

VOLCANIC MEMORIES

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DEDICATION

A mi Padre y mi Maestro, Alberto. Es por tu amor y la sensibilidad de tu mirada hacia el arte y el mundo que aprendí a amar el arte y el mundo así con esa pasión y entrega que herede solo de ti. Es por tu compromiso hacia la paz, la creatividad y la humanidad que veo con estos ojos tan abiertos hacia un futuro como el que tu y yo soñamos. Gracias Papá por toda tu magia, tu canto y tu poesía por el arte y la vida!

A mi Madre, Chita. Mi centro, mi raíz y mi tierra. Eres tu el nido de esta vida que corre en mí. Tu amor y ternura son mis alas y el abrigo de todo mi espíritu y mi ser. Gracias Mamá por tu fuerza y tu belleza. Es por ti que el fuego corre por mi sangre y es por ti que estos pies están sembrados en Libertad.

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I would like to acknowledge that I am currently living and working on the unceded, traditional, ancestral, and current homelands of the Coast Salish Peoples including the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

As someone that comes from Latin America, I identify with the colonial history of Turtle Island and I feel a deep indignation in my heart for the pain and horror that colonialism has had on the indigenous peoples that belong to these territories. This acknowledgement is also very meaningful for me because I have spent the majority of my life on these lands. I consider this my home and therefore everything that is here is also within me. I am thankful to feel connected, to continue learning with humility, to feel solidarity and to be here, surrounded by so much ancestral beauty and history.

ABSTRACT

Volcanic Memories is a thesis project that explores cultural identity and how this unfolds through memory, history, time, and intergenerational experiences of trauma, celebration, hope, immigration and collective and personal nostalgia in the context of El Salvador and its diaspora. The entry point to this thesis project began with *Ajkewa*, which is my first installation in the MFA program. This work marks a transformation in regards to the character of my practice from working with 2D projected experimental digital moving image to one that inhabits space and dimensionality. With this first exercise of projection mapping, I became very interested in activating the way in which the viewer interacts with moving image, visual narrative, objects and the space that these elements inhabit. *Somos Shikilit* is an experimental digital interactive installation and forms part of my thesis exhibition. The title translates into We are Indigo - *Somos* is Spanish and *Shikilit* is Nahuat. This work explores cultural identity through the history of indigo in El Salvador. It is a nostalgic celebration and exploration of cultural identity through the use of colour, texture and abstract forms. With this piece I began exploring an iterative manner of working which has been a great creative exercise and is now informing my practice in a very significant way. The artwork titled *Shuchikisa* completes my thesis exhibition and project. It is a commemoration of the spirit of resistance and how this moves through time, history and memory. The title in Nahuat translates into “to bloom”. *Shuchikisa* is conceived to be a projection mapping moving image installation. Through this thesis project, I have learned to invest my practice further in a deep emotionality that is concerned with the complexities of my cultural identity as well as my experiences as part of the Salvadoran diaspora. Acknowledging the weight and significance of cultural, social and political inheritance has become important in my creative process and practice. In my work, these experiences are expressed in a manner where moving image, sound and sculptural form encompass the subliminal corners of my emotional intellect and imagination.

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INTRODUCTION

*I am the daughter of mercados, volcanic and fertile land.
I am the daughter of corn and shikilit blue.
I am the daughter of rancheras and pueblos magicos.
I am the daughter of a colourful, diverse and complex North.*

These multilayered cultural and personal experiences are the current framework for my art practice. They set the tone and character in terms of how I currently approach my artwork conceptually, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

My entire life has been saturated with stories of war, struggle and resistance but also an immense amount of hope. Fear has driven a lot of my life because war has had a very real impact on how my family and I exist in this world. It is because of war that I was born in a land that was unknown to my ancestors. It is because of war that for the majority of my life I have identified as an immigrant and have never returned to live in El Salvador, that tiny little Central American country my nuclear family once called home. When I was born my parents named me Libertad, which in Spanish means freedom. My father tells me that this meant hope for the newer generations. My brother and I were my parents' hope. My father is a visual artist and my mother was a high school teacher in El Salvador. From a very young age I learned that my imagination, emotions, ideas and thoughts could exist and be communicated in a visual way. As a little girl I remember sitting beside my father as he would paint or sketch. I would usually grab a piece of clay that he would always have in our home-studio and I would play pretend that I too was creating something important. These early experiences undoubtedly fomented a deep sense of value and passion for the arts in me.

In the second half of the 20th century, as the western world was engaging in its cold war, being an artist and a teacher in El Salvador were very dangerous things to be. To dream of a more just society and future was a very dangerous thing to do in a nation that was under the sinister command of a military dictatorship and the pervasive watch of the imperial Uncle Sam. But just like thousands of their Salvadoran counterparts, my parents dreamt as deep and as fearlessly as they could. My generation, known as the children of the war, have inherited those dreams. But with this inheritance also came the deep pain and trauma caused by that dark chapter of our collective history. Hope and Freedom. War and Pain. When I consider the root of my art practice and the purpose for doing any of this, I look to that. My creative process is directly linked to how I have inherited and how I am connected to these histories, cultures, traumas and experiences. As

