
Sur Gallery

A Space for Curatorial Strategies of Representation

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A few years ago, I was invited to prepare a ten-minute presentation for a panel on Latin American art in Canada. The Ontario Arts Council and the Ontario Association of Art Galleries organized the conference, and its audience consisted mainly of fellow colleagues. It was an attractive but flawed proposal. I accepted, since after all, opportunities to speak about Latin American art from the diaspora do not occur often. The challenge, as I kept reminding myself, was that it would be impossible to delve into the multiple complexities and nuances within the artworks, highlighting the connections, the contradictions, the diversity and richness of concerns. How to communicate the shared and yet opposing histories, the myriad of sociopolitical contexts, as well as the magnitude and breadth of experiences, in ten fleeting minutes? Inevitably, the talk would leave several gaps, which I feared would be filled by uninformed assumptions and prejudices. That my fears were real became evident during the Q and A, when a colleague referenced the artists presented as “community-based artists.” Nonetheless, I was committed to, whenever possible, continue to promote marginal discourses and aesthetics, determined to explain the powerful, politically and socially engaged Latin American art practices to an uninformed Canadian audience, who nevertheless had granted a space for its representation.

My promotion of Latin American art in the form of a committed curatorial practice began over a decade ago. I needed to diversify exhibitions’ content and aesthetics to reach a predominantly Anglo-Canadian audience and arts community. Despite Canada’s self-image as a progressive and diverse place, marginalized artists who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color continue to face systemic barriers to entering a predominantly white male art world. And despite its relevance in the international art scene, in Canada (and in particular in Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in the world), Latin American art remains for the most part unexplored by academics,

critics, and curators. As a young art student at OCAD University in the early 1990s, there was only one Latin American art history class we could take during our four years of undergraduate studies, and it is not a subject offered in most Canadian universities. Needless to say, the course could barely scratch the surface of such an enormous topic. Despite the best intentions of the only professor knowledgeable enough to teach Latin American art at OCAD, there was no interest from the administration to dedicate further resources to Latin American art. Unfortunately, this still holds true twenty years later. Similar to how Ana Mendieta, working from the periphery in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s, was trying to break into mainstream art circles, in Toronto during the late 1990s, we had to continue to seek our own knowledge, to create our own opportunities and platforms, and to gather our own resources after reaching out to an art system that did not embrace us.¹ Thus, I began to create spaces of representation: curate exhibitions, write about fellow colleagues’ works, put together speaker series, deliver workshops, organize group studio critiques, all the while cofounding an arts organization. During this time, I realized that my attempts were to foreground a transcultural exchange, generate collective recognition, and build our own episteme in order to rupture the passive, hegemonic, hierarchical art receptions present in Canadian galleries, institutions, and museums.

DAUGHTER OF RESILIENCY

I come from a family of survivors. My mother arrived in Canada at a very young age, with a twenty-day-old infant, to an unforgiving winter in January of 1974. I am the daughter of left-wing activists who came in the first government-chartered aircraft as part of the resettlement program for Chilean refugees during Prime Minister

1. Luis Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists, Latin America, and Other Utopias* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 49.

Pierre Trudeau's government. My family and I went back to our home country when the Pinochet dictatorship issued decrees in 1984 and 1985 allowing most exiles to return to Chile.² We lived there during my formative teenage years. My mother and father were revolutionaries and both university students at the time of their arrival in Canada. They ended up washing dishes, cleaning toilets, baking bread, and working in the construction industry for the next decade, living in Vancouver before moving to Toronto. Their dreams and professional aspirations were never completely achieved, like so many other immigrants and refugees that arrive daily to this country. My parents were challenged by a predominantly Anglo-Canadian demographic who were unwilling to share their privilege and to whom systemic racism was the norm. I was well aware of this reality from a young age, for my politicized parents taught me to always question authority, to be a critical thinker, to fight for what I believed in, to be open to debate, and to learn from the mistakes of our past. These valuable lessons helped me navigate a world full of contradictions, nuances, and challenges. My background gave me the courage and resiliency to cope with difficult personal and global situations that I've had to confront throughout my life.

