unending beginnings

2022
USC MA Cohort
unending beginnings would like to thank and acknowledge the individuals who assisted in making this show possible through all the hurdles of COVID-19:

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Thank you,
MA 2022 Cohort
## Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td><strong>Exhibition Works</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Word for World is Forest: Resurgent Storytelling.</td>
<td>Lauren Guilford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A Proposal for an Ecotone</td>
<td>Austen Villacis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lakota Quarantine Bandana</td>
<td>Ruei-Chen Tsai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>A Window or a Portal</td>
<td>Nahui Garcia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio in Conversation with</td>
<td>Leah Perez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Becoming ‘We’: Multiplicity and Connectivity in the Face of Global</td>
<td>Emma Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Bacteriomancy (phase i)</td>
<td>Angel Lartigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bacteriomancy (phase ii)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Curator Bios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibition Works

Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio
No Siempre Era Tan Feo (Teen Jobs), 2022
Rubber, found cloths, tree and paint residue, paint, string, and found ephemera
8.5ft x 3ft x 2in

Pia Camil
Selva Maya, 2021
Steel, concrete, recycled newspaper pulp, pigment, inset newspaper photographs, plywood base
91 1/2 x 43 x 37 inches

Angel Lartigue
Bacteriomancy 2022
Ritual performance, microorganisms, acrylic purses, seaweed & agar
Dimensions variable

Gerald Clarke Jr.
From the series “One Tract Mind,” 2018
Digital print
52 ¼ x 76 inches
Colleen Hargaden

H2O, 2019
Water bricks, water, blue translucent acrylic, 3D printed rubber stoppers
(1) WaterBrick (Ottoman)
(1) WaterBrick (Loveseat)
(2) WaterBrick (Benches)

Reproducing “H2O”, 2019
Two channel video, monitor, and projection
11:42 minutes

Reproducing H2O: A Field Guide, 2019
99 pages, waterproof paper

Cécile B. Evans

A Screen Test for an Adaption of Giselle, 2019
HD video, sound
8 minutes 50 seconds
There was a word inside a stone.
I tried to pry it clear,
mallet and chisel, pick and gad,
until the stone was dropping blood,
but still I could not hear
the word the stone had said.

I threw it down beside the road
among a thousand stones
and as I turned away it cried
the word aloud within my ear
and the marrow of my bones
heard, and replied.¹

— Ursula Le Guin

Our world contains many narratives: large and small, hu-
man and nonhuman. Capitalism tells a linear story of
power and progress, ingrained so deeply into our very
being that it has become an existential challenge to imag-
ine alternative realities. Stories of modern progress have
been historically told to justify destructive and ego-driven
actions. Alternatively, resurgent stories challenge dom-
inant-hegemonic narratives of progress and imagine
emancipatory futures. Told through lenses of speculative
fiction, multispecies ecologies, and Indigenous knowl-
edge, resurgent storytelling considers the large and small
stories that make up our world.

¹. Ursula Le Guin, Finding My Elegy, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt, 2012), 231.
Ursula Le Guin’s 1972 novella, *The Word for the World is Forest*, employs an ethnographic and anthropological approach to science fiction rooted in ecofeminism and imagines alternative possibilities to engage with and live in the world of today and tomorrow. Equal parts utopian and dystopian, Le Guin’s novella emphasizes ecological interconnectedness and interrogates power dynamics between cultures and species, exposing the false notion that culture is separate from nature and the ways in which social systems relate to the natural world.

The story begins in a world that is not difficult to imagine—a world where capitalism and colonialism led to the ecological ruination of Earth, its forests dry and devastated. On Earth, women, like nature, are controlled and treated as expendable and inferior. On another planet called Athshe, life is intimately connected with nature—their word for “world” is “forest”. The Athsheans are maternal, collaborative, and nonviolent. Le Guin describes the luscious intricacies of the Athshean forest, “Little paths ran under the branches, around the boles, over the roots. The ground was not dry and solid, but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long, elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles.”

After exhausting Earth of its resources, the colonizers “killed, raped, dispersed, and enslaved the native humans (the Athsheans), destroyed their communities, and cut down their forests,” in the name of progress. In the end, the nonviolent Athshean resistance saves their forest from colonization. Despite this exceedingly idealistic ending, Le Guin’s story is an astute warning against the dangers of treating natural environments and people as commodifiable and disposable.

*The Word for the World is Forest* also serves as an ecofeminist critique of dominant-patriarchal society. The kind of ecofeminism that informs Le Guin’s writing does not simply connect women and nature; Le Guin’s ecofeminism emphasizes the position of women and nature in a socially constructed world and the collective struggle against systems of oppression. This kind of collaborative ecofeminism is echoed in the words of Audre Lorde:

“The Future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.”

Artist Cécile B. Evans’ *A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle*, is a film adaptation of the 19th century Romantic ballet which tells the story of Giselle who dies

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from a broken heart after her betrothed announces his engagement to someone else. Giselle’s grave rests in an enchanted forest surrounded by the spirits of scorned young women. When any man enters the forest, the ghosts rise from their graves and force them to dance until they die. In the final act, Giselle’s lover enters the woods and she surprisingly decides to spare his life. Evans’ adaptation takes the form of an ecofeminist science-fiction thriller set in a forest in a future where humans, nonhumans, and technology intermingle, and bacteria plays the part of the unlikely hero that saves the ecosystem of Giselle’s forest community. Le Guin’s 1986 essay, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”, calls for a similar kind of counter-hero to dispute modern notions of the all-conquering hero. Presenting the idea that culture functions as a kind of container or carrier bag of tools that shape stories, Le Guin advocates for alternative life stories that are non-linear and expansive instead of the individualistic killer stories that dominate human history. Le Guin writes:

“It sometimes seems that the story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we’d better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one’s finished. Maybe. The trouble is, we’ve let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.”

In the original ballet, Giselle’s character rejects the “killer story” when presented with the opportunity to take revenge against her lover in the woods. Evans’ ecofeminist Giselle also rejects the “killer story”—that is to say, the “modern killer story” that pervades the narratives, hierarchies, and borders that separate and oppress. In an interview, Evans describes how natural systems can provide blueprints to subvert patriarchal narratives of dominance, “specifically how they respond to threats and thrive on diversity and change,” asking us to think imaginatively and resurgently about the story of our own future.6

While speculative fiction offers particular tools to envisioning a world organized otherwise, the feminist anthropologist Anna Tsing’s book, The Mushroom at the End of the World (2015), offers another model of thinking about multispecies interaction. In a story about a disturbance-based ecology in which the Matsutake mushroom manages to survive despite life in capitalist ruins, Tsing prompts us to look closely at the resurgent possibilities in forests:

“One of the most miraculous things about forests is that they sometimes grow back after they have been destroyed. We might think of this as resilience, or as ecological remediation, and I find these concepts useful. But what if we pushed even further by thinking through resurgence? Resurgence is the force of the life of the forest, its ability to spread its seeds and roots and runners to reclaim places that have been deforested.”7

These “forest stories” present resurgent possibilities, achieved by collaborating with fungi and trees that help our world flourish. Tsing points out that human deforestation and forest resurgence have been responding to each other for several millennia, asking us to pay attention to these miraculous moments of resurgence.8 Our livelihood is a multispecies entanglement dependent on resurgence and collaboration for survival—Tsing suggests that our world, our home, is a forest.

