

An abstract artwork featuring a dense, textured pattern of teal and black. The pattern consists of irregular, rounded shapes that resemble cells or organic forms, creating a complex, almost crystalline structure. The overall effect is one of depth and intricate detail.

Guatemala

from

33,000

km

CONTEMPORARY ART 1960-PRESENT

LARGE FONT BOOKLET

**MUSEUM COPY
PLEASE RETURN**

ART AND POLITICS

ART AND POLITICS

Roberto Cabrera Padilla

b. 1939, d. 2014, Guatemala

The Encounter (El encuentro), 1970

Mixed-media (iron, wood, fabric, automotive paint, glass, and resin)

Courtesy Colección Palacios Weymann / FUNBA, Antigua, Guatemala

Through a diverse artistic practice that included painting, drawing, printmaking, and sculpture using found objects, Roberto Cabrera Padilla's artworks expressed the social, cultural, and political dynamics of his time. During the cultural movement of the 1970s Cabrera Padilla was a member of the Grupo Vertebra that pleaded for an art that could be used as an instrument of social and political engagement. For example, this work recreates a dangerous urban scene, which became customary throughout the '60s and '70s due to state terrorism—imposed by the oligarchic, military dictatorship—against any dissidence or individual officially considered as leftist or communist.

Cabrera Padilla's encounter does not refer to a car accident, as it might seem at first glance, but to the assassinations of people labeled by the militarized state as "subversive." It is the clash between state violence and defenseless citizens, and between the ruling class and the guerrilla-organized population. The ironic title also expresses the critical distance from which the artist used

Guatemala's typical black humor to both face and evade the pain caused by violence, death, and terror; the "normal" climate for political struggle.

ART AND POLITICS

Lorenzo González Morales

b. 1973, Guatemala

Exhumation (Exhumación), 2004/2016

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the Artist

The tradition of Atitlán-style oil paintings of the Tz'utujil Maya artists describe daily life in the small lakefront towns of Santiago, San Marcos, and San Pedro in the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala. San Pedro La Laguna is home to many of the country's (and this exhibition's) artists, providing much source for thematic and cultural inspiration.

As early as the 1930s, this local painting style began to gain public attention when a handful of artists in San Juan and San Pedro painted the first depictions of rural Maya communities in contemporary times. Today, they are part of the folkloric arts and crafts traditions that make this area popular among tourists.

Paintings of the lake and surrounding volcanoes, coffee harvests, fiestas, landscapes, still life, and Maya traditions capture local Tz'utujil at work, rest, and play. These

paintings are distinguished by distinctive bird's-eye and ant's-eye perspectives said to be developed by Emilio Gonzalez Morales and his brother, Juan Fermin. Their brother, Lorenzo González Morales , featured in this exhibition, employs the tradition but inserts an uncanny, often dark point of view to the typically halcyon scenes which make his work stand out. In this work, González Morales depicts an exhumation, referring to the discovery of mass graves resulting from the massacres, forced disappearances, torture, and summary executions of Maya people at the hands of US-backed Guatemalan military forces which have been widespread since 1965 and were longstanding policies of the dictatorial regime.

ART AND POLITICS

Quique Lee

b. 1977, Guatemala

Here There was a Genocide / Here There Wasn't (Aquí si hubo genocidio / Aquí no), 2014

Acrylic embroidery on fabric

Courtesy collection of Hugo Quinto & Juan Pablo Lojo, Guatemala City

This work by artist Quique Lee denounces the Guatemalan judicial system based on their futility in adequately dealing with the atrocious crimes against humanity that were a result of Guatemala's civil war and the perpetrators who committed those crimes. Current legislation argues that since there was no explicit intention of totally annihilating

the indigenous people (but rather eliminating several thousands of them, who were considered subversive), civilian massacres shall not be typified as genocide under international law, which conditionally requires the express intent to engage in total extermination. Here, the artist employs two different fabrics with colorful, tropical design patterns as backdrops to text that either states plainly, “Here there was genocide,” and “Here there was no genocide.” The citizens of Guatemala still debate this topic even today. This work confronts the debate and stands as an act of refusal to deny the countless indigenous civilians whose lives were lost while also portraying the deep division that this has caused in the Guatemalan society.

ART AND POLITICS

Naufus Ramírez Figueroa

b. 1978, Guatemala

Blue Abstraction (Abstracción azul), 2010

Single-channel video (color, sound) (6 min. 38 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa was born in Guatemala City in 1978. He received a BFA in Media Arts from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was also a postgraduate researcher at Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, the Netherlands. Working in drawing, performance, sculpture, and video, the artist explores the entanglement of history and form through the lens of his

own displacement during and following Guatemala's civil war. Ramirez-Figueroa literally and figuratively adds color to an aesthetic conversation about the war that has been very "black and white." He describes how the dialogue around the war often labels one or the other side evil, without looking at the gray areas, including the different ways that people deal with trauma.

Blue Abstraction shows a dried up field under a gray sky, and Ramirez-Figueroa painting a character in chroma blue, a color used to insert figures or backgrounds in video through digital postproduction. Originally, the artist planned to paint the character blue precisely to make him disappear from the scene, but after painting him he realized the post-production edit wasn't necessary and that the act of painting the character alone "disappeared" him while highlighting the absence. The character represents his uncle who was "disappeared" when Ramirez-Figueroa was only six years old, the year that he first left Guatemala. The work speaks of disappearance, loss, and trauma.

"Trauma is something that doesn't fit into the narrative of your life, it stands out, and how the thing stands out, I expressed it through the neon blue," says the artist. By adding blue to a landscape heavy with violence and loss, the artist is asking whether there is room for other ways to process grief that go beyond placing blame.

ART AND POLITICS

Alberto Rodríguez Collía

b. 1985, Guatemala

The Truth (La verdad), 2010

Single-channel video (color, sound) (11 min. 14 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist

Alberto Rodríguez Collía studied printmaking at Art School 10 in Madrid, Spain. He mines archives (newspapers, television commercials, documentaries, video clips, and the internet) to produce video works, drawings and collages that explore the country's recent history and its implications for young generations of Guatemalans as well as the current urban culture in Guatemala City.

Often, Rodríguez Collía presents images borrowed from mass media to criticize the unstable social and political situation in his country. The artist mixes references to the so-called high and low cultures, as well as multiple disciplines (cinema, history, books, music, etc.) to explore the complex history and lived reality of Guatemala in the recent wake of a civil war. *The Truth*, for example, is an exhaustive portrait of Guatemala made entirely from footage from the 1980s found on YouTube. The video portrays the contradictions of a country at war that, at the same time, wanted to present a state of normality.

Rodríguez Collía is an example of the millennial generation in Guatemala that is investigating notions of truth, memory, and legacy anew. He states, "I believe that the majority of the artists of my generation are aware of the

political context of the country but few approach it in their works and that depends on the current moment in which we live, which encourages political disenchantment."

