. Lo que puede significar pensar, crear y practicar desde el istmo como lugar de morada.

EXHIBITION SUMMARY

As a narrow landmass that connects two larger landmasses and bodies of water, isthmus is a term that has become synonymous with Centroamérica.

Isthmus, in the context of Centroamérica, connects the northern and southern hemispheres, western and global south, Pacific and Atlantic, and the whole of the Americas as Mesoamérica. An isthmus however is not merely limited to a geographical description.

ISTHMUS looks at the multiple configurations of isthmus imaginaries, resisting the hegemonic conceptualizations of Latin America, both regionally and reproduced in the diaspora. ISTHMUS asks what it might mean to centre the bridge, the borderland, the in-between? What it might mean to think, create, speak and practice from the isthmus as a site of dwelling.

ISTHMUS
el espacio en medio como el centro

Tania Cañas

“Reflexiono sobre la ubicación geográfica y la locución de Centroamérica como un istmo, dando lugar a metáforas espacio-culturales, discursos sinécdocos y narrativas entrelazadas que trascienden los imaginarios nacionales” (Rodríguez 2009, pág. 9).

Como una masa de tierra estrecha que conecta dos masas de tierra y cuerpos de agua mayores, istmo es un término que se ha convertido en sinónimo de Centroamérica. El istmo, en el contexto de Centroamérica, conecta los hemisferios norte y sur, el oeste y el sur del mundo, el Pacífico y el Atlántico, y el conjunto de las Américas como Mesoamérica. Centroamérica es el único lugar de la Tierra donde un istmo, como una masa de tierra geográfica, forma un sitio intercontinental y a la vez interoceánico.

Las distintas partes de Centroamérica se han descrito en diversas formas: el poeta salvadoreño Roque Dalton la describió como una expatria en la “que no alcanzabas a tener de una vez Norte y Sur”. El poeta nicaragüense Ernesto Cardenal habla por su parte acerca de un “Estrecho dudoso”; y los músicos nicaragüenses Luis y Carlos Gody describen el colectivo de la región como un sin fronteras, una región en la “que aún pequeños, juntos somos un volcán”.

A través de un lente histórico y social, a Centroamérica con frecuencia se le considera compuesta por cinco países: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua y Costa Rica, los cuales juntos

ISTHMUS
inbetweenness as centre

Tania Cañas

“I ponder Central America’s geographic location and locution as an isthmus, giving rise to spatial-cultural metaphors, synecdochal discourse and entwined narratives transcending national imaginaries” (Rodríguez 2009, p. 9).

As a narrow landmass that connects two larger landmasses and bodies of water, isthmus is a term that has become synonymous with Centroamérica. Isthmus, in the context of Centroamérica, connects the northern and southern hemispheres, Western and Global South, Pacific and Atlantic, and the whole of the Americas as Mesoamérica. Central America is the only place on earth where an isthmus, as a geographic landmass, forms an intercontinental *and* interoceanic site.

Parts of Centroamérica have been described in numerous ways, Salvadorean Roque Dalton talks about an ex-patria ‘que no alcanzabas a tener de una vez Norte y Sur’. Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal talks of an ‘Estrecho dudoso’ and musicians Luis and Carlos Godoy describe a collective region as a site without fronteras, a region ‘que aun pequeños, juntos somos un volcán’.

Through the historical and social lens, Centroamérica is often considered to be made up of five countries—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica—that together form perspectives on shared histories and ‘common social origins’ rather than geographically defined ones (Cárdenas 2013; Pérez-Brignoli 1989) One might define

forman perspectivas en historias compartidas y “orígenes sociales comunes”, en lugar de aquellos definidos geográficamente (Cárdenas 2013; Pérez-Brignoli 1989) Se podrían definir las dificultades políticas compartidas y continuas en la región como la(s) revolución(es) que ocurrieron entre los sesentas y los noventas, como fue el caso de Guatemala, El Salvador y Nicaragua. Desde otra perspectiva, se podría describir el “triángulo del norte”, abarcando El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras. Al hablar de lo histórico y lo espacial, Villacorta (2022) nos advierte que Centroamérica “no es exactamente el Caribe”, en referencia a la tendencia de amalgamar Centroamérica y el Caribe; pero apunta que hay un Caribe de Centroamérica. Por lo tanto, el marco geográfico del istmo o de Centroamérica es importante solo en la medida en la que nos cuenta acerca de una condición compartida de estructuras y grupos sociales.

Cárdenas (2013) apunta, sin embargo, que el marco de Centroamérica suele excluir a Panamá y a Belice, en los cuales se concentran grandes poblaciones Afro-Latinx. Esta exclusión suele argumentarse con base en desarrollos históricos distintos; no obstante, la exclusión también se produce históricamente. “Cuando hablamos de Latinoamérica filosóficamente, no nos referimos a ‘algo en específico’, sino más bien a un significado históricamente construido” (Santiago Castro-Gomez 1996, p.xix). La exclusión de regiones como Panamá y Belice, argumenta Cárdenas (2013), continúa por lo tanto silenciando a grupos ya excluidos y contribuye a entendimientos dominantes de lugar, historia y cultura. Arias (2003) advierte

shared and ongoing political struggles in the region as the revolution/s that occurred throughout the 60s to the 90s, as was the case with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. From another perspective one could describe the ‘northern triangle’, consisting of El Salvador and Guatemala and Honduras. Speaking of the historical and spatial Villacorta (2022) cautions that Central America ‘no es exactamente el Caribe’, referring to the tendency to amalgamate Central America and the Caribbean; but notes that there is a Caribe Central America. Thus the geographic frame of isthmus or Centroamérica is important only in as much as it tells us about a shared condition of social structures and groups.

Cárdenas (2013) notes however that the Central American frame often excludes Panamá and Belize, both sites with large Afro-Latinx populations. This exclusion is often argued on the basis of differing historical developments yet exclusion is also historically produced. “When we speak philosophically of Latin America, we are not referring to a ‘thing in itself’” but rather to a historically constructed meaning” (Santiago Castro-Gomez 1996, p.xix). Exclusion of regions such as Panamá and Belize, argues Cárdenas (2013), therefore continues the silencing of already excluded groups and contributes to dominant understandings of place, history and culture. Arias (2003) warns, the function of the term Centroamérica might have the unfortunate effect of contributing to the homogenisation of certain groups who might occupy the isthmus *geographically*, but often not *conceptually*.

Cárdenas, M 2013, ‘From Epicentros to Fault Lines: Rewriting Central America from the Diaspora’, *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, vol.37, núm.2, pp. 111-130.

Perez-Brignoli, H 1989, *A Brief History of Central America*. University of California Press, Los Angeles, USA.

Castro-Gómez S 1996, *Critique of Latin American Reason*. Columbia University Press, New York.

Arias, A 2003, ‘Central American-Americans: Invisibility, Power and Representation in the US Latino World’, *Latino Studies*, vol.1, núm.1, pp. 168-187.

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Arias, A 2003, ‘Central American-Americans: Invisibility, Power and Representation in the US Latino World’, *Latino Studies*, vol.1, núm.1, pp. 168-187.

que la función del término Centroamérica puede tener el desafortunado efecto de contribuir a la homogeneización de ciertos grupos que pueden ocupar el istmo *geográficamente* pero, con frecuencia, no *conceptualmente*.

...

Al hablar con el grupo musical *Las Cafeteras*, uno de los miembros, al escuchar mi postura, me dijo “Yo soy de Oaxaca y me considero centroamericano”. El poeta y autor del *Libro centroamericano de los muertos* (2018), Balam Rodrigo, con frecuencia se sitúa a sí mismo como ubicado en Chiapas (en vez de México; ya que México geográficamente hablando se considera Norteamérica) participando a menudo en foros con sede centroamericana. Estos dos ejemplos denotan un re-mapeo de Centroamérica: uno que alinea un límite político a la vez que desafía los límites geográficos, coloniales y epistémicos. ISTHMUS busca reunir múltiples configuraciones de imaginarios del istmo que reelaboran el mapa y amplían los entendimientos conceptuales de Centroamérica.

ISTHMUS como intervención es única en el sentido de que amplía el istmo no solo más allá de los límites nacionales sino también fuera de las Américas mismas. ISTHMUS reúne a artistas ubicados en Centroamérica (Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panamá y Honduras) y artistas ubicados en Australia y Aotearoa, produciendo imágenes del istmo en maneras que difieren de las de los Estados Unidos que dominan actualmente la literatura de diáspora de Centroamérica. La exposición busca alejarse de una meta-narrativa a través de obras que colocan en el centro las perspectivas de las Primeras Naciones, afro, feministas, encarnadas y desplazadas. La exposición también es multilingüe, con obras en: q’anjob’al, māori, inglés, español y espanglish.

...

...

Speaking to the band *Las Cafeteras*, one of the members, upon hearing my position, said to me ‘I’m from Oaxaca and I consider myself Central American’. Poet and author of *Libro centroamericano de los muertos* (2018) Balam Rodrigo often situates himself as based in Chiapas (rather than Mexico; as Mexico geographically speaking is considered North America) often participating in Central American based forms. These two examples denote a remapping of Central America—one that aligns a politic whilst challenging geographical, colonial, epistemic and temporal boundaries. ISTHMUS looks to bring together multiple configurations of isthmus imaginaries that re-map and expand the conceptual understandings of Centroamérica.

ISTHMUS as an intervention is unique in that it extends isthmus not just across national boundaries but also outside of the Americas itself. ISTHMUS gathers artists based in Central America (Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panamá and Honduras) and Central American artists based in Australia and Aotearoa, producing isthmus imageries in ways that differ from the US that currently dominates Central American diasporic literature. The exhibition seeks to move away from a meta-narrative through works that centre First Nations, Afro, feminist, embodied and displaced perspectives. The exhibition is also multilingual, with works in: Q’anjob’al, Māori, English, Spanish and Spanglish.

...

En el video de la obra de performance de Regina José Galindo, *Guatemala Feminicida* (2022), se le puede ver caminando por las calles de Guatemala con una bandera blanca y negra, limpiando las calles de misoginia.