During my development, art played an important role. My mother was an artist before the coup. Many of her professors, colleagues, and comrades were killed, and she refused to continue her art practice upon her arrival in Canada. Instead, she invested her exiled years toward the solidarity movement. Nevertheless, she encouraged me to pursue an artistic path, and art helped shape my identity. More importantly, it became a tool for recognition within a place in which I was excluded and erased. My life as a young artist in a multicultural city, with aspirations and dreams, quickly dissolved into obscurity, neglect, discrimination, and powerlessness. Luis Camnitzer eloquently denounces multiculturalism as "both a respectful process of assimilation of otherness and an inverse process of colonization performed by otherness."³ Multiculturalism did not help us; on the contrary, it perpetuated victimization and resentment. Fighting within this respectful but ineffective assimilation, we began to demand inclusion,

recognition, social privilege, distribution of wealth, and resources. Those of the periphery, the so-called visible minorities, wanted to change and innovate social systems imposed by generations of racism and colonization, a struggle that persists to this day.

ADVOCACY AND DIASPORA

In 2005, I cofounded the Latin American Canadian Art Projects (LACAP), a Toronto-based, not-for-profit arts organization. It was a space dedicated to the implementation of art projects to promote Latin American art in Canada, with an emphasis on artistic excellence, critically engaged artistic practices, and hemispheric networks of exchange. LACAP projects have ranged in scope, scale, and initiative throughout the years. Under this framework, in 2015 we launched our most recent project, Sur Gallery, during the Pan Am/ParaPan-Am Games in Toronto. After a decade of advocating for a publicly funded physical space to showcase work of the Latin American and Latinx diaspora, we finally received government support. Up until this date, there had been no other space in Canada that advocated for the dissemination and promotion of Latin American, Latin American Canadian, and/or Latinx art and artists in Canada. Up until the launch of Sur Gallery, there had been many events, festivals, and projects in various cities across Canada in an effort to showcase the work of its diaspora, but never a permanent gallery space that could house such initiatives. We developed Sur Gallery as a space to give artists voice and agency, with the underlying intention of becoming active players in the Canadian visual art circuit. It was crucial to have a critical dialogue, reflecting on current issues that not only affected our lives and perspectives working within peripheries, but also to discuss our role and associations within the Latin American diaspora and our relevance internationally.

PERSONAL AGENDAS

In 2014, state surveillance in Canada was on the rise. New laws and technologies were redefining the relationship between public and private spaces. I was convinced that art could play a significant role in critiquing this ongoing process as well as the impact of surveillance. Art has the ability to turn the modalities and technologies of surveillance inward, deepening our understanding of how surveillance affects relationships between the collective and the individual, the watcher and the watched, the

2. Luis Roniger and Maria Sznajder, "Exile Communities and Their Differential Institutional Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of the Chilean and Uruguayan Political Diasporas," *Revista de Ciencia Política* 27, no.1 (2007): 43–66, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2007000200003>.

3. Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists*, 88.



FIGURE 1. Juan Ortiz Apuy, detail of *The Freedom Fighter Manual*, 2011, interactive installation, various dimensions (photograph by Juan Ortiz Apuy, courtesy of the artist)

object and the subject. The concept of surveillance was a permanent concern during my upbringing, as the immediate threat of state surveillance and terror of growing up under dictatorship. As a child, I knew that our phones could be tapped, our conversations heard, and our literature censored. Consequently, we always needed to be at high alert and never reveal our sources to others. I felt that I always had to be in control of the situation and not let down my guard.

Needless to say, as a curator, there was a whole territory to explore. Hence, that became the theme of *Sportsman-ship under Surveillance*, the first exhibition I curated for Sur Gallery in 2015. The exhibition was presented in the context of Stephen Harper's conservative government and during the Pan Am/ParaPan-Am Games. Coming from a dictatorship in the southern hemisphere, having lived through state surveillance, and aware of the media's tactics of distraction, the theme of state surveillance was an obvious choice to launch with for Sur Gallery's first exhibition. Underneath the bewildering veil of prosperity and