ART AND POLITICS

Isabel Ruiz

b. 1945, Guatemala

From **Besieged History** (De **Historia sitiada**), 1991

Mixed-media (Guarro paper, watercolor, LED lights, acrylic, wood, plastic, vegetable charcoal, and paraffin)

Courtesy the Artist and the 9.99 Gallery, Guatemala City

Isabel Ruiz studied art at the Popular University of Guatemala from 1964-1968. She is a teacher in art, specializing in fine arts and was one of the active members of the Galeria Imaginaria. Through printmaking, installation, and painting, Ruiz deals with issues of memory, justice, and the consequences of war on body, both individual as well as political.

Perhaps one of the most eloquent testimonies of the civil war is this seminal piece from the series **Besieged History** from the early 1990s. In it she uses charcoal to cover the floor, as well as charred rustic chairs typical of those made by indigenous folk artisans, with a candle burning on each one. The candles stand as mute witnesses of the flames that consumed so many of the people of Guatemala during the war and were reduced to ashes by the counterinsurgent military. The charcoal references the

communities that were burnt to the ground through the scorched-earth policy.

ART HISTORIES

ART HISTORIES

Moisés Barrios

b. 1946, Guatemala

Bananópolis, 2014

Acrylic on *Artforum* covers

Courtesy the Artist

Moisés Barrios was born in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, in the department of San Marcos, Guatemala. He worked in advertising, design, and printmaking before dedicating himself to a full-time career in art. *Bananópolis* is representative of one of the artist's ongoing preoccupations, the tropical banana and the vestige and footprint of the United Fruit Company (later known as the Chiquita Banana Company)–the Bananera–in Guatemala. For years, Barrios has studied this American incursion into the country's territory and economy, continually referring to it in diverse media and expressions. Further, he references the term “virus country” (a country prone to infecting neighboring countries with its subversive influences), which was used by the US State Department to describe a communist-leaning Guatemala during the Cold War.

The starting point for this particular series began as a result of a flood in the artist's house which damaged his collection of *Artforum* magazines. The artist intuitively and freely paints a banana peel pattern onto the damaged magazine images that once presented Eurocentric artistic

events and important stages of contemporary art, contaminating them in the process. With this intervention Barrios in effect “tropicalizes” the works, making allusions to a contagious disease or an invasive species. In this regard, he is suggesting a comparison between the story of invasion, occupation, and deterioration of Guatemala by the US-owned United Fruit Company and its associates.

ART HISTORIES

Jessica Lagunas & Roni Mocán

Jessica Lagunas, b.1971, Nicaragua; Roni Mocán, b. 1965, El Salvador

ARTchivo, 2000–ongoing

Mixed-media installation (885 press releases, 457 brochures, 320 postcards, 220 calendars, 170 programs, 128 checklist, 67 flyers, 24 posters, 34 maps, 61 reviews, 6 essays, 37 other documents)

Courtesy the Artists

Since arriving in New York at the end 2000, Jessica Lagunas and Roni Morcán began amassing ephemera distributed by art galleries, museums, and other cultural institutions they attended, including press releases, brochures, invitations, posters, postcards, and ads, among other similar items. This collection acted as a kind of index of their artistic exposure and development. Learning of this, the Guatemalan curator Rosina Cazali saw the artists’ collection as a record of the themes that interested them, including works that dealt with memory, nostalgia, the

passage of time, documentation of daily activities, and collections.

Invited to participate in Guatemala's Paiz Art Biennial in 2012, titled Coexist/Share, Lagunas and Morcán presented the archive as an art project, sharing the material with the public. The artists state, "ARTchivo is more than just a way of registering our cultural experiences; it's the way we see life, and how we document it, accumulate it, treasure it..." The project, which continues today and is updated constantly, attests to what could be understood as one of many reasons for the artists' migrating to the United States: better opportunities not only for life in general, but particularly for access to art and culture.

ART HISTORIES

Jorge de León

b. 1976, Guatemala

Study of Light and Shadow (Estudio de luz y sombra), 2014
Documentation of performance (video (color, sound)) (4 min. 6 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist. Photos, video and logistics: Persy Cantilo, Manuel Chavajay, Nora Pérez, Gerardo del Valle
Acknowledgements: Fundación Paiz para el Arte y la Cultura, Canal Cultural, Naviera Chavajay, La Colección Wolf Bauman, Guatemala City

In this riveting video performance, the artist blends autobiographical narrative with art historical sources and

influences. The video shows the naked body of the artist inserting himself carefully into the empty carcass of a cow hanging from hooks. With the help of fellow artist Manuel Chavajay, it took de León three years to complete the work and three weeks to record it in a butcher's shop in San Pedro La Laguna in the Lake Atitlán region.

De León is familiar with cattle entrails because, as a young boy, he lived with his grandmother who sold beef organ meats at their local market. Additionally, because he belonged to a family of artists—his great-grandfather, Rafael Rodríguez Padilla, was a painter and founder of the School of Fine Arts—at age 12, he received a book with images of one hundred art masterpieces. In it he saw the work of Rembrandt van Rijn, whose use of Tenebrism and Baroque lighting made a lasting impression. This work is influenced by Rembrandt's painting, *The Flayed Ox* (1655), which he had once read resembled the shape of a vagina. This work also calls to mind Pedro Almodóvar's film, *The Shrinking Lover* (2002), in which a tiny man, rapidly decreasing in size due to an elixir, disappears into a gigantic rubber vagina. Additionally, de León's work nods to the survivalist method of sleeping inside of a carcass to provide shelter from the cold (most recently seen in the 2015 film *The Revenant*).

ART HISTORIES

Andrea Mármol Juárez

b. 1988, Guatemala

The Abundance (La Abundancia), 2016

Audio (2 min. 58 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist

Andrea Mármol Juárez was born in La Antigua Guatemala and early on became an artist in residence at EspIRA in Nicaragua, a space promoting the art of the Central American isthmus. Although she has worked for several years as a painter, she has also experimented with new media including video, sound, and public interventions. She is a co-founder of MarES Association (Artistic Mediation Education and Development) in Guatemala, which promotes critical and reflective education of contemporary art through ARCALAB (Contemporary Art and Culture).

This work was created in collaboration with Miguel Rincón, a Colombian sound researcher who for many years has recorded audio of street vendors in Bogota selling such items as avocados, strawberries, and scrap. The artist sought out Rincón and asked to make a work together that resulted in a script that extracted *Las chancletas de Nayo Chaperó*, a song by Fidel Funes and his Marimba Orchestra.