Influenced by Le Guin and Tsing, anthropologist and philosopher Donna Haraway considers how multispecies stories articulate possibilities for “recuperation in complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, as beginnings.”9 Haraway privileges Indigenous thinking and storytelling, describing Indigenous weaving practices as performances of stories and knowledge that “embody world-making and world-sustaining relations.”10 Part of the Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians, artist Gerald Clarke Jr. employs traditional Native American techniques that put forward a contemporary Indigenous perspective.11 There is no word for “nature” in the Cahuilla language because they see themselves as inseparable from nature — not

8. Tsing, Mushroom, 179.
11. See Ruei-Chen Tsai’s essay titled “Lakota Quarantine Bandana.”
dissimilar to Le Guin’s word for world, forest. Clarke’s One Tract Mind series examines tract housing developments in Southern California and their devastating disregard for water rights and sacred Indigenous sites. Clarke exclaims, “when the housing crisis happened and a lot of people were getting foreclosed on, I thought, if anyone can relate to what it’s like to lose a home or homeland, it’s an Indian.” Clarke prompts us to question the systems we value and whom those systems serve (and inevitably harm). Modernist notions of “progress” have devastated Indigenous landscapes, and in Southern California, real-estate development is colonialism.

While narratives of human exceptionalism tell stories of destruction, resurgent stories imagine futures of hope amidst the wreckage.

Bibliography


Water is a material used in nearly all artmaking processes, yet finds itself conspicuously absent on most gallery labels, uncited as a critical material without which most art could not exist. That might be because frequently, water is technically absent in the object presented to us. Though the traces of water’s role as an unappreciated interlocutor, the vestiges of its liquid formlessness, might reveal themselves upon closer examination. Water’s former presence can be seen in most paintings, where it evaporates after being mixed with ink or paint and applied to any number of absorbent surfaces like wood or canvas. It can be seen in the hand-formed handle of most ceramic vessels, where it is baked out through the firing and glazing process. It can also be seen in any dry image produced in a darkroom, where it is the base for the chain of reactive alchemical processes that gradually, and ultimately, create or expose the image. When water, or H₂O, is both presented and re-presented as the explicit subject and medium of an artwork, then, it stands out. Particularly in the context of a culture that is contending with ever-increasing occurrences of droughts and other natural disasters that limit human (and non-human) access to water.

_H2O_, Colleen Hargaden’s installation in _unending beginnings_, sites water within blue survivalist “Waterbricks,” which double as both objects and gallery seating for two films: Ralph Steiner’s _H2O_ (1929),

Steiner’s *H2O* is a silent film produced around the onset of the stock market crash of 1929, which would set off a series of events, in both the US and globally, that we now refer to as the Great Depression. It was the first film to document water exclusively as a formal entity and consists largely of a deluge of abstracted waves in various forms, which depict water as an abstract formal entity; its unique ability to refract light, distort reflections, and fill space. *H2O* is often cited as Steiner’s first film, and it would go on to inform several key films he made shortly after including *Surf and Seaweed* (1931) as well as *Mechanical Principles* (1930) which also abstracted a singular material: gears and machinery. *H2O* was selected for preservation by the Library of Congress in 2005.

Both Steiner’s film and Hargaden’s remake also, incidentally, document water and its relationship to place and time: each film was shot on an opposite US coast. Where Hargaden was unable to replicate Steiner’s shot, she inserted a black frame with several words describing what would have been: “rain dripping from a thin pipe” for example, or “overflowing water pump lifting up driftwood”\(^1\). The films themselves might also be read as intersections of water with earthly human life and architectures: dripping off gutters, from pipes, and flowing beneath bridges. The intertitles, which are typical of most historical silent films, draw attention to the topographic differences between either side of the country, as some shots would, by default, be difficult to replicate.

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\(^1\) Colleen Hargaden, *H2O* (2019).
in a Southern California context. Some of these changes, though, do not simply originate naturally or innately, but rather, are human-originated, or anthropogenic.

This interpretation applies particularly to California, where droughts are increasingly commonplace. The scarcity of water is implied by the Water Bricks, which themselves are tools for surviving a drought. They are exhibited full of water, and in other iterations of the project use recycled water by pairing up with local farms near the exhibition site. Designed by the son of legendary French oceanographer Jacques-Yves Cousteau and sold on Amazon, they are intended to hold water indefinitely in the event of an emergency or environmental catastrophe. As an added feature, the bricks themselves are capable of being stacked and organized to create bunker-like environments, and are advertised by Cousteau as “the sandbag of the 21st century,” hailed as “a new standard for bunkers, checkpoints, and parapet walls.” While the films focus on water formally, H2O as an installation asks another set of questions about the relationship of humans to water. While a flood of poetic abstracted waves progresses in silence, and on another, survivalist jugs prepare you for the day your access to the water you see in front of you is limited or disappears altogether. The very way in which H2O is installed is often responsive to the exhibition site itself. In Multiples at the Angels Gate Cultural Center in San Pedro, Hargaden installed H2O in a grid-like formulation, which resonates with the site’s original use as army barracks in the 1940s.

The last element of H2O is Reproducing H2O: A Field Guide, which asks viewers to venture out into their own lived contexts, in Los Angeles or elsewhere, and reproduce the film for themselves. By accounting for the presence of the viewer, time and representation spread out horizontally as opposed to being locked, vertically, within the objects themselves. The pedagogical aspect of H2O is emblematic of Hargaden’s work in general, like Tiny House (2015-ongoing) which involved publishing a step-by-step guide for building a tiny house, and her work as a high school teacher.
In environmental sciences, Hargaden’s installation embodies what is called an ecotone: a space where two different ecological communities intersect and exert influence over one another. The word comes from the Greek term *oeco*, meaning home, and *tonos*, meaning tension. The ecotone constitutes a sort of Venn diagram between two overlapping ecologies; they can occur naturally, such as between a forest and grassland, but can also be created by or include humans. As a literal feature of the natural environment, an ecotone can appear as a blending, like the overlap of marine and terrestrial ecologies in a mangrove forest, or as a sharp line, like between a forest and land cleared by humans. I propose the ecotone as both a biological term constrained by particular scientific strictures, as described above, and as a metaphor for overlapping sites of meaning and difference. H2O as an ecotone proposes that there is a space of opportunity between human ecology and the natural world: a space of overlap that provides an opportunity for a new path to emerge.