celebration, the games brought deeper control over citizens while invading privacy and distorting the ideas of what a free society should condemn. The exhibition exposed the reach that governments have when using questionable surveillance tactics in the name of national security. Costa Rican–Canadian artist Juan Ortiz-Apuy presented *The Freedom Fighter Manual* (2011), modeled on a seventeen-page document designed by the CIA in 1983 that was airdropped over Nicaragua with the goal of overthrowing the elected government.⁴ It contained a series of instructions for public disobedience and revolt, from ripping the pages out of books in public libraries to how to make Molotov bombs. For the installation, the artist replicated each page of the manual, which was silk-screened with glow-in-the-dark ink and set against three motion-sensor security lights (fig. 1). As you walked in the space, the lights were triggered, and the content of the

4. William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 295.

manual became invisible. You had to stand perfectly still for a few seconds for the lights to shut off once again and the text and images to become visible. With his installation, Ortiz-Apuy denounced US state intervention in Latin America and its imposed policies implemented for decades in the name of security. My own background, growing up within a left-wing Chilean exiled community in Canada and later in Chile under a repressive dictatorship, has of course heavily influenced my curatorial interests. Surveillance and several other issues such as feminism, anti-imperialism, violence, memory, and trauma dominate my imaginary. Hence my interest in exhibitions that engage audiences by displaying ignored and erased histories, by showcasing oppressed and marginal voices that seek a space of recognition. The conversations that I bring to the forefront at Sur Gallery are as relevant today as when I began curating fifteen years ago.

The common thread that ties these otherwise diverse Latin American Canadian artists is the direct references to the historical, social, political, and geographical contexts they expose. Not only is my role as curator to fill a gap within Canadian art spaces, but I'm also driven to not ghettoize "parameters of circulation, publication and consumption."⁵ Representations of Latin America's diaspora in Canada must be situated in active conversation with others, and not in isolation. These conversations transcend Canadian borders. I have attempted to establish international relationships with artists from other diasporas as well as with artists from Latin America, to avoid falling into "simplified notions of [regional] art."⁶ As such, the Latin American Canadian diaspora is exhibited at Sur Gallery alongside internationally renowned artists from Latin America such as Regina José Galindo, Regina Silveira, Voluspa Jarpa, Iván Navarro, among others. Exhibitions that address the ways in which the immigrant voice is portrayed and interpreted broaden Canada's contribution to a global art discussion.

MONUMENT VERSUS ANONYMITY

As I made connections and established differences between Latin American Canadian artists, I quickly found that many continued to look south and engage with political references that were deeply connected to where they came from. Latin America has a long tradition

of honoring national heroes, those who fought for independence, revolutionary martyrs, and courageous women and men who continue to fight for the disenfranchised. Some are more adored than others. Some are given national recognition, while others are portrayed as terrorists. This concept of the hero occupies a place in the Latin American imaginary and psyche as important as for its diaspora. In 2016 I curated *From the Heroic to the Absurd*. My intention was to find manifestations that subverted historical narratives by questioning sovereignties, reevaluating ideological constructs, resisting centers of power, and aesthetically rupturing infallibility. I believe that the role of the artist is not to erect monuments or necessarily defame all legacies but to offer insight into the normalcy of human nature. As such, we need to accept that all heroes may fall into streams of ridicule, disputing perceptions of their perfection (fig. 2). I invited Guillermo Trejo, Mexican-Canadian artist, to exhibit *A Forgotten Ideology, Monumento #1* (2015) and *A Dissertation about Actions* (2015), as well as Cuban-Canadian artist Julio Ferrer's *American Idol* (2013) and *Chelffe* (2014). Ferrer portrayed revolutionaries in Cuban pop-style serigraphy and contextualized them within contemporary global paradigms. Trejo's anonymous, covered-up, and dismembered structures of monuments symbolize their obsolescence and total destruction. Here a backdrop of posters signals "A Political Action" — "Apolitical Action" — "A Poetical Action."