ART HISTORIES

Feliciano Pop

b. 1925, Guatemala

Pop in the City (Pop en la ciudad), 1950–2015

Mixed-media installation (pumice stone, limestone, plastic, and polyester)

Courtesy the Artist and Benvenuto Chavajay

This installation of small sculptures is the brainchild of the artist Benvenuto Chavajay, also featured in this exhibition, in honor of the artist, Feliciano Pop, born in 1925. Both men hail from San Pedro La Laguna, Sololá, in the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala. Pop is a legendary Tz'utujil artist and former town mayor who, throughout his life, has dedicated himself to carving small, stone figurines of faces, deer, birds, monkeys, tigers, clocks, tanks, skeletons, coffers, and marimbas, among other things. Made of porous, vitreous rock formed by projected volcanic lava and taken from the surrounding area, the figurines are exhibited in his house like a swarm that hangs from innumerable threads. Chavajay's dedication to seeing Pop's work re-installed is a form of preserving both artists' Maya culture, because the documenting of tradition and passed-down artistic legacy from one generation to the other has not previously been a part of the historical canon or official history of Guatemala.

ART HISTORIES

Efraín Recinos

b. 1928, d. 2011, Guatemala

Guatemala Seen from 33,000 km of Distance (Guatemalita)

(Guatemala vista desde 33,000 kms de distancia

(Guatemalita)), 1960

Oil on masonite

Courtesy Colección John Gody, Guatemala City

Efraín Recinos was an architect, muralist, urbanist, painter, and sculptor and is among the most celebrated Guatemalan artists of the twentieth century. His works adorn the facades and interiors of many of Guatemala's landmark buildings, including the National Library of Guatemala and he is best known as the architect of the Centro Cultural Miguel Ángel Asturias, which serves as the country's national theater and largest cultural complex, which opened in 1978.

In 1960 Efraín Recinos completed this monumental painting in three panels on Masonite in which the outline of a planet is seen from space, partially obstructed only by a second celestial body, perhaps the moon. On the lower edge of the main planet is an anthropomorphized map of the country of Guatemala or as he called it, “Guatemalita.” He used this motif recurringly as a visual representation of the geography and symbolic identity of the country.

In addition to inspiring the title of this exhibition, the painting proposes the idea of Guatemala as part of a wider universe, perhaps as a utopian vision resulting from the promise of modernity inherited from the Guatemalan Democratic Decade (1944–1954); the notion of distance with respect to the country's realities and the rest of the world; and the relative difficulty of Guatemalan art to reach an international public.

ART HISTORIES

Gabriel Rodríguez

b. 1984, Guatemala

How I Became an Artist, 2013

Single-channel video (color, sound) (27 min. 6 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist

Gabriel Rodríguez was born in Guatemala City where he currently lives and works. While he originally studied architecture, he ventured into the field of visual art, creating videos, installations, and architectural interventions that draw from the history of art, particularly conceptual practices. He also founded the art space Sótano 1 in downtown Guatemala City in 2013 which has developed into a defining venue for the growing independent art scene of the city. His work is known for pushing viewers to the limit of tolerability, exposing the absurdities of social mores with a humorously subversive style.

Shot overhead, *How I Became an Artist* comprises hours of the artist flipping through pages and pages of books, catalogs, and magazines from the art world. Among them are Taschen and Phaidon art catalogs, exhibition publications by artists Ernesto Neto, Gabriel Orozco, and Banksy, and Artforum magazines and advertisements. The video is a reference to the artist's self-taught status as a contemporary artist, and the voracious desire to learn about the broader global art scene in a country with a

limited art education infrastructure. This lack of access is a problem shared among many of his contemporaries who live and work in Guatemala, a country that currently offers no MFA program in studio art or PHD in art history. Conversely, Rodriguez also takes a facetious approach, suggesting the futile gesture of learning to become an artist by simply leafing through pages of images.

ART HISTORIES

Mario Santizo

b. 1984, Guatemala

The Surrender (La rendición), 2008

Digital photography, exhibition copy

Courtesy the Artist

Mario Santizo is originally from Zaragoza, Chimaltenango and lives and works in Guatemala City. He studied at the National School of Fine Arts “Rafael Rodríguez Padilla” in Guatemala City and works with photography, drawing, painting, and animation, among other media. Santizo is a founding member of the Experimental Graphics Workshop of Guatemala (TEGG). He is also currently the coordinator of the exhibition space TRAMA.

This photograph is a contemporary re-staging of Diego Velázquez’ Spanish Baroque masterpiece, *The Surrender of Breda* (1634-35), which depicts the moment on the fifth of June, 1625, when the Dutch general Justin Nassau surrendered the Dutch town of Breda to Spanish forces led

by General Ambrosio Spínola. Painted for the Spanish court, this is a portrayal of submission and magnanimity on the part of the Spanish. Santizo's version is a comment on the culture of corruption that pervades the country.

Produced for the 2008 Paiz Art Biennial, *The Surrender* is a montage of several partial photographs made with simple equipment. Santizo himself reenacts all the characters, along with the help of an actor who took the role of the clown. Those on the left embody a type of urban savagery with stereotypical figures like the heavy-metal head, surfer, hippie, etc. In the middle of the scene, the Santizo character appears again submissively delivering a cell phone and a wallet to the clown backed by policemen, suggesting that extortions, amongst other crimes, have the full support of the armed forces.

ART HISTORIES

Studio Lake Vereea

Francisca Rivero-Lake, b. 1973, Mexico; Carla Vereea

Hernández, b. 1978, Mexico

Left to Right: *Portraits of the Current State of the Murals of Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) in Guatemala City Made between 1956–1964: IGSS (1964) (Retratos del estado actual de los Murales de Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) en la Ciudad de Guatemala realizados entre 1956–1964: IGSS (1964))*

Portraits of the Current State of the Murals of Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) in Guatemala City Made between 1956–1964: Civic Center, Guatemala (1956) (Retratos del estado actual

de los Murales de Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) en la Ciudad de Guatemala realizados entre 1956–1964: Centro Cívico, Guatemala (1956))

Portraits of the Current State of the Murals of Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) in Guatemala City Made between 1956-1964: Edificio Italia (1958-60) (Retratos del estado actual de los Murales de Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) en la Ciudad de Guatemala realizados entre 1956–1964: Edificio Italia (1958-60))

Portraits of the Current State of the Murals of Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) in Guatemala City Made between 1956-1964: Villa Dora (1958) (Retratos del estado actual de los Murales de Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) en la Ciudad de Guatemala realizados entre 1956–1964: Villa Dora (1958))