Dani Ruiz en *Yugo* (2020), toma la bandera salvadoreña y la reemplaza con la frase “Dios, Unión, Libertad” y con la frase “Dios Bendiga este Negocio”. La bandera estuvo activa en varios lugares de El Salvador, como en el Palacio Nacional, la Asamblea Legislativa, el Monumento a La Constitución e incluso en un partido de fútbol en vivo. No se puede evitar interpretar esta obra en el contexto del cambio de moneda ocurrido en los últimos veinte años, incluyendo el reemplazo de la moneda local, el colón, por el dólar estadounidense en 2001 y, más recientemente, cuando en el 2001 el bitcoin se volvió la moneda nacional.

El Juego (2016), por el colectivo seminal de El Salvador The Fire Theory, desarrolla una activación social participativa en la que exsoldados y exguerrilleros, desertores, disidentes y los hijos de combatientes juegan un partido de fútbol mixto en Morazán, uno de los lugares más afectados durante la guerra civil.

El poema de Luis González *Central America Greatest Hits/ Centroamérica Grandes Éxitos* nos sumerge en recuerdos sensoriales tangibles. La quietud mientras esperas a que te mezclen tu café en contraste con la mezcla cultural de la tierra, las personas y el sentimiento de atracción hacia múltiples direcciones.

La pieza de Sabino Esteban en q’anjob’al hace referencia a las caravanas migrantes de Centroamérica (que caminan desde Centroamérica hasta la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México) como una estrategia de supervivencia y una manera de “mantenerse en movimiento”. Esta obra habla acerca de seguir conectados con un país a pesar

Regina José Galindo’s video performance work, *Guatemala Feminicida* (2022), sees her walking through the streets of Guatemala with a black and white flag in order to clean the streets of misogyny.

Dani Ruiz in *Yugo* (2020), takes the Salvadorean flag and replaces the phrase Dios, Unión, Libertad (God, Union and Liberty) with the phrase ‘Dios Bendiga este Negocio’ (God bless this business). The flag was activated across sites in El Salvador such as the Palacio Nacional, Asamblea Legislativa, Monumento a La Constitución and even at a live football match. One can’t help but read this work in the context of the change in currency over the last twenty years, with the local currency colón being replaced by the U.S dollar in 2001 and more recently in 2021 when bitcoin became the national currency.

El Juego (2016) by El Salvador’s seminal collective The Fire Theory, develops a social engaged activation in which ex-soldiers and ex-guerrilla, deserters, dissidents and the children of combatants play a mixed team football match in Morazán—one of the most affected sites during the civil war.

Luis González Serrano’s poem *Central America Greatest Hits/ Centroamérica Grandes Éxitos* immerses us into tangible sensory memories. The stillness of waiting for coffee to brew contrasted with the brewing of land, people and the sense of being pulled in multiple directions.

Sabino Esteban Fransico’s piece in Q’anjob’al refers to the Central American migrant caravans (that walk from Central America to the US-Mexico border) as strategies of survival and a means to ‘mantenerse en movimiento’. The piece speaks about remaining connected to country despite displacement, “Istmo centroamericano es CORDÓN UMBILICAL-CAMINO que nos conecta con la energía de la madre tierra”, he writes. That is, the Central American isthmus is an umbilical cord-

del desplazamiento, el “Istmo centroamericano es CORDÓN UMBILICAL-CAMINO que nos conecta con la energía de la madre tierra”, escribe.

La lectura del poema *Insistencia* (2013) de Shirley Campell-Barr entreteje la resistencia, alegría y espiritualidad afro en un homenaje a “la parte más oscura, e incómoda de este continente”. Honra a aquellos que insisten en ser la piedra en el zapato, que insten en traer tambores a la iglesia, que insisten en crear ceremonia con los ríos y las estrellas.

En *El Sur que Soy / the South That I Am* y *La Rosa de los Vientos / Versión: “La Rosa Maorí”* (2017), el Dr. Leonel Alvarado y Rómulo Castro García nos llevan desde el Caribe hasta el mar de Tasmania, combinando los sonidos de la costa, ritmos e idiomas: māori, español e inglés. El videoclip fue grabado entre Aotearoa and Panamá.

En *Close Your Eyes and You’ll See What is really there* (2016) la instalación de la Dra. Lucrecia Quintanilla nos ubica localmente al hacer un arreglo con maleza introducida en florecimiento recolectada del arroyo de Merri al lado de una composición suya. La composición emite un aroma a caracola, un símbolo que para la artista evoca recuerdos de la infancia en El Salvador.

Al jugar con formatos como guías y manuales para usuarios, en *Trainings for el valle de las Hamacas* (2022) invito las intervenciones de performance a usar la guía para subirse y bajarse de una hamaca. El objetivo era el de tener una hamaca tejida a mano colgando desde el techo, sin embargo, debido a los requerimientos de salud y seguridad ocupacionales y restricciones de responsabilidad de la Galería, en lugar de esto la hamaca se encuentra en una pila en el suelo de la galería. Este giro de una *performance* a una instalación nos dice aún más acerca del comentario de la obra acerca del acceso a conocimientos encarnados y los modos

path which keeps us connected with the energy of mother earth.

Shirley Campbell-Bar’s reading of her poem *Insistencia* (2013) weaves afro resistance, joy and spirituality in her homage to ‘la parte más oscura, e incómoda de este continente’. She honours those who insist on being the stone in the shoe, insist on bringing tambores to the church and insist on creating ceremony with the rivers and stars.

In *El Sur que Soy / the South That I Am* and *La Rosa de los Vientos / Versión: “La Rosa Maorí”* (2017), Dr. Leonel Alvarado and Rómulo Castro García take us from the Caribbean to the Tasman Sea, combining the sounds of the shore, rhythms and languages: Māori, Spanish and English. The video clip recorded between Aotearoa and Panamá.

In *Close Your Eyes and You’ll See What is really there* (2016) Dr. Lucrecia Quintanilla’s installation situates us in the local by assembling flowering introduced weeds collected from the Merri Creek alongside a composition of the artist. The composition emits from a conch shell, a symbol that for the artist brings up memories of being a young child in El Salvador.

Playing on forms such as how-to-guides and user manuals *Trainings for el valle de las Hamacas* (2022) I invite performance interventions to use the guide to enter and exit a hammock. The intention was to have a hand-woven hammock hang from the ceiling, however due to Gallery OHS and liability restrictions the hammock instead sits in a heap on the gallery floor rather than experienced. This shift from performance to installation only further speaks to the works commentary on access to embodied knowledges and intergenerational modes of learning across forced displacement.

Archiving the Present (2022) was a quick response digital archive project in response

intergeneracionales de aprender de manera transversal en el desplazamiento forzado.

Archiving the Present (2022) fue un proyecto de archivo digital de respuesta rápida que responde a la destrucción de un mural de la comunidad salvadoreña (pintado por los niños de la comunidad salvadoreña de los apartamentos de Kensington en 1990). El proyecto invitó 7 respuestas abarcando video, ensayo, poesía, cartografía y fotografía como actos creativos de memoria. Los artistas que realizaron las obras fueron Timmah Ball, Hoang Nguyen, Luis González Serrano, Valeska Cañas, Tania Cañas, Andrea Mendez y Gianna Rizzo.

Finalmente, al enfocarnos en Centroamérica, ISTHMUS resiste conceptualizaciones hegemónicas de Latinoamérica, tanto regionalmente como reproducidas en la diáspora. Arias (2003) y Cárdenas (2013) argumentan que hay una invisibilidad particular asociada con narrativas centroamericanas en imaginarios latinoamericanos incluyendo la diáspora, lo que se traduce en una invisibilidad tanto en historias políticas como en ideas culturales y representaciones estéticas. ISTHMUS busca centrar el espacio en medio y unir obras creativas críticas que ofrezcan alternativas a las lecturas convencionales y a estéticas nacionales geográficas o *tutti frutti* (Roberts 1993). ISTHMUS pregunta qué podría significar poner en el centro el puente, la tierra en la frontera, el espacio en medio. Lo qué significa pensar, crear y practicar desde el istmo como sitio de morada.

to the destruction of a Salvadorean community mural (painted by the children of the Salvadorean community in the Kensington flats in 1990). The project invited 7 responses across video, essay, poetry, cartography and photography as creative acts of remembering. The artists that make up the works are: Timmah Ball, Hoang Nguyen, Luis González Serrano, Valeska Cañas, Tania Cañas, Andrea Mendez and Gianna Rizzo.

Finally, in focusing on Centroamérica, ISTHMUS resists hegemonic conceptualisations of Latin America, both regionally and reproduced in the diaspora. Arias (2003) and Cárdenas (2013) argue that there is a particular invisibility associated with Centroamerican narratives in Latin American imaginaries including in the diaspora, which translates to invisibility across political histories as well as cultural ideas and aesthetic representations. ISTHMUS looks to center the in-between and brings together critical creative works that offer alternatives to conventional readings and national geographic or *tutti frutti* aesthetics (Roberts 1993). ISTHMUS asks what it might mean to centre the bridge, the borderland, the in-between? What it might mean to think, create and practice from the isthmus as a site of dwelling.

*ARCHIVING THE PRESENT:
CREATIVE ACTS OF REMEMBERING*

2022

Luis González Serrano, Andrea Mendez, Valeska Cañas, Timmah Ball,
Hoang Tran Ngyuen, Gianna Rizzo, Tania Cañas and Kiah Reading

(MURAL)

This project pertains to a Salvadoran community mural (painted by the children of the Salvadoran community in the Kensington flats in 1990) which is set to be destroyed as part of a \$10.2 million redevelopment of the Kensington Community Recreation Centre. The project began as a collective quick-response by inviting 7 artists to develop creative responses to the mural as forms of creative archiving, before its destruction.

Archiving the Present asks: who gets to be remembered in settler-colonial Australia? How does memory and embodied archiving occur for sites deemed to have no “heritage significance” by national and state-level heritage organisations? What does it mean to engage in acts of creative remembering that sit outside of heritage regimes? How do we remember within displacement and in the context of ongoing dispossession?

