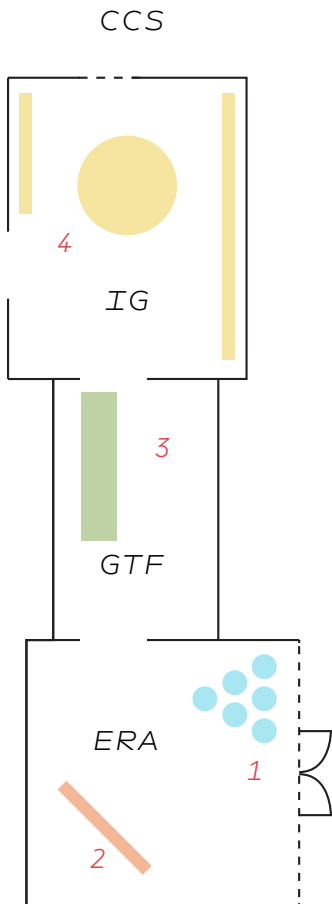


OE



Curated by Isabella Achenbach
Center for Curatorial Studies,
Bard College
Hessel Museum of Art

2022



Operational Excellence

Currency has a mystical power. We use it ritualistically. Swipes are the bass line of everyday life. Taps are the tom-toms, and the occasional coin the tinny hi-hats. While currency may structure the rhythm of contemporary society, it is also naturally evasive and abstract. Its use is a cryptic ritual that humans participate in, and the digitization of everyday life has only accelerated currency's secrecy. Experiments with fintech benefit from concealment. The three artists in this exhibition—Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, Ignacio Gatica, and Gabriella Torres-Ferrer—reveal how Latin American countries have historically and continuously been the testing grounds for these experiments, directed southward by the American institutions of Silicon Valley and Wall Street. The artists' objects of focus are their homes and places of origin: El Salvador, Chile, and Puerto Rico, respectively. In the hopes of synchronizing their informal economies with the tempo of globalized accumulation, these countries and territories have willingly legalized fintech projects such as institutionalized microfinance and microloans (Chile, 1980s and 1990s), US dollar exclusivity (El Salvador, 2000), untaxed capital gains (Puerto Rico, 2012), and Bitcoin as fiat money (El Salvador, 2021). Now, in a moment when cryptocurrency has swiftly become a lightning-rod global phenomenon, *Operational Excellence* considers the ways in which a lineage of dematerialized currency and the ostensible abstraction of value continue to fundamentally change infrastructure, ecology, and culture. When and where this occurs is the strategic result of imperial forces, and slippery forms of power and control are easily managed through digital financial infrastructures.



Much is hidden under the guise of financial help, aid, and even salvation. The ability to sell ideas of utopia or grand answers to seemingly any problem is one of technology's greatest assets, and cryptocurrency has a particularly strong emancipatory rhetoric. The artists in this exhibition counter this techno-optimism by raising issues of pollution, inaccessibility, and obsolescence. They have all experienced the forced adoption of financial systems and technologies that land in a place both too early and too late. Today, Bitcoin ATMs are part of the El Salvadoran landscape. Puerto Rico takes in more and more Silicon Valley transplants each year. And Chile is actively developing its own digital coins. These so-called upgrades benefit few.

Art has the ability to interrupt cacophonous, questionable information through creative interventions and the protective environment of the gallery space. The artworks featured in *Operational Excellence* are exorcisms of the invisible financial forces imposed on people daily.

IA

Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio

¹
Partidos Unidos, 2022
Volcanic rock, found house paint, dyed
artists pillow
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth
and Council, Los Angeles

²
De Colón a Dolar, 2019
Rubber, tree and paint residue, found
leather, acrylic, string, twine, wood
Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth
and Council, Los Angeles



Partidos Unidos (detail)



Born in 1990, Los Angeles, CA, Aparicio lives and works in Los Angeles

El Salvador's official currency—which began as the Salvadoran peso, was renamed the colón after Christopher Columbus, transitioned to the U.S. dollar, and now includes Bitcoin—provides the underlying history for two works by Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio. The first, *Partidos Unidos*, features a new material in the artist's oeuvre: black volcanic rock, referencing El Salvador's copious geothermal energy, currently exploited for crypto mining. The country's rocky landscape is covered in ad hoc, hand-painted advertising and political propaganda, such as the "N" logo of the Bitcoin-legalizing President Nayib Bukele. In its many elements, this work presents the complicated mutations experienced through the land and body as El Salvador continuously tests the livelihood of its population through drastic political and economic changes. *De Colón a Dólar* is made from distressed couch leather and a rubber cast of a ficus tree, both found or created in the El Salvador Community Corridor in Los Angeles. Painted on the bottom of the work is the signature of Columbus, and etched into the center reads "NO VALE NADA," or "it's worth nothing." Aparicio addresses histories of circulation through his materialist practice, which, in the midst of sweeping national corporatization, works to keep alive a long lineage of traditional Central American technological development, like that of rubber production.