All works: 2010

C-prints

Courtesy the Artists

Studio Lake-Verea is made up of the artists Francisca Rivero-Lake and Carla Verea Hernández who both live and work in Mexico City. The series of photographs presented here show the current state of publicly commissioned artworks by the celebrated artist Carlos Merida in *Guatemala City Made between 1953–1956*. Studio Lake-Verea's photographs analyze the legacy of Modernism with particular regard to Mexican and Guatemalan architecture. Modern architecture emerged at the end of the nineteenth century from revolutions in technology, engineering and building materials, and from a desire to break away from

historical architectural styles and to invent something that was purely functional and new. Termed “modern ruins,” the artists’ representation of once-revered artworks show them now abandoned, destroyed, or scarcely cared for. This underscores the passage of time and the eventual desecration of the purist, utopian ideals of Modernism found in Merida’s works.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Ramón Ávila

b. 1934, Spain

Morphs (Morfías), 1963

Ink on paper

Courtesy Colección John Gody, Guatemala City

Born in Barcelona, Spain, Ramón Ávila Bayona moved to Guatemala after having lived in Brazil for several years. Although his academic background focused on graphic design, the artist is generally regarded as having introduced the intuitive, spontaneous, and gestural style of *Tachisme* into Guatemala. Working with a loaded brush, producing marks with sweeping brushstrokes, drips, blots, stains, and splashes of color, Ávila's figurative work drew from Maya indigenous cultures he learned about while living in the country. Ávila contributed greatly to a culture of experimentation with materials and forms that developed in Guatemalan art during the second half of the twentieth century.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Darío Escobar

b. 1971, Guatemala

Kukulkán, 2009

Vulcanized rubber, steel, and bronze

Courtesy Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach,
California, Gift of Hugo Quinto, Ciudad de Guatemala,
M.2010.017

Conceptual artist Darío Escobar studied architecture and graduated from Rafael Landívar University, Guatemala City, and also studied visual arts at the National School of Fine Arts, Guatemala City. He has garnered international attention for artwork that merges precision and meticulous technique, traditional Guatemalan crafts, Maya mythologies, Spanish Baroque and Catholic influences, and mass-produced materials from popular culture and sports (such as soccer balls, pool cues, skateboards, and bicycle wheels). His resulting artworks, whether sculptures, paintings, or installations, are intentionally hybrid references to the diversity that make up the Guatemalan consciousness.

Kukulkán is one of a series of works, all variations on a theme inspired by the feathered serpent deity of Mesoamerican mythology. One Maya story relates that Kukulkán was a boy who was born a snake. As he grew older it became obvious that he was the plumed serpent and his sister cared for him in a cave. He grew to such a size that his sister was unable to continue feeding him, so he flew out of his cave and into the sea, causing an earthquake. To let his sister know that he is still alive, Kukulkán causes earth tremors every year in Guatemala. Hanging, circuitous tubes resemble the form of distended snakes but formally Escobar considers them drawing-sculptures because of their reliance on the element of line in space.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Alfred Jensen

b. 1903, Guatemala, d. 1981, United States

Untitled (Sin título), 1973

Pigment on paper

Courtesy collection of Beatriz de Torrebiarte, Guatemala City

American artist Alfred Julio Jensen was born in Guatemala in 1903 and is known for prismatic, colorful works on checkerboards of black and white or, conversely, figurative elements in black and white against a prismatic, colored checkerboard. The geometric abstractions and reticular chess forms became powerful references to spiritual themes. The rhythms of light and darkness designed in a checkered form reveal oppositions always present—day and night, life and death—and indicate a search for clarity, balance, and meaning. He worked in line with other well-known Abstract Expressionist peers, such as Ad Reinhardt and Hans Hoffman, and infused geometric forms with a personal and mystical touch.

Around 1960 he read *Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*, by J. Eric S. Thompson, which linked him to a childhood spent in Guatemala, and would prove to be a theme in much of his subsequent work. The use of bright colors reveals the Maya visual culture Jensen had access to through his

indigenous nanny and appears in the silk-screen print included in this exhibition.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Dennis Leder

b. 1946, United States

Mare Somniorum, 1998

Painted steel

Courtesy the Artist and Sol del Río Arte Contemporánea,
Guatemala City

Born in New Jersey in 1946, Dennis Leder, SJ moved to Guatemala in 1991. This work is an example of his many iron and polychrome steel sculptures that both emphasize a tension between order and chaos and reveal a sense of hidden harmony between the two seemingly opposite ideas. It also springs from the idea of a mare somniorum or sea of dreams or visions. With recurrent inclusion and interlacing of the five basic geometric forms—the cube, cylinder, sphere, pyramid, and cone—the artist generates a kind of matrix that invites one to contemplate such ideas as discontinuity, fragmentation, unity, completeness, harmony and order; in short, to discover a particular beauty through the elements of art and principles of design. Leder's style may have owed to his own personal tensions between two parallel aspects of his life, of being a Jesuit priest and visual artist, two vocations that, far from contradicting each other, are nourished mutually. The notions of chaos and order in his work may also be seen as

parallel to the socio-political conditions of Guatemala in the later half of the twentieth century.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Daniel Schafer

b. 1937, d. 2004, Guatemala

Untitled from the exhibition *Begin the Beginner* (*Sin título de la exposición Volver a empezar*), 2002

Silkscreen on paper

Courtesy Legado DS, Guatemala City

Daniel Schafer was born in Bananera in the department of Izabal, Guatemala. He studied painting and design at the University of Pittsburgh, PA and taught graphic design in Boston, MA. Upon his return to Guatemala in the 1960s, he founded the DS Gallery, along with fellow artist Luis Díaz. A teacher, graphic designer, theater director, and set designer, he left a legacy of graphic work, publicity posters and invitations, handmade silk-screens with geometric designs that influenced many artists of the following generations.

Schafer was known for Op Art, geometric abstraction, and hard-edge painting styles he studied in the US, although he also asserted that his inspiration derived from Guatemalan textiles and his love of quilting. The work here relies on a graphic, geometric grid in black and white, emphasizing the visual tension between positive and negative space,

inspired by the rehilete or pinwheel, a common element in Guatemalan traditional pop culture.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Diana de Solares

b. 1952, Guatemala

To Enter a Material Space of Radiance, 2013–17

Acrylic on MDF

Courtesy the Artist and the 9.99 Gallery, Guatemala City

Born in Guatemala City, Diana de Solares studied architecture at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. A self-taught visual artist, she also studied with the influential artists Juan de Dios González and Daniel Schafer. Her oeuvre includes painting, sculpture, assemblage, and drawing, often using modest materials such as wood, paper, and shoestrings. Her meticulous and elegant works employ color and geometry as key elements through which the formal language of space, texture, line, and scale are explored. De Solares' works are inspired by the rich, geometric textile traditions of the Maya and the colorful array that is Guatemalan pop culture, as well as formal traditions of Geometric Abstraction like those of Margarita Azurdia, Alfred Jensen, and Daniel Schafer. *To Enter a Material Space of Radiance*, like many of her installations, is an exploration of space and the very act of existing within it. Intuition is a key strategy in the construction of her pieces which attempt to locate spaces somewhere between reality and perception.

FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Vivian Suter

b. 1949, Argentina

Untitled (Sin título), s.d.