a result, my process considers memory, nostalgia, celebration as well as hope. This montage of emotions and experiences drives my moving image and installations. In my work I want to discuss the gravity of such devastating and horrifying realities yet I am also very interested in reconciliation. I think it is important to challenge the homogeneous nature of colonialism and imperialism in the context of my story and those stories of the community and people that I care about. I want to remind us all that trauma, horror, pain or fear just like memory and time are not stagnant. What this means is that we cannot only exist in darkness, it is vital to transcend and propose new narratives or at least try. The complexity of these experiences is expressed through the abstraction and gestural character of my work yet a recognizable language through figure or symbolism still remains so as to facilitate an entry point. As they enter a space where the digital moving image exists in different layers and dimensions, my installations invite viewers to engage with these concepts and ideas in a holistic manner. Objects and/or sound encourage further navigation and interaction with the work. Reconciliation and reclamation cannot exist passively and in service to these ideas, my work asks the viewer to activate their experience by moving through the space and interact with the objects, sound and digital moving image.

AJKEWA

“Understand that Nahuat has its own order and structure and therefore it is not at all like Spanish. We cannot force it to fit where it does not.” - Genaro Ramirez Vasquez - *Native Nahuat speaker from Witzapan, El Salvador*



Figure 1, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Ajkewa (To take off)*, 2019. Projection mapping installation on CNC'd styrofoam.

My maternal great grandmother was illiterate; she could not write or read Spanish. She raised ten of her grandchildren including my mother in the land that she purchased by selling everything that she had. She was a spiritual healer and was profoundly connected to her people and her land. I think of her often. I think of her strength and resilience and how this has shaped my mother. Every thing I have learned about her and from her has been passed down to me through oral testimony. I come from a line of very strong women who have taught me that the mind is nothing without the heart. When I think about my cultural identity I always think about the binary in me; my mixed race. My whole life I have spoken two deeply colonial languages: Spanish and English. The first year of this thesis project was primarily dedicated to the exploration of cultural and personal identity through the reclamation of language.

In the months prior to starting the MFA program I learned of a sort of renaissance in El Salvador in regards to the revitalization of one of its indigenous languages. This language is known as Nahuat, not to be confused with Nahuatl, which is an Indigenous language spoken in Mexico. An exploration of the revitalization of this language, *Nawat Mujmusta* is the first book of its kind. Its pages have provided me with a thorough introduction to Nahuat culture and language with a translation in Spanish. Nahuat is deeply rooted in oral history and has survived in this way until now. Connecting with this language now in written form has allowed me access to another dimension of my cultural identity and ancestral heritage. I feel that the way we exist in and understand this world is rooted in language and culture. In a way, *Nawat Mujmusta* has given me access to a sacred ancestral home. As I have been discovering this unique book, I thought of asking my mother if her grandmother knew how to speak another language other than Spanish. My mother tells me that she knows very little of her grandmother's past. In the year 1932, when my great grandmother was in her early thirties, there was an ethnocide in El Salvador. This event is known as "La Matanza" or "The Massacre", over 30,000 people of indigenous Pipil ancestry lost their lives. Anyone that "looked" indigenous was persecuted and killed. The military government of that time banned every vestige of indigenous culture, including language, traditional clothing, and music. Fear drove most indigenous people to hide all outwards signs of

their identity. I have often wondered whether my ancestors hid as well. Thus identity and language have been an important preoccupation of mine.

The entry point to this thesis project began with *Ajkewa*, shown in fig 1, my first installation in the MFA program. This work marks a transformation in regards to the character of my practice from working with 2D projected experimental digital moving image to one that inhabits space and is projected onto objects. *Ajkewa* means “to take off” in Nahuatl. I chose this word because it metaphorically relates to the beginning of my journey into the tripartite of discovering a new language, a part of my cultural identity, and a new form of creative expression. As a digital artist I have become very comfortable with my medium. And even though I am always facing many new challenges, it is in a language and form I have become accustomed to. While conceptualizing this piece I wanted to optimize the digital tools that I felt I had a certain domain over, while introducing my practice to a more physical and concrete materiality. I was interested in working with physical objects and I wanted to bridge my skills and knowledge in this new work. In his essay, *Innovative Digital Moving Images: Structural Digital Video and Handmade Digital Cinema*, Pedro Ferreira states that “Digital Cinema offers new innovative forms and visions by exploitation of software, programming, interaction, random access, manipulation and data transformation, the digital media offers new practices for the experimental cinema.” He goes on to say, “I explore the cross-media possibilities and through digital media I attempt to create new images for the practice of experimental cinema. Combining digital video, montage, the possibilities to manipulate image through sound, interaction as well, exploring the possibilities of hybrid presentation of the work as traditional screening, installation or live act, embracing the digital aesthetic.”(Ferreira) I feel strongly about this hybrid approach. In this way, digital art is not an isolated practice, divided from other forms of arts. It is essentially a methodology that incorporates many types of interconnections with other art exercises together with other manners of presentations and enquiries. *Ajkewa* is my first attempt at embracing this spirit and all of these concepts in my practice.