We invite you to engage with the creative responses here <https://archivingthepresent.com>

EL SALVADOR

This mural depicts a typical scene in the central plaza San Salvador, the capital of EL Salvador, a small country in Central America. The mural was designed by Ben Liscak and painted by children from the Salvadorian community here in Melbourne. It was painted with the assistance of the Comunidad Salvadoreña Unificada en Victoria, (The United Salvadorean Community in Victoria) The Kensington Community Centre and the Department of youth sport and recreation.

July 1990



SABINO ESTEBAN FRANCISCO
B'EYIL/ CARAVANA

2021

(POEM)

CARAVANA hace referencia a la migración como estrategia de sobrevivencia, eso de tener que dejar la tierra de origen por la violencia, la falta de oportunidades y el deseo de una vida mejor. El poema es entonces un llamado a no permanecer estáticos ni pasivos, sino a caminar; porque el camino es como el cordón umbilical que nos une a la madre tierra, a la madre naturaleza que nos da la vida. Caminar es una forma de mantenernos en movimiento y de ir en busca de la vida. Dejar el lugar de donde se nace no quiere decir olvidarnos de nuestro origen, porque el camino es al mismo tiempo el cordón umbilical que nos une a nuestro territorio y a nuestro origen. El mismo ISTMO centroamericano es CORDÓN UMBILICAL-CAMINO que nos conecta con la energía de la madre tierra, camino que muchos centroamericanos recorren en busca de una vida mejor.

B'EYIL

B'eyoqoneq,
manchaq kob'ak'aj xoyan kob'e
a jantaq b'e b'ak'b'il ai xoyanoq
a chi ek schemoq q'eqq'inal xol anima.
Axka junooq miman tx'an ak'un chi xumakil
kaytontu kob'eyil
laq'an ek xel'xin tx'otx'tx'otx'.

CARAVANA

Caminemos,
no enrollemos nuestro camino:
la oscuridad usa caminos enrollados
para sentarse entre la gente.
como enorme bejuco que concluye en flor
así es nuestra caravana:
tiene raíces abrazadas la tierra.



DANY RUIZ
YUGO

2020

(FLAG PIECE)

EL TIEMPO... (dicen) hará el resto
a fuerza de transitar ... el talón / el casco / la rueda irán allanando ...
ya estamos cansados ...

Nuestros hijos trabajaran (si quieren ...
Demasiado hemos hecho para lo poco que hemos de gozar)
¡ indios desgraciados ¡ que he visto errantes por los desiertos del
NUEVO MUNDO
Con las cenizas de nuestros abuelos (ustedes ejercitan conmigo la
hospitalidad a pesar nuestra y yo no podría ofrecértela hoy por qué
pago como ustedes sujetos al favor de
los hombres / y menos feliz es mi destierro por qué no llevo los
huesos de mis padres A QUIEN INTERESE

no es la benevolencia del carnicero / del cervecero o del panadero lo
que nos procura nuestra
cena (sino el cuidado que ponen ellos en su propio beneficio / no nos
dirigimos a su
humanidad si no a su propio interés / y jamás les hablamos de sus
necesidades si no de sus
ventajas

no hay reunión de hombres sin un fin . EL FIN ES SATISFACER NECESIDADES
Indispensables / fácticas o ficticias en las indispensables están :

el alimento
el vestido ...los animales nacen vestidos
el alojamiento ...los animales se alojan a poca costa
la curación ...los animales no se curan
la distracción ...los animales se distraen sin gastar
QUEDA AL HOMBRE POR NECESIDAD COMUN EL ALIMENTO

los animales se juntan donde hay:

pasto ...pero no se entreayudan para comer
agua ...pero no se entreayudan para beber
y abrigo ...pero no se entreayudan para abrigarse

los hombres se juntan y se entreayudan { pero entreayudarse para
adquirir cosas

no es fin social... entreayudarse para proporcionarse medios de
adquirir no es fin social
tampoco

proyectos de riqueza / de preponderancia / de sabiduría / de
engrandecimiento ; cualquiera

los forma y los propone pero no son proyectos sociales

si el PUEBLO no respeta el puesto en que coloca el órgano de su
autoridad cada día habrá
menos ciudadanos que quieran ocuparlo

(el culto no altera el sentimiento) ... dicen
(la salvación no depende de opiniones) ... dicen
si es así, ¿Por qué hay diferentes comuniones?

Si es así, ¿Por qué cada comunión se cree solo la buena o la mejor?

un MITO tiene que estar tan vivo como la comunidad que lo narra (
cuando se esteriliza se
puede decir también que la comunidad ha terminado)

A riesgo de parecer insolente: mí propuesta tal vez se vea como darse
un tiro en el pie.

le HE dado el nombre de YUGO { cambiar la utopía de DIOS
UNION LIBERTAD en la bandera de
EL SALVADOR por la leyenda: DIOS BENDIGA ESTE NEGOCIO
A QUIEN INTERES/ E le hago la petición del espacio donde se
encuentre:

DIOS BENDIGA ESTE NEGOCIO



LUCRECIA QUINTANILLA
*IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES
YOU WILL SEE WHAT IS REALLY THERE?*

2016

(FLOWERING
INTRODUCED
SPECIES WEEDS
COLLECTED
FROM MERRI
CREEK.
MELBOURNE,
AUSTRALIA.
CLAY, IPHONE
PLAYING OUT
A COMPOSITION
BY THE
ARTIST.)

Conch shells have been used by humans for generations and generations to communicate, call on each other and make sounds. This work comes from my interest in the conch which began from when I was a young child in El Salvador it follows my interest in sounds and how they are amplified and the stories that we chose to amplify. This time the sound is my version of the narrative of the conch shell itself.



LUIS GONZÁLEZ SERRANO
CENTRAL AMERICA GREATEST HITS /
CENTROAMÉRICA GRANDES ÉXITOS

2022

(POEM)

When I write about ‘the tropics’, I usually explore the contradictions of my relationship with El Salvador. Central America is my heart of darkness—a place that can be beautiful and bursting with life, and at the same time ruthlessly violent and unequal. Having lived in El Salvador as a young adult during the 1990s, I witnessed the country come out of the madness of civil war, which evolved into hope, which quickly devolved into the madness of organised crime and an almost failed state. In my writing, I cannot ascribe to a nostalgic, romanticised view of a homeland. I take pride in my origins but I cannot long for (or invent) an idealised tropical paradise. Poems like this are a result of this dynamic.

Central America Greatest Hits

After the earthquake
the tropics reemerge limp as always
trees with longer beards
and cars with huskier voices
as if disaster had never happened
people got up and dusted themselves
licked volcanic wounds
spat out floodwater.

Once trousers were patched and shoes mended
pick pockets reconnected with their need
beggars pounced on peak hour traffic
radios played new fads
and politicians returned to mass
it's good to have faith
but it's better to distrust;
the times are still violent
like the sea that fills and empties
every day.

Old people say la vida da vueltas
life turns around
as if time was a scratched record
spinning on the same track
Landslides in Guatemala
Elections in Nicaragua
Floods in Honduras
Volcanoes in Costa Rica
Earthquakes in El Salvador
while war brews like coffee on the stove
and no one can decide which one to tend to.

Centroamérica Grandes Éxitos

Después del terremoto
los trópicos se levantaron cojos como siempre
árboles con barbas más largas
y carros con voces más roncacas
como si el desastre nunca hubiera ocurrido
la gente se levantó y se sacudió
se lamieron las heridas volcánicas
y escupieron el agua de la inundación.

Después de remendar pantalones y zapatos
los ladrones se reunieron con su necesidad
los mendigos se volcaron a la hora pico
las radios encontraron nuevas modas
y los políticos regresaron a misa
es bueno tener fé
pero es mejor ser desconfiado
la cosa siempre está violenta
como el mar que se llena y se vacía
todos los días.

Los viejos dicen que la vida da vueltas
como si el tiempo fuera un disco rayado
tocando la misma pista
Derrumbes en Guatemala
Elecciones en Nicaragua
Inundaciones en Honduras
Volcanes en Costa Rica
Terremotos en El Salvador
mientras, la guerra bulle como café en la cocina
y nadie sabe qué atender.

Te Reo
He putanga wai
He nohoanga tangata
Nohoanga tangata
He putanga korero

Haka
Rere atu rere mai nga
ai koorero
I nga tai noo uta, i
nga ngaru o tai
He huinga wai, he
huinga tangata

DR. LEONEL ALVARADO AND RÓMULO CASTRO GARCÍA
EL SUR QUE SOY / THE SOUTH THAT I AM
AND
THE WIND ROSE / LA ROSE DE LOS VIENTOS

2017

(VIDEO)

Between February and March of 2017 I had the rare privilege of going halfway across the world with my guitar and a handful of songs to Aotearoa / New Zealand, “the land of the long white cloud,” as it’s called in the beautiful language of the Māori people. This opportunity was made possible by my good friend Leonel Alvarado, poet and university teacher, who managed to weave an invitation from Massey University and the city of Palmerston North to give a few concerts and talks in high schools around the North Island with the idea of bringing the sensibility of art into the teaching of Spanish in those distant latitudes. From that journey, two children were born, literally nine months later, in the form of two video clips recorded halfway between New Zealand and Panama, bringing together through music two oceans and two seas, the Caribbean and the Tasman, as it has probably never been done before. Capturing moments and trying to perpetuate them as small audio-visual pieces was only possible through the work and involvement of many good, talented and noble people. It wouldn’t have been possible, particularly financially, any other way. Please have a look at the Credits—we’re definitely riding on the tail of an Antipodean fraternal tide. The first song was this one, “The South That I Am,” a joint Alvarado-Castro poem, written via internet and taken with me to New Zealand in February merely with music, voice and Marco Linares’ guitars. It was put together

in a hurried “Protocols” session by Luis Thomas, keyboardist and musical director of the band Tuirá. I had the vague idea that something could come out of it somewhere down the road, but did not suspect that it would become a quick and beautiful reality in the small and beautiful city of Whanganui, “The Great Harbour”, where many rivers meet. It was embraced as their own by the teachers and students from Whanganui High School and by Te Atihaunui a Papaarangi Whanganui iwi. For these reasons, we are very happy today as we share this South we are with all of you since you are this South, too.