Mixed-media on canvas

Courtesy collection of Hugo Quinto & Juan Pablo Lojo,
Guatemala City

Vivian Suter was born in Buenos Aires in 1949 and moved to Europe in the 1960s where she spent her youth living in Basel, Switzerland. In 1983 during a trip across North and Central America, she visited the small lakefront town of Panajachel in Guatemala's Lake Atitlán region where she moved and has since called home. Once in Panajachel, Suter moved to a former coffee plantation where she built a home and studio suitable for her painting practice. The palms, avocado, and mango trees, originally planted to protect the coffee plants, create a lush, green environment that inspire the artist's works that she considers collaborations with nature. "The artistic works created up there are about the wind, the rain, the volcanoes, and the vastness and clarity of the tropical landscape," the artist says.

This untitled work presents the traces of the flooding of her studio that 1998's Hurricane Mitch produced. Treated without a sense of preciousness, her paintings of unstretched canvases are typically exhibited either on

walls, arranged on the floor, or eccentrically draped over hanging racks.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Enrique Anleu Díaz

b. 1940, Guatemala

Untitled from **The Conquest of Space** (*Sin título de La conquista del espacio*), 1969

Ink on paper

Courtesy Colección John Gody, Guatemala City

Enrique Anleu Díaz is an artist, writer, teacher, and musician who studied at the National School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City. Anleu Díaz's gestural work was inspired by Modern Art masters such as Antoni Tàpies and Jean Dubuffet. This work is part of a series created as an homage to the landing on the moon, which took place in the year the work was made. Anleu Díaz pays tribute to this historic event while applying to contemporary events his long-standing exploration of texture and abstraction.

In the 1960s, Anleu Díaz was part of the Valenti Circle, co-founded with Marco Augusto Quiroa from the X Gallery. In the following decade, he joined the second stage of the collective Grupo Vertebra, made up of Roberto Cabrera, Elmar Rojas Azurdia, and Marco Augusto Quiroa. Their main objective was to reinforce the social commitment of artists to their contemporary life and to perform a testimonial that could express the issues of their time to a broader audience.

Anleu Díaz is also an accomplished musical composer who studied at the National Conservatory of Guatemala and Orchestra Direction with Hans Swarowsky, in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Chiachio & Giannone

Leo Chiachio, b. 1969, Argentina; Daniel Giannone, b. 1964, Argentina

Holy Family (Sagrada familia), 2010

Mixed-media (hand embroidery with cotton, rayon, and beads on handwoven fabric)

Courtesy the Artists. Work done in collaboration with OLAS, a group of LGBT weavers from Santiago de Atitlán, Guatemala.

Leo Chiachio and Daniel Giannone, both Argentinian, live and work together in Buenos Aires. Although they studied painting, they are well known for creating hand embroidered works using a dazzling array of color and stitches. Epic in scale, their work incorporates elements of magical realism and a sense of humor. They simultaneously reflect the changes in society while demonstrating an encyclopedic knowledge of embroidery. Much of their work revolves around the notion of the “holy family” as represented by the two of them and their dog *Pirolín* (Tweety Bird). Here, the artists transform the traditional family portrait into a new ideological and social narrative

by focusing on the varied family models formed by gays, principally the formula man plus man plus pet.

This work was produced in Guatemala in collaboration with an association of gay, male stitchers from the Lake Atitlán region. It was exhibited at the Spanish Cultural Center in Guatemala in 2010 and is a reflection of a greater openness on the part of Guatemalan society—at least in the capital—towards the issue of sexual diversity, though troubling acts of violence and discrimination toward LGBTIQQ communities continue to occur. The theme was further engaged through a reversal of roles, being that the works were textiles embroidered by homosexual indigenous men; that is, the men carried out an activity traditionally reserved for women.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Daniel Hernández-Salazar

b. 1956, Guatemala

Frank, 1993

Analog photography shot with 2 1/4" × 2 3/4" film, printed on 8" × 10" fiber paper sheets, selectively toned to sepia

Courtesy the Artist

Daniel Hernández-Salazar began his career as a photojournalist documenting the political violence of Guatemala city. Later he turned his lens to more artistic purposes with early portraits of traditional musicians in the countryside. Returning to the rural areas in the Guatemalan

highlands, he learned of exhumations of mass graves and met survivors of the massacres that had claimed the lives of countless impoverished villagers. By the mid-1990s, he began visiting the offices of forensic anthropologists who had been excavating graves, when he noticed a human shoulder blade. “They looked like butterfly wings. They also looked like bird wings,” the artist stated. That discovery led him to an important body of work around the subject of angels which eventually made it to the cover of the national report on peace and reconciliation titled the *Inter-Diocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory Guatemala: Never More* published by the Office of Human Rights of the Archbishop of Guatemala.

Hernández-Salazar was also one of the first photographers who made and exhibited photographs of nude men in the early 1990s, fighting the conservatism that pervaded Guatemala and its deeply religious culture. *Frank* is one of these portraits which, drawing from the anthropological character of his work, portrays a naked man in a suggestive pose, paving the way for homoerotic photography in Guatemala and, more broadly, for the discussion of gender diversity and LGBTIQQ rights.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Jessica Lagunas

b. 1971, Nicaragua

Feminicide in Guatemala (Feminicidio en Guatemala), 2012–

15

Hand-embroidered and hand-bound artist book Courtesy the Artist

Jessica Lagunas produces artwork that investigates the condition of woman in contemporary society, questioning cultural obsessions with body image, beauty, sexuality, and aging. The materials she selects underscore the theme of the feminine, utilizing hair, makeup, wedding dresses, perfume, and lace to create installations, video-performances, embroidery, drawing, printmaking, book arts, and objects.

The work in this exhibition concentrates on the difficulties and vulnerabilities of women in Central America, and the femicidal violence perpetrated against them. This artist book presents statistics of the crime of feminicide from 2000-2010 in Guatemala, mostly taken from national police records. Although most of this data came from official records, real numbers are believed to be higher than what is reported to the police. Each number is hand embroidered with red thread on white lace pages and based on copperplate-style calligraphy. The artist stated, "With this work I intend not only to bring awareness about this crime but also to honor the lives of these women."

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Zipacná de León

b. 1948, d. 2002, Guatemala

Wall and Barrier (Tribute to Oliverio) (Muro y barrera (Homenaje a Oliverio)), 1978

Acrylic on masonite

Courtesy Colección Palacios Weymann / FUNBA, Antigua, Guatemala

Zipacná de León was born in Guatemala City and, as a painter, printmaker, and ceramicist, is recognized as a central figure in the cultural scene of Guatemala in his time. He was also the co-founder of several cultural institutions in Guatemala, notably coordinating the Permanent Art Program at the Paiz Foundation—including the Bienal de Arte Paiz—(1978-1989), and implementing the state-run Regional Schools of Art (1989). In addition, he was a professor at the National School of Fine Arts “Rafael Rodríguez Padilla” from 1977-1996. In September 2000 he was granted the title of Distinguished Citizen of the City of Quetzaltenango.