Concepts of monumentality are relevant today as we witness several actions and struggles against monuments throughout the world, from the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States to the massive social uprising in Chile, where Mapuches have dismantled symbols of Spanish colonization.⁷ The most obvious thread that ties Latin America together is colonization, with the genocidal practices of conquistadores leading to a history of violence and resistance. Rolando Vásquez argues that "monuments erase and close access to people's histories. They perform the power of coloniality."⁸ This concept is repeatedly discussed in Latin American subaltern studies but is just as relevant to a decolonial framework in Canada, as it

5. Gerardo Mosquera, "Against Latin American Art," in *Contemporary Art in Latin America* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 20.

6. Mosquera, "Against Latin American Art," 22.

7. Laurence Blair, "Conquistadores Tumble as Indigenous Chileans Tear Down Statues," *The Guardian*, November 5, 2019, www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/05/chile-statues-indigenous-mapuche-conquistadors.

8. Rolando Vásquez, "From Globalizing towards Decolonizing: Art History and the Politics of Time," interview by Aline Hernández and Rosa te Velde, *Kunstlicht* (2018): 101.



FIGURE 2. Guillermo Trejo, *A Forgotten Ideology, Monumento #1*, 2015, plaster, wood, paint, foam. *A Dissertation about Actions*, 2015, serigraphy on newsprint (photograph by Mirna Chacín, courtesy of Sur Gallery)

describes the hierarchical legacy of colonialism and its structures of social, political, and economic discrimination that are systemically prevalent in Canadian society. With this in mind, I curated *Power in Resistance* in 2019 at Sur Gallery. From the southern hemisphere of the Mapuche to the Cree in the North, artists in *Power in Resistance* addressed the impact of colonization, including forced sterilization, language extinction, residential schools, and shaming of queer identities. Counteracting such violence, these artists offered instead a path of healing, truth, power, and transformation. Rather than examine colonial traditions of monumentality, archived histories, and national conservative replicas, artists in this exhibition counteracted attempts at erasure. As a result, marginal voices rose to the forefront, offering a space for artists to deal with colonial difference, its wound, and the need for remembering and mourning in order to heal.⁹ For example, Mexican-Canadian artist Carlos Colín shared a series of photographs entitled *The Uprising of*

the Mask: The Iconoclastic Riot (2014), in which he referenced Indigenous resistance movements in Latin America (fig. 3). The traditional belts from Guatemala concealed the artist's identity, much as the Zapatistas do with black ski masks. Without a face, the artist undermines authoritarianism through anonymity. Since the possibility of individuality is not exposed, strength is revealed, for the masked subject allows conditions of visibility and representation. As Kency Cornejo asserts, "a decolonial approach to visibility, art and visual thinking requires an unveiling and decentering of Western perspectives."¹⁰ From the point of anonymity as a departure, these artists are able to expose positions of marginality, all the while subverting and reimagining its narrative.

THE TRAUMA WE CARRY

In 2017, I curated an exhibition entitled *Vehemence*, in which artists and designers explored the site of trauma

9. Vázquez, "From Globalizing towards Decolonizing," 100.

10. Kency Cornejo, "Indigeneity and Decolonial Seeing in Contemporary Art of Guatemala," *FUSE Magazine* 36, no. 4 (October 2013): 31.



FIGURE 3. Carlos Colín, *Mask 004 Mask 004* from the series *La Sublevación de la Máscara. El Motín Iconoclasta/The Uprising of the Mask. The Iconoclastic Riot*, 2014, c-print, 47 x 31½ in. (119 x 79 cm) (photograph by Sarah Shamash, courtesy of the artist)

and memory by proposing an intense vernacular narrative informed by personal, collective, and intergenerational stories based in Central America. *Vehemence* articulated an epidemic site of violence in the region by offering testaments, outcries, and denunciations. For decades, Central America has been subject to human right violations. Violence pervades social, political, and cultural life through abductions, torture, death squads, execution of prisoners, massacres of women, children, and the elderly. Indigenous people are subject to the most disruptive forms of repression and fight a long battle against large corporations that are killing the land and its people in the name of profit. Drug trafficking across the borders increases violence and social instability, while governments do little to improve the population's daily life. In Guatemala, for instance, after the peace agreements of 1996

“failed to address the structural dispossession of the majority of the population under neoliberal structural readjustment policies, violence has skyrocketed in a population that is still armed, dealing with guilt and retaliation. . . .”¹¹ Thousands of people fled violence in the region, landing in Canada as a place of refuge. Such is the case of Salvadoran-Canadian artist Osvaldo Ramírez Castillo, whose watercolor drawings on paper using sawdust present uncanny elements—mutilated bodies, decapitated eyes, hanging flesh (fig. 4). Ramírez Castillo repeatedly references popular folklore, pre-Columbian mythology, and North American street culture, alluding to traumatic memories of violence that the artist suggests are intergenerational.