The ecotone can also be leveraged to describe Hargaden’s practice more broadly. *Anthropogenic Mineral Collection* (2020) points to an ecotone at several industrial ore-mining and mineral extraction sites. Since the Industrial Revolution, these mining activities have left a residue globally that constitutes an entirely new class of minerals that originate in human activity. *Anthropogenic Mineral Collection* is presented as a video interspersed with deep earth audio and several images depicting the residue and microscopic samples of Canavesite, Andersonite, Hydromagnesite, Fiedlerite, Lansfordite, Dypingite, Phosgenite, and Trinitite. Hargaden’s project directly addresses twelve, though the total number of anthropogenic minerals could be as many as 208, based on research conducted in 2017.

By seeing ecotonally, we better understand not only better how Hargaden’s makes meaning, but how many artists in the show generate multiple realities. Pia Camil’s Selva Maya (2020) evaluates the ecotones within Selva Maya, its intertwined and overlapping human histories and the form of the ancient termite mound, which presents a model for collective survival. Angel Lartigue’s object-based component of Bacteriomancy 2022 (2021) sites non-human ecologies directly in the gallery space, in the form of bacterial and water samples collected at various sites within Los Angeles, which reproduce in agar inside acrylic purses.

The work in unending beginnings reminds us that we live in a world that is more-than-human. Using the ecotone as a metaphor frames the complexities of anthropogenic climate change in way that connects it, rather than disconnects it, from issues of social justice, like water rights, land use, and global extractivism. For Hargaden the process is about “unforeseen obstacles,”[1] which, if the past two years or so have taught us, is a process that never stops... one long unending beginning.

Bibliography
On May 11, 2020, the Oglala Sioux Tribe closed its border, setting up checkpoints along highways leading onto Pine Ridge Reservation after the first COVID-19 case was confirmed. Soon after the Oglala Sioux Tribe announced its lockdown, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem warned the Oglala Sioux Nation members about taking legal action against the tribe if it did not reopen its border and remove its highway checkpoints. Inspired by this threat of legal action from a foreign government, Marty Two Bulls Jr. created *Lakota Quarantine Bandana* (2020). Though a product of the pandemic, the content of Two Bulls Jr.’s work expands beyond the issue of quarantine. Opening the border was not only about tribal sovereignty; it was a life and death issue, one that would put tribal elders members at risk of being infected.

*Lakota Quarantine Bandana* employs black and yellow colors to strike a visual chord, resembling the flag internationally used to signify “quarantine” during nautical emergencies, also known as the L (Lima) flag. According to the International Code Of Signals (ICOS), the L (Lima) flag (black and yellow squares) sends a codified message; it is used to indicate, “I have or had some dangerous, infectious disease on board.” After a radical overhaul by ICOS in 1965, the L (Lima) flag’s meaning became simplified and shifted to the abrupt command, ‘You should stop your vessel instantly,’ as a way to
eliminate any possible confusion¹. It is the flag’s latter meaning that best describes the feeling of emergency — and need of protection — that the Oglala Sioux Tribe experienced in an unprecedented moment in history.

While the L (Lima) flag relies on the ICOS, Lakota Quarantine Bandana finds inspiration in the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868). The document’s text frames the Oglala Sioux Tribe flag, serving as metaphor for the unending battle between the U.S. government and Native Americans.

The Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868) dates back to the first Fort Laramie Treaty signed in 1851, which failed to keep the consequences of the Colorado Gold Rush at bay. One of the most significant accomplishments of the Treaty’s second version was to designate “the Black Hills as ‘unceded Indian Territory’ for the exclusive use of native peoples.” Unsurprisingly, the U.S. government failed to adhere to the agreement following the discovery of gold in this area, redrawing the boundaries of Native Americans’ designated territory. The completeness of the Sioux Nation has been undermined from each deal made with the U.S. government. Disputes over land rights is a zero-sum game, and it may never rarely be settled.


Who We Fight For:
Vulnerability of Native Americans

Two Bulls’ practice reveals three critical issues in the Native American community: health, safety of tribal members, and tribal sovereignty. In addition, to the obstacles mentioned above, a lack of advanced medical resources, and poverty ravage Indigenous communities to this day. Despite these issues, Indigenous resilience lives on, allowing Indigenous communities to fight back against colonial powers.

Specific strategies of Indigenous resilience vary within different Indigenous communities around the globe: Access to land is imperative practicing Indigenous traditions and ways of life are instrumental to Indigenous resilience due to a spiritual connection to the land². Here, I choose to define Indigenous resilience as a phenomenon that is “[b]uilt on the common understandings of Indigenous scholars, [one that] focuses on the innate determination of Indigenous peoples to succeed rather than to overcome challenges.”

Besides Two Bulls, other tribe members have further expanded on the issues of tribal sovereignty. A critical figure in the Oglala Lakota Nation is Nick Tilsen, resident of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Tilsen dedicated himself to starting organizations such as Defenders of the Black Hills, Lakota Action Network, Indigenous Peoples Power Project, and Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation. What motivated him was to “build a community from scratch with some of the highest standards of regenerative and sustainable development in the poorest place in the country, here

on Pine Ridge.” To further elaborate, as the founding director, he attempted to create a “regenerative community” that was capable of building sustainable housing and able to produce energy and food on its own on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The ambitious goal of the development project was to be “one of the nation’s first net-zero energy communities, with 100-percent water reclamation in 21 single-family homes, a 12-unit apartment building, and a community center.”

Site-Specificity of the Bandana

The connection to land anchors Indigenous people’s identity, sense of tribal belonging, and the fundamental spiritual connection to their ancestors often creates site-specific art. As a local artist, Two Bulls’ reflects the very constituents of the Oglala Sioux Tribe as a member of the tribe himself. The relationship between Lakota Quarantine Bandana and the Oglala Sioux Tribe can be reinterpreted by moving on to the discussion of site-specificity. Thus, this section attempts to justify the site-specificity of the Lakota Quarantine Bandana. Sites are usually designated as community parks, buildings, plazas, stations and so on. In One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity, Miwon Kwon crystallizes the notion of Site-specific art:

Site-specific art initially took the “site” as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed of a unique combination of constitutive physical elements: length, depth, height, texture, and shape of walls and rooms; scale and proportion of plazas, buildings, or parks.

Whether it is in the form of a flag stuck in the checkpoints at the Oglala Sioux Tribe border or as a mask worn by tribal members, the bandana demonstrates its site-specificity elsewhere on the land of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Site-specificity of Lakota Quarantine Bandana is informed by thinking of tribal members who wear the bandana metaphorically: as the pedestals of the work itself. The land of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and its tribal members are integral part of the bandana, the meaning of the bandana built upon the tribal members, especially Indigenous elders who are vulnerable to the pandemic (in Two Bulls’ artistic statement, “Lakota Culture is rooted in an oral tradition. Our elders are our connection to our past, they ground us in our present, and guide us into our future.”), and the land itself.

