

Historias de Maíz

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Para mi mamá Lisseth, lirio proveedor

For my mother Lisseth, the lily that always gives

Para mi abuela Gilma, maíz que nutre

For my grandmother, who's maize nurtures

Para Sandra Semchuk, árbol frondoso que da sombra

For Sandra, tree that provides shade

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My thesis research is an investigation of Guatemala's history, where I am from. I do this in resistance to silence, venerating and collaborating with my ancestors.

The silence I speak of is a Guatemalan characteristic that entails never speaking about trauma. The trauma of violence, war and the wounds left by the colonization of indigenous peoples by the Spanish. This silence exists in my home where the recent war is seldom talked about, it exists in school classrooms where we are not taught history, and it exists in the public as forms of self hate and neglect of the other.

But this silence is broken by the iq' (wind) on the day of the dead. During the celebrations for the day of the dead in Guatemala, communities gather each year on November the 1st to construct giant kites that with their flight take messages to the dead. But within these messages there exists resistance. I am using the idea of the kite to venerate and communicate with the people of the CIRMA archive (center for mesoamerican research), that is an archive of guatemalan history through the lense of a camera.

The photographs of the archive are witnesses of history, they break the silence and deny the lies. I have separated this archive in two group, the perpetrators that stand as witnesses, and the photographs that symbolize collective memories and ancestors whom I wish to venerate in the creation of a memory sculptures that function as kites that cannot fly. The heaviness of their material, that of the cement and steel ground the kites to the earth as symbols of what repression and silence can create. I hope that by the creation of these sculptures I am able to resurrect these spirits and celebrate them in hopes that their memory can be not only acknowledged, but released.

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“Never does one open the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter. For the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to emerge, people approach it indirectly by postponing until it matures, by letting it come when it is ready to come. There is no catching, no pushing, no directing, no breaking through, no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes. Time and space are not something entirely exterior to oneself, something that one has, keeps, saves, wastes, or loses.”

- Trinh T. Minh-ha

“Europa nos donó sus idiomas y sus guerras, su política y su vergüenza pudorosa ante lo ajeno. En todas las medias verdades siempre se tuercen los senderos.”

- Javier Payeras

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My practice is made of personal investigations regarding reality and history. I explore reality in various forms, and from different angles each time. The first time I researched reality, I was working with the terms Hyperreality and Simulacra. I was obsessed with Jean Baudrillard's ideas, and how he had somewhat predicted the new age of technology. I believed that photography had the potential of mimicking life in such detail it could replace it. Technology, specifically in the mediums of photography and video, had changed the new generation's way of viewing facts and "reality"(13). The closer I came to examine these ideas the more I realized that reality has a context. The context of geographical location and privilege: you need to be able to afford technology. This brought me to investigate the realities of "the third world". Specifically the realities of Guatemala, where I was born and raised. How does a nation abandoned in a system full of corruption operate? How does the reality of Guatemala come to explain its history? I am looking to narrate my reality as I investigate where I came from - although I want to state that my work is not about me, it's about collective memories. The memories of the spirits that guide me every day. *De los abuelos y abuelas que me cargan y me guían*. I also want to state that because this work is invested in Guatemalan roots, it might not be for everyone. I am happy to have a Canadian audience, and potentially a global audience, but to truly understand it you would have to be made out of maize, like me. The gods of my grandmother tried making men and women out of mud and wood. These materials didn't work, so then the Gods tried with maize. That is the story of how the first Mayan men and women were created (*Popol Vuh, Las Antiguas Historias del Quiché*). The maize men and women were subsequently conquered by Spanish armies, and after years of colonization, many Guatemalans are now mixed. This mix is referred to as Ladinos. The term ladino is used to refer to Guatemalans who are mixed

Indigenous and European; people who no longer speak a Mayan language or wear Mayan clothes (Ladinos - Orientation). I am a ladina - a question I get often, as people see my white resemblance - but say I am Guatemalan. Not that you, the reader, need to know my genealogy, but for the sake of this text: my mother is of Mayan descent, and my father, like me, mixed Mayan and European. Vestiges of German and Spanish, he says. Therefore, this text is about how I construct a reality through a short story, photographic archives and Guatemalan artistic customs: Solentiname, CIRMA y los barriletes gigantes de Sumpango y Santiago.