The installation can be deconstructed into three main components. The first is the text in the form of 3D objects seen in figure 1. Working with a CNC machine technician the text objects were milled out of white styrofoam. The second component of the artwork is shown in figure 2, which is the projected moving image. I worked intuitively by creating basic shapes and forms in software and then built the image layer by layer. These shapes and forms are nascent of the concept of taking off, taking flight and therefore of moving through time towards something further and into the future. This work embraces a geometric abstraction and I wanted to provide a

continuous and repetitive gesture of wings spreading and of sails gently moving and passing. The blue hues and tones were an intuitive choice but were also reminiscent of the colours of the sky and ocean. The third and last component of *Ajkewa*, the projection mapping installation in the space can be seen in figure 1. With this first exercise of projection mapping, I challenged myself by allowing my moving images to break beyond the borders of a two-dimensional screen. I became very interested in activating the way in which the viewer interacts with moving image, visual narrative, objects and the space that these elements inhabit. This first expression of expanded moving image marked a breakthrough in my way of moving through my practice. It was very challenging, rewarding and incredibly exciting, and it set the tone for this thesis project.



Figure 2,
Rosalina
Libertad
Cerritos,
*Ajkewa (To
take off)*,
2019. Digital
Moving Image
Still.

HOME: THE REAL AND THE PERCEIVED

“Home may become a place of nostalgia, imagination, and memories that never actually happened but have been romanticized through the utopian desire for belongingness.” -
Kakali Bhattacharya

Diaspora for me means displacement from one’s original home. It means being far but feeling close. But what is home? Home is my Mestiza body. Home is my colonized body.

Home is my indigenous body. Home is my brown female body. Home is my decolonized spirit. Home is Libertad. Home is memory, movement, fluidity, connection, nostalgia and reclamation.

However, home is not singular and perhaps I have multiple homes.

I immigrated to Canada from Mexico City when I was seven years old. Immigrating under any condition is difficult, but immigrating as a child has its own challenges, complexities and complications of disconnectedness, hybridity and suspension. I identify as a Mestiza woman who was born in Mexico City to parents that come from El Salvador, Central America but who grew up in a western country called Canada. My Mestiza identity is always at the forefront in regards to how I approach my subjectivity in my work. Sometimes I feel as if I will never fully understand what it means to be of this mixed race because the answers to the origins of my ancestry or heritage seem so distant and out of reach. A colonial history that spans more than 500 years has obscured the possibility of finding concrete answers to many of my questions. Perhaps these things will come. There is conflict and tension in these experiences but there is also a multidimensionality which enriches my creative process and allows me to expand the ways in which I express myself. In this fragmentation, I locate abstractions in my visual language which are informed by these experiences of hybridity and plurality. My practice is actively and dynamically informed by a diasporic experience of identity, culture, language, memory and histories. Bhattacharya's interpretation of home connects me to my own feelings and ideas about cultural identity and heritage. Having immigrated at a very young age to Canada I have consistently felt that my connection to culture, place and home has always been in a sort of state of suspension. Neither here nor there. In this way, culture and identity exist in a state of the real and the perceived. I have only recently considered this to play a significant role in my work and research.

Eddie Aparicio is a visual artist living and working in Los Angeles. His work addresses immigration and the complexities of Latinx identity in the US and abroad. When reflecting upon his experience as part of the Salvadoran diaspora, he states that "I have a specific way of knowing through my family and their experiences that is worth thinking about, worth not ignoring." (Aparicio) He recounted a moment during his time in the MFA program at Yale University where one of his professors suggested that his work felt overburdened. He was told that such heavy topics might not be leaving space to make other things. In his work Aparicio is challenging the narratives that arise from complex colonial underpinnings and is therefore reclaiming space by embracing his own history. This leads me to consider that to be able to leave space to make other things we might have to first reconcile ourselves with doing the work of not forgetting and not ignoring our personal and collective histories/experiences. In my work there is a clear emphasis on exploring cultural identity and so it is important to contextualize my experience as part of the Salvadoran diaspora. I move slowly through these Mestiza, Salvadoran, diasporic experiences, emotions, sensations, thoughts and ideas. And I am discovering methods of accumulating, gathering and organizing information and material that feeds my practice.

Like Aparicio these methods take form through my lived experiences with my family and my community here and beyond. My practice in this way, is in constant movement, absorption and reflection of oral history and collective memory. There is a non-linear and asymmetrical nature to the way that I approach my digital/visual practice and I believe that this stems from the manner in which I perform or engage with my research. By constantly engaging and reconnecting myself to my identity as part of the Salvadoran diaspora I experience a kind of transcendence in regards to my ideas of what home means and symbolizes.

HIJAS DE LA GUERRA

We are like mirrors to each other. Somos las hijas de la guerra. We are the daughters of the war. We are the collectors of the shadows of our memories. We are the inspectors of the darkest alleys and corners of our collective history. We are the present constructors of a future that will never forget its past!

In her book *Memory and Intermediality in Artist's Moving Image*, Sarah Duncan describes the term postmemory as one that refers to the children of Holocaust survivors and how they identify with and inherit their parents' experiences. Duncan also uses the term 'indirect' memory which references a deep awareness of children in regards to their parents lived memories of traumatic experiences. Indirect memory. Indirect trauma. I have always felt deeply connected to my parents past experiences. The generation born during El Salvador's civil war is known as Los Hijos de la Guerra (The Children of War). We grew up during the war either in El Salvador or as a part of its diaspora. For a number of years now I have been looking at the work of two Salvadoran filmmakers, Tatiana Huezo and Marcela Zamora, who are part of this generation. Their work has had a very strong influence on me. I share their deep passion and sense of commitment to reclaiming a part of our collective memory and history. We are exploring similar subject matter but our visual expression is very different.