The site of unending beginnings is worth discussing. To start with one of the three paradigms of site-specificity proposed by Kwon—discursive. Kwon indicates that the site can be established through artists’ consis-


5. Miwon Kwon, One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, (MIT press), 11.

tent engagement with issues concerning their fields of interest. Such issues thus become the “site” of their work. In Kwon’s view, its creation is exclusive, consistent with the bottom-up approach, and a linear process; it has been constructed since the artist works on such an issue. My argument about the “site” of unending beginnings is different from Kwon’s in some aspects. The site of the exhibition is shared, co-created by organizers of the show; its inception is consistent with the dialogue that emanates from the artworks. In this sense, Unending creates the site that centers on survivance, Lakota Quarantine Bandana, thus being integrated as part of the “site.”

Spatial Conflict

Through the lens of anthropological studies of space and place as Aucoin indicates that “landscape, space and the body represent important sites for cultural meaning, social and political memory, and public discourse,” and “place carries with it sentiments of attachment and identity that emerge out of lived experience.” In a political sense, closing borders and setting up checkpoints along highways demonstrates tribal sovereignty. While in an anthropological sense, these certain sections of highways thus be transformed from nonplace, a place where individual remains anonymous, frequently passes by, for example, airport, motel, and highway, into an anthropological space that is bestowed by tribal members.

The conflict between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem could be explored in the context of Henri Lefebvre’s Conceptual Triad of Production of Space. In 1974, Lefebvre indicated three concepts of space: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. These concepts are worth quoting here at length:

1. Spatial practice: the spatial practice of a society secrets that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.

What is spatial practice under neocapitalism? It embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the roJ.1tes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life-and leisure)

2. Representations of space: conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent - all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived … This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production). Conceptions of space tend, with certain exceptions to which I shall return, towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs.

3. Representational spaces: space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’, but also of some

artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe.

This is the dominated - and hence passively experienced - space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.9

The conflict can be viewed as the tension between representational spaces and representations of space by identifying concerns of the tribe and Noem. To clarify, the discussed subject refers to certain highway sections that the Oglala Sioux Tribe set up as checkpoints. In this frame of mind, these sections represent Lefebvre’s representational space; they are everyday home areas and streets, closely related to each tribal members’ daily life. However, these sections are representations of space to Noem. Which can be clarified through what Noem had said:

“I request that the tribes immediately cease interfering with or regulating traffic on US and State Highways and remove all travel checkpoints.”10

The section to Noem is merely conceptualized space conceived by engineers, cartographers, which is to say, part of State Highways on US Road Map.

A Window or a Portal

Nahui García

At first glance, *Selva Maya* (2021) appears almost indecipherable. It is a totem-like sculpture made from recycled paper, modeled on the monumental termite mounds that exist and grow in Australia and Africa. It forms part of a nine-sculpture series of varying colors and sizes inspired by Donna Haraway’s book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, in which the author introduces string figures as one of the book’s central metaphors (fig. 1). For Haraway, string figures—looped and tangled in between the hands of one or two participants—describes multispecies collaborative thinking, a new form of storytelling that, as she maintains, is “as full of dying as [of] living.”1

Upon closer look, the story that *Selva Maya* seeks to tell is one about the multifaceted relationship between human and non-human beings in the Maya Forest, a tropical region stretching widely across Southeastern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, hence the work’s title. To accomplish this task, Camil used newspaper clippings—small photographs encrusted within the sculpture’s rugged surface acting as windows to not-so-distant worlds. When a person approaches them, they illuminate the Maya Forest’ social fabric, an already complex ecosystem exacerbated by the anthropogenic effects of climate change.

One of these photographs depicts a woman wearing a *huipil*, hand-picking coffee beans from a local plantation in Southern Mexico—the land that Indigenous people obtained during the Mexican Revolution, led by insurgent leader Emiliano Zapata at the beginning of the twentieth century (fig 2). After overthrowing the established government, Zapata signed the constitution of 1917 and adhered to pre-Hispanic models of private property, granting farmers the right to the *ejido*, a community-oriented system where the land belongs to everyone; where soil, harvest, and solidarity are the community’s central priority.² Almost five-hundred years after the Spanish Conquest, Indigenous people had, for the first time, land ownership of the crops they harvested, protected from ranch owners who could no longer force them into labor exploitation.

His relentless support for the agrarian community resurfaced in 1993, the year that a group of Indigenous militants formed the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) in Lacandon Jungle, Chiapas. The group immediately contested the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994, which ended Zapata’s ejido system by introducing communal lands to the private market.³ While all of this occurred, Mexico had just experienced its first financial crisis since the Revolution, resulting in the extreme devaluation of the “peso” against the US dollar. Thus, farmers, especially those who lived in extreme poverty, sold their property to private investors in hopes of recuperating their financial losses. Indigenous people’s rights to land ownership, gained as a result of the Mexican Revolution, were terminated almost overnight—the same land seen in this small photograph of Selva Maya.

The day that I encountered Selva Maya in its initial exhibition at Blum and Poe, I thought about my great-great-grandfather: Manuel Sedas Rincón. He was a coffee farmer who lived up to 100-years-old, fought in the Mexican Revolution in support of Úrsulo Galván, one of the leading agricultural leaders in Veracruz.⁴ When the revolution ended and the government distributed the land among farmers, starting with Coahuila and ending in Mexico’s southern region, Sedas Rincón continued to maintain his revolutionary spirit. In 1996, he organized local *cafetaleros* (coffee farmers) into forming the first union in the region, raising coffee prices and fair wages for all workers.⁵ I share this anecdote because it represents a window into another world that is much more intimate; a window into the life of someone who experienced several phases of Mexico’s history, serving as a reminder that life is expansive and radical change can happen at any moment.

³. Ibid., 16.
⁵. Ibid., 9.
On the sculpture’s opposite side, Camil placed the photograph of a Mesoamerican figurine made from clay, with rounded limbs and an amicable facial expression (fig 3). Some of these archeological artifacts, introduced to the West as colonial trophies enshrined in window displays, have a much more meaningful connection to the Maya Forest, formed by the Mayans, Zapotecs, and the Kaqchikel peoples, among other ethnic groups. In the process of co-curating Unending Beginnings, I came across Kaqjay Moloj, a Kaqchikel collective based in Guatemala that bridges ancient history with the present through anthropological research. From them, I learned that these objetos antiguos (antique objects) belong to the Indigenous people of the twentieth century; that they are used as house adornments, cooking appliances, and religious amulets in their homes, living rooms, and kitchens. Their existence affirms that history exists in a continuum and that the present is continuously being rewritten.

The Maya Forest’s already diverse ecosystem is further expanded by the incoming flow of climate refugees from Central America and, most recently, the Caribbean. In October of 2021, four months before the exhibition’s opening, thousands of Haitian refugees passed through Mexico’s Southern border in search of a more livable future. Their homeland, which has already begun to experience the effects of climate change, has left most of the population living in precarious conditions due to severe flood storms and mudslides. Many of them have made their way to Texas while at least 252 thousands of them have been detained by Mexico’s National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional Migratorio, INM), a government organization accused of human rights violations against refugees as reported by local news media. While these accusations are still under investigation, they range from physical violence and extortion to police killings and forced disappearances.