The methodology of my practice is the visual output of a storyteller. My job as an artist is to tell stories; but instead of only using words I use *Jitanjáforas*<sup>1</sup>, the mediums of photography, sculpture and lithography. As a Guatemalan I carry myself in silence. What we do is subtle and hidden underneath veils of protection and sometimes lies. The lies of withholding information on purpose, the lies of the silence-culture that violence proclaims. Some call it paradoxes, I call it dualities. In my case, two realities that will never find each other's translation. *De Guatemala a Canadá*. This paper exists within tensions of multiple times, geographies, and skepticism overall.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the Guatemalan style of writing called *Prosa Lirica*. It translates to lyrical prose. It is a form that uses common language, or what is known to be prose, while remaining poetic. It is also known for the use of *Jitanjáforas*. A *Jitanjáfora* is a word that is either made up or used purposefully for its auditory form. (Bellini).



Arraigo, stranded in the here and there. In the now and never. In an asymptote reality that lies between dreams and truths. Entangled realities where I can't tell what is certain. Which one happened. *Horizontal es la verdad* (Truth is horizontal).

Archives are truth keepers.

Ruido

Rabioso

Rebelde

Never trust anything I say.

*Escalando hasta aquí, donde te encontré por casualidad. La casualidad del sonar de tu obturador. Porque allí fue donde me robaste este momento. Que está entre pasar y no pasar. Entre aquí y allá.*

(Climbing here, where I found you by accident, the same accident your shutter creates. There, where you stole my moment, that is between the truth and a shadow.)

In the present we stand, but we live in the past. Our thoughts are made out of compilations of memories, lessons, and moments. What is the future? The combination of moments passed, making the 'right now' a past. As you read this, the 'this' belongs to the past. As I write this, 'this' becomes a yesterday. Not a today.

Rápido

Raro

Reacio

I am a firm believer in firmly believing nothing.

How can I describe history as an artist through archives, photography, and statistics?

Ritual

Remington

Real

*Un viento rabioso me trajo aquí. Y ahora aquí atrapada estoy.*

(A violent wind brought me here, where I am trapped.)

Reality is not possible without time. And time does not let moments be static. Moments are forever passengers in a train with no stops and destinations. So how do you describe facts in a unstable paradigm like that of reality and time? In these cases, dreams become less illogical, and more appropriate than “truths”.

But violence as a variable makes reality a subject for the living. Where there is violence, there is nothing that matters but survival. Violence is silence. That is when the train stops, fragmented and frozen by terror.

Raíz

Respeto

Rabinal

It is no coincidence that photographers refer to their practice with the verb shooting.

Riachuelo

Ríos

Recinos

*Me gustan las palabras con erres, suenan a lucha. Suenan como si tu boca prendió fuego. Juego con tu boca, fuego con tu espalda, juego, juego, fuego. Fuego con tu boca, fuego con tu espalda, fuego, fuego, juego.*

(I like the sound ‘R’s’ make, they sound of rebellion. Like your mouth is about to burst in flames.)

Ronroneo

Ron

Rincón

*Espero que te hayan gustado los barriletes.*

(I hope they liked the kites.)

The dead speak more truths than the living. The living have agendas, the dead have memories.

Represión

Refugio

Recuperación

I need to teach myself the history of Guatemala, because no one did. No one does, it's a taboo of memories that are still missing.

Resistencia

Rocío

Reflexión

**El ahora**, the now. Now what? It's a paradox. It cannot be represented, because every fleeting moment now belongs to the past. The now creates memory. In memory we stand. It is this memory that constructs who we are as humans, not time. Photography to me is the physical representation of the now. A stolen moment engraved in a mimetic object based on lies. The lies of the now. And although pictorial painting was similar in the way that it tried to reconstruct a moment, photography steals it as it is in the hands of anyone to use it at their discretion. But what is this discretion concerned of, in a digital time like the one of our now?

