



SUBVERSIVE KIN:
THE ACT OF
TURNING OVER

CURATED BY
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TATIANA AROCHA
BEL FALLEIROS
CHRISTINE HOWARD SANDOVAL
KAREN MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA



Installation view: *Subversive Kin: The Act of Turning Over*
Abrazo Interno Gallery at The Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, NYC, 2021.

TATIANA AROCHA

The work of Tatiana Arocha is a vast and endless personal re-creation of the Colombian tropical forests. Her art practice involves creating layered detail, graphic compositions, and application of digital techniques learned in her earlier professional career as a graphic designer and illustrator. In her process, Arocha creates libraries of textures from local plants, and gathers physical and photographic data that serves to inform her creations.

The pieces presented in the exhibition are depictions of her way to establish relationships to a place. She documents and archives plants by pressing, collecting, and photographing specimens that she will later transform into brushes, textures, forms, and compositions. Arocha uses a variety of digital and analog approaches, including drawing, frottage, monoprints, photocopying, and digital painting. Her installation *Entrelazándose con el territorio* includes a selection of these documents in addition to imprints in clay, samples of trees, objects and photographs. Altogether, Arocha establishes a new approach to exhibit installation rooted in botanical studies.

A few of the samples presented in the exhibition were the base to create *Estranguladora (Strangler)*, an 18-by-5-foot piece in cotton canvas that is digitally printed and hand painted with acrylic, which illustrates a species of trees found in tropical forests and in the Amazon, named for their tendency to strangle other trees. Among other behaviors, this tree has aerial roots that fall to the ground, where they offer additional support to the giant trunk as supplementary trunks. These two pieces enable a dialogue that is rooted in Arocha's layered relationship to the bio-political and vulnerable landscapes she grew up exploring in her native Colombia, especially its rainforests.

Arocha's work has a particular archaeological character that records that which has not yet disappeared but is in the face of extinction. Thus, Tatiana generates future memories of what has been found, reproduced, and reimagined.



Tatiana Arocha, *Estranguladora*, 2021.
Digital Latex Print on cotton canvas, hand painted with acrylic, 18 x 5 feet.



Tatiana Arocha, *Entrelazándome con el territorio [Weaving Myself Into The Land]*, 2019.
Clay, pressed plants, monoprints on paper, 6 x 4 feet.
Polaroids installation approx 300 photos each 2 x 3 inches.



"I re-create environments that both visually beckon and serve as a reminder of the historical and continued exploitation of natural ecosystems. Remaining natural landscapes and their destruction often feel like abstractions; important but removed phenomena we should care about and advocate for, but seldom do. My work seeks to make those abstractions real and personal, inviting the viewer to both delight in nature and challenging them to form a meaningful, immediate relationship to its endurance.

All of the techniques I employ serve to reach the goal of balance. Balance between new world and old world problem/solving, and also between Indigenous and scientific knowledge. My raw materials originate from fieldwork in the tropical forests of my Colombia, Brazil, and Peru. On each journey I seek to learn more deeply about the ecology of the region, immersing myself in the knowledge, stories, and relationships between the land and their communities.

Influenced by — and in opposition to — the scientific texts and botanical engravings of colonial explorers, I alter my archive of flora and fauna to re-create and reimagine endangered ecosystems. Each individual element is rendered at life-size scale before being composed into the whole, ultimately combining into printed digital collage. I employ a monochrome palette as a metaphor for the endangered natural world, using black and white interrupted by details painted in gold; glimmering reminders of human avarice and the violent costs of extractive economies."

Tatiana Arocha, Detail of *Entrelazándome con el territorio [Weaving Myself Into The Land]*, 2019.
Clay, pressed plants, monoprints on paper, 6 x 4 feet.

BEL FALLEIROS

The work of Bel Falleiros deals with the hard scars of colonization and with ideas of disconnection. She addresses these subjects from a subversive point of view by creating pieces that aim to create roots while exploring different notions and ways for grounding.

“My work looks into the contradictions latent in our experiences as human beings inhabiting landscapes, and how both – the body and the earth – are affected by these experiences.

As an act of both grieving and remembering, “Vermelho como Brasil [As Red as Brazil]” is a series of fabric dye drawings made in the aftermath of Jair Bolsonaro’s inauguration in 2019.

*“Red marginals will be banished from our homeland.”
– Brazilian Presidential Candidate Jair Bolsonaro on the campaign trail in 2018*

**Red as ‘communists’ or anyone with liberal thoughts, against his far right politics*

Brazil is named for a tree, the “brazilwood.” This monumental tree was a commodity valued for its red pigment and logged to near extinction in colonial times. The word Brazil relates directly to the color Red, the same one the president-elect pledged to banish. “As Red as Brazil” is born from these contradictions, resurfaced in our contemporary moment.

Like an hourglass, the red color of “As Red as Brazil” has been fading since its fabrication. Captured in the fabric are the remains of the tree’s presence. Made from the absence of brazilwood, the drawing evokes a ghostly presence: When something disappears, what emerges in its place?

**Brazilwood, Pau-Brasil or Palo de Brasil is also known for its curative qualities (spiritual and physical) and is used across the Americas.”*



Bel Falleiros, *Vermelho como Brasil*, 2020.
Cotton fabric dyed with brazilwood pigment, 60 x 40 inches each.



Bel Falleiros, *Eye of the Earth*, 2019-21.
Red clay soil, brick fragments and unfired clay objects, 96 x 76 inches.



Bel Falleiros, *Inhapuambuaçu [Eye of the Earth]*, 2016.
Graphite on Paper, 9 x 12 inches.

The Eye of the Earth (Bel Falleiros, 2019) was first created in São Paulo, Brazil. For this piece, Falleiros used local soil to honor the knoll where the city was founded. Working with found natural earth from the same historical area, the artist symbolically recreated the mountain to celebrate its ancestral sacredness and bring attention to its forgotten history (i.e., a stage of a colonial battle, an Indigenous crossroads). The work brings attention to the many layers of historical amnesia at this particular site and the universality of these stories.

The created mound honors her hometown's ancestral knoll and, by extension, all sacred mountains and their symbolism as foundational sites, literally centers — or navels — from which cities emerge. It celebrates the human necessity of finding home in the landscape and our shared myths and symbols for grounding and belonging.

“For Subversive Kin, I decided to use the soil from where I lived when I first moved to the U.S., a Virginia red clay soil, similar in color and texture to the São Paulo soil. This time, “Eye of the Earth” also carries brick fragments from the shores of the Hudson River where I live and clay vessels that remind of body organs.

Since the beginning of quarantine, I’ve made heart-like figures as part of a daily healing ritual. What started as mini-paintings to send to friends has grown into independent sculptures. They serve as a manifestation of the presences and absences all around us. Like life, they signify the force of renewal that makes things sprout overnight.

This force has been what’s grounded me during the pandemic: in conversations with friends, in the making of this show, in experimenting with new forms of art, in initiating new collaborations and teaching experiences. I believe this moving, “creating worlds” force is essential to carry us forward to the next cycle. Grounded on being present on the today.”

Eye of the Earth is an installation that measures approximately 6’ in diameter. The ceramic vessels in it remain unfired, in their most fragile state.

CHRISTINE HOWARD SANDOVAL

Christine Howard Sandoval is a Vancouver-based, Obispeño Chumash and Hispanic artist whose practice focuses on the past and present histories of her ancestral home. Through the use of performance, video, sculpture and drawing, Christine questions the stories of a place and creates new meanings that stem from the combination of images and materials, in an attempt to reveal and turn over histories of trauma.

“I have used my work to arrive closer to the place where we have been, where we are today, through abstraction, through presencing adobe material, which is a land material that has multiple meanings in my family, through archival and genealogical research and the inclusion of documents.”

Howard Sandoval’s Adobe Mud and graphite on paper drawings — *Land Form III Mother Ditch* and *Land Form II Diversion* — are part of *Channel*, an ongoing long-term project spanning sculpture, video, and drawings encrusted with adobe earth, that addresses the complex relationship between Hispanic and Native agrarian histories and current riparian rights and land uses.

The artist’s research into ancient water democracies called Acequias, which still exist in New Mexico today, was expanded through conversations, interviews, and site visits during a residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute that was focused on Water Rights. Recalling overlapping and neglected histories as she walks, the artist draws on her Native and Hispanic heritage which extends from Bernalillo, New Mexico to San Luis Obispo, California.

In a small room in the corner of the gallery, *Live Stream* is projected. As the title suggests, this is a live-streamed performance and video using surveillance technology as a tool to channel migratory paths, waterways, and embedded histories in and around the site of the Acequia Madre (Taos, NM).