In *Wall and Barrier* he pays homage to Oliverio Castañeda, a left-wing student leader assassinated by the government of General Romeo Lucas García, after he organized a series of protests against the rise of the price of public transportation in 1978. As General Secretary of the Association of University Students, he fought for human rights and accused the Interior Minister at the time, Donaldo Álvarez Ruiz, of being responsible for the wave of violence and terror that permeated the country.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Carlos Motta

b. 1978, Colombia

Gender Talents (Talentos de género), 2015

Selection of videos from web-based project

Courtesy the Artist

Born in Bogotá, Colombia, and based in New York, artist Carlos Motta engages issues of sexuality, gender identity, and the politics around narrating and documenting official and unofficial histories. *Gender Talents* is an archive of documentary video portraits and a platform for events that engage discourses and movements for gender self-determination within trans and intersex communities. Based on interviews conducted in Colombia, Guatemala, India, and the US, the project seeks to expose the ways that international activists challenge the bi-cultural “foundations” of society and question gender norms from the perspective of sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, and disability. With this work, Motta was invited to participate in the nineteenth Paiz Art Biennial where he exhibited a series of video portraits of members of the Trans Multicultural Network of Guatemalan Women (Redmmutrans), an organization that advocates for the rights of trans communities in Guatemala City as well as in the country’s rural areas. The interviewees have been active participants in the cultural, legal, political, and social processes around sexual difference in their city. The videos

feature the personal stories of the interviewees as they seek social inclusion on their own terms.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Paula Nicho

b. 1955, Guatemala

My Dream (Mi sueño), 2000

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy Colección Fundación Paiz, Guatemala City

San Juan Comalapa in the department Chimaltenango is known in Guatemala as the “Florence of the Americas” because of the many Kaqchikel Maya landscape painters who have lived and worked there from the 1930s to the present day. The revered artist Salvador Cumez Curruchich believed that in a field dominated exclusively by men, women could become excellent painters and he helped form a women's painting collective. Paula Nicho was one of those participants who has gone on to become one of the the most original Maya woman artists in Guatemala. Nicho has stated that the inspiration for many of her works derives from her dreams, especially those of flying. *My Dream* is one such painting, which also illustrates the cultural and daily life of the Kaqchikel Maya expressed through the strength and power of a woman’s point of view.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Diego Sagastume

b. 1991, Guatemala

My Mom Rules, 2013

Single-channel HD video (color, no audio) (14 min.)

Edition 1/3 + 2 AP

Courtesy the Artist, and the 9.99 Gallery, Guatemala City

Diego Sagastume is part of Guatemala's Millennial generation of artists who are working through various media platforms and technologies to express their realities and interests, many related to life in the city and the increasing access to information via the internet.

Sagastume uses Instagram, surveillance footage, and GPS-tracking software to create his artworks, using technologically proficient ways to connect him to a globalized internet community.

My Mom Rules is both tender and heartbreaking. In a voyeuristic manner, the artist set his camera on his windowsill, capturing the banal comings and goings of a young neighbor boy across the street. On a flat roof, a bored child wanders completely alone, passing the time and looking for anything that may be a source of entertainment, including playing dress-up with a handbag and pair of heels. The ending calls into question the child's innocence and state of mind, leaving the audience to wonder about his home life and upbringing. The video speaks of growing up in a city like Guatemala, the lack of

education and recreation opportunities, and the loss of innocence.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Hellen Ascoli

b. 1984, Guatemala

Encounter (Encuentro), 2014

Documentation of performance (video) (3 min. 51 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist. Documentation and video courtesy Alejandro España.

Hellen Ascoli is an artist and educator interested in a social artistic practice that includes activation, participation, and collaboration. Ascoli completed her BFA in Studio Art at Southern Methodist University and received her MFA from the School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Inspired by the notion of Proprioception (the unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself), *Encounter* uses the artist's body to focus on the theme of reflection, interiority, and private contemplation. The work comprises a video showing a sequence of the artist wrapped in a hand-woven net, rolling down a landscape. In its initial installation, the public was invited to put on the mesh netting and roll around on the ground. The artist states: "I propose to investigate the senses directly with my body. I will do this by creating a physical space where I can invite people to swirl with me. I am interested in using my body actively, interacting with objects, as an excuse to connect with others and to intensify a sense."

In addition to her artistic practice, she currently works at Ixchel Museum of Indigenous Textiles and Clothing at Francisco Marroquín University in Guatemala City where she has produced multiple experiences combining art education and mediation.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Moisés Barrios

b. 1946, Guatemala

Banana Liberty, 1998

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the Artist

Moisés Barrios was born in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, in the department of San Marcos, Guatemala. He worked in advertising, design, and printmaking before dedicating himself to a full-time career in art. *Bananópolis* is representative of one of the artist's ongoing preoccupations, the tropical banana and the vestige and footprint of the United Fruit Company (later known as the Chiquita Banana Company)—the *Bananera*—in Guatemala. For years, Barrios has studied this American incursion into the country's territory and economy, continually referring to it in diverse media and expressions. Further, he references the term "virus country" (a country prone to infecting neighboring countries with its subversive influences), which was used by the US State Department to describe a communist-leaning Guatemala during the Cold War.

Banana Liberty is an allusion to the effects of the United Fruit Company's long-standing presence in the country. Through the depiction of a banana bunch and the word "liberty"--a reference to conceptual and text-based art common in Barrios' practice-the artist underscores the paradox between the freedom with which the company operated in the country and the economic and administrative constrictions to which the Central American country was subjected. The banana is a constant element in Barrios' work, through its direct portrayal, as in this case, as well as in the application of the recognizable color and spot pattern of its skin.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Alfredo Ceibal

b. 1952, Guatemala

Akua: World and Society of Volunteers (Yax - Tun, Eternity Stone, Live Waters/Horus Cosmic Observatory over Nefertari Asteroid/Zóser Library and Obelisk/Himhotep Asteroid Colony/Hatsépsut Avenue and Setí/Nile River/Red Queen Obelisk with Floating Cosmic Spheres on Chichen Itzá Avenues) (Akua: Mundo y sociedad de voluntarios (Yax - Tun, Piedra de la Eternidad, Aguas Vivas/Observatorio Cósmico de Horus Sobre Asteroide Nefertari/Biblioteca y Obelisco de Zóser/Colonia de Asteroides Himhotep/Avenida Hatsépsut y Setí/Río Nilo/Obeliscos de la Reina Roja con Esferas Cósmicas Suspendidas en Avenidas de Chichen Itzá)), 2010