...I had an encounter with a man once, he told me about a trip he made to Nicaragua. He spoke about the people, and how warm they were and how well they had received him, they even took him to a local party (*Bienvenido sea usted* to the banana republic). Not really thinking about what it meant, he took photos of the town: kids playing football, cows in the field, and people going about their day with smiles on their faces. Then he took photos of a few paintings he had encountered in the town hall made by some of the locals. He thought they were interesting because the painters had no training in the arts, so they were not forced to go by the rules of the art world. They painted what they knew: some *vaquitas, montes y ríos*. He and I shared a moment, a fascination for the mundane. He photographed the paintings, not thinking what it meant to be stealing these people's moments. He went back home (he was an Argentinean living in Paris). All was good. His wife greeted him and offered to develop the negatives of his trip (you see, he was old when he told me this story, so photography was not digital, that magical moment when you don't know what will turn up still existed). Days passed. He hadn't really thought of those people and their lives, but remembered the photos, and thought what a nice surprise it would be to show his wife those paintings of the *vaquitas*. He was so excited, he prepared the projector for the slides and thought "I'll give them *una ojeadita*, before she comes home". And there they were: the kids were no longer playing football, they were learning how to use a gun; they were homeless sleeping close to a toy store for the ladinos; they were dying fighting for a war that was not theirs. Nicaragua was no longer, it was all Latin America. *La*

sierra Lacandona, los volcanes, el cura guerrillero, un Anaité.<sup>2</sup> Then his wife came in, and she said “Pero que tiernas esas vaquitas”.

He cried,

he didn't know how

he didn't know now

he didn't now now

Ahora mismo (qué palabra, ahora, qué estúpida mentira)

- Julio Cortázar en Las babas del diablo.

He probably had gone mad. He might have just dreamt it all. What matters is dreams and reality, they intersect so much no longer are we forced to separate them to understand the now. You see he didn't really tell me, I read it. Julio Cortázar<sup>3</sup> and I never met, never will meet, but we shall always share that nightmare. This story taught me that the indexical mark of time can be captured in a photograph. Simulacra is not here, said violence to his friend logic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **Anaité**: an isolated truth of that of the technological city. A jungle far away from the rules of men and society. A place of liberation as well as terror; the terror of there being no rules that govern constructs we are born to understand as our reality (Monteforte).

<sup>3</sup> Julio Cortázar was an Argentinian writer who witnessed a similar form of violence in his country, making him finally migrate to Paris.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Baudrillard starts his book Simulacra and Simulation by introducing a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. It might have been lost in translation, or maybe Baudrillard did not fully understand the story, but Borges subtly hints at reality. In his story there is a town obsessed with mapping itself, to the point that they create a map as big as the town. Further generations forget about the town and the map is abandoned, left to be destroyed by the earth itself along with the homeless and abandoned. Are the homeless in this story the unrepresented? The truths that don't lie if you give it a chance and actually look?

What happens now? When all that you know crumbles to the ground. When all your memories are stored as fiction inside your skin. When you realize photography and all those lies that were told to you about history and how we came to be as humans are... lies. And when you realize that people don't learn from history but from mistakes, and that war is never going to be in the past but in the now. Because people are always going to find something to fight about, because we are animals. And that's what we do; territorial specimens that were given faculties of thought, but were always, will always, be animals.



Fig.1: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Apocalipsis en Guatemala*, 2016

This photograph (Fig. 1) is a double exposure of a historical photograph of the internal conflict in Guatemala during the 80's with a photograph of a “kodak” moment of Guatemala's landscape. It was my first attempt at re-creating the story “Apocalipsis en Solentiname” (which I have briefly translated in the story above).

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My mother used to tell me stories before bedtime every night, but as I grew older I imagine she ran out of stories to tell me and started reading to me. One of the authors was Julio Cortázar, and one of the stories was *Apocalipsis en Solentiname*. I didn't fully understand it, but I knew it was important when her voice started to break. It turned out she was a student during the 42 year conflict in Guatemala (she attended the public university 'Universidad San Carlos de Guatemala, famous for hosting *arbenzistas*<sup>5</sup> and leftist leaders). She was not a radical herself, but witnessed first-hand the violence and the trauma of forced disappearances. She doesn't really speak about it, I don't really ask her either. That is why I did not ask why she was upset after reading the story to me. I didn't have to ask because I knew.

It is a Guatemalan characteristic to stay in silence. Silence is harder on you because you don't face the problem, but easier to perform. So when the American education I received in Guatemala did not teach me about the conflict, colonialism, and repression in general; I decided I needed to confront it myself. (Regardless of the education received during class time and the curriculum set by my high school and primary school, everyone still knew, deep down, about the divide that exists in Guatemala.)

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<sup>5</sup> Arbenzistas is a term given to followers of the ex president Jacobo Árbenz that was taken out of power by a coup d'état in 1954 staged by the USA (García Ferreira).