Christine Howard Sandoval, Left: *Land Form III Mother Ditch* (diptych), 2019. Right: *Land Form II Diversion* (diptych), 2019. Adobe mud and graphite on paper, 52 x 40 inches.

"I use my body to physically trace buried paths that have been disrupted by ongoing notions of land ownership, boundary systems, and the built environment. Navigating these contested spaces with a wireless camera attached to my body, a video installation transmits my remote exploration as a disorienting but potentially "grounding" viewer experience."

Christine Howard Sandoval, still from *Live Stream*, 2018. Single channel video with sound; 32:00 min.





Christine Howard Sandoval, stills from *Live Stream*, 2018. Single channel video with sound; 32:00 min.

KAREN MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA

Karen Miranda-Rivadeneira's practice is centered in storytelling and story keeping. In her work, the body acts as a vessel for the most primal creative force, and as a channel to dream interspecies and co-create with the earth. She's interested in the performative maps that the body stores, specifically in connection to indigeneity, nature and resilience, which she explores through a variety of mediums, including photography, performance, and clay.

Miranda-Rivadeneira's work in this exhibition are images taken from *MEDA* (2018-2019), a series of images informed by the Southwest landscapes where Rivadeneira lived, "that explore our relation to nature from the principle of myth and memory embedded in the body as the first land and the land as the first body".



Karen Miranda-Rivadeneira, *Ollin Mecatl II*, 2018-2019. From the series *MEDA*.
Pigment print on rice paper, 12 x 10 inches.

"MEDA is fictitious. As in its Latin root: to make by hand; made of clay; to earthen. It pertains to the imagination, to the realm of dark creative force.

To talk about the desert is to speak of water, its vestige exposing a tactile earth story, what does it mean for the psyche located in myths and in the memory that lives in the skin? In the languages of the Original people, Iyurina, ya sankofa; to remember by contemplating the land.

Deep in the mind of every living human there are memories that can be traced back millions of years and they can be activated under specific sounds, patterns, and images; ancient cosmologies shaped by geography, dust and blood. I seek a relation to nature that is spontaneous, collaborative and non-binary. Matriarchal sustenance birthed from transformation, pain and power. What I capture and encounter in these women is their relation to the body as the first land that we live in, which is also a land that bleeds. Photography has the ability to confront illusion: as both a layering subjective process and as a raw direct experience.

We live in tumultuous times, contemplating the land is contemplating our origin and also where we are heading. MEDA is an anthology of the essentiality of intersectional storytelling, blood memory, a celebration of resilience, and our increasing need for a new paradigm."



Karen Miranda-Rivadeneira, *MEDA series*, 2018-2019.
Pigment print on rice paper, variable dimensions.

Nuka yakawiria nau nukati mukushinia
Muy arriba en la corteza de los árboles
Very high in the canopy of some trees

Nau wikaja akanuja aka aki mapa tsawanu
Las hojas entrecruzadas crean un mapa en su sombra
The branches that traverse create a map in their shadow

Nau rapaka ikicha ikiumu
La tierra está húmeda
The land is moist

Kika esmeralda, Kika iyauna
Verde esmeralda, verde wayusa
Green Esmerald, green bitter leaf

Naruka kuyajaka
Piedras huacas guardianes
Guardian stones

Chatim nakuna ati nau irishipijaunu
Cada planta/ser tiene su historia
Each plant/being has their story

Omeede
Ta richunu nau ninakari
Se espera la noche
They wait for the night

Iya katsaka kawiria nau katsaka ikicha iwana yanukua
Dejando que todo lo que está bajo el sol
Letting everything that is under the sun

Ataunjuka
Descanse
Rest

Niatu nau Jumandi
Hija de Jumandi
Daughter of Jumandi

Nau paratu atinu, nau mukushi Piatsaw nakuna atinu
El viento le habla, el palo santo prendido le habla
The wind speaks, the heartwood ignited, speaks

Pakatetaka tsamarujinia
Prende al alma dice
Ignite the soul, it says

Charatu ta tsamaraw
Tomadora de espíritu
Imbiber of the soul

Nau naku ta ku ikicha, nuka katsaka nau nashini ta
La selva te llama, para que la cuides
The forest calls, to care for her

Ikicha kuiñu pirinu
Estos hermanos menores
These younger brothers

Saninu ta iki nukiriu
Confundidos en su espejo
Confused in their reflection

Taikua aniki nukisha
No saben ver
They do not know how to see

Nau imatiña ta ikinu
El jaguar le pregunta:
The jaguar asks:

Nau pajinu ikicha ku tsamaraw
A dónde está tu alma?
Where is your soul?

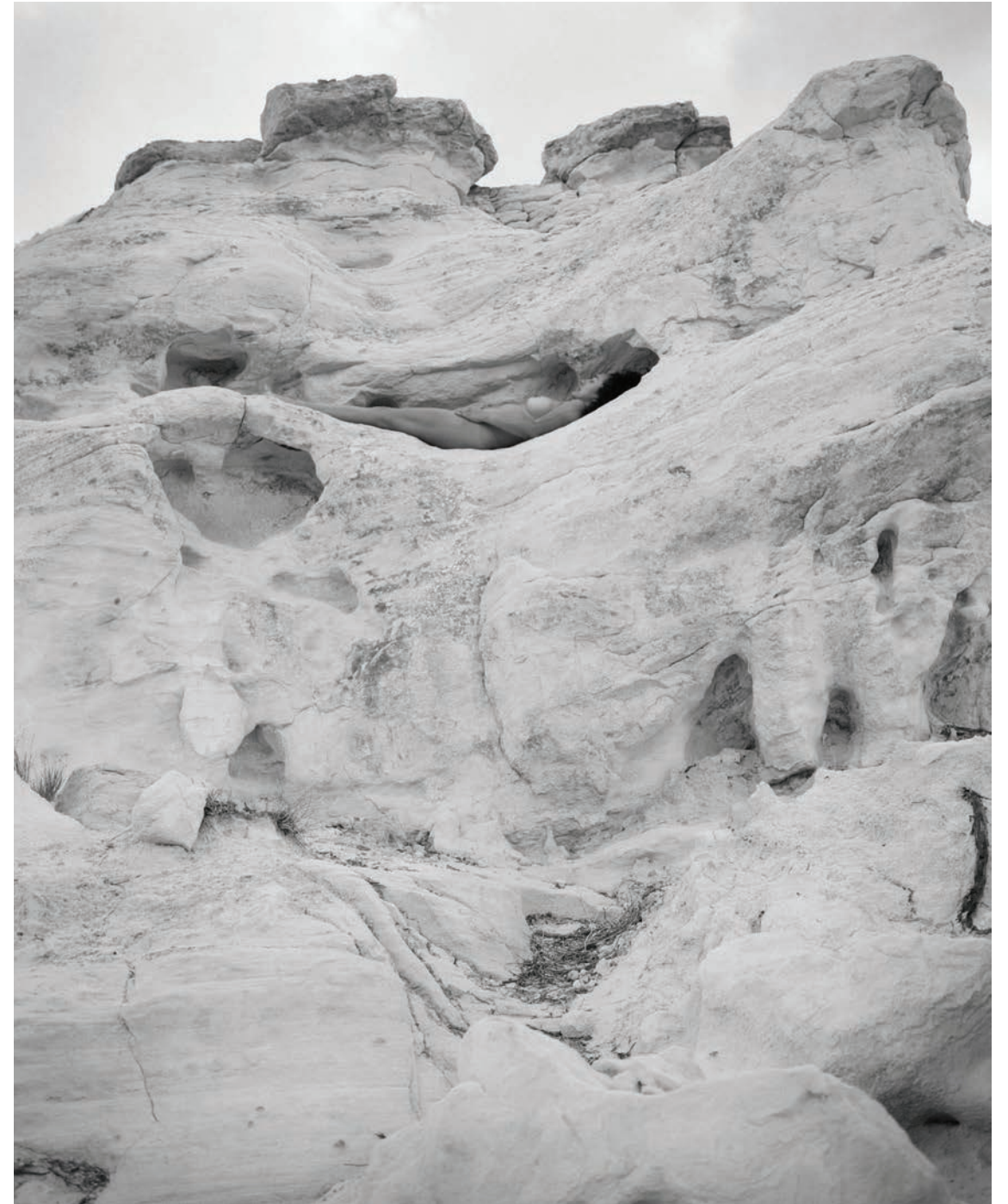
Tsururuku irishipiukanu
Contando historias,
Telling stories

Ataujuka anaka icha nau aramaja
Haciéndonos recordar a través de la piel.
Reminding us through her skin

Katsaka tausi nujinia anaka, ta,
Que somos hechos de memorias,
That we are made of memories,

Ta muricha, nukiti, rapaka, naka ta anamishuka.
De agua, aceite, tierra, sangre y sal.
Of water, oil, mud, blood and salt.