—Rómulo Castro Panama, October 2017

ARTIST: Dr. Leonel Alvarado and Rómulo Castro García
 TITLE: El Sur que Soy / The South that I Am
 MEDIUM: Video
 DURATION: 9:37
 DATE: 2017

ARTIST: Dr. Leonel Alvarado and Rómulo Castro García
 TITLE: The South that I Am / El Sur que Soy
 MEDIUM: Video
 DURATION: 9:36
 DATE: 2017

Leonel Alvarado was born in Honduras and lived in New Zealand where he holds the Spanish and Portuguese Programs at Victoria University in Wellington. He is post-doctoral research professor at Victoria at the University of New England in Australia. He has published more than 10 books of poetry, criticism, and theory, and has translated several international literary awards. He and Rómulo Castro have collaborated in a few projects.

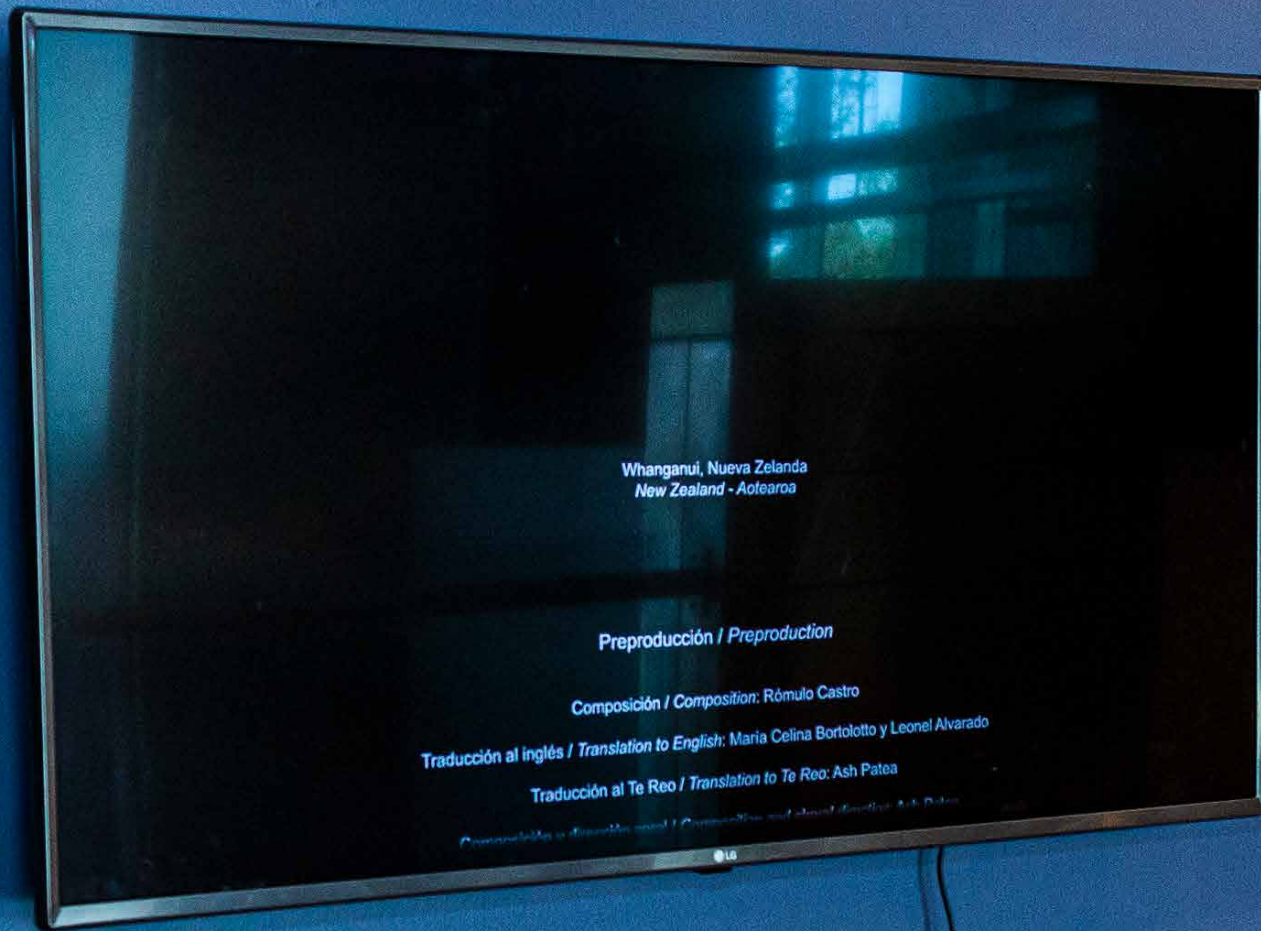
Rómulo Castro García - Poet and Translator
 Rómulo Castro García is a poet and translator who has published several books of poetry and criticism. He has translated several international literary awards. He and Leonel Alvarado have collaborated in a few projects.

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TANIA CAÑAS
TRAININGS FOR EL VALLE DE LAS HAMACAS

2022

(PERFORMANCE
TURNED
INSTALLATION) Trainings for el valle de las Hamacas invites performance interventions to use the provided guide to entre and exit a hammock. The piece is a commentary on embodied knowledges and intergenerational modes of learning across forced displacement by playing on forms such as a how-to-guides and user manuals. The intention was to have a hand-woven hammock hang from the ceiling, however due to Gallery occupational health and safety (OH&S) and liability restrictions the hammock instead sits in a heap on the gallery floor. This shift from performance to installation only further speaks to the work's critical themes.

Illustration and Graphic Design by Natalie Ex.

El valle de las hamacas (the valley of the hammocks) is a phrase often used to refer to El Salvador, a metaphor of hammocks to refer to the frequency of earthquakes in the region.

TRAININGS FOR EL VALLE DE LAS HAMACAS

To enter the hammock



1 Approach hammock at the half-way point. Turn your entire body to face either of the fixtures where the hammock is secured.



2 Carefully swing the leg closest to the hammock over the hammock, placing your foot to the other side so that the hammock is now in between your legs.



3 Hold the front of the hammock with both hands to support your weight as you sit into the hammock - ensure hammock below is spread out enough to support your body.

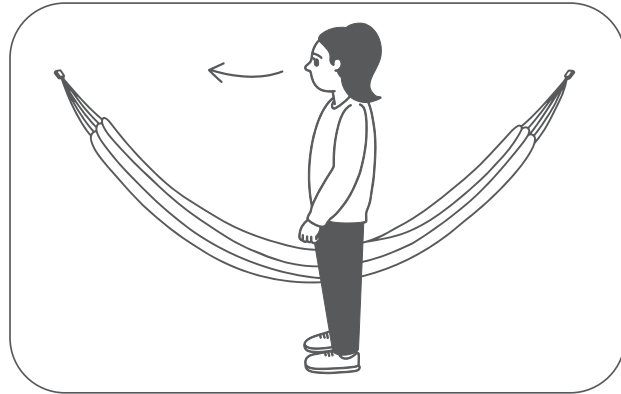


4 Put your feet up. Make yourself comfortable. Enjoy hammock.

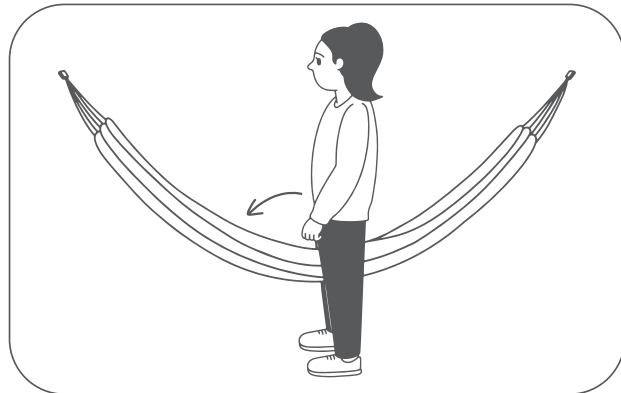


TRAININGS FOR EL VALLE DE LAS HAMACAS

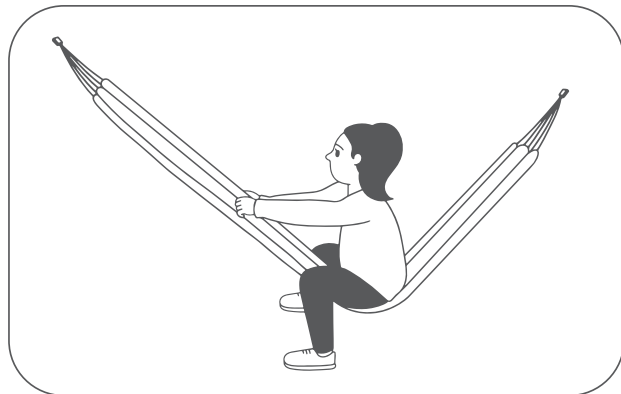
To enter the hammock



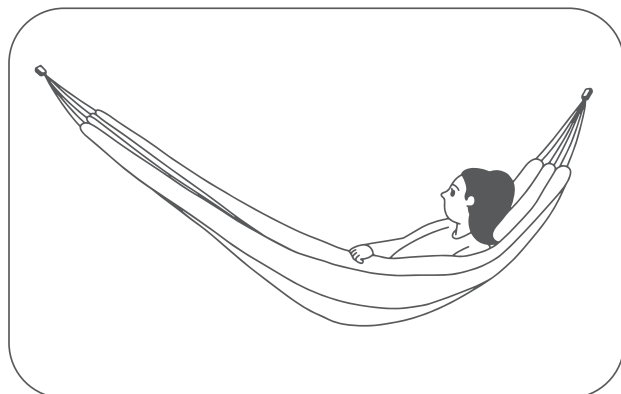
1 Approach hammock at the half way/mid way point. Turn your entire body to face either of the fixtures where the hammock is secured.



2 Carefully swing the leg closest to the hammock over the hammock, placing your foot to the other side so that the hammock is now in between your legs.