Photos: Eddie Aparicio. Border of El Salvador and Guatemala, 2015

Gabriella Torres-Ferrer

3

Mine Your Own Business (8), 2022

Found objects, microcomputers, live data, electroluminescent LED panels, batteries, wires

Courtesy of the artist and EMBAJADA, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Gabriella Torres-Ferrer's electronic apparatuses attempt to live-mine Bitcoin in the gallery, primarily using battery power in contradiction to the exorbitant amount of energy required to mine the cryptocurrency from the grid. Made in the wake of Hurricane Maria and Puerto Rico's subsequent electrical grid collapse, the sculptural assemblages point to the extractive cryptocurrency mining industry that emerged post-hurricane and the ensuing commodification of the island's crisis. The year of the hurricane, 2017, was also a surge year for cryptocurrency, and blockchain entrepreneurs moved en masse to Puerto Rico seeking corporate tax breaks, ominously promising to create "blockchain island" while locals faced life-altering reconstruction. A similar pattern continues today, following impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic. Torres-Ferrer uses everyday consumer objects collected in Puerto Rico as support systems for coded computation and live data collection, forcing technological development to stand next to its own waste and pollution. *Mine Your Own Business* exposes ongoing colonialist practices that occur, often unseen, through digital and financial means.



Born in 1987, Arecibo, Puerto Rico, Torres-Ferrer lives and works in Berlin, Germany

BTC Medalla, 2018
Aluminum beer can, live Bitcoin cryptocurrency miner, 9 volt battery

Ignacio Gatica

4

Stones Above Diamonds, 2020-22

Stock ticker, live financial data, printed credit cards, card reader, aluminum shelves
Courtesy of the artist and Galería Patricia Ready, Vitacura, Chile

Ignacio Gatica's work reflects on the contemporary repercussions of the American neoliberal project in Chile, which introduced the free market economy as an experimental endeavor under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in the 1970s. This installation features a series of credit cards printed with photographs that document the boarded facades of banks in Santiago—a response to protests that broke out in 2019 and 2020 over increased metro fares. Each card is encrypted with unique messages gathered from graffiti tags around the city. Visitors can swipe the cards at the card reader, which in turn interrupts the stock ticker's live market feed with the street poetry, building the work both in its urgency and in its dynamic form of a poem, or chant, that is indicative of the class disparity in Chile. Printed and programmed in this way, Gatica's subversive cards are charged in the spirit of freedom, rather than debt. *Stones Above Diamonds* presents a sensitivity to language that empowers the human voice and collectivity in resistance to predatory financial enterprises.



Born in 1988, Santiago, Chile, Gatica lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

Reverse: Photo: Ignacio Gatica. Santiago, Chile, 2020

Back Cover: Translated phrases collected from Santiago graffiti, 2020

Stones Above Diamonds (detail), digital photograph

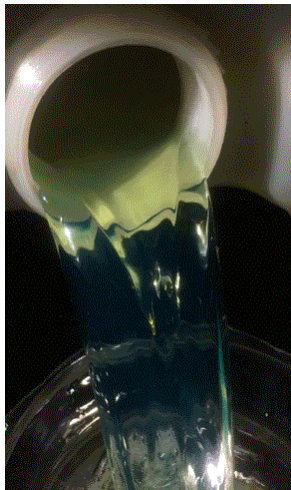


ACUÑA DE TORRE

TORRE



Photos: Gabriella Torres-Ferrer. General objects of consumption, 2019



Diesel, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2017

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ALL CURRENCY IS FAKE

VIOLENCE DOES NOT HEAL

I STILL WAIT FOR YOU MY FREEDOM

THE ECONOMY AS GOD

FRIENDSHIP AS RESISTANCE

THE DAILY LIFE THAT IMPOSES ON US

WHAT DO YOU HOLD ON TO

RECOLLECTION 30 DAYS

ARE YOUR DESIRES YOURS

YOUR SILENCE IS GUILT

DECORATING THE CAGE DOES NOT
FREE YOU

THE DEMONS THE DEVILS THE

Operational Excellence