In 2015 after having lived in Canada for six years, I returned to Guatemala, eager to start a fresh career as an artist. I got a job in an artist residency, and through the residency I was able to apply for a grant that would give me access to archives of Guatemalan history<sup>6</sup>. In my mind Cortázar's story still set the stage for a new project, I just needed to conceptualize the images I was going to use of the 'reality' of the conflict (the nightmare part of his story "Apocalipsis en Solentiname", the part where he no longer saw what he had photographed, but what was happening in the land and the war). Once I gained the entrance to the archive I realized how

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<sup>6</sup> The archive of photographs I have been using to create my work comes from archives of historic photography compiled by the institution CIRMA, specifically their program 'Fototeca CIRMA'. (Center for Mesoamerican Regional Investigation). The name of the archives and file number for the photographs chosen are as follows:

Familia Taracena Flores

- 007-003-105
- 007-003-106
- 007-003-107

Jonathan Moller Nuestra Cultura es Nuestra Resistencia

- 049-001-011
- 049-001-060
- 049-001-095
- 049-001-096

Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres

- 60-006-022
- 60-006-051
- 60-006-459
- 60-008-086
- 60-008-283
- 60-015-069

Comité Holandés de Solidaridad con el Pueblo de Guatemala

- 117-001-127
- 117-001-147
- 117-002-042
- 117-002-119
- 117-004-255
- 117-009-022

See Appendix for more information.

much more it meant to see photos and documents of a war I had only heard of and not seen.

Things started to click, the rampant violence of the city I grew up in started to make sense. How could someone who had seen the things portrayed in the photographs in real life not be affected, when I as a distanced viewer was affected? How could a person have a 'normal' life after being in the presence of this type of violence?

My mother's story and Guatemala's story is important to my practice, it not only informs who I am but it is the foundation of what I want to research in my work. The war I am speaking of has its roots in 1954, when a coup d'état overthrew the president Jacobo Árbenz who was aiming at implementing an agrarian reform that would greatly affect the way the United Fruit Company ran their business. After that, the fear for communism driven by existing hate between Ladinos and Indigenous Guatemalans fueled a war that ended in 1996 (Weld, 45). The war might have ended, but the hate remained. And amongst these violent winds I was born. I might have only passively witnessed the last years of the war (I was born on the 30th of September in 1990) but I fully witnessed the vestiges. My generation and the next was left to grow in broken country. The violence of the war became the fuel for the violence that nowadays haunts in the form of organized crime and corruption. It was the violence that drove me (and so many more people) to leave.

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Fig. 2: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Barrilete Gigante en Sumpango*, 2017

Birds have a sort of freedom that allows them to have migratory patterns humans can't have. Some migrate from north to south in the winter and have the right of passage. No hours wasted in lines to get a visa or problems being allowed to cross imaginary lines set by governments etc. They are free that way. Carried by the wind, like kites.

The kites I am specifically referring to are the kites flown for the Day of the Dead in two communities in Guatemala. On the first of November people gather in Sumpango and Santiago

Sacatepéquez to fly giant kites that have been in production for several months. Some are made just as birds to fly, but also communicate messages to the dead (and also the living). To the dead they are messages of hope and forms of protection, to the living they communicate resistance. Resistance of a culture that has been put down by years of discrimination, racism and violence. In the giant Guatemalan kites of Sumpango and Santiago there is always a central figure. Most of the times it is describing or venerating the dead. Sometimes this central figure is a form of resistance instead (for example, Fig. 3 portrays a kite made by kids that translates to: I don't need a job I need an education). In the case of my kites, I am trying to venerate the dead as well, the same way Guatemalans do for the day of the dead, but also send a message to the world that these specific deaths described by the photographs in the CIRMA archive are deaths that did not have closure. The photographs in the archive are filled with empty names, pictures of people that are long gone and whose names the world has forgotten. These kites are heavy and cemented in the ground, not to be flown.



Fig. 3: Pilar Guinea Gil, “*No Necesito Trabajo, Necesito Educación: Pequeños Guerreros*”, 2017

My “Kites that do not Fly” are made of steel rods, cement, and flowers. The cement and steel are used in response to the metaphor of heaviness I have created. The use of flowers is in response to the visual imagery used in the real kites of Sumpango and Santiago. Flowers during the day of the dead function in a similar way to flowers used in funerals. They are beautiful gifts to the dead, that mimic life’s delicate time on earth. What is important about these flowers is the colour. Part of the resistance of indigenous populations is colour. In the time of colonial Guatemala, the spanish placed rules upon indigenous people’s clothing. They were given a set of rules so that the spanish could tell them apart from population to population: ethnic group (Redacción Crónica). Within these rules indigenous people took upon themselves to resist with colourful designs. The kites are similar to the clothing indigenous people wear. The use of

flowers is linked to their colour and a signifier of time. The flowers will be fresh for the first few days in the cement. But they will die, like the Guatemalan people in the photographs and their memories.