The documentary film, *El Lugar Mas Pequeño (The Tiniest Place)*, by Mexican-Salvadoran filmmaker Tatiana Huezo discusses the reconstruction of historical memory in relation to the civil war in El Salvador. The filmmaker has traveled back to Cinquera, El Salvador which is her father's hometown to try to reconcile with that part of her own personal history. Through the testimony of survivors of the war, the film takes us back to those horrendous years of government military repression. The survivors recall the personal pain of losing loved ones and the immense fear that they felt during that period of El Salvador's history. The film touches upon

the human aspect of war, the human lives that are affected and in this case how after many years of being displaced from their homes, a community tries to rebuild itself despite the horrors of the civil war. The film is a visual poem in the form of moving light that reminds us of the power of transcendence and reconciliation. Huezo is also part of the Salvadoran diaspora but she grew up in a very different country and cultural context than me. Despite this, I have found myself echoing the same emotions and experiences when it comes to our relationship with El Salvador.

Los Ofendidos (The Offended) is a documentary film by Nicaraguan-Salvadoran documentary filmmaker and journalist Marcela Zamora. This work is committed to revealing the very difficult truths and realities of people who suffered torture and persecution during the civil war in El Salvador. The filmmaker was motivated by her father's experience of torture. She recalls her own difficulties in building up the courage to sit down to talk with him about his experiences. In this film Zamora creates a safe and open space or platform for others to tell their stories of pain and suffering. This work is very difficult on a personal level because like so many Salvadoran families, I also have a family member that suffered torture during the civil war. I was separated from my mother at a very young age; because I was so young, I cannot recall this period in my life, but I know that even at that age, deep in my subconscious self, I was affected and impacted by her absence and by the gravity of her suffering. Zamora's work has a very formal and raw documentary style. She creates a very tense and uncomfortable experience both visually and conceptually as the issues she discusses are regarded as controversial and therefore provocative. She is unapologetic about the issues she explores in her work and her conviction to reveal and discover truths is a quality that has helped to drive some of my own inquiries regarding historical memory and intergenerational trauma in a Salvadoran context. I still think of certain scenes and moments in the film. I can still hear the wavering voice of a man when he recalls his own experience of torture. The intimacy and gravity of his pain still brings tears to my eyes and rage to my spirit and heart. Zamora's art reminds me that I am not alone and when I am thinking of my ideas and projects I always go back to artists like her.

While I am experimenting with imagery through the use of colour, texture, motion, interactivity and immersion and my work is dense with digital colour and imagery, the visual style of Zamora and Huezo is more loyal to traditional documentary filmmaking aesthetics, narrative styles and techniques. In this manner my moving image is not as direct as theirs but I am inspired and moved by their works. We are a generation that has inherited the scars, the struggle, the pain and the remnants of that dark period of our collective history. Filmmakers like Zamora and Huezo have helped me contextualize my work at a deeper level. This work of researching the past and trying to reconstruct a history that embraces inclusivity rather than exclusivity is also something

that has resonated with me. While history can be very exclusive and selective, at least when written down, the works of these artists seeks to challenge this by providing a platform for stories that might otherwise be unheard and unseen thus opening up a space for decolonization. This kind of work also emphasizes memory and history and the way that they are distinct but also interrelated. “History denotes both what has happened and quasi-scientific accounts of past events while memory is affective, subjective and virtual. Yet without memory there is no history as historiography depends on the transmission of memory in documents and testimony. The distinction between memory and history can be defined in terms of ‘different forms of knowing’ and ‘different concepts of temporality’.”(Sarah Duncan, 4) My work is in direct dialogue with Huezo and Zamora’s work as well as other Salvadoran artists/creatives of my generation as we are actively engaging with our historical/collective memory and our cultural identity. There is a lot of horror in our collective past. We have grown up hearing and knowing of these stories and histories and now we are all indirectly working together to share what we know and what we’re learning with each other and with the world.

SOMOS SHIKILIT

Moving Image. Movement and sound through time. And through time I am slowly discovering what my ancestors were made of and therefore what I myself am made of. Shikilit runs through our veins, our spirits and our hearts. But is it truly a part of us? Or was it made a part of us? There is poetry and warmth to this Indigo Blue. Our ancestral shadow is present and it reminds us that here, there is also violence, darkness, struggle and pain.

Somos Shikilit is an experimental digital interactive installation. The title translates into We are Indigo - *Somos* is Spanish and *Shikilit* is Nahuat. This work explores cultural identity through the history of indigo in El Salvador. It is a nostalgic celebration and exploration of cultural identity through the use of colour, texture and abstract forms.