— Excerpt from *Old Memory Woman Chants*,
Amaraka the eternal tales
Zápara translation by Shimanu Ushigua,
defensor de la selva



Karen Miranda-Rivadeneira, *X Balam*, 2018-2019. From the *MEDA series*.
Pigment print on rice paper, 20 x 24 inches.

DEC 29, 2020

Elisa: For me this idea of *turning over* is so strong, and maybe what I want to start sharing is the perspective I took when choosing this approach for the title of the exhibition. When I was thinking about the idea of subversion, there was a strong reference toward something more violent or controversial. And I was not quite comfortable with that notion in the context of this exhibition. As I was diving deeper in the concept, I found this very simple definition of subversion at the Merriam Webster Dictionary that explained it as an act of *turning over* to something or someone. So even though it is still a defiant act, it becomes a matter of perspectives that invites us to change gears.

The idea of changing gears was really beautiful, and I wanted to bring it to the conversation. Because even though I am convinced that rupture is needed at times like the ones we're living in, the *turning over* needs to come from a different perspective. And now that I think of that in relation to my own experience, for me this *act of turning over* has become a recurrent practice where I try to separate what is presented from the hidden perspectives, and from the other less evident views. This certainly applies to my family history, to the place where I'm standing today, and to all the relationships that I am creating with people around me.

But it also has so many layers, and I would love to know what are those ways in which the idea of *turning over* is manifested in your work? For instance, it can be seen from a historical perspective, or from a more speculative position that allows the creation of different realities. It could also mean to *turn over* to other possibilities. Any other thoughts?

Christine: I have a lot of thoughts about this idea of *turning over*. I really appreciate your use of the term as a verb. It is something that we're in the progress of doing, it is not a completed act.

That *act of turning over* is also looking at the other side of what we have, the other side of what is visible, looking at what is invisible and making those things felt. I also feel like *turning over* is about desire, and that desire is at the heart of imagining our future and learning our past, how we understand ourselves and where we stand in the land.

I think the *act of turning over* is a constant cycle of reciprocity, circulation, expansion, and building these connections, which I really like in relationship to

subversive kin because it is growing these networks and relationships.

It is not just about knowledge, right? *The act of turning over* is not just about gaining knowledge, but about finding out really what you care about and who you are. There are different ways that I do that in my life personally, and then there are strategies that I take in my work to turn things over, stories, narratives, different containers that we've been given through imperial structures that exist and also through our families who have existed and survived through those imperial structures, and not just dismantling, but looking at what has not been visible.

My practice works through photography; photography was kind of the impetus for the creative act when I was younger, and it still is very much a part of my process. I am looking at the way events and people get documented in an image historically, and the act of turning over the document and literally looking at the other side, those spaces in between, is really what my work is trying to do. I am trying to turn over those narratives of history and present them in the now as a way to project a possible future.

Elisa: I love that you bring back the idea of different times that converge in the same place. I was talking to Bel a few days ago, and we were going back to this idea, that is also present in the text of the exhibition, of becoming good ancestors, which implies bringing all those temporalities, past and future into the present. I don't know if you want to add anything to this, Bel.

Bel: Yeah! I don't know if I can articulate it well right now, sorry. This full moon is really strong, and I think it is affecting me! I don't know if you felt it last night, but something in me feels more wired up than I'm used to, and that happens in full moons.

There is a deep feeling of closing a very big cycle, not just individually, but globally, and it is coming strong. So the message it's getting to me is, "Okay, time to rest and get ready for the next big marathon we are about to embark on." To become good ancestors...

Elisa: I remember that in our conversation we were talking about culture as something being built in the center of a community, and all this in relation to the idea of the heart as the center of things. When Bel was talking about the importance of the heart in her work, she was also speaking about softening the hard angles, and when she said that it all came to full circle. To think of the

heart not only as the vital life component, but also as the center. And I say this because I'm also thinking about "togetherness," of us, a circle of women from different parts of the continent that are establishing relationships of care.

Karen: When you were talking about becoming good ancestors and honoring the ancestors, I was also thinking about my artistic practice. And I think that being an artist is a subversive act in itself. When I'm thinking about projects or ideas, I'm always trying to balance them with really enjoying the process. So, moving from a place of the mind, to a place of the heart. How much am I enjoying doing this project here, in my heart? That becomes really central. And also alluding to this pleasure principle as well, pleasure, enjoyment as an act of resistance and honoring my ancestors.

I'm also trying to ask simple questions. That's also something that is important and not easy. There's so much magic and wisdom in observing foundational things and spending time with them.

Tatiana: I've always heard I'm a person that's always going against the current. I heard it so much that I never thought of myself as someone subversive.

I have been on a very short journey with my art, a conscious journey, as I recently started focusing on my practice. Every time I think I figured something out, something comes along and makes me rethink what I'm doing and the point of view of where I'm coming from. I guess my practice is constantly turning me over.

In 2017 I was part of artist residency LABVerde in Manaus Brazil. I had been longing to be in the rainforest, after being away from Colombia. My time spent there felt very emotional, so much personal history was uncovered and I realized that I had a complicated relationship with the land, based on my country's history. It was a moment where I started seeing myself through the work and understanding that, even as an artist, I could risk relating to the land in the same way that colonizers had done it.

Being an artist did not exclude me from acting in a way that colonizers acted. I realized there was a problem, even with art in relationship to the land and how the land was being perceived. This experience made me question the way I was talking, what I wanted to talk about, and how I was placing myself in the conversation.

Even if I was already touching upon ideas of colonization and impact on the land, these ideas had not been fully developed. I'm looking to constantly shift the perspective from where I'm coming from and understanding the language that I'm trying to use. To revisit places and put them in perspective in relation to where I belong.

What if my ancestors were the colonizers?

Anthropologist Fernando Santos Granero, writes about the Yanéscha people in the Amazon, how they have a different relationship to objects than westerners, and how there is an inherited relationship to non-human beings, how objects have souls. People are made from "*material and immaterial substances provided by a variety of human and nonhuman, male and female entities: gods, spirits, plants, animals, artifacts, parents, relatives, and friends.*"³

It's just really beautiful, it made me reflect how we are made even of this conversation, or of the memory of this conversation; the fact that memories come from our experiences, our life, and how we are also made from what we eat, and how the objects that we use are also made from those elements that come from the land. All of these connections make a person, not an individual, but a dividual, meaning that it can't be separated from the rest.

Thinking about furniture in relation to this concept, on my installation "Impending Beauty" I use furniture reminiscent of colonial periods, with printed imagery illustrating the aggression of extractive economies over the rainforest territories. That connection for me happened in a very instinctual process.

Thinking of how furniture connects to ancestral bloodlines and places of origin, in this installation the furniture pieces and objects become a class system symbol connected to heritage. As a Colombian, I connect these symbols of class with the aggression on the land, the exploitation of the land in connection to commerce.

What I'm trying to say is that I've been thinking about *the act of turning over*, through understanding my early explorations, created from a place of intuition, personal history, and experiences, and how these connect back to the land.

Coming back to where I started, in those artist residencies in Manaus, Brazil, and then later in Pucallpa, Peru, is when I started seeing how as an artist, I couldn't

³ Fernando Santos-Granero, "Beinghood and people-making in native Amazonia," *Has: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (1) (2012): 181-211.

exclude myself from maybe having a place that is similar to the place that the colonizer has, and how I need to choose carefully how to tell these stories.

I started thinking that the more those stories relate to me, the deeper I dig into myself and how I feel and act with my surroundings, the work will just continue to change and evolve over and over.

Elisa: I really like that you bring up this concept of the individual and the dividual. What you were saying about language also reminded me of a narration of Carlos Lenkersdorf, a German philosopher who spent time with Maya-Tojolabal groups and eventually became part of their community. He was surprised by how language is so important in their life, because it reflected directly into their actions. For instance, they wouldn't refer to anything as an object, but only as a subject, and because everyone is a subject, everyone, and everything has the same rights when thinking about nature, about animals, rocks, the sky, the sun, all seen as subjects.