Prior to the wave of Central Americans arriving during the 1980s and 1990s, Canada hesitantly opened its doors to thousands of Chilean refugees after the 1973 coup d'état—as attested by my own family's history. The exhibition *Declassified History: Archiving Latin America* that I curated in 2019 highlighted the remnants of the Cold War. Artists revealed how oppressive regimes in the South are indissociably linked to corrupt governments of the North. Through installations, the artists captured a dark period marked by US interventions in Latin America, broadening our perspectives on how we view and interact with the past. Cuban-Canadian artist Omar Estrada's artwork showcases archives of the CIA's involvement in Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, and other Latin American countries to explore the dynamics of the Cold War. Many Central and South Americans have fled violence finding in Canada a place to call home, and Estrada reveals how these events mark their collective memory, exposing not only the violence endured but the responsibility and complicity we all must face.

VOICES OF DIASPORA

For the immigrant, it is a constant struggle to inhabit the present, to conquer spaces, and to leave a haunted past behind. An arrival is never completely attained, and a departure is forever yearned after.¹² The search for a place is persistent and unsettling; it is one of ambiguity, a place where two or more realities are in constant

11. Emilia Barbosa, “Regina José Galindo's Body Talk: Performing Feminicide and Violence against Women in 279 Golpes,” *Latin American Perspectives* 41, no. 1 (January 2014): 61.

12. This sentence is taken from the curatorial statement from the exhibition *Interstices* (2016), co-curated with Sally Frater.

negotiation and dialogue. An imagined process of detachment, discrepancy, and prolonged estrangement, and a longing for anchorage that seems at times unattainable. Gloria Anzaldúa offers wisdom for those who navigate this state of disorientation. She describes it as a state of *Nepantla*, derived from the Nahuatl word meaning an in-between state, an “uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another . . . when traveling from the present identity into a new identity.” To her, “*Nepantla* is the midway point between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted . . . a place we can accept contradiction and paradox.”¹³

various ways Latin American diaspora artists in Canada navigate a state of identity disassociation. Chilean-Canadian artist Isabel M. Martínez's series of chromogenic prints *The Weekend* (2008–10), showcased in *Interstices*, stages various times of day, periods of weather, and life cycles that either avoid or fail to offer a complete and accurate depiction of reality. Instead, the chromogenic prints synthesize a fragmented memory that can easily be erased and forgotten. Under the surface, we witness a dualism that overcasts an ongoing experience, a lifetime of shadows, and plays with relationships and aspirations, appearing in both personal and existential realities. Mexican-Canadian artist Laura Barrón, in contrast to this imprecise depiction, offered the installation *North* (2017) in the exhibition *Life in Flight*, composed of a series of photographs along the shores of Lake Ontario (on the southern edge of the city) in which individuals face south rather than the camera. The video component of *North* (2018) includes the merging of these same portraits, which now face us yet have indistinguishable features (fig. 5). North and South are in constant



FIGURE 5. Laura Barrón, still from *North*, 2018, video, 03:20 (photograph courtesy of the artist)

dialogue with one another, their histories, thoughts, and concerns merge into one single gaze. This exploration refers to not only what is missing but also the power of the collective and how these voices from South and North are interrelated. For Argentinean-Canadian artist José Luis Torres, his prefabricated and found objects are re-contextualized and become vessels through which to reflect on notions of space and place, memory and the relationship between body and site, as well as the process of transition entailed in exile. For his installation *The Ultimate Map* (2014), exhibited in *Interstices*, Torres uses measuring tapes to construct a wall map of the world. Using materials that represent the permanent construction of our everyday lives the work suggests that any topographical attempt to accurately reproduce the earth and all of its territories is fictional and impossible (fig. 6).