On the opposite side of the Northern Hemisphere, nearly 200 nations met at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, where they agreed to fund developing countries who will be the most affected by climate change in 2030. Their decision brings to mind Haraway’s conceptualization of cosmopolitics, a term that she borrows from philosopher Isabelle Stengers who maintains that “decisions must take place… in the presence of all of those who will bear their consequences.” At a global event with as much resonance as the UN’s, cosmopolitics points toward a larger issue: de-

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7. Climate refugees have been defined by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as “individuals, families, groups and populations confronted with a sudden or gradual environmental disaster that inexorably impacts their living conditions, resulting in their forced displacement, at the outset or throughout, from their habitual residence.” See glossary for more.


cisions surrounding planet-warming emissions and the fate of fossil fuels are rarely made in the presence of those affected. Perhaps the most regrettable part about the crisis is that migrant refugees—the ones with the lowest carbon footprint—must pay for the actions of others. Thus, climate change is not atemporal. It is happening right now.

As the Maya Forest grapples with the arrival of climate refugees, it must also act upon the recent droughts and wildland fires that, over the years, could leave farming communities without a land to harvest. Activist adrienne maree brown, a critical voice in the theoretical cohesion of the exhibition, believes that radical imagination is the engine to escape this human-made threshold. In her book *Emergent Strategy*, she asks:

> How do we prepare the children in our lives to be visionary, and to love nature even when the changes are frightening and incomprehensible? To be abundant when what we consider valuable is shifting from gold to collard greens?... How do we articulate a compelling economic vision to sustain us through the unimaginable? To unite us as things fall apart?\(^{11}\)

She admits to not having an answer to her questions; yet, what I find the most compelling about her work is her emphasis on jotting down new possible realities. She argues that the Earth has already given us everything to exist—namely water, air, and land—and it is

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Indigenous people who have spent their lives protecting it. Thus, a new way of coexisting with the Earth is possible because it has already existed before. I hope that these questions can serve as an exercise in imagining the role that everyone will play in the next decade, starting today, after closing this book.

Selva Maya is a portal that leads to the complexity of a not-so-distant world, one that is living as well as dying as Haraway would put it. It addresses, perhaps indirectly, the legacy of Emiliano Zapata, the EZLN, Manuel Sedas Rincon, Mayan communities, and climate refugees, all of whom did not accept the social conditions in which they lived despite what they could perceive. Each of their stories began as small fractures in someone else’s reality, fissures that led to a world that had yet to be imagined. A portal—or in this case, a window—can start as a small fracture on a wall, hammered down until it becomes vast enough to occupy an eye’s entire viewpoint. At Unending Beginnings, Camil’s Selva Maya is a window to many worlds, some of which are real and others that are imagined.

Bibliography


12 For a further discussion on the protection of natural resources in Indigenous land, please refer to “Lakota Quarantine Bandana” by Ruei-Chen Tsai.
The small Central American country of El Salvador endured a civil war lasting from 1979 to 1992. The conflict was between the leftist-driven organization, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and right-wing juntas implemented by the Salvadoran government. This conflict was created in part by the United States government, which worried that FMLN would block the commercialization of one of their so-called “banana republics.” At the end of the war in 1992, nearly 75,000 environmental activists, liberation theologists, and civilians were either killed or disappeared. To this day, El Salvador remains a colony of production for the West, as one of the largest producers of coffee in the world.

The war in El Salvador serves as a devastating example of America’s legacy of a foreign policy prioritizing profits over people. As the general public becomes increasingly aware of the atrocities committed by the US within Central America, it is important to highlight both the narratives of its survivors and the post-generation of displaced Central Americans currently living in the US.

Eddie Rodolfo Aparcio is an LA-based artist of Salvadoran descent. His work revolves around themes of displacement, forced migration, and generational trauma.
His most recent solo exhibition is entitled *My Veins Do Not End In Me* and deals with his own lineage of being a subject of colonial violence while drawing parallels to the history of ficus trees in Southern California.

This interview has been edited for clarity and concision.

Leah Perez:
What particular area Los Angeles did you grow up in?

Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio:
I grew up in a mixed community, in between Pico and Crenshaw. My parents were really involved in several resource centers for Central American refugees, which have come up since the 1980’s. Since I was born in LA, my experience [as Salvadoran] has been through the diaspora. So here I am trying to understand the history of a place that many people cannot return to through a lens of LA history.

LP: Did your parents come to the US in the 80’s?

EA: My dad came to the US in the early 80’s fleeing the Civil War; he was a guerrero [in El Salvador]. When identity was discovered, a lot of his family was disappeared and killed, so he came here. He met my mom through one of these outreach organizations. A lot of my early childhood was involved in the war. I was born in 1990 and the war officially ended in ‘92. There was a lot of time where they were travelling back to El Salvador during the Civil War and doing humanitarian out-
reach. [My mom] has stories of being in meetings with me [in El Salvador] as a little baby. My father was an artist and he came here painting and making sculptures of his experiences from the war; massive oil paintings of his were on my living room walls growing up and formed a big part of my experience [as an artist]. Me and my siblings are all named after people who were killed during that period of time. So I feel like I was born and raised into the war.

**LP:** Thank you for sharing such a personal part of your life. There are folks from El Salvador who don’t know this history and even less Americans know this history or the huge role that the US played in that violence. It seems like a big part of your work is to bring awareness to this. Can you speak more to that?

**EA:** My dad lives in El Salvador now and even though he lived [in the US] for almost thirty years, he never learned English. For him this was a political statement. He would tell me my whole life that he fought against Marines who weren’t even supposed to be there. […] I was talking to someone in my family recently about the naming of children based on people that have passed away and the incredible role that that places on a child […] and the pressure of basically being a stand-in.

I say that as my origins of trying to understand all of this and not having the ability to until I was older. [I was] making geometric abstractions based off the poems of Ernesto Cardenal and then I went to grad school [at Yale] and I was like okay, maybe I can come at this from a more research-based perspective, instead of prying my own family about it. […] When I made works about the war my faculty was like “You’re too burdened by this trauma.” Then in the same crits they were praising these white minimalist artists who were making these generic abstractions, and for me that was really [an awakening]. It kind of radicalized in my own mind, that it’s not a burden, it’s actually an incredible privilege to have access to this community, this history […] I really wanted to center my family in my work.