And also relating it to this idea of the individual and the dividual, he narrates an interesting anecdote where he was teaching a group of kids who were curious about knowing what is a test and why do people do tests? So they asked to be tested. Lenkersdorf gave them a problem to solve and the way that children approached the problem really surprised him, because instead of going to their desks and trying to solve the problem individually, they all immediately got together to solve the problem as a group. Another important thing that he learned is that verbs are never static, and there is a different idea of time. They always speak in the present. So I thought that was another beautiful thing also related to what Christine was saying about *turning over* as a verb that is still happening, in a continuous way.

Christine: I also think that when we think about what our initial approach was to coming together in this exhibition, it was also *the act of turning over* the way that cultural production happens. I remember Tatiana said something about sharing knowledge, sharing our stories, which is exactly what we wound up doing after almost a year of meeting through Zoom. So it feels like we are also trying to subvert together.

I agree with you Karen, that being an artist is already a very subversive act. I think about that specifically coming from relatives and family members who never considered themselves artists, I'm placing their practices with adobe within an art context, as a way to honor something that was mostly based on

labor. Sharing our knowledges in the context of an art exhibition and program is also insisting that people who don't come from a background of trained Westernized artistry, people who maybe were not existing in the city centers — or in the centers of anything — can assert an agency as a collective of people who are working with different skills and experiences and knowledges. So I see Elisa not just as a curator, but also as somebody who has a practice, and we all have a practice that we're giving to each other and sharing with each other. And that is a subversive act.

When you've had any experience with museums and the way curators take ownership of a show or ownership of the idea behind the show, it becomes subversive for this group to acknowledge a collaborative and collective endeavor. Nobody has ever done anything alone — ever. As much as the art world depends on the idea of individuality and authorship, none of us have ever accomplished anything by ourselves. We are merely trying to make that visible with the way we have approached organizing this exhibition.

Tatiana: After we had our last conversation, my husband and I were reflecting on how artists that are included in group shows have no previous relationship to each other. It's been incredible to be able to know each of you, and to establish so many connections and see all of these overlaps in our lives.

I wonder if for all of those previous group shows I've been part of, there have been similar overlaps with the artists. Because these kinds of conversations have not been made available and set up, I have felt most of the time distant and intimidated. I find myself a lot of times feeling very intimidated by other artists, it shouldn't be like that. I think we all go through so many similar processes in our mind and in the way that we feel towards our work and process. It's strange not to know the person showing next to me, or to understand how those connections were drawn between the works.

What is happening here is so important in terms of a group show. Because even if the work is different, we're being able to find those connections through the dialogue. I think that's the real art, what's happening here, what is happening in our conversations. Not so much of what is going to be placed in the space.

Karen: I agree. I think it's really phenomenal. I mean, it's just so interesting that we're talking about subversive acts, and what we're doing is a subversive act. As artists, thinkers, creative people, or however we want to describe ourselves, we still live within a world that is like "hurry up," "move it along," whatever you

are creating, “do it fast so we can have an exhibit,” “figure out who sells it and where to show it.” And it’s just like such emotion. And as you said, you don’t know the person that is exhibiting next to you at all. To be able to have this time where we’re getting to know each other and to talk — it’s the beginning of communion in art making.

Bel: I think we are all talking somehow about the notion of time. Until now, I never thought about the word kin as something directly related to time. And referring to what Christine was saying, and to think of time as lifetime, the only few years that we have as individuals in this Earth ... If this is the span we consider and operate into, we are missing a more layered notion of time. A time that includes everything that is not just this very individual transient moment.

Then, if we measure our actions and focus of life by a short span of individual goals: I was born, then I was a kid, then went to college, job, marriage, kids and blah, blah, blah. What can you achieve in just a lifetime?

I think it can be very shallow and it doesn’t enable us to make all the connections, dialogues and ripple effects to everything we are talking about. I believe it’s a subversive act to look at life and art in this more expanded, deep, real notion of time, that is not just a lifetime, and it is also not linear.

And that subversive act of looking at the multiple presences of time in our short passage on Earth changes everything.

As Karen was saying, it makes you go to the simple things. They connect us as people, nature, across time and culture. If we’re busy with the shallowness of daily obligations of our limited lifespan, we don’t go deep enough, we don’t turn to the essential things that are needed to be listened to. We need to listen to them to make these connections across time: past, present, future.

Other words that were sitting with me while I was listening to you are presence and absence, and how these two concepts are the same — are part of each other. They exist at the same time; they are the things (visible or not) that are all around us. And it made me think that if we are responsible beings, we tend and care for all those things, we leave passivity and we listen, so we really can turn over and be good ancestors.

Christine: I wanted to read a quote from Saidiya Hartman, somebody I have been reading lately and who has been guiding me a lot on strategies of *turning*

over in a way that feels like you’re not just repeating colonial narratives or you’re not just repeating the colonial structure. And so she says,

Every generation confronts the task of choosing its past. Inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on. The past depends less on ‘what happened then’ than on the desires and discontents of the present. Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell. What we recall has as much to do with the terrible things we hope to avoid as with the good life for which we yearn. But when does one decide to stop looking to the past and instead conceive of a new order? When is it time to dream of another country or to embrace other strangers as allies or to make an opening, an overture, where there is none? When is it clear that the old life is over, a new one has begun, and there is no looking back? From the holding cell was it possible to see beyond the end of the world and to imagine living and breathing again? ⁴

I feel like I come to that question a lot, especially when I’m really exhausted, I mean emotionally exhausted; when are we going to be able to move forward and really allow the fullness of our spirit to exist without still dredging ourselves out of a past? When are we, as subjugated people, going to be able to be artists that are not relegated and categorized according to race and gender? I ask myself often, what is the ultimate goal? Is there a goal in terms of *the act of turning over*? Is there a horizon that we individually imagine for this work that we are doing?

Tatiana: I love so much what you just said, because I’ve been thinking, how do I reimagine myself? How do I enter into this conversation from a place that is not coming from anger or resentment? How is it that you can be in a different place? Categorization of art can be so subtle; I sense that categorization puts me and my work in a place where it supposedly fits and can be explained.

Does it need to be explained or categorized to be understood or feel right, or to create those conversations? Most of the time I notice too late to act when those categorizations and interpretations are drawn. And then I feel I just need to be thankful so I can move to the next step.

Bel’s idea of the linear time. I personally struggle with this. I had a challenging conversation about why not using color? I was compared with a baker who

⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008)

has a signature bread, but to keep their business running they need to bake a chocolate bread if that was what the client wanted. But I'm an artist, not a baker.

Maybe in two years I will be using other color palettes in my work because something took me there. What I'm doing now will continue to change and evolve. Being placed in these categories is very dangerous and in that sense, I think that it's challenging to break with that idea of linearity. I love the concept of seeing things in a circular way. That's how you break with the linear.

Bel: There is this Brazilian musician called Tiganá Santana⁵. He has done a lot of research about The African diaspora and how many of African languages are very present in today's Brazilian-Portuguese. And he is the first to compose songs with this multitude of languages that constitutes ours.

One thing that he said that I think helps answer your question is, that we all have a fruit to give to this world as individuals. We were born to give this fruit. And we have our roots, and the soil that we are planted on. But the thing is that in between the fruit (the future) and the roots (the past), what connects those two times, is the trunk. So between past and future, the trunk (the present) is what supports us to bring our fruit to fruition, and give continuity to our roots. And the trunk is all about presence. To be in the trunk, full potential depends on our capacity of being present and acting, today.

I was thinking a lot about that when Karen was talking about pleasure and living fully in the present moment. If we are living in our true trunk, that was born from our seed, we can then fruit our true fruit, what we came to give to this world. To live fully, in fruition.

It also made me think about the word *tradition*, which is related to *trair* (in Portuguese), or *betray* (in English). So *tradition* is made out of this constant "betraying," of constant renovation and transformation — to subvert! A tradition remains alive by subverting itself, in the present moment. And to make tradition actualized itself, in the context of that living trunk, we need to be truly present and responding to what is happening now. While honoring and subverting, updating, we are also connecting with this eternal evolving of things. And to a deeper notion of time.

Tatiana: Oh, I love that. It makes me think about the Christmas celebrations. I felt the need to bring back some of the things that I grew up with, even if

I wasn't crazy about them and had some issues with them before.

I grew up with nativity scenes, not a Christmas tree. We would collect little things from different places, cereal packages, walks in the mountains. Very random things and sometimes chaotic and weird. My dad's wife has been collecting nativity scenes made in different places and cultures, México, Afro Colombian Nativity scene from Pacific Coast of Colombia. They share with me all of these nativity scenes, and it made me really happy. So I decided to bring out a present they gave of a nativity scene in mandarin peel, with Joseph, Mary, and Baby Jesus.