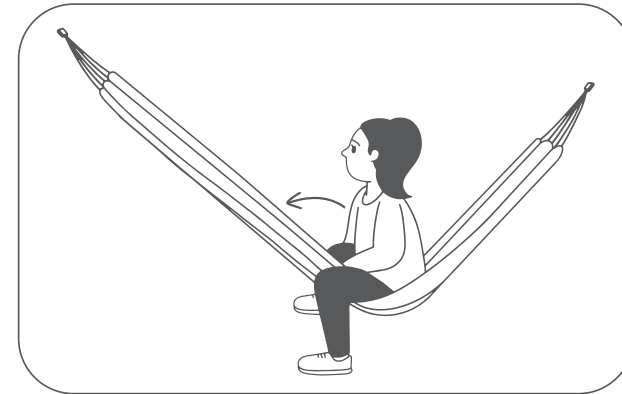
3 Hold the front of the hammock with both hands to support your weight as you sit into the hammock – ensure hammock below is spread out enough, to support your body.



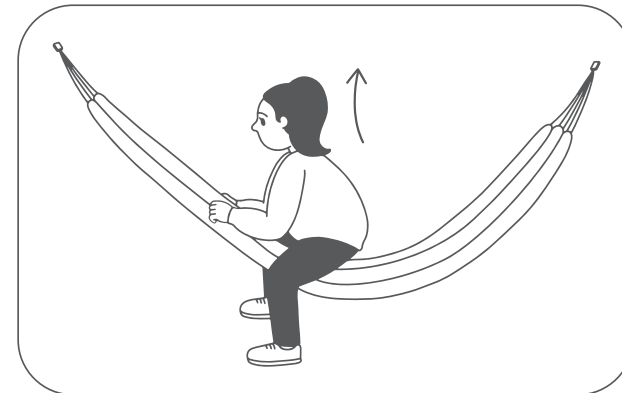
4 Put your feet up. Make yourself comfortable. Enjoy hammock.

TRAININGS FOR EL VALLE DE LAS HAMACAS

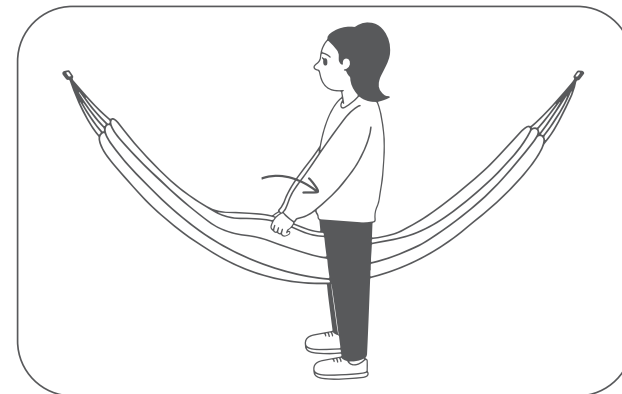
To exit the hammock



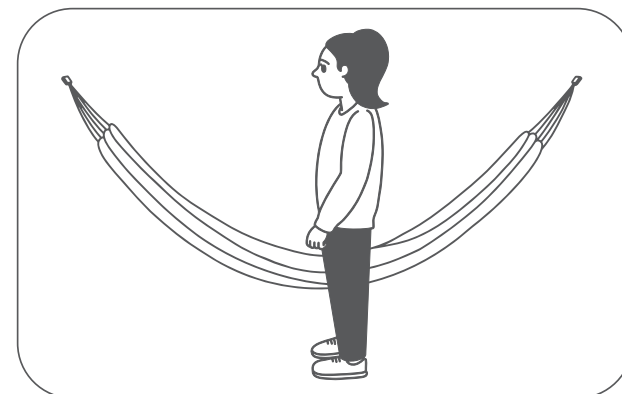
1 Sit up. Swing legs (from inside the hammock to outside) so that they are firmly on the ground on either side of hammock.



2 Grab hammock in front of you with both hands. Pull yourself up so that you are now in a standing position. Release hammock.



3 Carefully swing your leg back over the hammock.



4 You have now safely exited the hammock.

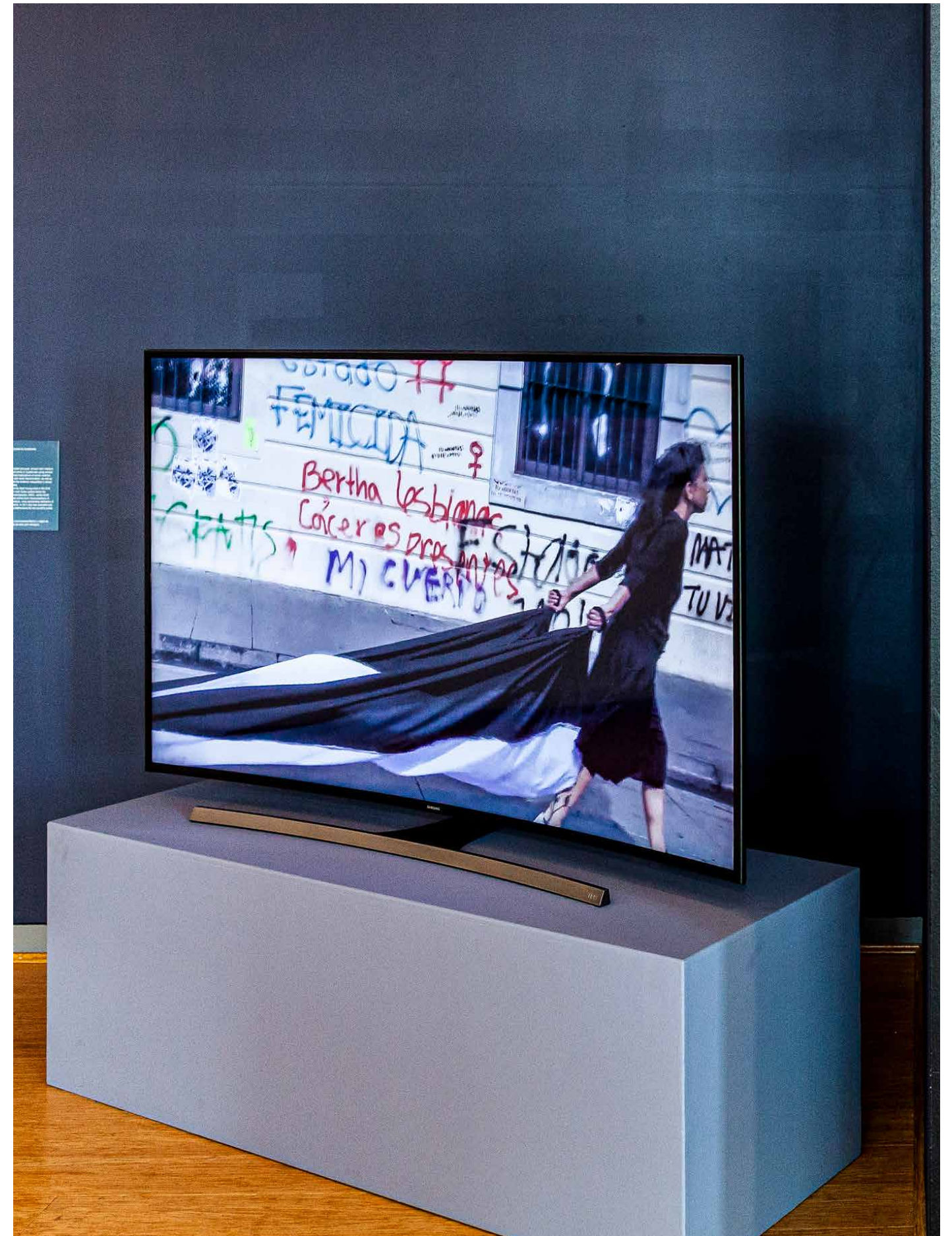


REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO
GUATEMALA FEMINICIDA

2021

(VIDEO
PERFORMANCE)

En Guatemala Feminicida utilizo una bandera blanco y negro de guatemala para limpiar las calles de este país misógino.



THE FIRE THEORY
*MELISSA GUEVARA, MAURICIO KABISTAN,
CRACK RODRIGUEZ, ERNESTO BAUTISTA*

2016

(PROJECTION)

EI JUEGO

Este partido de futbol ocurrió el 7 de mayo del año 2016, en Los Quebrachos, parte de la comunidad Segundo Montes, en el departamento de Morazán, una de las zonas del país más afectadas por la guerra civil que vivió El Salvador en los años 80, que costó más de 70.000 vidas.

Los primeros habitantes de Segundo Montes fueron sobrevivientes a las masacres, refugiados reubicados en ese territorio luego de los acuerdos de paz del año 1992. Los jugadores convocados no se conocían entre sí. Había ex guerrilleros, ex militares, desertores, disidentes, hijos e hijas de combatientes. Participaron incluso un soldado que se hizo guerrillero y un guerrillero que se hizo soldado. El partido fue un experimento. No sabíamos si iba a resultar. Si iban a reaparecer las confrontaciones entre los dos bandos. Solo intervenimos para generar un punto de partida, las condiciones para que ocurra. Los equipos, uno blanco y otro azul, se armaron espontáneamente en el momento, a partir de la consigna de mezclar ambos bandos.

Al finalizar la guerra, luego de doce años, los combatientes de ambos lados quedaron solos, sin apoyo del Estado, sin trabajo ni atención psicológica. Muchos terminaron en el alcoholismo o en las drogas, con problemas psiquiátricos, o

THE FIRE THEORY
*MELISSA GUEVARA, MAURICIO KABISTAN,
CRACK RODRIGUEZ, ERNESTO BAUTISTA*

2016

(PROJECTION)

THE GAME

This football match took place on May 7 , 2016 in Los Quebrachos, in the Segundo Montes community of Morazán province, one of the area's most affected by El Salvador's civil war in the 1980s, which cost 70,000 people their lives. The first inhabitants of Segundo Montes were massacre survivors: refugees who resettled there after the 1992 peace agreements. The players did not know each other. There were ex-guerrillas, ex-soldiers, deserters, dissidents and the children of combatants. There was even a soldier who became a guerrilla and a guerrilla who became a soldier. The game was an experiment. We didn't know whether or not it would work; whether conflict between the opposing sides would re-emerge. We only intervened to create a point of departure; the conditions for it to happen. The teams, one in white and one in blue, were put together spontaneously with the idea of mixing both sides together.