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Working in a predominantly Anglo-Canadian sphere, Latin American Canadian women confront a much more challenging path than their fellow male colleagues. Artists such as Julieta Maria, Claudia Bernal, and Maria Ezcurra actively contribute to a critical dialogue, yet they are rarely noted or recognized. In the exhibition *Strike a Chord* (2017), Colombian-Canadian artist Claudia Bernal presents the installation and performance *The Sleepwalkers* (2017, fig. 7). Sleepwalking, being a combined state of

sleeping and wakefulness, is a phenomenon we can all in some way relate to during times of anxiety and uncertainty. It works in tandem with the state of Nepantla discussed above, blurring the lines of illusion and form. Bernal exposes the reality of sleepwalkers: as agents who act despite their state of unconsciousness, despite their blocked sight; agents who define their actions based on the course of their own stories and trajectories. Bernal leaves traces of the body in performance, and we are left with an installation of scattered pieces as we struggle to decipher the meaning of a shared dream.

Getting Therse (2015), a video performance installation by Colombian-Canadian artist Julieta Maria, shares an opulent Canadian landscape with no signs of human life. Within a few minutes, a body emerges on the path of rocks and we slowly identify the artist's full frontal naked self. We understand that she does not belong in this context, in this situation, in this geographical landscape. She walks barefoot upon jagged rocks. We witness the difficulty and painful vulnerability as she emerges from a camouflaged to an overt state of presence. This fluid and controversial manifestation of identity poses questions of marginality, invisibility, and the importance of land for those who are in constant migration. Julieta Maria's video performance *Limpia* (2013), meaning "clean" or "she cleans" in Spanish, is a mother-daughter performance where the artist washes away invisible marks of pain, unseen trauma, and distress unclearly defined and performed through the act of licking her daughter's face (fig. 8). It is our mothers who acknowledge our pain, who are in tune with our past and future, and who can offer healing and understanding when all else fails. This raw and beautiful state of true belonging can only be found in a place of total acceptance and comfort. Maria's body is the protagonist of her video performances. In *Embrace* (2012), she holds a living fish and squeezes it against her naked chest as we hear the waves and wind blow against her back (fig. 9). Are we the fish, captured and immobile, as we await our death, destined for consumption? Are we the person embracing guilt and our own complicity, capable of changing the course of our and others' destiny? Most of us could be both, living precarious lives, destined to be either active agents or subjects of abuse. Julieta Maria manifests as a survivor capable of healing and knowing her position, flowing from one place to another with ease. Her voice is poetic and strong, ahead of her time, as she offers images that linger in a contemporary vernacular.



FIGURE 6. José Luis Torres, detail of *The Ultimate Map*, 2014, measuring tape and nails, 72 x 144 in. (183 x 366 cm) (photograph by Mirna Chacín, courtesy of Sur Gallery)



FIGURE 7. Claudia Bernal, *The Sleepwalkers*, 2017, digital prints, textile fibers, gravel, synthetic hair, sound by Thierry Gauthier (photograph by Mirna Chacín, courtesy of Sur Gallery)



FIGURE 8. Julieta Maria, video still of *Limpia*, 2013, digital video, 2:25 (photograph courtesy of the artist)



FIGURE 9. Julieta Maria, video still of *Embrace*, 2012, digital video, 2:00 (photograph courtesy of the artist)

Maria Ezcurra shares the same power as Julieta Maria, but instead uses the missing body as a departing point denouncing violence perpetuated against women. The exhibition *In Your Shoes* (2016) was the Argentinean-Canadian artist's first solo show in Toronto. Ezcurra

constructed disembodied anomalous installations that engulf the gallery space by displaying disenfranchised communities, all of which engendered painful memories of perpetual inequality and violence. The disappearance and murder of women is a truth few choose to address, as



FIGURE 10. Maria Ezcurra, *Invisible*, 2016, installation made of nylon stockings (photograph by Mirna Chacín, courtesy of Sur Gallery)

it entails confronting a trauma inherited and painfully ignored. Ezcurra's stretched nylons, hanging emergency rescue blankets, and empty and floating high heels contained in panty hose look like tears shed and remind us of the abuse women endure throughout the Americas. Missing bodies eerily reminiscent of the disappeared in Argentina during the military dictatorship are also heavily evocative of the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. Despite efforts for reconciliation with Indigenous communities, the Canadian government's colonial genocidal practices cannot be ignored. It is a truth few brave artists choose to address, and the intergenerational trauma inherited is often dismissed, as the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women remain painfully unresolved (fig. 10).