For the past 20 years I didn't have a nativity scene at Christmas, but this time I just needed to bring it out, I put it under our tree, a skinny real tree, and it was so meaningful. We're building our own traditions, not necessarily discarding everything but taking the valuable and significant parts of it, and understanding that not everything to be thrown away. I will continue to ask, what are the things that I would want to continue to adopt and make our own in my family. This is totally random, but I like hearing that idea because it helps me put pieces together and transform them in a way.

Karen: While you were sharing, I was simultaneously thinking about tradition, and about your original question, Christine, and I was thinking about how the women in my family are altar makers. My grandmother made an altar where she had Baby Jesus and donkeys, and frogs. She had saints from all over, and different trinkets that were sacred for her. Very much in relation to Catholicism and her own syncretic cosmology that she just brought into the mix. And my mom also has an altar for her sister who passed away. So there's a bunch of altars in the house of people that have passed away.

And I have my own altar here, which takes one quarter of the living room. It's an altar with all sorts of different things and places. It's my sacred altar.

And I was thinking about how you were talking about evolving. For me, it's not so much that we evolve, but we learn how to innovate. And in that innovation, we touch upon other people and other cultures and start growing into this other family, a broader family. And through that, also the relationship that we have with our past changes.

I've read Saidiya Hartman's work before. It's incredible to think about these other specificities that incorporate who we are, how they connect also to other

⁵ Work from the Brazilian artist Aline Motta, inspired in the research of Tiganá Santana on the Bakongo symbols, sayings and notion of time <http://alinemotta.com/Corpo-Celeste-Celestial-Body>

people, and how we change history and change stories related to our present and also to the stories of our ancestors.

Christine: It's funny, my grandmother on my mother's side, who was very Catholic had a stack of saint cards, and I'm using the saint cards in my work right now, but she had a whole collection of saint cards. She had huge altars in her house. She had an altar that took up a whole room in the trailer where she lived. So she didn't have a lot of space, but she had the altar room. She would pray every day to the saint cards, she would hold them in her hand close to her eyes and just recite things under her breath. When I saw her praying, I thought, she is in such a state of meditation right now, she is really communing right now. I had a very special relationship with her, and she taught me about the generational connection with the ancestors just through our relationship.

Our family has always been kind of "superstitious," a word that doesn't feel like it really captures the way that we think. *Superstitious* is a very Western word, and it doesn't account for the knowledge that gets passed down.

When death happens, it's weird, because we all kind of know it before it happens. I have this ongoing conversation with my mom — I had a dream about so-and-so last night — we've always had that conversation. Last night I had a dream about being in the inipi, about that moment when it's dark, you're sitting on the ground, right at the moment when they're going to close the door. I always have a lot of anxiety at that moment, because I know it's going to be hard and there is no sense of time. I know I'm going to cry and I'm going to not be able to breathe and I'm going to be going through all of these emotions and all of these fears. It was this moment in the dream where the door was going down and I was like, okay, here we go. It's usually very small, the spaces are tightly packed, but in the dream suddenly it became very big and I was breastfeeding and it became this whole other thing. It transformed from something that was about anxiety to something that was so nurturing.

I don't know where I'm going with this, but just hearing you talk about the altars you have in your house, and Tati, about your understanding of the nativity and us reclaiming these things that have been passed down and are rooted in erasure, amnesia, and violence.

But in the end, we bridge them together with things that we are reclaiming, ceremonies and ways of being to something else that is literally the act of turning over. You know, like my grandmother meditating with the cards was the

act of turning over something that was very violent into something that was very spiritual as a practice for her, and practice does that.

I just, I feel like I agree with Tati: We don't have to get rid of everything. We also don't have to feel guilty about reclaiming certain things and acknowledging that those things have constructed new meanings over time, even though they might be rooted in something else, something that wasn't originally ours, right?

Tatiana: Almost everyone in Colombia is superstitious.

Karen: Pretty much!

Tatiana: But the concept of superstition did not exist until I entered the United States and people would say "Oh, you're so superstitious." I would like to call it intuition. I'm being connected in a different way with what happens around. I think that a lot of that superstition actually comes from the ancestral people in the land and those people that have learned how to negotiate and work through spirituality and conversations that are different. For instance, *Mal de Ojo*, that's a way of negotiating differences between cultural variations.

Christine: Can you define *Mal de Ojo*?

Tatiana: It's translated as "The evil eye". I used to carry a little Greek eye that my mom used to put around my neck to protect me.

Karen: Our countries border and just to think about the idea of trading practices, it's really interesting.

My experience with *Mal de Ojo*, now that you're saying it, is that my mom used to clean me from *Mal de Ojo* by passing an egg, and then reading the egg. There's this whole tradition around it. But there's something really interesting about this idea of transaction, because when she would do it, it was with the idea of trade: If I do this then you get rid of that. A transaction.

Tatiana: My mom gives eggs to a community of old men to prevent rain from coming on days when there are outdoor celebrations.

Bel: In Brazil we put them on top of the exterior walls/fences.

Tatiana: Oh, yeah. Or like the fork on the ground so it doesn't rain, or the broom

behind the door so an unwanted guest leaves your house quickly.

Karen: Or you can not sweep the house at nighttime. I never do it!

Tatiana: It's interesting to have all this magic in countries which are predominantly Catholic. I feel there is so much from the ancestral cultures intertwined in those families who claim European ancestry. But somehow they have inherited that knowledge called superstition or *brujeria*, but it's embedded in the culture and combined with the saints, all meshed up in a beautiful way.

Hearing you talk about your dream is amazing. Sharing our dreams was a constant practice around breakfast with my parents, and my mom still calls me to tell me her dreams. I've lost that practice that I had for many years where everything was guided by what I dreamed. I knew that my dreams had a much larger meaning. I lost it because I didn't encounter the same exchange with others here. You're the first person that I hear talking about dreams.

Karen: I would do the same thing with my mother.

Tatiana: That's kind of the magic, that spiritual connection. I'm starting to come to terms with it, instead of feeling that it's something ridiculous, I'm letting it come back. When I was a teenager, I would go with my friends to a woman that would read our chocolate cup. At some point, I stopped because I got a little freaked out about the idea of knowing my future. But what is interesting for me is the history of chocolate and what it means in this context. I've recently started thinking about the importance of chocolate in our culture and understanding it.

I've been using coca tea, but I didn't grow up with tea bags, we had the herbs from the garden, and my grandma would make tea out of mint or citronella. And that would be the tea, called "agua aromática." Do any of you have "agua aromática"? My grandmother maybe had black tea, but the tradition was to have chocolate in the afternoon. Now I'm wanting to do a little bit more research about chocolate.

Elisa: In Mexico, the cup readings are also made with coffee. I have one aunt that does these readings, and she's scary accurate. And she does it also with chocolate for the kids. She learned it from one of my grandmother's sisters who used to read me and my cousins' chocolate cups when we were kids. I guess that it's also depending on preferences and traditions, but coffee is another

grain with a lot of history, even in terms of trade.

Bel: I think we are all talking about ways to connect, somehow, across time and presences. And in the end, we all came from a place where people had, at some point, that connection, and created the tools to connect and knew they were part of something bigger. And the challenge remains on how to be present and always remember to tap into that.

Jan 10, 2021

Elisa: This week has been one full of strong emotions after the attack on the Capitol, and I know we are all shaken by it. But while thinking about the current events in the world, I wonder if you have any thoughts on how we can keep going? What is next? How should we approach an active turning over in the local, but also in the global?

Tatiana: I started reading the work of Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and one of the things that shocked me is to see how little I know about the important and advanced conversations that are happening in Latin America. I've been living in the United States for 21 years, and only now am I starting to connect with the incredible work produced [in South America]. As someone from South America, I grew up looking at the universities, thinkers, and scholars of the north – USA and Europe. Ideas and writings like the ones of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui can help expand the conversations happening in the U.S. I've been feeling the US is very polarized. I can't negate the racism and political issues of Colombia. I guess I'm just saying that opening the conversations and acknowledging what happens in other countries can raise awareness and bring new perspectives into the current conversations. I would love to see here in the United States more awareness of the knowledge of people from Latin America.