Fig. 4: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Barriletes que no Vuelan*, 2017

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These kites function similarly to ‘memory sculptures’. Memory sculpture is a term referred to by Andreas Huyssen in his article “Sculpture, Materiality and Memory in an Age of Amnesia”. He describes memory sculptures as objects that have “an awareness that all memory is re-collection, re-presentation. It resists not only the erasure of a specific personal or political past, which may of course vary from artist to artist; it instead works against the erasure of pastness itself which, in its projects, remains indissolubly linked to the materiality of things and bodies in time and space.”(32). Memory, and the resistance of the erasure of a past is why I am

so attracted to these kites. They represent attitudes and momentums that I wish to also portray in my own work. I want to resist everything I was taught, in order to find my reality. That of a ladino and immigrant woman.

Huyssen's article is part of the catalogue for the exhibition "Displacement" in the Art Gallery of Ontario hosting three artists: Doris Salcedo, Mirosław Balka and Rachel Whiteread. Doris Salcedo's work inspires me through her use of lived objects from people whose life has been affected by the political climate of her country, Colombia. Her use of these everyday objects as types of memorials is something I am also trying to recreate in my work. Salcedo's use of material and the way she formulates resistance in her sculptures is similar to the sentiment I wish to portray in my work.

Guatemala's history is linked to perpetual violence inflicted on indigenous populations, from the time of the arrival of the Spanish, to our current times. Maintaining the Mayan culture has been the ultimate form of resistance. The kites operate as memory sculptures because "memory is displacing of past into present, offering a trace of a past that can be experienced and read by the viewer". When the Spanish came they tried doing everything they could to erase Mayan culture; forcing their language, religion, and rule upon us.

*Nuestra memoria es nuestra cultura.*

Memory became culture.

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I am recreating memory sculptures through the use of eighteen photographs I was able to access with permissions granted by CIRMA (Center for Mesoamerican Regional Investigation). This institution hosts an archive of documents and photographs of Guatemalan history. As I sorted through the archive in search of the photos I was going to use, I kept an eye out for photographs that were representative of how Guatemala has been throughout history (at least since the time photographs started being taken). For example, the first photograph (Fig. 5) depicts a settler being carried by slaves. The next three photographs (Fig. 6) are of an execution during the time of the dictatorship of José María Orellana (1921 -1926)<sup>7</sup>. The rest are photographs taken during the civil war, as well as examples of how I see Guatemalan society function. One of the photographs (Fig. 7) of the military shows a white ladino in front of a line of many indigenous soldiers.

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<sup>7</sup> CIRMA archive notes.



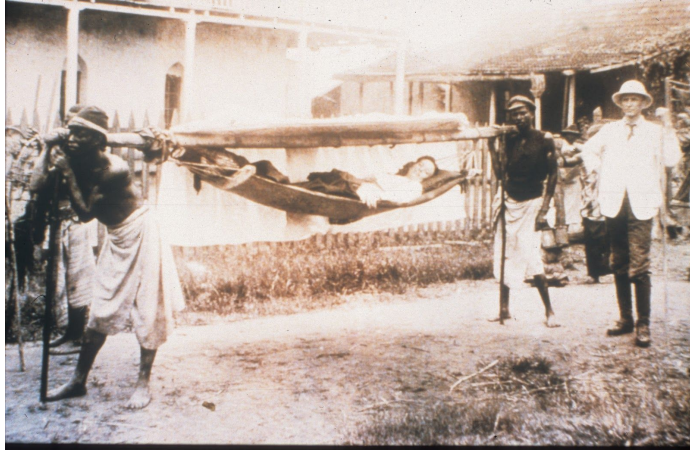


Fig.5: Unknown, *Plantation*, 1920. Used by permission of the Center for Mesoamerican Regional Investigation.



Fig.6: Unknown, *Sub-lieutenant Garrido executed*, 1924. Used by permission of the Center for Mesoamerican Regional Investigation.