I began developing this work at the end of the spring semester of my first year of graduate studies. My inquiries into cultural identity in the context of El Salvador led me to indigo. It was a completely new discovery for me as I had no knowledge of the link between indigo and this tiny Central American country. I was immediately intrigued and seduced by this ancestral blue connection to my history. Water, I discovered, is an integral element in the process of producing the indigo dye deposits. As I began visually conceptualizing this work I decided to focus on the different characteristics of water as well as the different stages of how indigo is produced in El

Salvador. As the indigo leaves are soaked and begin fermenting, they start to release their deep indigo blue colour into the water. As this process continues, the leaves are agitated in the water by two large paddles that are moved back and forth in large basins that in El Salvador are called pilas. A thick foam then appears that has a very peculiar and vibrant turquoise colour. The character of the water and the colours of processing the indigo dye inspired the blue and turquoise abstract visual element that is prominent throughout this work. But I wanted to draw a deeper human and historical connection to indigo. This led me to film the very intimate portraits of my family and friends, all of whom form part of the Salvadoran diaspora. An example of these portraits can be seen in figures 3 and 4. I also decided to do interviews with them by asking each one of them what they knew of indigo in El Salvador. In this way I was harvesting their knowledge and connection to this part of our history. These interviews were very informal and open. My family and friends were excited and curious to share what they knew and to also learn of what I knew. This part of the process was very rewarding as it was a collective exercise of reciprocity in the sense that we were all activating our connection to our indigo history. It was through these conversations that I learned that this history was tainted with a very dark colonial past. Thus this experience helped me reframe the nature and character of this work. The significance of these beautiful portraits became more evident and meaningful for me because it enriched the imagery but also the conceptual landscape of the work.



Figure 3, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit (We Are Indigo)*, 2020. Still image of an individual portrait.

Somos Shikilit for me is a culmination of those qualities that I have cared about since beginning the MFA program and even before then. More than any other work, I feel that the multidimensionality and complexity of how I understand my cultural identity is reflected in this piece. The blue indigo element represents the fluidity of water and as it constructs, reveals, and intertwines with these beautiful Salvadoran faces and portraits it becomes a metaphor for time, history and memory. The visual narrative becomes a metaphoric trajectory as the moving image at first is vivid and bright but as it moves through time it starts to fade and become dark melding past, present and the unknown future. We can also see a texture that looks like digital static that starts to absorb the portrait. This was a spontaneous encounter while developing this piece and I decided to invite it into the image in the sense that I let it stay without much intervention. In her essay, *In Defense of the Poor Image*, artist Hito Steyerl discusses the poor image. She describes the poor image as “a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped...”



Figure 4, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit* (We Are Indigo), 2020. Still image of an individual portrait.

In my work when I confront what in digital language is called an artifact or a “mistake”, most times I decide to let these experiences move and guide me forward in the work as I am not always interested in rendering pristine and perfect images. For me these artifacts can possess the

same qualities as a poor image. In *Somos Shikilit*, as the digital static starts to disintegrate, rip and deteriorate the portraits, they then begin to take on a new form. The digital noise creates a rich texture and the visual narrative becomes engaging and interesting. This enriches the metaphoric quality of this work even further as the weight of the visuals become more expressive, poetic and enigmatic.



Figure 5, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit (We Are Indigo)*, 2020. Digital moving image installation. (Projection mapping on white linen fabric.) - Iteration #1

As I moved into the installation phase of *Somos Shikilit*, it became important for me to create an immersive experience and activating my work as a projection mapping installation has allowed me just that. I used fabric, which seemed like a natural extension of indigo as textiles have a very strong connection and history to indigo dye. I decided to project each individual portrait on a rectangular shaped piece of white linen as seen in figure 5. In my search for fabrics I was looking for something that had enough density so that the projected moving image could be readable and that would hang in a streamlined manner. I arranged the different textiles screens in the space to invite the viewer to walk around and interact with the work.

The screens are suspended from the ceiling at different heights and at different depths, close enough to each other to give a sense of collectivity but far enough to allow for the power of each individual portrait to come through. In this arrangement, these screen textile elements are also a symbol of diaspora. Diaspora is a term derived from the Greek verb diaspeirō which means “I scatter” or “I spread about”. In *Somos Shikilit* I spread and scattered the textiles screens in the space to embody the concept of diaspora further. Projection mapping as a creative experience is expansive in itself as it presents so many possibilities and opportunities to redefine and transform the work. I spent around a week or so playing and experimenting in the space until I found its ultimate form. Projecting the fluid moving blue indigo element onto, through and beyond the white linen fabric screens, and even onto the back wall and ceiling brought cohesiveness to the entire installation. A second iteration for this work is seen in figure 6 where I had the opportunity to participate in a micro residency at the New Media Gallery in New Westminster. The purpose of this residency was to add interactivity to this work. I used the interviews that I had recorded as the interactive element. For three days I worked to learn a new interactive software and conceptualized how to integrate the sound.



Figure 6, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit (We Are Indigo)*, 2020. Digital moving image interactive installation. (Projection mapping installation during micro residency at the New Media Gallery.) - Iteration #2

In figure 6 *Somos Shikilit* does not function in the same way as in figure 5, but in regards to its interactivity with sound it was alive and dynamic. In this experience, as the viewer approached each portrait, it would trigger the corresponding interview. As the viewer moves through the space, multiple tracks play over each other. The tracks are both in Spanish and English and I felt that this added a deeper dimension to how this work functions in regards to a diasporic context and experience. Figure 7 shows the third iteration of *Somos Shikilit*. I reinstalled it in the same space as the first iteration however this version now had sound. Just like in figure 5 the viewer was invited to enter the space and intuitively discover that as they approached each portrait they would then trigger the corresponding interview. The work becomes more dynamic as each conversation starts to overlap the next as there is a certain lag between one interview and the other. So as the viewer moves around the space and approaches a new portrait, the sound from the last portrait is still being heard. The sound is also triggered by more movement, therefore it is even further activated as more viewers interact with the work. The experience of this installation with the sound integrated completed the immersive and expansive character of *Somos Shikilit*.