At the end of the war, after 12 years, combatants on both sides found themselves alone, with no help from the state, no work and no psychological support. Many of them turned to alcohol or drugs, developed psychiatric problems or became involved with gangs or evangelical churches.

Others reinvented their lives: one player, who is an ex-guerrilla, is now his community's president

entraron en las maras o en iglesias evangélicas. Otros reinventaron su vida: uno de los jugadores, ex guerrillero, hoy es presidente electo de su comunidad.

Otros participantes por su edad (igual que nosotros) no vivieron la guerra pero sí sus secuelas actuales. Es la guerra y la impunidad que hemos heredado. Esos jóvenes nos hablaron con lucidez del pasado y sobre todo del futuro. Un gesto hacia las nuevas generaciones que se están matando (en la nueva forma que asume la guerra). Todos los participantes coincidieron en algo: querían y siguen queriendo que las cosas cambien.

¿A mí en qué me concierne la guerra para cambiar mi presente? ¿Por qué necesito cambiar el presente? ¿Cuál es la conciencia colectiva que tenemos en el país sobre estos hechos que nos afectan? ¿Cuáles fueron los motivos de la guerra de hermanos contra hermanos? ¿Cuáles son sus consecuencias a nivel colectivo e individual? ¿Para qué se usó a la gente? ¿Por qué cambio se luchó? ¿Qué se logró? ¿Por qué seguir luchando?

The Fire Theory y Ana Longoni.

elect. Because of their age, other participants (like us) did not live through the war but are feeling its aftermath today. It is war and its impunity that we have inherited. The players spoke plainly about the past, but even more so about the future, a nod to the new generations that are killing each other (with the new form that war is taking). All of those who took part agreed on one thing: they wanted things to change, and still do.

How does the war concern me in terms of changing my present? Why do I need to change the present? What collective awareness does the country have of these events? What caused this war between brothers? What are its collective and individual consequences? Why were people used? What change were they fighting for? What was achieved? Why keep fighting?

The Fire Theory and Ana Longoni.



The players in the photo are JUGADORES: Norma Jeanette Cardoza Cruz, José Edwin Guzmán "Pirriri", Juan Nepenceno Guevara, José René Reyes "Loma", Noel Raúl Díaz Márquez, Irene Orellana "El Gorrión", Walter Cardosa Ramos, Leónidas Sorto "Apoko", Mauricio Ruiz "Wicho", Alfredo Reyes "José", Pablo Hernández "Tulio", Armando Pineda "Armando", Ernesto Martínez "Benavides", Atilio Vásquez "Chillo", Lucas Pérez "Roberte", Bernardo Carrillo "Gaspar", Santos Sánchez "Santos", Domingo Tobar "Melo", Raúl Guevara "Raúl", Idalia Chicas "Idalia", Salvador Martínez "Abilio", Nelson Lara "Manuel", Enrique Ruiz "Cletillo", José Modesto Arqueta "Lencho", Blas Vázquez "Chepe"

SHIRLEY CAMPBELL BAR
insistencia

2013

(AUDIO ON
SCREEN)

Creo en la poesía como forma superior de filosofía, tal como es concebida por estudios. Va más allá de una misma, cuestiona la realidad y es sin duda un reflejo de quien la produce y del tiempo y la realidad que habitamos. La creación poética está definida por ese diálogo íntimo con una misma que permite sanar y aliviar el espíritu. La poesía trasciende la soledad y se convierte en un ejercicio colectivo, cuando conmueve, educa, cuestiona y posibilita la potenciación de caminos de lucha, auto-reconocimiento y reivindicación. La poesía tiene valor porque libera y sana. Al construir poesía, me construyo a mi misma y aporto para la construcción de la identidad de mis pueblos.

Shirley Campbell Bar
insistencia

Insisto en renegar de todo cuanto me
incomoda
en querer seguir siendo la parte más
oscura
e incómoda de este continente
en querer hablar la lengua
heredada de mis antepasados,
tan presentes
y en seguir danzando al pie de la letra
la canción de mis abuelas.
Insisto en tararear las notas de
canciones que ya ni recuerdo
en cantar las canciones que casi fueron
borradas de la memoria
el mismo día en que aprendí las
canciones de otras lenguas.
Insisto en tener la voz más gruesa y
sonora de todos en la América.
En vestirme de colores rimbombantes
y en colocar collares coloridos
alrededor de mi cuello,
aretes musicales en mis orejas.

Insisto en llevar tambores a la iglesia
y en adorar Dioses y Diosas con
nombres
impronunciables.
En recrear ceremonias e inventar
rituales que me dignifiquen
en bautizar a mis hijos bajo las estrellas
y en los ríos y en religiones
y acentos que yo ni siquiera entiendo.
En colocarles nombres en lenguas
extrañas

y educarlos para la irreverencia.
Insisto en ser la parte más incómoda
de este continente
en querer ser la porción más oscura y
altiva de esta tierra.
En vestirme de gala para las guerras y
de luces en los velorios.
En reírme a carcajadas a pesar de las
penurias
y en cantar canciones de victoria a
pesar de los reveses.

Porque aún soy
la piedra que incomoda en el zapato
y el número más notable entre las
cifras.
Aún soy la luz relegada a la parte
postergada de la casa
pero que alumbra insistentemente el
jardín de enfrente
que grita con muchas voces la palabra
cierta,
y pelea con muchas manos la guerra
más humana
y aguarda irreverente
por su justo homenaje.



TANIA CAÑAS, LUIS GONZÁLEZ SERRANO,
AND ANDREA MENDEZ

IN CONVERSATION

Sunday, 2 October 2–4pm

[edited for clarity]



MEGAN: I want to start by acknowledging that we are gathered here this afternoon on the sacred sovereign lands of the Boonwurrung on the border of the Wadawurrung which is just on the other side of the river. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and all First Nations people, and to all the Indigenous people, especially those of you who are with us here today. I also want to acknowledge that those nations lands has never been saved and that they always have and always will belong to the rivers, seas, skies and red earth on which the city of Wyndham has being built. And I personally thank them for the gift of living and learning and walking on their land today. So thank you so much for coming with this beautiful artist-in-conversation.

TANIA: Thank you. And I also want to start by acknowledging the Sovereign lands on which we are speaking from today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and future. And keeping in mind the exhibition today and the lands which we're talking about, I also want to extend this acknowledgement to First Peoples of colonised and occupied lands internationally. So thinking about this in particular in the context of the Americas, or

Abya Yala, which, as I found out recently, is a framework and a word that's also come out of Central America.

So one of the really important things about Isthmus and bringing the voices together was it was about interrogating and challenging the homogenous idea of Latin American and how we think about ourselves. So when integrating sites and practices of contestation, of resistance and as Shirley Campbell Barr notes in her poem, which is the audio work in the corner she talks about insister and she frames it like *que se siente como una piedra en el zapato*.

It is about an insistence that is like the pebble in your shoe. So in this way, it was really important to bring voices from different contexts and to not just have Spanish and English, but to also have language languages such as Q'anjob'al, Maori and Spanglish. Which maybe an interesting side note is when we when we when this exhibition was shared in the in the Central American context. So media outlets in Guatemala and El Salvador. The term Spanglish is one of the languages listed was edited out. But I think that speaks to the 'why' of the exhibition, in this context, needs to happen. And ongoing navigation that long term displaced peoples, particularly Central American, go through.

So it isthmus as a conceptual and metaphorical frame that challenges the nation state ideas of what it is to be across contexts, and importantly, to bring voices that don't just in the North American context, which currently dominates displacement, discourse, and finally to centre Central

America. Particularly thinking about how Central America is seen as the periphery to the Latin American discourse and often treated as the periphery—forgotten or as an afterthought. And how these dynamics also manifest locally when it comes to Latin American discourse in Melbourne, in Australia. So it's really important to centre Central America and I think this is where the line 'centering in-betweenness' has come from and really kind of seen this exhibition through.

(Poetry reading by exhibiting artists
Luis González Serrano and Andrea Mendez)

TANIA: I guess I wanted to start off with this provocation of 'isthmus', and isthmus coming to mean Central America and I wondered what your initial thoughts and your entry point into the framework of Isthmus was for both of you and how that maybe differentiates from Latin America as a whole?

ANDREA: I think for me, as someone who's a part of this new generation of first generation people, the children of refugees and immigrants, and I really connect with that in-betweenness feeling. And so I found it to be I found my connection to be stronger than, say, a phrase such as Latin America or Central America, which were able to associate more with my parents and ancestral lineage.

LUIS: Well, it's kind of an interesting question that of identifying as Central America or Latin American, because that's kind of all a product of being an immigrant in a way. So

before I came here, I wasn't Latin American I was El Salvadoran. And you sort of identify where you are from. But here you kind of default into this kind of kind of sameness, in a way making it easy for people to understand. I am from Central America, although that never works out that well [audience laughs] people don't know where Central America is. And yeah. So you default to this sort of Latin Americaness. It's kind of weird because I met more people from Latin America here than I ever did back in my home country. Here I've met Colombians, Uruguayans and Chileans and whatnot. There's a lot of people from the diaspora of the Americas are here. And that's where that identity kind of clicks in. It doesn't before you arrive. Before you arrive here your Salvadoran or Costa Rican or whatever. It's a thing that becomes, becomes an identity in exile.

TANIA: Whats a different entry point of saying Salvadoran, to Central American to Latin America—as you say it's shifting per context- temporal, generational maybe.