Fig.7: Unknown, *Guatemalan official army procession in the streets*, 1980. Used by permission of the Center for Mesoamerican Regional Investigation.

I excluded photographs that recounted events and monuments (there were many photos that were taken from the farm industry and the construction of roads), and focused on war photographs. Most are from unknown sources because during times of war, photographers, along with their photographs, were being eliminated. (I also chose the least graphic photographs, out of respect for the dead.)

The idea of using photographs (specifically the ones from the CIRMA archive) came from a short story written by Julio Cortázar titled “Apocalipsis en Solentiname”, which I have already mentioned as one of my main sources of inspiration. I am cynical towards the medium of photography. I believed in Susan Sontag’s words in contrast, “The camera relieves us of the burden of memory. It surveys us like God, and it surveys for us. Yet no other god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget”(55). And as much as I keep these thoughts in mind when I am working with the medium of photography, I also know the truth behind *some* photographs. The CIRMA photographs are of real people, people that lost their lives in a stupid war, people that existed on this same world, that walked on this earth and had a life. They no longer are, but these vestiges are. I will use this vestige to remember what they once were, like I am right now.

One of the texts that helped me get to this realization was John Berger’s essay on “photographs of agony”. In this text he says:

“ [photographs] bring us up short. The most literal adjective that could be applied to them is arresting. We are seized by them. As we look at them, the moment of the other’s suffering engulfs us. We are filled with either despair or indignation. Despair takes on some of the other’s suffering to no purpose. Indignation demands action. We try to emerge from the moment of the photograph back into our lives. As we do so, the contrast is such that the resumption of our lives appears to be a hopelessly inadequate response to what we have just seen.” (38).

It took some time for me to be able to use these photographs. I was in a state of “arrest” until that same indignation Berger talks about took me to the place where the kites exist. The remembered is what is left of the disappeared.

Nuestra memoria es nuestra resistencia.

Memory is resistance.

---

The truth has many contexts, and it is different here than it is there (in this case Guatemala and Canada), which sometimes makes life confusing. Displacement and immigration are the causes of this confusion of mine. I have been trained as an artist in a very different place than where I grew up and became who I am. Having to accept these differences is what can bring these confused characters of the now and photography into a dimension of many overlapping, and yet discontinuous, truths. Both realities are vivid but never to meet, forever asymptotes. Having realized this, two colliding worlds of mine are what forms my practice. It is what has brought me to this indecisive space with more questions than answers. And in this realm is where my kites are born. Metal and cement impossibilities, useless to their jobs as kites, but conduits of lost translations and memories (the memories of the dead and unspoken for in the archive, and the lost translations of those who cannot tell their stories). In these memories and dreams are where my reality is constructed, in a mist of blurry detached statements of truths and lies. I am going through a divorce of thought and histories. I don’t believe in what I believed in before and in what I believe in now. Therefore working with an archive has become more about exploring and re-thinking the histories of where I come from, than having to establish how I feel about

them being in the form of photography. They belong to the kites, because as photographs they tell stories of moments lived in pain and resistance, not of moments lost to the lies of our modern world. I believe there are two worlds, two realities. One where a person can upload a photograph to Instagram of themselves with layers of makeup and fabricated photoshop layers, and one where a seeker of truth snaps the image of a radical student shot by the military for believing he could bring change.

One of the kites in Sumpango this year said on it: “**Pájaros con Suerte**”. Meaning, “birds with good luck”. (Fig.8) I hope these bird-like kites can fly far away with messages of change and resistance. May my cement kites fly one day. For now, I will continue to re-think and find alternative ways of constructing memory and reality through the mediums of sculpture and photography.



Fig. 8: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Pájaros Con Suerte*, 2017



Fig. 9: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Barriletes que Vuelan*, 2018

As the audience members walk the corridor towards the main installation of my work, “Barriletes que no vuelan”, I attempt to prepare them by giving them context, to introduce them to the inspiration for the work, the kites and the archive. They are welcomed with a video (Fig.9). The video is a double exposure of the flight of the kites with twelve of the photographs from the archive. As people move along the hallway there is a photograph of one of the massive kites (the previously mentioned kite with the phrase: “We do not need jobs, we need an education”). It is an example of the traditional kites used on the Day of the Dead that are so important in the understanding of my work. Beside that photograph are six other photographs from the CIRMA archive, not shown in the video. They are surrounded by a black rectangle painted on the wall. These photographs are of what, for me, symbolizes the perpetrators of the pain that now exists in Guatemala. I do not wish to venerate them like I am doing with my

ancestors and the rest of the people of Guatemala. I could not include them in the rest of the work, but history has to be accurately represented, therefore not including them at all was not an option. Through these photographs I represent the perpetrators as witnesses of history; I offer the photographs the agency to deny the lies. I provide a brief artist statement that describes the work overall, along with the list of the CIRMA photographs, descriptions and authors. The abstract was as follows:

“The Center for Mesoamerican Regional Investigation CIRMA houses a comprehensive archive of Guatemalan history. The many collections of photographs especially their “Fototeca Guatemala” provide a rich record of the historical evolution of the country, rescuing and preserving the visual memory of Guatemala.

This project is a visual exploration of Guatemalan history through the use of eighteen photographs obtained at CIRMA. Twelve of the photographs are portrayed as metaphorical kites in hopes that the spirits living within the photographs can obtain peace. The other six photographs are portrayed on this wall as witnesses of history.

The kites I speak of are part of the tradition for the “All Saints Day”, or “The Day of the Dead” in Guatemala (Santiago and Sumpango). During this day giant kites are flown to send messages to the dead, and to protect the living. It is a form of direct contact with our ancestors a form of resistance through our cultural practices as well as a denial of the silence created by war and European colonization.”





Fig.10: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Exhibition Image*, 2018.

Beside this hallway is the bigger room with wide windows and a tall wall (Fig.10). In this wall I placed two steel sculptures resembling a similar design and scale to the real kites in Guatemala, surrounded by flowers. These kites were meant to be a transition to the twelve kites that laid on the floor. These twelve kites on the floor contained twelve of the photographs of the archive, represented in the initial video. The photographs were placed on cement surrounded by real flowers and a steel frame that served as protectors and also symbols that resemble the real kites. This was the main installation, it depicted the sentiment of loss in a similar way a cemetery does. The flowers started to wither, and with that there was a sign of change, of time passing. Audience members spoke of the deep loss they felt looking while navigating the floor kites with

photographs. They reflected on the contradiction held in mind and heart between the cement bound kites and the release that their sun and seed pod-like structures offered (Fig.11).



Fig. 11: Pilar Guinea Gil, *Barriletes que no Vuelan*, 2018

Memory is selective, temporary, changing. It depicts what it wants to depict, sometimes the truth and sometimes a fleeting moment that is indescribable... I had a glimpse of what it meant to bring the spirit of Guatemala and the people's resistance with me. Guatemala was here, even if just for a second. Maybe this installation is a memorial to what I left once I migrated, or maybe it's a part of me, intrinsic to me, a substance that I will always carry. My mother's pain and joy, my ancestor's pain and joy. The joy of the breaking of silence, and the pain that gets transformed into resistance and indignation. This pain and joy were not only Guatemalan— they



became Canadian, they became global. My pain becomes your pain, the pain of Colten Boushie's family, and that of so many more in Canada suffering of similar disadvantage, racism, and neglect.

-----My mother's pain will be my pain, Guatemala's pain will be my pain,  
Canada's pain will be my pain; until the day this neglect ceases to exist. -----  
It is not in my nature to forgive.

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## Appendix:

### *Anonymous*

Sub-lieutenant Garrido and his father before his execution.  
Guatemala City, September 20th 1924.  
Taracena Flores collection.  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-007-03-105.

### *Anonymous*

Sub-lieutenant Garrido waiting for his execution.  
Guatemala City, September 20th 1924.  
Taracena Flores Collection.  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-007-03-106.

### *Anonymous*

Sub-lieutenant Garrido executed.  
Guatemala City, September 20th 1924.  
Taracena Flores Collection.  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-007-03-107.

### *Jonathan Moller*

Health care provider member of the CPR (Community of Population in Resistance).  
Xecuxap, Cabá, El Quiché , 1993.  
Jonathan Moller Archive.  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-049-01-011.

### *Jonathan Moller*

A young man's body buried by his father.  
Aldea San Francisco Javier, Nebaj, El Quiché 2000.  
Jonathan Moller Archive.  
Fototeca Guatemala. CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-049-01-060.

### *Jonathan Moller*

Don Daniel's unearthed family's remains, massacred in 1982.  
Marcos, Nebaj, El Quiché, 2000.  
Jonathan Moller Archive.  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number GT-CIRMA-FG-049-01-095.