Figure 7, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit (We Are Indigo)*, 2020. Digital moving image interactive installation. (Projection mapping on white linen fabric.) - Iteration #3

In her essay, *Archival Activations - the writings by Nam June Paik*, Hanna B. Holding discusses how Paik “challenged the common understanding of an artwork as a physical object and how an artist might relinquish uniqueness and singularity in favour of producing many versions of his works. Among Paik’s greatest innovations—and among the greatest challenges to traditional collecting, conservation, and presentation—was his rejection of the singular authentic object, in support of which he habitually released work in numerous versions, variations, and clones.” The experience of *Somos Shikilit* has taken on somewhat similar qualities and characteristics that are iconic to Paik’s language and works. I am learning also to detach myself from a singular and unique version of a work. And I am opening myself up to this sort of creative transcendence where site and place can dictate how a work exists. However, it is not until I installed the fourth iteration of *Somos Shikilit* for the thesis exhibition that I started to fully engage with this creative philosophy and strategy. With every new iteration I had the opportunity to reinvent and reimagine a work while still maintaining a certain fidelity to core components. As seen in figure 10, *Somos Shikilit* is quite distinct from its 3rd iteration, but there are still many aspects that I decided to keep the same. The space I installed this iteration in was very different than the previous and so it was exciting to reimagine *Somos Shikilit* in this new dimensional context. One of the advantages of working in an iterative way is that there is a creative dialogue between intuitive and informed decisions. This is true I think for most creative processes but when you are working in an iterative way you are able to explore and experiment with the same or similar elements.

I am finding that every new experience with a work is not quite new in the sense that every iteration is informed by the latter. What is new is the process of editing which introduces new possibilities and directions for the work. A great example of this is Nam June Paik’s installation titled *TV Buddha*. In every new iteration this work has been transformed yet the core components have remained the same: a statue of a Buddha is always sitting in front of a television monitor. Yet in every iteration Paik depicts Buddha in different forms and states; such as sitting, standing or just the head of the Buddha resting on a pile of dirt. The materiality of Buddha changes from bronze, to wood, to gold or in some iterations there are markings on the Buddha. The type of TV monitor also changes with each installation and in contrast to the statue of the Buddha which is ancient and timeless, the changing TV monitor reflects the current time period the installation is in. With the iterative evolution of *TV Buddha*, Paik is successful in depicting a juxtaposition of modern and emerging technologies with religious and historical themes. Figures 8 and 9 show two different iterations of *TV Buddha* more than a decade apart. Working in this manner of rejecting a singular unique version of an artwork can seem counterintuitive and almost full of indecision and



Figure 8, Nam June Paik, TV Buddha, 1974.
(Image by John Krannenberg)



Figure 9, Nam June Paik, TV Buddha, 1989.
(Image by Biennale of Sydney)

lack of commitment. But I have found that it can be incredibly rewarding in regards to what one can learn from approaching the same creative exercise but from different angles and through different strategies. The iterative process is allowing me the opportunity to be more courageous with the kinds of choices I am making because I feel a certain confidence in knowing that I can explore other possibilities in future iterations. This is very exciting for me as it has allowed me a lot of room and freedom to open up to further experimentation as I feel less conflicted and less fearful of the creative choices I am making. This methodology and process is also allowing me to stay longer with a work which is giving me the opportunity to connect and delve deeper. The exchange of giving and gaining from the experience I think is also richer because with each iteration I am learning to identify the successes and failures of the work.

With *Somos Shikilit* one the components that has remained consistent throughout all of the different iterations is the moving image as well as the suspended elements in the space. What I have experimented with and transformed the most has been the sound and how it is triggered through interactivity with the other elements of the installation. Also the objects in the space have also evolved in regards to their form. In previous iterations the textile was a modest intervention in space as I just chose to cut and suspend it in the space maintaining a more natural form and state. However, with this last iteration, I found myself really wanting to push myself out of my comfort zone and explore space and form in a completely different manner. I chose to attempt to mold and sculpt the large piece of textile so as to create a wave like form that would feel more fluid and organic. Doing this helped me create more harmony and cohesiveness between the textile objects and the content of the moving image. In the previous iterations there

was a disconnection and tension between the fluid and organic character of the moving image and the rectangular shaped textile screen objects. Also the space in which I installed the fourth iteration in guided the manner in which I wanted to treat the textile sculptural object. I wanted to intervene the entire space with the textile because I also wanted to project the moving image at a larger scale than the previous iteration. There were aspects and qualities of the moving image that had been lost in the previous installation and I wanted that to be at the forefront of the work. It is important for me to engage the viewer with how the moving image is existing and activating a space. I am very interested in creating an experience where the moving image takes on a sculptural and physical form that a viewer can interact with and explore by moving around it. Figures 10, 11 and 12 depict the fourth iteration.