LUIS: Yeah, it changes depending on the context. I wonder whether it is about being able to explain to others where you are from. Because a) no one has heard of El Salvador and b) its sort of and I hard to explain... It's, I don't know, at what point. But you don't make a conscious decision to say, I am Central American. It just sort of happens. There's some kind of, I guess it's probably a sense solidarity that happens with being in a new country when you arrive here. Back in your home countries, these big rivalries between

between neighbouring countries. You know, famously we went to war with Honduras in the 60 or 70s. There's been disputes over land and borders. There's always some kind of, you know, back and forth about who invented pupusas.

We don't have that united kind of identity back there, we have it back here.

TANIA: Andrea, did you want to add about this sense of in-betweeness and unpack that as your entry point?

ANDREA: when I first started practicing as an artist, I realised in my biography I needed to describe myself as someone who is non-white. And with the advice of my agents who were white, they told me to put myself Salvadoran and I was showing my mum by brand new bio and she said and she said, Andrea, you're not Salvadoran and while she didn't mean to, it wasn't said maliciously. It did kind of make me think about the ways that I needed to describe myself. So then I tried the first generation, and landed on Latinx, but I'm still finding words that feel comfortable to me.

TANIA: So I wanted to ask you now specifically about your contributions to this exhibition. You kind of touched on there in your entry point, English or Spanish and how it sort of comes out. But specifically about 'Central America Greatest Hits'. I wondered if you could share with us about how that came about, how that piece came about. You really encompass this idea of being pulled in multiple directions.



LUIS: Yeah, well, I think one of the main things that, probably the spark for that one came out of the constant music you get from El Salvador or Central America in general, that there's always some disaster happening. It's a place that is it's either earthquake, an election. You know, there's things that happen, there's always some kind of unrest, some kind of turmoil. But at the same time the tourist over there and there's videos on Instagram... the latest on that that someone showed wife she me was this guy's going he's eating pupusas and it's some famous British actor and like this beautiful place and it's a beautiful country. And it's like, you know, the surfers rave about it and mum has been able to get through one through customs with some kind of questionable item because the guy at customs had been to El Salvador and he'd been surfing in El Salvador and so like it's a beautiful place, but it's always riddled with some sort of disaster. There's always something going on. There's always some crisis. And I think that's where that the inspiration for that came about, how there's a kind of a self acknowledged resilience in people that, yeah, this is 'just the rainy season', 'yeah, that place got flooded. all those people lost their homes. It's what happens'. That's kind of how people approach it. Right. There's a line that is always stuck with me from the Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton, he says there is a poem where he says 'debedia dar premio de resistencia, por ser salvadoreño' which means: they should give you an endurance prize just for being Salvadoran.

TANIA: I also wanted to ask you about motifs, there is the motif of the coffee brewing. Then in other works you talk about the heat—and it just reminds of, returning back for the first time since leaving and I remember my aunty was saying you'll feel the inferno when the doors open from the airport and that's exactly what it felt like. And so those kinds of memories you invoke in your work. Could you share a little bit about how you weave motifs?

LUIS: Yeah, I guess it's very much a physical experience. I guess you could call it that, El Salvador is a physical experience. Yeah, there is that constant heat. One of the last times that I went there was around Christmas time. And I hadn't been up to El Salvador for quite some time. And my, my memory was 'oh it gets a little bit chilly around December' and I took a jumper and I realised I don't really need a jumper in this case. But you, become acclimatised to that so much so that when it drops below 24 degrees you put a jumper on—that's the kind of place it is. So that's, that's how it comes from. And it does you kind of get seared into your mind. And things like coffee as well, just as sort of an everyday. It's a bit of a ritual, you know, you sort of sit down at 3:00 or whatever and you have a coffee and it's time to sort of chill out and talk about stuff.

And there is a complex kind of history there, of coffee. Even then people acknowledge and very proud about coffee. I mean, it is one of the biggest sources of oppression in El Salvador—14 families used to own 98% of the land because they grew coffee on it. So it's, you know, you could write



a whole book on coffee and the complexity of places like El Salvador.

TANIA: You both of you spoke about being invled with Archiving the Present project in which you were both involved with as part of this exhibition. As you've briefly touched on it. It was a quick response project to the destruction of a mural that was painted by young people in 1990 as part of a big, massive redevelopment that was happening in Kensington. We were unable to preserve that because it was destroyed this year. And you know, this whole process was happening in between variations of lockdown. So a lot of it was online. And I think in between lockdowns, we actually met in front of that mural for the first time in different occasions. And I've known about each of your works beforehand, but we met for the first time in person in front of that mural. And I think that speaks to the power of what that mural could bring out. And what creative practice can bring out as a form of storytelling. So with that in mind, I wanted to ask you Andrea. You shared your piece with us as part of the poetry reading that came from that experience and visiting the mural for the first time. And I was there to witness you see the mural for the first time. Could speak to us a little bit about that, that process, that journey, and how you got to the piece.

ANDREA: Yeah. When you first approached me, I was honestly just so excited to meet other Salvadorans that you know, parents didn't know through the church. And all of these memories, flooding in from childhood,



from parents, just imagining their stories but on that palette. And then I returned and I had a notepad with me the whole time and the fence was up and I wasn't expecting it because I returned. About a week after or two weeks after we met and I was upset. So I think you can kind of hear that in the piece—I'm a bit sassy. And the piece is exactly what I felt for the most honest way that I can describe. I stood in front of the mural, but I also walked around the mural and went inside the building. And that in itself was a whole different piece. It's just it was just like graffitied and messy and, like, artistic. But then so I had to edit down a lot to just get to the heart of the piece, which was about the mural and my associations with it and just remembering that I understand. But I will never understand. But I. Understand the translations. I understand what I'm reading. But I don't understand. I wasn't there.

TANIA: Actually, the next question I was going to ask you, maybe this is what you were speaking about, is this line 'Pace. Pace. Pace. I understand, but I don't understand'.

ANDREA: In acting as his technique about repeating a word. And I think people just doing this in general when repeat words, we just try to find more associations and understandings of it. And I was repeating the word and I understood literally the translation. But my associations and my definition of peace is completely different to what my parents would have that association with the word peace. Peace as a word hasn't really played a big part in my life positively

with negatively. But that's not the case with my parents at all, with their hardships. And that's kind of what I was addressing that I understand but I will never understand.

TANIA: So I think finally to wrap up, I wanted to ask each of you, aside from your piece. Was there another work as part of the exhibition that really spoke to you and why?

LUIS: I was really intrigued by the piece that is both in the Mayan dialect and in Spanish that is hand written on the wall, particularly around well, a reminder that even though Spanish is our first language, there were other languages beforehand and many languages that had been lost. But also the constant is that is the notion of diaspora about walking and, and the whole concept of the caravan. So this, this caravan that the writer is referring to is that people started just walking up to the US and kind of going, 'well, you won't let us in try your hardest, kind of thing'. But how even though in the process of immigrating or of leaving your country, your still rooted back to where you came from. That really spoke to me.

TANIA: and this metaphor of the flower, it's a movement. The stem is the movement.

ANDREA: Luis, your poem actually. It was captivating when I first read it. But there was something that you said that I really connected with. "I take pride in my origin, but I can't long for or invent an idealised tropical paradise", calling Central America your heart of darkness. Personally, for me,

there's been times in my life that I felt, you know, sad and ashamed of my troubled and complex relationship with El Salvador. And I felt really connected and seen when you said that. Thank you for sharing that. And I'm sure we can both connect with that in both our separate ways.

TANIA: and a big thank you to the artists including the artists that couldn't physically be with us but virtually present with us today. And so I invite you all to stick around, have some more coffee, more cakes, have a conversation with us with each other. Take a look at the gallery upstairs.



Opening night









EXHIBITION. REFLECTIVE PIECE

1 September 2022

Glenda Mejía

I write this piece from a place of ISTHMUS, in between-worlds. I write this piece from a place of remembering, learning, and healing. I write this piece from a place of brown tears, salty like the ocean water, salty water that heals. I write this piece from a place of reflection, memories, emotions, sensations, sentipensando y sintiendo el golpe in my heart and in my head.

Surface feelings of bodily response that I let rise as I was walking through the gallery. I write this piece with a palpitating heart, palpitaciones de alegría, dolor y recuerdos. I write this piece by feeling a sense of orgullo for the curator Dr Tania Cañas when I saw her name, a pride of how a Salvadorean woman in Australia has created a space so that various artists from Central America in a rincón in Australia can share their voices with us. Voices that many times are invisibles in this part of the world.

I write this piece as a displaced Salvadorean woman by a civil war which did not start in the '80 but way back in 1932 by La Matanza. I write this piece as a guest in a country that is now known as Australia, which history of its matanza started in 1770.

As I walked up the stairs to the exhibition as soon as I put my foot on the shared welcome space, my heart started panting and my tears started rolling down on my face, tears of emotions to see a mural created in 1990 by displaced Salvadorean children by a civil war, now living in Melbourne. The emotions continue when my eyes captured a message written in another

language which I am sure is Indigenous but do not recognise, which later I learnt is Q'anjob'al. I was grateful to be physically the only one in that gallery during my visit, knowing that I was not completely alone as I was surrounded by music, dance, voices, poems, bodies, culture artefacts of many memories, and what it means to be a woman, a child, a man or black in Central America.

As the exhibition has been *trenzada* so are my emotions, sensations, and thoughts, and as I walked and pondered from one piece to the next one, taking my time to digest, to breathe, to live it, I think of Dr. Clelia Rodríguez a Salvadorean scholar in Canada who says, "The experiences tattooed in our copper-brown skin provided opportunities to be packed into projects in other countries" (2019: 104). These experiences tattooed in copper-brown bodies were reflected by the work of Luis González Serrano's poem *Central America Greatest Hits*, by the song of Leonel Alvarado and Rómulo Castro García and by the composition of Dr. Lucrecia Quintanilla all of them created in diaspora either in Australia or New Zealand weave in different languages by different voices. Art works that spoke to me and felt connected in one way or another.