*Jonathan Moller*

Don Daniel holding his disappeared father's photograph, who was massacred in 1982.  
El Quiché, 1993.  
Jonathan Moller Archive.  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-049-01-096.

*Luis Felipe Gonzalez*

Indigenous leaders strategizing their defense.  
Huehuetenango. Approximately 1980.  
Collection of the guerrilla army of the poor (EGP).  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-060-006-022.

*Luis Felipe Gonzalez*

Catholics receiving communion during a clandestine meeting. (Community in Resistance CPR).  
Ixacán, Huehuetenango. Approximately 1980.  
Collection of the guerrilla army of the poor (EGP).  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-060-006-051.

*Luis Felipe Gonzalez*

Community Reunion.  
Huehuetenango. Approximately 1980.  
Collection of the guerrilla army of the poor (EGP).  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-060-006-059.

*Anonymous*

Massacred victims in Panzós with a tag saying: "Stop the genocide in Guatemala".  
Panzós, Alta Verapaz. Approximately 1980.  
Collection of the guerrilla army of the poor (EGP).  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-060-008-283.

*Anonymous*

Guatemalan soldiers being trained by United States of America military official.  
Guatemala. Approximately 1980.  
Collection of the guerrilla army of the poor (EGP).  
Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.  
Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-060-015-069.

*Anonymous*

Victim of the repression.

Guatemala. Approximately 1980.

Archive of the Dutch committee in solidarity with the people of Guatemala.

Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.

Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-117-001-127.

*Anonymous*

Civilians forcefully recruited for the autodefense patrol (PAC).

Guatemala. Approximately 1980.

Archive of the Dutch committee in solidarity with the people of Guatemala.

Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.

Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-117-001-147.

*Paola Bocio*

Elder being carried in front of a soldier.

Guatemala. Approximately 1980.

Archive of the Dutch committee in solidarity with the people of Guatemala.

Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.

Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-117-002-042.

*Anonymous*

Guatemalan official army procession in the streets.

Guatemala City. Approximately 1980.

Archive of the Dutch committee in solidarity with the people of Guatemala.

Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.

Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-117-001-119.

*Anonymous*

Drunk men sleeping in the streets.

Guatemala City. Approximately 1980.

Archive of the Dutch committee in solidarity with the people of Guatemala.

Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.

Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-117-004-255.

*Anonymous*

Plantation.

Unknown location in Guatemala. 1920.

Archive of the Dutch committee in solidarity with the people of Guatemala. "History of Guatemala".

Fototeca Guatemala, CIRMA.

Reference number: GT-CIRMA-FG-117-009-0022.

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Ak'abal, Humberto; Bauer Paiz, Alfonso; Mack, Helen; Falla, Ricardo; López, Fernando; Polanco, Mario; Velásquez Nimatuj, Irma Alicia. *Rescatando Nuestra Memoria: Represión, Refugio y Recuperación de las Poblaciones Desarraigadas por la Violencia en Guatemala*. Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2009.

- Part of the CIRMA archives come from the investigations done for this book by the photographer Jonathan Moller. Moller and his colleagues were part of a group of activists in Guatemala during the early 90's trying to uncover Guatemala's truth during the internal conflict that lasted more than 30 years. This book is a compilation of stories from the survivors, photographs of the survivors, and the disappeared as a group of anthropologists dig them, as well as scholar essays describing the war. It helped me understand the reasons for the conflict as well as placing a narrative to part of the archives. It was a legitimate backbone to the stories told to me by my mother and other relatives during my upbringing in Guatemala.

Weld, Kirsten. *Paper Cadavers*. The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

- This book is another example of the surreal ways Guatemalan history and land work. A policeman, Edilberto Cifuentes, who used to work for the history department in the 'Universidad San Carlos de Guatemala', stumbles upon a massive archive of the national police in Guatemala that kept track of so called insurgents during the war. He was called in with a group of policeman when a munitions depot caught fire (a fire that would continue as the truth became uncovered). Because he was a historian, he was able to understand what these

documents meant for the creation of a legitimate peace treaty, instead of a pile of garbage as some other officers described the archive. The book describes some of the stories uncovered by the archives, along with some of the guatemalan history to give the photographic archive a context. It gave me an idea of how archives of troubled histories are treated in Guatemala, as well as being a representation of the stories made text told by the photographs of the CIRMA archive.

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