Bel: Because everybody's losing with that, who is not being listened to and who is not aware of others sources of knowledge, we are all missing something because of that loss. When Elisa started to ask the question, I immediately thought about that phrase I sent to you today, Tati, that says "caminando por el pasado y el futuro, caminamos hacia el presente,"⁶ so, "walking through the past and the future, we walk to the present." And I think it's a phrase that was in something I was reading about "buen vivir," "to live well" in direct translation. It is a *Indigenous* "knowledge-philosophy" that I think we, living in the U.S., should be much more aware of, which is very different and more holistic than well-being.

⁶ Translated by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui from the Aymara aphorism *Qhip nayr uñtasis sarnaqapxañani*. The Aymara people is an Indigenous nation that spans Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.

If we think about this layered notion of time — past, present, future — and in this way of approaching time and knowledge, it includes the diversity of times, thoughts, people, cultures so we can live in a healthy environment — in a very local level, but also in a very global, big-picture level. From our individual bodies to the whole planet.

Tatiana: I wanted to share the *ch'ixi* definition, which I am loving right now.

The concept of ch'ixi appears in response to the limitations and contradictions of definitions such as "mestizaje" or "multiculturalism". The word ch'ixi has many connotations: it is a color that is the product of juxtaposition, in small points or points, of opposite or contrasting colors: black and white, red and green, etc. It is this mottled gray that comes from the imperceptible mixture of black and white, which is confused with perception, without ever being completely mixed. The notion of ch'ixi, like many others (allqa, ayni), reflects the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time. It is the logic of the third party included. A Ch'ixi gray color is white but not white at the same time. It is white and its opposite, black. The potential for deviation is what unites the opposites. The Ch'ixi combines the Indian world and its opposite without ever mixing them.

*The notion of ch'ixi is equivalent to René Zavaleta's concept of "motley society" and expresses the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but antagonize and complement each other. Each reproduces himself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way."*⁷

Karen: This morning I was listening to a conversation about decolonizing, about how we see ourselves, and very much in relation to being in Abya Yala, in the Americas. A concept that kept coming up was the use of *mestizaje* and how we need to stop putting so much of our identity in the word *mestizaje*. Because we like to think that it's about being of different races, but this is really a concept very much brought from Europeans. *Mestizaje* in that sense says that the part that is *Indigenous* to you is unknown, totally anonymous. And the part that is Spanish or Christian from you is the one that takes precedent, because you can trace it. So it's a type of erasure of indigeneity, and at the same time people use it because by being *mestizo*, then you have access to land because you can claim it, it's a very interesting way to weaponize identity.

Gloria Anzaldúa uses the nahuatl word *Nepantla*, which also means "a mix of races." And *Indigenous* peoples have always mixed, but in their own terms. I just thought about it because of what you shared and I thought, oh we're talking about *mestizaje* here again.

Tatiana: Interesting that you're mentioning *mestizaje*, because while *mestizaje* homogenizes, the word *ch'ixi*, talked about by Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui, is about bringing up all those differences, and that's what I've been loving so much about it.

The word speaks about the tensions connecting the concept *abigarrado* (multicolored/motley), it's really about looking at those differences and all shades of the gray as what's valuable.

A few years back I did a DNA test and found out I'm 11% *Indigenous* from Colombia and Venezuela. This was never present growing up, completely erased and unaware. Discovering the works of Rivera Cusicanqui and Gloria Anzaldúa, is showing me how to embrace all those differences.

For me the term *Latinx* feels like *mestizaje*. Every time I check the box, it worries me because this umbrella encompasses people with extremely different cultural, racial and political backgrounds, and stories that need to be differentiated. Even though we can find relatable things — history of exploitation of the land, extreme inequality, still being under colonization, extraction of natural resources impacting our Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities — these Latin American countries have their own issues, that should not be "homogenizados" en una cultura. It seems to be continuing that idea of *mestizaje*.

Christine: I feel that way about the word *Indigenous* and I feel that way about BIPOC. I do not identify as BIPOC. I've been thinking about that so much. Specificity is so important as a strategy to counter homogenization, as you're saying Tati, even when you look at the census and you look at how people have been identified in the U.S. census as *white*, which includes families who came from various Latin cultures or from *Indigenous* cultures that have been erased.

Earlier generations of people who weren't white wanted nothing more than to assimilate. So they were very happy not to contest that designation of white in the census. And now you're seeing people going back and not only changing their census, but also being more specific and trying to invoke other categorizations that are very specific, such as specific *Indigenous* Nations or using more recent

⁷ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (1) (2012): 95-109.

terms such as *Chicano*. Even major debates on what *Chicano* means and what it's allowed to mean, what *Indigenous* means, what it's allowed to mean.

Right now I am learning about the timeline of colonization in Canada, which started in the 1800s. My Chumash ancestors have been enduring colonizing forces since the 1500s on Turtle Island, and in Central and South America it is even earlier. Singular, all-encompassing racial definitions actually flatten the complexity reflected in those timelines. Karen, you were saying that you can't weaponize identity that way. There are all these dichotomies, like the urban versus the Rez NDN.

Karen: And also the lived experiences, to say "I'm more native than you. You are more native than me." We shouldn't be doing this to each other.

Christine: I agree, it's so toxic, but I have to say that I'm thinking a lot about the intersection of feminism within all of these cultural politics. I look to writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, who speaks about the intersection of race, class, Indigeneity, and feminism.

This week was very hard for me because of the loss of a matriarch in our family, a loss that has rattled our family to the core. I have been speaking with my mother almost daily, and for the first time she said that she is ready to share stories about the white washing of our family. She said that she has never told me these stories of assimilation, but there is a lot to understand about why it happened, and what was happening at the time. I think this has been compounded by what is happening politically; there has been a real reckoning over the summer in my family.

Karen: Condolences.

Christine: Thank you, Karen.

Karen: You were talking a little bit about your relationship with the term BIPOC, and I'm curious to hear more about your thoughts on that term.

Christine: BIPOC is an acronym that's been in use here for quite some time. And at the same time I am learning about different First Nations of Canada and Metis, who are mixed *Indigenous* and French.

There are *Indigenous* people here who very much present as white and blonde and blue eyed but who have suffered horrendous colonization. And so when

you're in a room with BIPOC people, there are actually a lot of white presenting people. I have been in BIPOC-only spaces to talk about institutional racism, and the things that I hear from white-presenting *Indigenous* people has been really problematic in regards to racism.

I know the term *people of color* is also a fraught term that has its own issues, but there are very different experiences for people who have been identified in the public space as having a racialized body. And there are so many different shades of what that color is, it is a race-based term that has been created by white supremacy to divide. I think you can't deny that those people who are identified as people of color on the streets have a different experience. I am starting to see very quickly the limitations of flattening terms like *BIPOC*, which actually perpetuates unsafe spaces for people of color and continues from the inside to delegitimize those voices.

Tatiana: That's very interesting, because it becomes very complex.

Christine: Yeah. We have to keep those complexities. We have to stay in that complexity. I think that's why I get so frustrated. I just learned that the chairman of the Proud Boys is Afro-Cuban, he's Afro-Cuban! So these lines are all over the place right now. We can't flatten these complexities into hard-edged factions with un-nuanced positions that don't relate to reality. What I see happening is all these factions that are being created by identity politics and shaming.

Bel: And that relates to that thing again about monoculture, the unhealthy way of the monocultural structure (said by Robin Wall Kimmerer).

Tatiana: In an interview with Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui, she shared how Bolivia's president, who is *Indigenous*, has continued to encourage mining in the country.⁸ She questioned, what it meant to be *Indigenous*? Acknowledging that even though Bolivia's president was *Indigenous*, he seemed to have a different way to relate to land. As I'm hearing this, there's something that keeps coming to my mind. I worked so many years on advertising, experiencing capitalism at the highest level, with the goal to create target groups in order to profit. And I just kept thinking, how much of this homogenization is related to capitalism and needing to have to produce and sell and make money? The need to "understand the market" and understand who are the people that are being targeted.

I ran into a posting on Instagram of an image that had a side-to-side obnoxious

⁸ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Utopía ch'ixi" con Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui", *Revista de La Universidad*, TV UNAM, <https://tv.unam.mx/portfolio-item/revista-de-la-universidad-utopia-chixi-con-silvia-rivera-cusicanqui/>

guy at the Capitol and a character from *The Simpsons* dressed up identically. The post said “*The Simpsons* keep predicting the future.” My question is, are *The Simpsons* predicting the future, or is the media telling us what to do next?

Elisa: This person has also been using those horns and pelts for many, many occasions. So, this is not the first time that he shows up with this costume. Perhaps *The Simpsons* are doing some research and using their findings?