HORIZONTAL DIALOGUES

As I navigate perspectives of Latin American art and its multiplicity in Canada, I continue to be drawn by my own experiences of longing, of mourning, searching for political agency, manifestations of historical references,

alluding to Nepantla identities and their social implications, all the while attempting to promote these contributions by exhibiting and documenting them. I hope to offer a glimpse of a Latin American Canadian vernacular and begin a conversation, a dialogue of translation between artists who are caught between two hemispheres, ignored by their adopted country and forgotten by their homeland. This method of translation has inevitably led me to seek an understanding of our own responsibility and role as immigrants and settlers to this land.

Canada prides itself on its multiculturalism and its ability to open its doors to immigrants from all over the world, setting the standard quite low by constantly comparing themselves to their southern neighbor. Nevertheless, as subaltern theorist Silvia Cusicanqui claims, echoing Camnitzer's ideas on multiculturalism, it "has been the concealing mechanism par excellence for new forms of colonization," and these identity formations constructed by a Canadian imaginary play out an ornamental role as we continue to witness marginalization and exclusion of

Indigenous and racialized voices in the arts.¹⁴ Adding to this critique, Slavoj Žižek asserts that the “ideal form of global capitalism is multiculturalism . . . it maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position . . . the multiculturalist respect for the Other’s specificity is the very form of asserting one’s own superiority.”¹⁵ For this reason, this active dialogue must expand beyond South-to-South circuits to reach out to Indigenous communities throughout the Americas.

As disenfranchised and racialized people working within a hegemonic structural system that privileges white artists and curators, this need to collaborate with Indigenous artists and critical thinkers has also been part of my curatorial agenda. As described above, in *Power in Resistance* I invited Cree artist Meryl McMaster to exhibit alongside other Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. Her photograph *Truth to Power* (2017) references the role and vision Duncan Campbell Scott played in the development and administration of Canada’s residential school system. As deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, he believed Indigenous communities were primitive peoples “doomed” to disappear and it was the duty of the government to introduce them to civilization. The method used was the forced enrollment of Indigenous children in residential schools, a process that subjected children to abuse, torture, and death. Ironically, Scott is also remembered as an icon of Canadian poetry. He wrote *The Onondaga Madonna* in 1898,¹⁶ in which he racializes an Onondaga woman and her child, painting them as

“savage,” “pagan,” and “doomed.” This poem is written in McMaster’s *Truth to Power* by the hand of a ten-year-old Indigenous Kahnawà: ke girl, 119 years later. Adjacent to the handwritten poem is the portrait of the artist, who stands defiant. Despite being surrounded by Scott’s legacy and a system that continues to oppress and ignore, future generations prevail and heal; they resist and overcome the unimaginable. McMaster’s photograph reminds us of the resiliency we carry and the strength endured as we overcome the challenge of erasure. Because life is a continual cycle, I recall why I came to this country as a twenty-day-old infant in the arms of a frightened twenty-three-year-old mother escaping a brutal dictatorship and entering the unimaginable outcome of our exile. As we continue to demand and struggle for a future that acknowledges our truths, we also need to embrace memory, for without addressing the past, reconciliation will never be possible. It is within this recognition that we can begin an intersectional dialogue, which not only places value on neglected, decontextualized, and erased voices but attends to wounds difficult to heal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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14. Silvia Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 54.

15. Slavoj Žižek, “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 225 (September–October 1997): 44.

16. Duncan Campbell Scott, “The Onondaga Madonna,” Representative Poetry Online, (Toronto: University of Toronto Libraries, 1998), <https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/onondaga-madonna>.