My own family is worthy of so much attention in the making of an art piece. So what I started to do was make works around things that in my mind were stand-ins for all these conversations, like these tree castings in these communities from this material. This tree has super similar migration stories to actual Central Americans. I was always trying to find stand-ins for these stories so that people could access this history without necessarily being bogged down by their own biased specificity of names or countries. So that was a strategy that I subconsciously employed, until it became conscious, and they were like, “Oh these trees are amazing! It’s a conversation around environmentalism.” Then all of a sudden this white liberal faculty would have all these amazing things to say and, in my mind, I was almost playing this Mad-Lib game of replacing a lot of the words they were using with words that the works were actually standing in for.
LP: That’s really disappointing that your faculty didn’t get it but quite frankly not surprising. When I saw your tree works, I felt really uncomfortable by their resemblance to flesh but when I understood your background they clicked for me. The trees that you use, what are they called?

EA: The majority of them are ficus trees. I ended up doing this work because I was making rubber castings of other industrial machinery in factories in El Salvador and Guatemala and I wanted to make work in LA. This was around the time when Trump was elected.

He was talking about immigration policy and referenced this thing called “Operation Wetback.” I was like–first of all, how is this just allowed to be named that? Second of all, what is this!? I was looking into the history of braceros and I was also doing this research on the ficus trees. They were brought in the 50’s and 60’s and planted all over Southern California and LA, tens of thousands of them, in these tiny plots in the sidewalk. They grow really quickly and provide shade—cars can pass underneath them, too—but what they didn’t realize is that they break the concrete sidewalks and now the city is cutting them down or removing them. They were planted around the same time as the braceros were coming here, so I was thinking about this connection—and you know, Operation Wetback happened ten years after the braceros, when the country basically just deported millions of Latinos, many of whom were citizens, and just sent them to countries that they weren’t even from.

LP: My family was deported during Operation Wetback, who were citizens - or not even citizens, they were here before the border even existed.

EA: Exactly, so I was just really looking at this specific species of trees and the timing of them. I don’t know, I was just correlating these histories together. Also, I was in El Salvador and I was doing some of this research. I was there for three or four months at one point and I was going to rubber plantations and then hearing how the owners were talking about the care of the trees, and they were like, “we can only tap them for two weeks and then we need to let them rest for a month so they can stay healthy.” Then they were talking about the workers who have to tap 130,000 trees a month to be able to make their quota, regardless of rain or conditions or chemical exposure. So it was this idea of rest and this idea of the trees and the bodies of humans involved in the production of this material.

LP: That’s really helpful to understanding the context of these ficus trees in LA because they are everywhere.

EA: They’re everywhere. They’re even more ubiquitous than palm trees and they have the capacity to record scars on them. I feel like some trees shed their skin when they grow and ficus trees scarify everything that’s done onto their surface so it records information and a certain interaction that, from a formal and visual perspective, comes across in the work—all of the graffiti,
all of the carving into the trees, all of the trees natural growth marks. And then the trees abstract those marks by trying to heal them so then those marks become these kinds of hieroglyphs, a combination of the human marking. Then, the trees’ growth back into those spaces. So that for me is this idea of material agency and collaborative compositional sentiment that I feel like is in a lot of [my] work.

LP: Do ficus trees secrete a liquid in the same way that rubber trees do?

EA: Ficus trees have the exact same latex on the inside. Rubber trees are just used commercially because they have the greatest quantity of it, but there’s thousands of trees that have the same chemical material inside of them for the same purposes but they don’t have it in the same quantity so it’s not as commercially viable to try to produce it the same way. […] This racist narrative of “Go back to your own country!” is ignoring the ways in which we integrate things from other places and [they] become a part of this place so easily and readily as long as it’s not like...

LP: -Damaging.

EA: Yeah, so I think part of it for me was thinking about this species that comes from Asia and has come here now and become so integral. When I was in El Salvador and Guatemala I was getting this tree sap, this rubber from these plantations. But when I was making the work...
here in LA, I didn’t want to have this exoticized material saying like, “Oh I have to import this exact material!” When I came to LA and wanted to make this series of work, I went to Burbank for the Hollywood special effects industry materials. There were already pails of this rubber that were being imported from Guatemala through these CAFTA [Central American Free Trade Agreement] systems that allow for the exploitation of agricultural resources; yet, people from those countries don’t have the same access to migrate here. When the Spanish arrived to the New World, they noticed how Indigenous communities were taking tree sap and dipping their hides, and their clothes, and their feet and making these shoes out of the casts of their feet. There’s all these references to high fashion in Spain during the colonial period, where they would take the rubber castings of feet from Central America, from Brazil and wear them. There’s still some that are in Spanish museums. [The shoes] were pointing me to technological innovation that I feel is a part of your first question, the one about “what history are you trying to tell through this work.” A big part is this understanding of culture that is around us at all times, co-opted by Europeans who, to some degree, looked at technological advances in Latin America and Africa, tweaked them a little bit (if at all), and then took the technological credit for them. For me that becomes important for how we think about the cultural significance of certain communities and especially around conversations about immigration in the United States. This sort of sentiment of worthlessness of Central America culture is something that I feel really

strongly, or “What have you contributed?” - well actually if you begin to look at everything you have on your body and a lot of the main elements that come from natural resources have some sort of connection to Indigenous communities and their technological innovations. […]

LP: Post-memory is specific term to come out of genocidal studies and describes the experiences of people like yourselves a generation removed from direct impact of genocide but still affected by it. Can I ask how you situate yourself within this term?

EA: The themes of post memory were very much in my mind when I made my work for the Mistake Room. [It] elates to what I was describing about the difficulty of growing up with the names of people who were lost in the war. The weight of being buried with them, but still breathing above ground, feels akin to waking up from a dream and not having any direct images of what happened. It’s this weight on your chest that lets you know that you just went through something incredibly deep… but it’s not all trauma. My father talks about the time before his migration with so much excitement and love as well.
Cuando había dinero
y no había empréstitos extranjeros
ni los impuestos eran para Pierpont Morgan & Cía.
y la compañía frutera no competía con el pequeño cosechero.

Pero vino la United Fruit Company, con sus subsidiarias la Tela Railroad Company
y la Trujillo Railroad Company
aliada con la Cuyamel Fruit Company
y Vaccaro Brothers & Company
más tarde Standard Fruit & Steamship Company
de la Standard Fruit & Steamship Corporation:
la United Fruit Company
con sus revoluciones para la obtención de concesiones
y exenciones de millones en impuestos de importación
y exportaciones, revisiones de viejas concesiones
y subvenciones para nuevas explotaciones,
violaciones de contratos, violaciones
de la Constitución

Hora 0 escrito por Ernesto Cardenal

1. Note that the United Fruit Company is now called Chiquita Brands International.
We are living in a period of crisis. The past year alone we have been both co-conspirator and witness to the burgeoning climate change induced famine in Madagascar, the displacement of an estimated 980,000 Rohingya from Myanmar, the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people by the state of Israel, the seemingly never-ending COVID-19 pandemic, and countless other social and ecological atrocities.1, 2 These examples are by no means similar, and in listing them my aim isn’t to generalize, but to illustrate that while we have relied on codifying ourselves by blanket identifiers like gender, religion, and race as a means of avoiding involvement in things that – on the surface – appear to not directly involve us, they are inseparable from our global conscience. High-income nations’ feverish fossil fuel consumption, failure to hold countries accountable for atrocities because of empty labels like “allies,” and inequitable global distribution of

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1. As of 2018, Madagascar emitted an average of 1.57 tons of CO2 per capita, while the United States averaged 17.74 tons per capita. Despite being one of the smallest contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions, Madagascar is on track to be one of the first cases of climate change induced famine. (Data provided by Climate Watch).