Tatiana: I think that this episode happened many years ago, but you may be right. But when Trump won the presidency, I heard people saying, “Oh, *The Simpsons* predicted it.” And I think, no, everyone watches *The Simpsons*, because for many it’s something that is entertaining, funny.

I find *The Simpsons*, and many other TV shows that ridicule race and celebrate white dumbness, problematic. There are only one or two characters that are brown. I keep thinking about what’s the purpose of creating this. Monocultures with people that are being homogenized.

Karen: I grew up in Ecuador watching a lot of Chilean, Colombian and Venezuelan telenovelas, and all the women were beautiful, had blondish hair and were white. And I never really thought about it then, but now I want to see more diversity. I’m really tired of the same type of face.

Tatiana: I agree. In my house, there was chamomile in the yard, and what’s funny is that my grandma would make chamomile water to wash my hair with so I would be blond. For many years I dyed my hair, when [my son] Joaquin was born, a childhood friend came to visit and was surprised that my hair was black. He thought I was blond. I think that that kind of obsession for whiteness is really crazy, and not only whiteness but blonde hair, blue eyes, white skin, you know?

Elisa: To this day, in Mexico, there’s a lot of denial of some people about the color of their skin. To be brown or to be Indigenous is not seen as a good thing and it is full of stigmas, and some of those stigmas are of course, related to race but also with class. The assumption is that people in better positions are probably whiter. And even if in reality there’s diversity in all social stratas, the people that are in those higher social positions, regardless of their skin color, continue to oppress the people below them based on the color of their skin. Which doesn’t make sense.

There is a pejorative word in Mexico, *naco*, which originally meant someone without education, but has been now used to describe someone with Indigenous traits, or even people in different levels of poverty. So it’s a very loaded word, often used without much care. Many people are unaware of the ingrained biases towards occidental traits, that are also fed from telenovelas in many cases. Because that is the symbol of success and power. And this mindset has been perpetuated for centuries and is rooted in the Hispanic colonization.

Karen: There’s just so much intergenerational trauma. And I think a lot about my relationship with christianity and my grandmother. How can I be so upset with a religion that my grandmother passed down to me with love? Because she really did. When she was praying, she was doing it with love. No one was forcing her, my dialogues with her were always about uprooting that pain. So how does the anger that I have toward what they lived serve me at this time?

I am against what they wanted for me, and who they are is what their parents gave them so they could be better. So status quo, and being Catholic means “I don’t want you to suffer, I want you to go out in the world and get a job.” I feel it’s really rooted in acceptance. You have a lot of people out there in the world, like you’re saying Elisa, that do not see themselves as brown or native, because it’s less painful to be something else, internalizing the view of others as their own. What do you do then?

Tatiana: I’m thinking back to the phrase that Bel said earlier, and to think of these two paths touching is what’s informing the present in which we are right now. I’m trying to figure out how to navigate the extremes, and because I think that I’m kind of in the middle, I don’t have the ability to go to either one of the extremes.

And I’m trying to navigate that middle part and trying to understand that edge. I relate so much with you with all the parts of Christianity and Catholicism. A few years back, we needed to find a new apartment in one week. I remember sharing it with my mom, so my aunt sent me Sata Rita de Casia’s prayer, telling me I needed to do it for nine days. I prayed everyday. It’s a very dramatic prayer, but if I didn’t do it for nine days, I wouldn’t get my apartment! [Laughs] What a mixture of feelings of regret, guilt and gratefulness as I found a new home. I can only laugh about it because I can’t escape from it.

I studied at a nun’s school, but I refused to attend religion class or to get confirmation . I always think back to my first communion and my confusion with

God, where I thought that speaking to him was to ask for roller skates — clearly no connection to spirituality. To this day, I can't make fun of Santa Rita de Casia because then I think I'll be punished by God. So complex.

Elisa: This also ties to what we were talking about in our previous conversation about the New Year's rituals that we're so attached to, and even if we know that there's more beyond that, it is something really embedded in the culture and in the education. Going back to the idea of indigenism, I wanted to share a quote about Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Carlos Lenkersdorf, that says:

Lenkersdorf y Rivera Cusicanqui consideran que no se es indígena por el color de la piel, ni por la raza, ni por utilizar un vestido tradicional. Ser indígena quiere decir asumir un compromiso con un proyecto de civilización alternativo. En cambio, no serlo implica formar parte de la sociedad dominante, se tengan rasgos indígenas o no.⁹

So it says, "Rivera and Lenkersdorf consider that one is not Indigenous based on the color of their skin, nor the race or the use of traditional clothes. To be Indigenous is to assume a compromise with a civilization project that is alternative. On the other hand, not to be Indigenous implies to be part of a society that is dominant, whether you have Indigenous traits or not."

Bel: This morning I was listening to Robin Wall Kimmerer reading a recent article¹⁰ that she wrote about the economy of gift and about abundance, which I think relates to the ideas of flattening and separation we are talking about. In the article she used an expression that really helped me. She speaks about how the capitalist system is based on creating scarcity, and making abundance unthinkable or impossible to exist.

To create scarcity is a way to deny abundance to everybody, but abundance for all is something that exists and it is possible, and nature teaches us that every single day. Animals, plants, and other organisms work together, in collaboration, to make sure everybody thrives. It's proof of that abundance. And humans used to do that too. Anyways. I just thought about this idea to bring back to the conversation something that Christine was saying about feminism and intersectionality.

I think those are important things for us also to understand why all those labeling terms are not working/serving us, like *BIPOC*. And we need to ask

ourselves if those labeling terms are creating scarcity too. Are they denying us the gift of exchange and abundance?

Christine: I think that's a really good point, because *BIPOC* means Black, Indigenous, people of color. I mean, how many cultures does that flatten? It's unbelievable. When I hear, Elisa, the quote that you just read, I feel like, well, that's a very specific political statement within the culture that this person is speaking from, because I think it's actually different in the U.S. for Indigenous people. Indigenous identity is not just about being alternative or that there has been another path that has led to current notions of Indigenous identity.

That's why I have a problem with the overuse of the term Indigenous, because it doesn't account for the specificity of somebody who is Apache versus somebody who is Chumash versus somebody who is Lakota, or somebody who is from the Tsleil-Waututh Nation versus an Indigenous person in Central America or South America.

What does it mean to be Indigenous in a global space and a global culture? How do you maintain the complexity and the specificity when you are living away from your homelands or maybe never had a relationship with your homelands before? How do you account for that complexity in relationship to the Indigenous cultures where you are? There's just so much work that goes into trying to locate oneself at any moment. Especially when you identify as Indigenous. What are the long politics of that colonial history? How can you be a good guest on that land while maintaining all of your other relationships and responsibilities in society as somebody who's just living in the world right now?

Elisa: You said something that for me is essential. And that's why I thought that this quote was interesting. I agree that it's very generalizing in what Indigenous could be and it's not looking at those complexities, but the part that I thought was really interesting was not the definition of what Indigenous is, but the definition of what it's not. And the words that you just used are "identify yourself as." So, the acknowledgement of those complexities requires will and intention. And to say, I identify myself as this or that — and this extends to other realms of life, not only race and ethnicity or origins — that is the first step to acknowledge these complexities.

The description in this quote of those who are not Indigenous refers mainly to people that stay in the dominant, homogenizing perspective that eliminates those complexities, whether or not they have Indigenous traits. As you say, the

⁹ Aimé Tapia González, *Mujeres indígenas en defensa de la tierra (Feminismos)* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2018)

¹⁰ Robin Wall Kimmerer, "The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance," *Emergency Magazine*, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-serviceberry/>

word *Indigenous* has its own problems, but it seemed an interesting starting point to explore all those gray zones that are so hard to understand at times.

Tatiana: Right. It's the acknowledgement of those complexities and being present to the complexities that are happening and not try to oversimplify them or, or create like a literally, black-and-white solution, right?

What does it mean to have all those complexities and how do we adjust the movement and the changes that are happening in the world, while still acknowledging those differences and those complexities?

I feel that what I'm getting is that you're also coming from a place from your own experience? From what you're talking about, what it means not to be in the land that you were from, right?

Christine: Not only from my experience, but as part of the larger conversation right now in the Indigenous community in the U.S. I see a lot of fighting and shaming of somebody who grew up on a reservation versus somebody who grew up in an urban area, which is totally insane to me. Or I see it, as you were saying, Elisa, with class, that Indigenous people who've gained any kind of financial stability or wealth, even on a reservation, for instance, reservations who have casinos and who benefit greatly from casino income. They also don't want to acknowledge the complexities of a culture that has gone through genocide and oppression for hundreds of years and suddenly come into great wealth, and the difficulty of that. On the other hand, the lack of resources to understand how to navigate that and what the effects of that are, which are huge.