Mixed-media on paper

Courtesy collection of Christian Ochaita, Guatemala City

Alfredo Ceibal is a self-taught artist who began his career in New York City in the early 1980s. His early works were featured in alternative spaces of New York's East Village, and later in exhibitions in museums and galleries including MoMA PS1, Bronx Museum of the Arts, and El Museo Del Barrio. For years, his work has explored themes of identity and culture, often depicting scenes of Guatemalan social customs, such as funerals, honeymoons, and piñata birthday parties, among others. He is also known for drawings that merge environmental issues, science fiction, ancient Egyptian culture, and Maya cosmologies as a way to caution, suggest, and propose alternative realities. A distant, artistic descendant of Efraín Recinos' space-age, futuristic scenes of Guatemala, and akin to Afrofuturistic cultural aesthetics, Ceibal combines elements of history, fantasy, magical realism, and Maya spirituality not only to critique events of the past but to also project onto the future the possibility of a cosmic, utopian reality. In this work, Ceibal depicts a future in which the Spaniards did not arrive in America but where the Maya population flourished and developed. Embedded with hope, these drawings propose alternatives to the current situation: where indigenous populations have been subject to oppression and marginalization since the Spanish conquest to the present day.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Manuel Chavajay

b. 1982, Guatemala

Sik Ch'aooj, 2014

HD video (color, sound) (5 min. 00 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist

Manuel Chavajay works in various media including drawing, painting, sculpture, and video. Like other artists in the exhibition, Chavajay hails from San Pedro La Laguna, Lake Atitlán in Guatemala, where he continues to live and work. Deeply committed to protecting the culture of his indigenous people, he and his brother founded an art collective that presents exhibitions, art classes, and installs public art murals in the area, with the aim of displaying obscured histories as well as preserving the original Tz'utujil language.

The video *Sik' Ch'aooj* shows the artist on a *cayuco* (canoe) with a bouquet of flowers behind, paddling softly in the middle of Lake Atitlán. Inspired by the bird's-eye view, folkloric painting style of his region, the video is shot from an aerial perspective as the *cayuco* enters and leaves the picture. Chavajay appears, dressed in military attire as well as a traditional Tz'utujil suit. The only sound is that of the paddling oars against the water, although sometimes a machine gun is loaded and a cloud of smoke appears. The subtlety and symbolism in *Sik' Ch'aooj* suggests the trauma of Maya communities during the war, with families divided as some members became part of the military while others

stayed behind in resistance; both suffering at the hands of violence.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Oscar Farfán

b. 1973, Guatemala

Left to right: *Amajchel* from **Scorched Earth** (*Amajchel* de **Tierra arrasada**)

San Francisco Javier from **Scorched Earth** (*San Francisco Javier* de **Tierra arrasada**)

All works: 2011

Photography and text, exhibition copies

Courtesy the Artist

The photographic works of Oscar Farfán address issues of memory, power, loss, and recovery as they pertain to Guatemala's recent history. A scorched-earth policy is a military strategy that targets destruction of anything that might be useful to the enemy, while it is either advancing through or withdrawing from an area. In the early 1980s, dictator Efraín Ríos Montt implemented this method through Plan Victoria 82. The campaign spread across rural settlements in the Guatemalan highlands, as a counterinsurgency strategy that decimated whole villages, to combat the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity rebellion and root out supposed communist threats. Ríos Montt's policies resulted in the violent deaths of hundreds of thousands (most of them indigenous Maya) leading to accusations of genocide that persist to this day.

In this series, Farfán documents lush, verdant landscape where seemingly nothing appears. The photographs and accompanying texts in this project function as records of these deserted places and what happened in them. The title of each work corresponds to the names of the communities of each razed place. Each of them has an excerpt or entire testimony of those who lived through or witnessed what happened in the portrayed spaces. Hauntingly, these are the sites where settlements once stood; houses were rebuilt years later on the outskirts, while the original inhabitants relocated to far-off places, or the villages simply ceased to exist.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Yasmin Hage

b. 1976, Guatemala

Aldea modelo, pequeña historia, 1984 (No translation), 2011–16

Mixed-media

Courtesy the Artist

At the beginning of the 1980s, in the context of the civil war in Guatemala and the destruction of indigenous villages in the whole territory, the army implemented a program of constructing "model villages" as a strategy to withdraw civilian support to the insurgent guerrillas and to keep the indigenous population under control. These were complete villages that functioned within military barracks

built on the periphery so that these new localities acted as a communal human shield. With strategic cooperation from The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), model villages were replicated throughout the territory.

The work here is inspired by oral testimony of the inhabitants of one such village. The artist met some of the settlers who had been summoned for the construction of a site and, based on this testimony, decided to do a scaled reconstruction. The wordless pop-up books refer to indigenous histories, which rely upon oral rather than written testimony. They relate untold histories, those left out of the institutionalized canons, the master narratives, and the official record.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Regina José Galindo

b. 1974, Guatemala

Who Can Erase the Traces? (¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?), 2003

Documentation of performance, exhibition copies

Courtesy the Artist

One of Guatemala's pre-eminent artists, Regina José Galindo has gained international attention for using her body in performances that refer to the plight of Guatemalan victims of war, focusing particularly on women's issues. In this seminal work, the artist walked

from Guatemala City's Constitutional Court to the National Palace of Guatemala, leaving a trail of footprints made with blood. The grisly traces served as haunting memories of the disappeared and massacred casualties of the armed conflict in Guatemala. They also stood as an ominous foreboding of the presidential candidacy of ex-military, genocide, and coup leader Efraín Ríos Montt in 2003. The artist stated, "When it was announced that Efraín Ríos Montt had managed to win acceptance as a presidential candidate, I was in my room, and I suffered a panic attack and depression. I cried out, I kicked and stomped my feet, I cursed the system that rules us. How was it possible that a character as dark as this would have such power with which to bend everything to his will? I decided then and there that I would take to the streets with my shout and amplify it. I had to do it."

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Regina José Galindo

b. 1974, Guatemala

Landscape (Paisaje), 2012

Documentation of performance (video (color, sound)) (25 min. 14 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist, Video: José Enrique Juárez

One of Guatemala's pre-eminent artists, Regina José Galindo has gained international attention for using her body in performances that refer to the plight of Guatemalan victims of war, focusing particularly on

women's issues. Meditating on the notion of landscape, Galindo performed an act that required her to stand naked in a remote forest, with her back toward a man digging a grave. As he burrows his shovel into the earth to dig a deep hole, the dirt he flings behind him slowly begins to bury the artist alive. A profoundly moving reference to the thousands of indigenous Guatemalans who were buried in mass graves, the work also considers the theme of the loss of innocence, and the archetypes of birth, death, and renewal.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Diego Morales Portillo

b. 1992, Guatemala

Plateau Landscape (Paisaje del altiplano), 2015

Digital print on paper, exhibition copy

Courtesy the Artist

Diego Morales Portillo is an artist who, like many others in Guatemala, also works as a graphic designer. *Plateau Landscape* presents the binary code behind a photograph of the Guatemalan highland plateau. The artist questions the notion of representation, particularly that of the landscape—a fundamental element in the construction of the national imaginary—while bringing together his two areas of concern: art and computer-based design. In doing so, Morales Portillo provides a contemporary reading of a decade-old concern in Guatemalan art and speaks to the

difficulties that the population faces regarding accessing technology and the digital world.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Juan Sisay

b. 1921, d. 1989, Guatemala

Untitled (Nocturne) (Sin titulo (Nocturno)), ca. 1970

Oil on canvas

Courtesy Colección FerVas, Guatemala City

Juan Sisay is recognized as the first twentieth century Guatemalan painter of Lake Atitlán. Born in 1921 of a Maya Tz'utujil family, he was a farmer, merchant, and painter. In his early works beginning in the 1930s, he was mainly retouching religious images. In the 1940s, a foreign artist visiting the area of Lake Atitlán gave him a box of oils with which Sisay began to paint on paper. Subsequently, he opened a small gallery in which his paintings were sold. During a visit to the area, journalist Rigoberto Bran Azmitia met the artist and exposed his work to audiences in Guatemala City, where he was met with praise and positive critical attention.