COVID-19 vaccines ensure our complicity in what we write off as “the problem of others.” This individualistic mindset is no longer – and arguably was never – feasible in today’s reality. The globalized world means what occurs in one area of the globe ripples in an inescapable wave of reactions. Cause and effect do not occur in isolation but sweep outwards, making catastrophes the responsibility not of one person, community, or nation, but the collective us. In the face of an impending crisis, what would happen if we acted with one another for one another? If we disavowed the individual in favor of the mutual? If “we” truly became we?

The questions I pose are far from novel. They have long been asked by philosophers, scientists, and artists alike in their searches for alternatives to our current narrative. The quest to shift from the individual has opened up explorations into biomimicry, and how practices centered around collectivity, mutability, and interspecies interaction can affect our survival. In their 1980 book A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose the rhizome as a method of social organization. A rhizome is a horizontal root system with no discernible beginning or end. Rather, growth occurs in multiples and spreads outwards on one horizontal plane. Having a regenerative ability, rhizomatic networks exist in constant adaptation, placing them in a liminal space of “interbeing.”

The success of the rhizome is dependent on the “limitless interconnectivity” between all parts of the whole and, additionally, the continuous establishment of new nodes of connection.

Deleuze and Guattari’s proposal of constantly mutating network of complex connections is built upon in adrienne maree brown’s book Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, where she introduces her theory of “emergence,” described as the process of building social structures via “a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions” between human and non-human ecosystems. Multiplicity can be understood as privileging the relational, bringing together fragmented and disparate forms, to create ever-evolving systems of knowledge and organizing for the purpose of collective survival. The idea of “collective” or “mutual” survival is heavily underscored in both Emergent Strategy and A Thousand Plateaus and is indicative of a shift in scholarly thinking regarding Darwin’s theory of natural selection. In direct disavowal of the theory of “survival of the fittest,” contemporary scientists contend that community is necessary for survival.
collective survival appears as the only possible solution to what would otherwise be self-inflicted destruction. The interdisciplinary artist Cécile B. Evans explores alternatives to collective destruction in their film, *A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle*. Evans’ 2019 film is a reimagining of the 1841 French ballet *Giselle*, composed by Adolphe Adam, in which the titular character dies of heartbreak brought on by the betrayal of her lover, Albrecht. In the original, Giselle finds her post-death existence in the afterlife to be amongst a group of wronged women called “Willis” who haunt the forest at night and force any man they encounter to dance until they die from exhaustion. Albrecht passes through the forest one night and the Willis pressure Giselle to take revenge, but she refuses, and through the intensity of her love Giselle saves Albrecht from certain death, and herself from an afterlife of revenge. Evans’ adaptation loosely follows the original storyline of *Giselle*, however their reimagining proposes collectivity, mutability, and interspecies exchange as strategies of survival. In *A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle*, the Willis are replaced by an assembly of women existing in the not-so-distant future in a wilderness commune they envision as a reprieve from a crumbling outside world. A montage of found footage showing wildfires, hurricanes and other natural disasters comprises the first forty seconds of the film, after which it cuts to sutured together scenes of the women dancing in a room. Quickly, the dancing transforms into intimate moments of support and kinship as group members grasp hands, scream into each other’s faces, and hold one another to a frantic drum rhythm. At the forty-five second mark the percussion breaks and we hear the first spoken line of the film – a distant male voice fuzzily saying, “a corruption took place.”

While the “corruption” that occurred in the original ballet was Giselle’s betrayal by Albrecht, in Evans’ version it refers to the introduction of an unknown contaminant to the utopic community. The bacteria (suggested to be brought by a lover of Giselle’s) leaches into the group and results in Giselle’s death. In their description of the film, Evans describes Giselle’s death as a catalyst for a practice that “proposes mutability and multiplicity as a strategy for escape, with the force of the natural ‘cultures’ as an ally against the violence of essentialism.”

In other words, the women respond to the infection not by working against it, but by engaging with it, a choice that ultimately ensures their survival. The series of shots following Giselle’s death show the women in the forest lounging in the nooks of trees and sauntering through the brush in trance-like movement. Interspersed with these scenes are clips of bacteria moving under microscopes while a disembodied female voice speaks of fungibility, mutability, and transference. Close up shots of the women’s faces show the texture and details of

8. For more on Cécile B. Evans’ film *A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle*, please turn to Lauren Guilford’s essay “The Word for World is Forest: Resurgent Storytelling.”


their skin and features in active distortion as though the women are morphing into one another before our eyes. The film closes with scenes of the women mutating, gyrating, and pulsating with one another and the environment around them in a near symbiotic relationship with nature and each other.

Evans’ choice of ending marks the biggest difference between Giselle and A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle. In the former, the Willis are destroyed and only Giselle rests peacefully in death. The latter, however, ends with the women surviving due to forming relationships with themselves, nature, and the contaminant. The moments of human and non-human interaction illustrate the generative power that comes from functioning as a collective, rhizomatic body, rather than as isolated individuals. The women’s strategy for survival can be read as a biomimetic approach to brown’s theory of emergence and its emphasis on adaptation, interdependence, and acceptance of the liminal. To quote noted scientist and writer Janine Benyus, “species only survive if they learn to be in community.”

Although A Screen Test for an Adaptation of Giselle takes place in a very small commune, the film is an example for what is possible when a community adapts anti-individual and interdependent practices. Embracing fungibility and acting collectively generates alternative ways of being, thus creating numerous ways of acting for mutual survival. Applied to the real-world, how would climate change progress if we acted not as separate from the ecosystems around us, but as an equal in their rhizomatic network? Would we stand silently as thousands died in refugee camps and occupied territories if we nurtured relationships due to shared humanity as opposed to capital benefit? What would the pandemic look like if we realized that survival isn’t possible if it’s at the cost of others? As I said at the outset: these questions aren’t new, they’ve been answered by Deleuze, Guattari, brown, and Evans, and while I can’t claim their ideas are the absolute solution, I can say they’re worth a shot. What could go wrong that hasn’t already?