Seeing Galindo's video performance walking with determination, carrying a long heavy flag it reminds me of *luto*, all the struggles and heaviness that many women had and are still experiencing in Central America due to a system that rewards violence. I thought of many Central American women who have experienced *una ruptura* from their land due to violence and war. There is one scene in the video that caught my eye, which I watched a few times, and it is seeing the name of Berta Cacéres written on a wall, is a coincidence or a connection I asked? as this

week I have prepared a lesson for my Spanish class about Berta Cacéres's biography, which reminds me of the responsibility I have to teach in different ways, to share those lost stories in this part of the world. That Spanish is not just about how to order *una cerveza* but of knowing, unlearning, and learning how an Indigenous woman and environmental activist was assassinated for protecting her land, of being *una piedra en el zapato* as Shirley Campbell Barr's reads from her poem at the gallery.

While I was walking through the gallery I was so deep in thought. There was a moment that my body was transported and experienced what I felt in 2019 when I visited a museum in Costa Rica. At that same moment at the gallery, there were sounds, noises coming from outside and inside, cars *pitando*, people talking and the mellifluous voice of Shirley Campbell Barr's reciting her poem, not knowing that she is Costa Rican, connections again. A poem that talked to me when she says '*en querer hablar la lengua de mis antepasados tan presente*', a sense that I have always longed of knowing the language of my ancestors.

Without getting *enredada* in big empty terms re-use and misuse constantly by many people, Shirley sublimely weaved her own personal experience, and beautiful stories that she has crafted as a poem, which by being attentive we can hear her Blackness.

As an example of reconciliation and healing I came across a large photo with smiling faces, faces that represent a generation of war that many of us here in Australia belong to. Faces that remind me of my dad and many more people here in Australia, who, like the ones in the photo, had to reinvent their lives, and many times once they arrived, they were mixed not as an experiment

but as a process of displacement while struggling with memories, melancholies, realities, and unfinished dreams.

At the last room I sit on the floor next to Lucreccia's piece listening to the sound of birds, and I deeply submerge myself into my thoughts, my own time, my feelings, my emotions, memories, and bodily experiences.

This exhibition was felt in my body and mind as a whole—sentipensante—It was a rich emotional experience of a continuous healing, proudness, and connections even when experiences projected by the artist are different than my own.

Líneas, tejidos, thoughts, feelings entrelazados embodied through this exhibition in Melbourne from every Central America country were reflected in various forms of art by different Central American artists. This is what Dr Cañas has curated and shared with us, a richness of ISTHMUS knowledges, and for that I am grateful.

CONTRIBUTORS

SABINO ESTEBAN FRANCISCO

Guatemalan poet of Mayan q'anjob'al ancestry. During the internal armed conflict, his family took refuge in Chiapas, Mexico, for two years. In 1984, he returned to Guatemala to join the "Los Limones", a camp of the Popular Communities in Resistencia -CPR-, in Ixcán. His childhood and part of his adolescence took place in the CPR, where he attended elementary school.

He has published the books of poetry *Sq'aqaw yechel aqanej / Groove of Footprints* (Editorial Cultura, 2007), *Yetoq 'junjun b'ijan aq'al / With a Coal's Piece* (Editorial Cultura, 2011) *Xik'ej K'al Xe' / Wings and Roots* (Catafixia Editorial, 2013) and *Sq'och Xajaw / The Moon's Stairway* (Editorial Cultura, 2017). He has been invited to poetry festivals and cultural events in Guatemala, Spain, Mexico and the United States. His poetry appears in national and foreign anthologies.

DR. LEONEL ALVARADO

Leonel Alvarado was born in Honduras and lives in New Zealand, where he heads the Spanish and Portuguese Programmes at Massey University in Wellington. He is and Adjunct Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of New England in Armidale. He has published more than 10 books of poetry, criticism, and fiction, and has received several international literary awards. He and Rómulo Castro have collaborated in a few projects.

RÓMULO CASTRO GARCÍA

Cantautor Panameño con orígenes compartidos entre España, México y Cuba. Compositor de una extensa obra musical con eje en los problemas y esperanzas de su tiempo, en la que destaca su trabajo junto al tecladista y productor Luis Thomas y el Grupo Tuirá, con los que ha editado los álbumes discográficos *Herencia* (Panamá, 1997), *Amor a medias* (Panamá, 1999), *Travesías* (Panamá-España, 2003), *Intermedio* (Panamá-Estados

Unidos, 2009) y *Multiverso* (Panamá-Mundo, 2019). En esta última obra participan más de cien músicos de Panamá y otros ocho países del mundo.

LUIS GONZÁLEZ SERRANO

Luis González Serrano is a Melbourne poet born in El Salvador who came to Australia in 1988 as a refugee. In 2003 he founded, along with two mates, *Salt-lick Quarterly*, a well regarded poetry journal. In 2005 he published a book, *Cities with Moveable Parts* (NSW Poets Union Publications). He has been involved in the Melbourne poetry scene since 2002, and directly or indirectly with the Melbourne Overload Poetry Festival, of which he was Artistic Director between 2011 and 2012.

REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO

Regina José Galindo is a visual artist and poet, whose main medium is performance. Galindo lives and works in Guatemala using context as a starting point to explore ethical implications of social violence and injustices related to gender and racial discrimination, as well as human rights abuses arising from the endemic inequalities in power relations of contemporary societies. Galindo received the Golden Lion for Best Young Artist in the 51st Biennial of Venice (2005) for her work *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas? And Himenoplastia*, (*Himenoplastia*, 2004), works which critique Guatemalan violence that comes from misconceptions of mortality as a form of gender violence, while demanding restitution of the memory and humanity of victims. In 2011 she was awarded with the Prince Claus Award from the Netherlands for her powerful public art.

SHIRLEY CAMPBELL BARR

Shirley Campbell Barr studied drama, literature and creative writing in her native Costa Rica. She is an anthropologist from the University of Costa Rica and took post-graduate courses in African Feminism at the University of Zimbabwe. She holds a Master's degree

in International Cooperation for development. She has lived and worked in Zimbabwe, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Brazil, United States and Panamá and travelled extensively in Latin America and several African countries. She has worked in cultural and social programs including as a teacher, directing creative writing workshops (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras). Her acclaimed poem “Rotundamente Negra” has become an emblem for many Afro-descendent organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean. As such she has received several distinctions across the region.

DR. LUCRECCIA QUINTANILLA

Dr. Lucreccia Quintanilla is an artist, DJ and writer. She has recently completed her Doctoral research titled: *Whose Myth? The Echo and the Diaspora*, at Monash University. Recent works include: *Brian Fuata; A Generous Opacity*, for the Anti LIVE Art International Award publication, Finland. *Records of Displacement in Disclaimer* online Journal, *Speaking Surfaces*, St Paul’s gallery, Auckland University of Technology Curated by Charlotte Huddleston. Recent Sound work includes *Call for Westspace Offsite*. Quintanilla has presented at the Sound System Outernational Conference in Naples, Italy and has been a resident artist at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada. She is currently part of the *Makeshift* program as part of Artshouse, Melbourne. Quintanilla has received Australian Post Graduate Award for her research, received a Vic Arts Grant and the Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship.

DR. TANIA CAÑAS

Tania Cañas is an artist-researcher based on unceded Kulin Territory. Her work looks at socially engaged and community-led creative practices as sites of collaboration, modalities of resistance, as well as ways to rethink processes and recast institutions.

ANDREA MENDEZ

Andrea Mendez is a latinx actor and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Theatre Practice) graduate from the VCA. She is also an award winning writer and has been published in *Overland*, Australian Multilingual Writing Project, *Yo Soy*, *Sangre Migrante*, *Kindling & Sage*, *FOLK Magazine* and has written works for the Emerging Writers Festival.

GIANNA RIZZO

Gianna Rizzo has been documenting the local music and arts scene for close to fifteen years. ‘Community’ is a principle theme of her work, often aligned with grassroots and multicultural engaged platforms. She has captured a wide range of events, most notably for exhibition and performance facilitators such as *Footscary Community Arts Centre*, *Foreign Brothers Productions* and *Yo Soy!* collective.

HOANG TRAN NGUYEN

Hoang Tran Nguyen is a Naarm Melbourne-based artist, most known for site-specific and participatory social practice that address overlapping cultural histories and politics of place.

VALESKA CAÑAS

Valeska is Salvadoran-born cartographer and digital artist based on unceded Kulin land. Her practice interrogates maps as political documents and how they construct ongoing coloniality. Central through her practice is interest in the design elements of maps in terms of practical use and improved accessibility for the mixed ability user. Her work expresses the spatial as social practice. Valeska worked as a Coordinating Cartographer at *Lonely Planet* and has since expanding her practice into art and digital design for community-based organisations.

TIMMAH BALL

Timmah Ball is a nonfiction writer, researcher and creative practitioner of Ballardong Noongar heritage. In 2018 she co-created Wild Tongue Zine for Next Wave Festival with Azja Kulpinska which interrogated labor inequality in the arts industry. In 2016 she won the Westerly magazine Patricia Hackett Prize, and her writing has appeared in a range of anthologies and literary journals.

DR. GLENDA MEJÍA

Glenda Mejía, is a scholar, a mother, a daughter, as sister, and an educator born in El Salvador. who teaches Spanish language and culture and Migration studies at RMIT's School of Global, Urban and Social Studies. As an educator and a scholar Glenda is committed to un-/re-/learning and teaching by applying decolonising approaches, and senti-pensando pedagogies. Her ethics, teaching, and work are inspired by Paulo Freire, bell hook, Audre Lorde, Clelia Rodriguez, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Some of her work and publications cover topics on experiences, and memories of Latin American (im)migrants and displaced people in Australia (e.g., identity, belonging, place-making and intersectionality), inclusive language in the classroom, students in the classroom.

DANY RUIZ

Dany se considera u su mismo ANARTISTA, un concepto creado por Marcel Duchamp: Adopta esta expresión para describir la posibilidad de alternar entre las nociones de arte y no arte en suproducción. Y ya, en el jardín del Centro Cultural de España de El Salvador hizo su epitafio. Sobresu historia; quiere creer que el currículo se forma con las piezas que uno desarrolla y no con los espacios que uno acumula. De entre sus inquietudes a no olvidar, su obra es parte del patrimonio del Museo de Bellas Artes de Chile y el Museo Louvre.

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Editor
Tania Cañas

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