Figure 10, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit (We Are Indigo)*, 2021. Digital moving image interactive installation. (Projection mapping on white linen fabric.) - Iteration #4

In his immersive large scale video and sound installations the prolific and video art pioneer, Bill Viola, is able to provoke and surprise the viewer. His visceral use of slow motion and sound as well as his reference to historical artworks is captivating and seductive. His slow moving image allows the viewer to fully absorb qualities of the image that can be missed in a more automatic and normally paced context. His work challenges the viewer to engage with the liminal and to

discover aspects of the image and sound that might be otherwise be overlooked. Viola emphasizes expression through slow motion and it is quite incredible to observe those in between moments and details of changes and transformation in gesture and expression. With *Somos Shikilit* I am embracing these similar qualities and strategies to challenge and engage the viewer. But rather than using slow motion, I am using existing architecture and sculptural objects or forms to evoke a similar experience. So as to enhance this sense of abstraction, distortion, transformation and liminality of the image, I decided to use a more transparent fabric because I was interested in creating distinct layers for the moving image to flow and move upon. In its previous iteration, the moving image was projected onto a linen that was more matte and dense.



Figure 11 & 12, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Somos Shikilit (We Are Indigo)*, 2021.
Digital moving image interactive installation. (Projection mapping on white linen fabric.) - Iteration #4

This made the image adhere to the fabric surface without allowing much of the image to go through. This experience taught me that I could achieve very intriguing results were I to use a fabric that was more transparent. The different folds and layers of the transparent fabric allowed more depth and dimension for the projected moving image. The shadows casted on the wall by the sculptural fabric blended with the projected moving image created a trompe l'oeil optical illusion. This lyrical montage of shadows and image was striking and exciting for me as it introduced yet another dimension of how the moving image is operating with the objects and the architecture in the space. Just as the visual experience changed in this new space, so did the sound. In this fourth iteration instead of showing the six portraits together I decided to show only

three at a time. This was the most obvious change to the how the sound was functioning in this iteration. Just as Viola uses sound in his work to create a more palpable immersive experience, in this fourth iteration of *Somos Shikilit* the interactivity with the sound and its volume is attempting to function in similar ways. As the viewer approaches each portrait the volume of the sound in the space increases so as to implicitly ask for a focused attention. And as the viewer moves around the space the volume of the sound also increases. In this way sound accompanies the moving image and immerses the viewer deeper into the work.

SHUCHIKISA



Figure 13, Rosalina Libertad Cerritos, *Shuchikisa (To Bloom)*, 2021. Digital moving image installation. (Projection mapping on white linen.)

“An Indian had died.

Anti-Christian, anti-cultural...

They could once again, in a civilized manner,

*build gallows, crack whips, reward executioners” - Roque Dalton, in reference to the execution
of Anastasio Aquino*

Anastasio Aquino was an indigenous leader who led a campesino uprising in El Salvador known as the Insurrection of the Nonualcos in the early 19th century. He came from the Nonualco peoples and thus his uprising is referred to the Uprising of the Nonualcos. He was an indigo plantation worker. After the arrest of his brother who worked at the same plantation, he called for a rebellion. Thousands of plantation workers and indigenous peoples organized to rebel against the government. The rebellion was unsuccessful and Aquino was ultimately captured and executed. His corpse was then beheaded. His head was then placed in an iron cage with a sign that read “Example for the Rebels”. Aquino’s legacy has inspired a profound sense of rebellion and resistance in Salvadoran culture and society. One of El Salvador’s most celebrated poets, Roque Dalton, referred to this legacy in various poems that he dedicated to Aquino. El Salvador’s history, just like the rest of the Americas, is tainted with colonial and imperial pain and horror. Social and political injustice is at the root of all of these rebellions, revolutions and unrest. The artwork titled *Shuchikisa* is a commemoration of the spirit of resistance and how this moves through time, history and memory. In this work, I am continuing to inquire and explore cultural identity, personal/collective memory/history and how these are related to the history of indigo in El Salvador. *Shuchikisa* as shown in figure 13 is the second installation that forms completes my thesis exhibition. The title in Nahuatl translates into “to bloom”. *Shuchikisa* is conceived to be a projection mapping moving image installation. Fabric flower petals are suspended in the space and on the background there is a projection of a white blooming flower. In similar ways to the third iteration of *Somos Shikilit*, the textile petals are scattered in the space again functioning as a metaphor for the scattered reality of diasporas. This fragmentation of the moving image constitutes a visual configuration of digital moving image memory. The petals function as different windows or screens that are an active invitation to the viewer to participate in the act of memory as they observe each different window or screen. Different instances of blue blooming flowers are seen on the petal screens, and the flowers are also shedding their petals.

In her work, the Swiss video and installation artist, Pipilotti Rist, is always challenging the normative and standardized notions of the video screen. Her installations saturate a space with colour, dynamism and abstract visuals. Her piece, *Pixel Forest*, shown in figure 14 is composed of 3,000 LED lights in crystalline resin that are suspended from the ceiling. The colours are continuously changing in synchronization with the adjacent large-scale projections. These suspended crystalline resin objects function as particles of an exploded and fragmented screen that creates a space in which visitors become fully immersed. In *Shuchikisa*, the environmental fragmentation of the screen in the suspended textile petals function in similar ways. These petal screens are lit up with hues of indigo blues and transitory encounters are experienced with the constant changes of the moving image. Embodying space and dimensionality is a clear

characteristic in Rist's work. She has a great ability to mesmerize and generate full interaction and immersion with her installations. The placement and configuration of all of the different elements in her installations engage and activate the body. *Shuchikisa* is mirroring certain qualities found in Rist's work in the way that I have chosen to arrange and suspend the textile objects which asks the viewer to activate their experience by moving around and inside of the installation. The dialogue that occurs between the floating petal elements and the adjacent projection of the white blooming flower is also a quality that is found in *Pixel Forest*.