You can't make big generalizations about what is good and what is bad, and right and wrong within any culture, without understanding all of those nuances. I am referring to these age-old debates, that seem like they've been stuck in the mud, and actually furthering the oppression of my own people. Furthering the oppression of my direct relationships, furthering the repression of myself. That's why I get so frustrated, because we're just really struggling to get out of this cycle of shaming each other.

Tatiana: As I hear you, I keep coming back to this idea of the modern Indigenous and to see them as somebody that has changed and has gone through these changes and not this idea that got stuck in time, like the museum's vision of an Indigenous person. Those complexities that you're talking about are part of that modern Indigenous, right? Involving the territory and how

it has changed, the land access to work, the stories of the people there, and how they were displaced into different areas, and many other things that are defining those nuances, and their way of being, because I don't think that there is a definition that can encompass so many different stories.

I need to continue to ask questions, more than trying to draw conclusions. What does it mean to become an ancestor? And what is really hard to know is how can I be a good ancestor and what is being a good ancestor based on.

How can I relate to this backstory full of information. Is it directly with the land? How can I honor your ancestors from where you are? And how can I connect to that without necessarily going back to the specific point and place in time before colonization happened, before all the impact, the damage and the transformation that has been so hard to heal. Because it continues to be extremely hard. It's a very complicated answer. How do we get to be good ancestors too? How do we honor our ancestry or how do we connect back to our ancestors? And how then do we move forward from where we are at?

Elisa: Perhaps one way is continuing to ask those questions and reveal those complexities and keep them present in this idea of the cycle that involves the past, future and the present.

Karen: I think this circles back to what Bel was talking about, the *Alli Kawsay*, the *buen vivir*, the "good living." And I think that we can always find ways to be good ancestors from the people that are inhabiting the land. If you feel connected to the teachings of the people in Colombia or in Ecuador, *Alli Kawsay*, then you follow that. And if you feel like, you want to honor the teachings of this place in Lenapehoking, then find where the teachings are, how people live with the land and how they relate to the land.

I see myself in the morning praying and I observe the chickadees and the robins and the sterlings, and all these birds that are not from Ecuador, but I'm connected with them as my winged relatives. We can always find teaching and we can always find ways to be good ancestors by listening to the land and to the original people that live in this land.

Elisa: That's the perfect ending.

Christine: That's the perfect ending. Thank you.

Bel: Yes, cultivating the abundance back.

Tatiana: :)



ELISA GUTIÉRREZ ERIKSEN is a Mexican Brooklyn-based curator and arts and cultural producer who has worked and collaborated with artists and institutions to produce and curate art pieces, exhibits, festivals and cultural events. As Cultural Specialist at the UNESCO Field Office in Mexico, she developed projects and curated exhibitions concerning the relationship between culture and migration, audiovisual heritage, and others relating to social sciences and the environment. Prior to that, she was Head of Exhibitions of the *Alas y Raíces* program at the Ministry of Culture in Mexico between 2010 and 2013, where she curated and produced over 20 exhibitions and over 10 site-specific installations. She started her curatorial practice as Assistant Curator of the 100m³ Gallery in Mexico City. Among other projects, she has collaborated with the International Human Rights Art Festival in New York and the International Contemporary Animation Film Festival ANIMASIVO. She currently lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she works as Programs Manager & Curator at NARS Foundation.

TATIANA AROCHA is a New York-born Colombian artist, living in Brooklyn on Lenape ancestral lands. Her art practice explores intimacy between people and land, rooted in personal memory and her immigrant experience, and centers on community through public art interventions and transdisciplinary knowledge exchange. Most often, Arocha's works vivify and reconstruct the vulnerable tropical forests of her homeland, confronting the ecological, emotional, and cultural loss caused by extractive economies and colonial practices. In weaving

together historical and contemporary technologies, Arocha's unconventional process and craft expresses her layered relationship with nature and cultural transformation. She has held residencies at The Wassaic Project, LABverde, Centro Selva, Arquetopia, and Zea Mays Printmaking. Arocha has received funding from The Sustainable Arts Foundation and Brooklyn Arts Council. Solo exhibitions include Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, Queens Botanical Garden, and site-specific installations at BRIC, Brookfield Place/Winter Garden, MTA Arts, Goethe-Institut Kolumbien, and Hilton Bogota Corferias. She has participated in group exhibitions at Smack Mellon, Wave Hill, BRIC, The Wassaic Project, ArtBridge, KODA, and The Clemente. Arocha studied illustration and graphic design in Bogotá, Colombia. From 2000-2008, she was owner/curator of *Servicio Ejecutivo*, a digital-turned-physical gallery in Brooklyn.

BEL FALLEIROS is a Brazilian artist whose practice focuses on land identity. Starting with her hometown, São Paulo, she's worked to understand how contemporary landscapes and their monuments (mis)represent the diverse layers of presence that constitute a place. Walking is core to her practice and to her first solo show at CAIXA Cultural São Paulo, as well as her residency at the Sacatar Institute in Bahia, Brazil (2014). Since arriving in the U.S., she has worked to create spaces for grounding and connecting people, including a site-specific installation at Pecos National Park, New Mexico (2016), an earth-work at Burnside Farm, Detroit (2017), and functional sculptures for a community garden in collaboration with Tewa Women United, during the Santa Fe Art Institute's Equal Justice Residency (2018). She is currently part of the *Monuments Now* show at Socrates Sculpture Park and a *More Art Engaging Artist Fellow* (New York). Beyond her studio practice, she participates in collaborative projects across the Americas connecting art, education and autonomous thinking. She is a teaching artist at *Escuelita en Casa*, Garner Arts Center and *Dia:Beacon*.

CHRISTINE HOWARD SANDOVAL is an interdisciplinary artist of Obispeño Chumash, and Hispanic ancestry. Her work challenges the boundaries of representation, access, and habitation through the use of performance, video, and sculpture. Howard Sandoval makes work about contested places, such as the historic Native and Hispanic waterways of northern New Mexico; the Gowanus Canal, a Superfund site in New York; and an interfacing suburban-wildland in Colorado. Howard Sandoval has exhibited nationally and

internationally; at The Museum of Capitalism (Oakland, CA), Designtransfer, Universität der Künste Berlin (Berlin, Germany), El Museo Del Barrio (Bronx, NY), and Socrates Sculpture Park (Queens, NY). Her first solo museum exhibition debuted at The Colorado Springs Fine Art Center in May 2019, during which time she was the Mellon Artist in Residence at Colorado College. Sandoval has also been awarded residencies at the Santa Fe Art Institute, Triangle Arts, and The Vermont Studio Center. She holds a BFA from Pratt Institute (NY) and an MFA from Parsons The New School for Design (NY). She is currently Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Art in the Audain Faculty of Art at Emily Carr University (BC).

KAREN MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA is an artist, healing arts practitioner, and mentor living in upstate New York. She grew up in the coast of Ecuador. Her work focuses on memory, geo-poetics and storytelling through collaborative processes and personal narratives. Intersectional theories, and earth-based healing inform her practice. Following these interests she has collaborated with communities and relatives to create photo base projects. She has worked extensively with Indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon, in the Andean Mountains and more recently in the American Southwest. She has exhibited widely among places The Portrait gallery at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, Aperture Foundation, had a solo show at Miyako Yoshinaga in NYC, +Arte in Ecuador. She has participated in the Musée du quai Branly biennial and received their artist in residence fellowship in 2017. In 2018 and 2019 she was nominated for the Prix Pictet, The Foam Paul Huff Award, The Rolex Mentor & Protégé initiative and was shortlisted for the Hariban Award. In 2021, She is having her second solo show at Miyako Yoshinaga gallery and a two person show in the fall. Her first monograph was published by Autograph ABP in 2018. She is currently a recipient of the WeWomen Award and is an artist in residence at BRIC Arts Media.

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LINKS

- Canal Encuentro — *Historias debidas VIII: Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q6HfhZUGhc>
- Centro Experimental Oido Salvaje — *Entrevista a Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pGICIJpcc4>
- NMAI Museum — *Always Becoming*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TimVprO6opE>
- Revista de la Universidad — *Utopía ch'ixi con Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHJkCqe2gAk>
- Robin Wall Kimmerer — *The Serviceberry, An Economy of Abundance*
<https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-serviceberry/>
- SmithsonianNMAI — *Living Earth 2019: Roxanne Swentzell*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hug8MI-i4G4>
- Yuval Noah Harari <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>

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