Bibliography


Angel Lartigue
Bacteriomancy
(phase i)
(phase ii)
Courtesy of Alexandra Lartigue

“Cuando mis palabras se volvieran miel, las moscas cubrieron mis labios” - Mahmoud Darwish

Bacteriomancy 2022 is a two-part performance in which Lartigue cultivates microorganisms from various architectural structures, colonial and modern, across Los Angeles. The work explores the idea of decomposition through the artist’s targeted use of bacteria and fungi in a performance art context. Extracting Agar nutrients from seaweed to grow bacteria and fungi in acrylic purses, which function as fabulous Petri dishes, Lartigue considers the ocean a living marine/memory biome. Educated in forensic anthropology and human remains recovery, Lartigue’s material and performance practice is concerned with the relationship between land and the body. Bacteriomancy 2022 explores how living matter can carry memories of pandemics past and present brought about by colonialism, imperialism, and military occupation.

The second portion of Lartigue’s performance took place on February 11th on the rooftop of the Mateo Gallery in front of the Los Angeles skyline. Using the hire rise building as a contemporary pyramid, Lartigue reinacts the creation of humans from the Popol Vuh channeling the essence of a Mesoamerican priestess. Throughout the performance, a soundtrack created by artist HC - (M) plays on a loop as Palestinian artist Qais Assali repeats the following line from Mahmoud Darwish’s Psalm Three in Arabic:

 حين صارت كلماتي عسلًا،
 غطّي النبّاب شفتي
 - محمود درويش
CUANDO MIS PALABRAS SE VOLVIERON MIEL.

LAS MOSCAS CUBRIeron MIS LABIos.
Glossary

Apocalypse: A catastrophic event (or series of events) that inflicts permanent harm to society or the environment on a global level; destruction.

Archival Absence: Archives exist as records of the past, as repositories of what is deemed “important.” However, those who determine what is considered worthy of preserving are by and large those who occupy spaces of power at the expense of others, and thus, the archives they create enable the erasure of specific voices and events.

Class Consciousness: Although Karl Marx did not articulate a theory of class consciousness, Das Kapital proposes that the working-class must become conscious of their collective struggle to rise against the ruling class. As conglomerate companies such as Facebook and Google profit off information on the internet, the ruling class no longer owns the means of production. It is these current forces of production that push toward new class structures and that need new names, definitions, and collective aims.

Climate Refugee: A term used to describe the large-scale migration of people who have been forced to leave their home as a result of the effects of climate change on their environment.

Collaborative / Collective Survival: Survive from globalization, from capitalism, from nature, from history—indigene; exploited labor; resilience; erasure. History-making is about the testimony of survivors.

Critical Posthumanism: Building off concepts from popular posthumanism, critical posthumanist allows for the examination of posthumanist futures through a lens influenced by postcolonial, postmodern, and queer studies, and further enables the production of new structures for recurring discourses.

Decolonial: Economically, colonialism is about global class formation (2011), a diversity of forms of labor is organized by capital as a source of production of surplus value (p.8). However, culturally, preventing sovereignty from being imposed by external forces is the sufficient condition in terms of decolonization. Decolonization must straddle deontology and consequentialism, actions that undermine each of them will be in vain.

Emergent Strategy: Theories of emergence posit that we exist in between temporalities, in a morphing state that emphasizes “adaptation, interdependence and decentralization, fractal awareness, resilience and transformative justice, nonlinear and iterative change, creating more possibilities.”

Environmental Consciousness: Environmental consciousness is the starting point for us to ponder about the relationship between species, it is also the catalyst to reach a different future.

Multiplicity: In thinking of the double-slit experiment, “interference is a phenomenon in which two waves superpose to form a resultant wave of greater, lower, or the same amplitude.” This world is filled with interferences, what we encounter is the entanglement of the events from the past; the state of many.

Survivance: Gerald Vizenor coined the term “survivance” to describe the active way in which Native American peoples continue not just to subsist on the cultural ruins/relics, but actively survive. Vizenor writes: “survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.”

Temporal Plurality: The state of simultaneous existences.

Resurgence: According to Anna Tsing, “resurgence is the force of the life of the forest, its ability to spread its seeds and roots and runners to reclaim places that have been deforested.” In an anthropological context and in the context of unending beginnings resurgence is the idea of growth and rebirth through chaos.

Ecological Feminism: The term ecological feminism was first introduced by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 to describe women’s position and potential to encite an ecological revolution. In her book, Ecological Feminism (1994), Karen Warren defines ecological feminism as “an umbrella term which captures a variety of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the connections within social systems of domination between those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of nonhuman nature.”

Species Interdependence: The interrelationality and interdependence of all living species.

Curator Bios

Leah Perez is a writer and curator based in Los Angeles, California. She holds a BA in Contemporary Latino and Latin American Studies from the University of Southern California. She is currently pursuing her MA in Curatorial Studies at the Roski School of Art and Design. Her curatorial interests lie at the intersection of art and ethnic culture, specifically contemporary and historical aesthetics of Black and brown communities in Los Angeles. Perez is interested in challenging the precarious definition of Latinidad, prioritizing decolonial practices that emphasize queer, indigenous, Black, and Brown Latinxs in the United States. Her thesis will be exploring how the Baroque was developed through the cultural syncretism of Europe and the Americas and how the ethos of the Baroque is ever present in the aesthetics of Latinidad.

Nahui Garcia is a curator and writer from Mexico, currently based in Los Angeles, CA. She holds a B.A. in Art History from the University of Southern California, where her focus of study explored the representation of indigenous American and African people during the eighteenth century. In the past, she worked as the Program Coordinator at the Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL) in Mexico City, Mexico. There, she organized symposia and guided visits surrounding the work of Carlos Mérida, Saturnino Herrán, and José María Velasco. Besides working in art institutions, she has also contributed critical thinking pieces to Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles, and Cultured Magazine.

Lauren Guilford is a curator and art historian based in Los Angeles. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Art History from University of California, Santa Barbara. She has written for Artillery and Frieze. Guilford is a Masters candidate at the University of Southern California where she is currently writing her thesis on the history of alternative art spaces in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s.

Emma Christ is an art historian and curator from Portland, OR, currently based in Los Angeles, CA. She studied photography at Bard College before transferring to Reed College where she obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Art. Most recently, Christ co-curated Blue on Blue on Blue at Nationale in Portland and In Cahoots: Artists and Curators at USC Roski at UTA Artist Space in Los Angeles. Christ is a Masters candidate at the University of Southern California where she is writing her thesis on transcorporeality and embodiment in art practices post the 1980s.

Ruei-Chen Tsai is pursuing a dual degree (MA, Curatorial Practice/ MUP, Urban Planning) at the University of Southern California. He received a Bachelor’s degree in Industrial Design from Tatung University in Taiwan. Being a multidisciplinary individual, he practices integrating the design thinking process into non-design projects and considers it essential to self-development. He’s currently interested in socially engaged practice with particular emphasis on public art and monuments. Ruei-Chen aspires to work in cultural sector planning.
Austen Villacis is an arts worker based in Los Angeles. He holds a BA in Art History from Texas State University and is currently a Masters candidate in the Curatorial Practices and the Public Sphere program at the University of Southern California. His interests range from issues in and around digital mediation to critical archival practices and AIDS activist collectivity. He is currently researching the resurgence of quilting histories and practices in contemporary art.