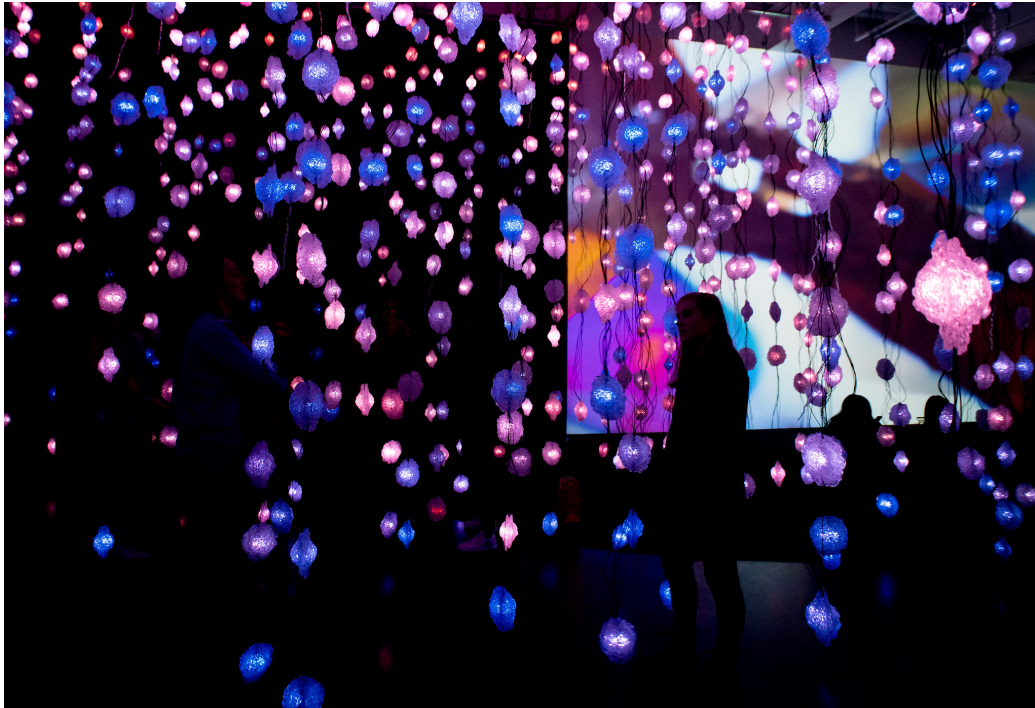


Figure 14, Pipilotti Rist, *Pixel Forest*, 2016. (Image by Victoria Pickering)

A blooming flower is a beautiful image that renders hope and a new life. The spirit of resistance for me is always a pathway to this. These petals are a commemoration to those humans that have marched and lived with this spirit in their hearts. Many have shed their petals and given their lives. Thus as *Shuchikisa* sheds, the petals transform, morph and distort into something that is no longer relatable to a petal. The act of commemoration holds the value of all of these voices and lives in our present time and in our memory. As the different windows or frames cross different temporal zones of the moving image, the flowers and the petals become a metaphor for how histories and memories are thickly filtered through the passing of time. Whether they are collective or more personal, our capacity to retain the exact experience as memory transforms yet the spirit remains intact. Some memories and histories are difficult to remember and to capture,

and even though *Shuchikisa* is mainly about hope it is also about injustice, indignation and pain. It is a celebration of the expanded spirit that exists in acts of courage, resistance and refusal.

CONCLUSION

Encountering and re encountering a work is an exercise I have learned to engage with during my MFA experience. Before beginning my graduate studies I was already experimenting a lot with deconstruction, fragmentation and deformation of moving image and sound. My visual language was embracing experimentation and abstraction. Yet I was feeling a certain preoccupation and frustration in regards to challenging and breaking away from the two-dimensional projected moving image. In my practice, immersion now means activating dimensionality and space with my moving image and sound. Through the experiences of *Ajkewa*, *Somos Shikilit* and *Shuchikisa* I have learned to redefine and reconstruct my own notions of how an expanded moving image can and should function in a space. To insist on a full activation of corporality and dimensionality is something that is very exciting for me. Through these creative exercises I have learned to allow the moving image and sound to move, play, transform and reimagine it self as it encounters different forms and objects in space. Through this thesis project, I have also learned to invest my practice further in a deep emotionality that is concerned with the complexities of my cultural identity as well as my experiences as part of the Salvadoran diaspora. In navigating themes of intergenerational trauma, celebration, hope, diaspora and collective and personal nostalgia I am attempting to reinvent and reclaim collective and personal narratives. Acknowledging the weight and significance of cultural, social and political inheritance has become important in my creative process and practice. In my work, these experiences are expressed in a manner where moving image, sound and sculptural form encompass the subliminal corners of my emotional intellect and imagination. I continue to be interested in the unpredictable character of experimentation and this is something that fills me with curiosity and excitement when I consider future projects. I am also learning to lean my practice closer to that of others that are investigating and working in similar ways. Discovering synergies between my own creative processes and those of other artists has significantly enriched and informed my practice.

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