Early on, the press and art critics of the 1950s and 1960s referred to Sisay's work as "primitivist," a label imposed on many works by indigenous artists. However, today, the term is rejected to describe the style of this self-taught artwork as a form of resistance and revisionist history of the contributions of Maya in Guatemala. *Nocturne*,

exhibited here, a rare night scene of Lake Atitlán, is an example of the degree of experimentation the artist undertook. Other examples are a series of paintings on rocks done in the basement of a private home in the Lake Atitlán region.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY

Julio Zadik

b. 1916, d. 2002, Guatemala

Left to right: *Untitled (Atitlán) (Sin título (Atitlán))*

Untitled (Petén) (Sin título (Petén))

Untitled (Amatitlán) (Sin título (Amatitlán))

Untitled (Amatitlán) (Sin título (Amatitlán))

Untitled (Izabal) (Sin título (Izabal))

Untitled (Antigua) (Sin título (Antigua))

All works: ca. 1960s

Posthumous digital print from original B/N negative,
exhibition copies

Courtesy the Estate Julio Zadik, Guatemala City

Although Julio Zadik studied photography in the United States in the early 1930s and continued to photograph throughout his life, he did not dedicate himself to a professional artistic career. He was an entrepreneur who managed the family business, Litografía Zadik. His body of work was later discovered after his descendants recovered his archive and began to introduce it to a larger public. Like his Mexican contemporaries Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo or the Peruvian Martín Chambi, Zadik captured

images of his country tinged with modernist and surrealist influences. His images document Guatemala throughout a period of industrialization as well as the effects of twentieth century technologies. On display here are a series of landscapes from different parts of Guatemala produced with an evident formal concern.

POPULAR CULTURES

POPULAR CULTURES

Andrea Aragón

b. 1970, Guatemala

Untitled from **Home** (*Sin título de Home*), 2016

Digital photography, exhibition copy

Courtesy the Artist and the 9.99 Gallery, Guatemala City

Photographer Andrea Aragon lives and works in Guatemala City and cites fellow artists, Regina Jose Galindo, Jessica Lagunas, and María Adela Díaz as inspirations and mentors. For years, Aragón has been steadily documenting the effects of emigration from her native Guatemala to Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Mostly shot in rural areas and featuring individual and group portraits, the photographs are organized under three basic groupings: use of symbols, specifically the American flag; acquisition or markers of class mobility and acculturation; and communication between those who leave the country and those who stay behind. Aragón takes these portraits in the subjects' immediate environment, whether inside their home, their neighborhoods, or village streets.

The work in this exhibition portrays an indigenous mother watching the field accompanied by her two children and covered with a towel that is decorated with American nationalistic imagery. The image represents the permeation of American culture into all areas of Guatemalan life. Given the longstanding effects of US intervention in the country—economic, political, and military—this photograph

powerfully suggests that issues of immigration are more rooted and complex than what is often portrayed in the US.

POPULAR CULTURES

Margarita Azurdia

b. 1931, d. 1998, Guatemala

The Banana Women from **Tribute to Guatemala** (*Las Bananeras de Homenaje a Guatemala*), 1970

Wood and acrylic paint

Courtesy Milagro de Amor, S. A., Guatemala City

Margarita Azurdia studied at the National School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City and McGill University, Montreal, Quebec. She is one of the most innovative artists of the second half of the twentieth century, with a body of work that reflects her feminist and anti-establishment views. In 1962, she exhibited her first painting, a self-portrait, and thereby publicly opposed the neo-figurative style promoted by a group of male artists known as Grupo Vertebra. Instead, she introduced a new art movement known as new conceptual abstraction and went on to create a diverse artistic practice including abstract paintings, performance, and sculpture.

In the early 1970s, she created a series of wood sculptures, titled **Tribute to Guatemala**, that combined the sacred and the profane. Partially produced by artisans from whom Azurdia commissioned wood carvings, and then finished by

the artist in her workshop, the series fuses popular culture and fine art by applying to the wood carvings materials such as plaster skulls, masks, feathers, and pedestal tables, as well as by using patterns and colors present in her previous geometric paintings. Reminiscent of the magical realism from Latin American literature, the sculptures were often set atop wooden tables and depict women carrying firearms, babies riding on crocodiles, and tigers transporting bananas.

In the sculpture featured here, a group of female bodies carry bananas atop their heads. Guatemala is known as a “banana republic,” a derogatory political and economic term for the structure of a servile dictatorship that aids and abets, for monetary gain, the exploitation of large-scale, plantation agriculture, in particular banana cultivation. Historically in these banana republics, US-owned companies and a profiteering elite social class exploited the poor working classes for economic, political, and social gain. Azurdia’s work of art suggests that women in this labor structure are among the most vulnerable.

POPULAR CULTURES

Margarita Azurdia

b. 1931, d. 1998, Guatemala

Untitled from **Geométricas** (*Sin Título de Geométricas*), c. 1967

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy Colección Wolf Bauman, Guatemala City

Margarita Azurdia studied at the National School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City and McGill University, Montreal, Quebec. She is one of the most innovative artists of the second half of the twentieth century, with a body of work that reflects her feminist and anti-establishment views. In 1962, she exhibited her first painting, a self-portrait, and thereby publicly opposed the neo-figurative style promoted by a group of male artists known as Grupo Vertebra. Instead, she introduced a new artistic idea described as new conceptual abstraction and went on to create a diverse artistic practice including abstract paintings, performance, and sculpture.

POPULAR CULTURES

Alfredo Ceibal

b. 1952, Guatemala

The Piñata (La piñata), 1984

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy La Colección Wolf Bauman, Guatemala City

Alfredo Ceibal is a self-taught artist who began his career in New York City in the early 1980s. His early works were featured in alternative spaces of New York's East Village, and later in exhibitions in museums and galleries including MoMA PS1, Bronx Museum of the Arts, and El Museo Del Barrio. For years, his work has explored themes of identity and culture, often depicting scenes of Guatemalan social

customs, such as funerals, honeymoons, and piñata birthday parties, among others.

This painting portrays a typical child's birthday scene in Guatemala, depicting a blindfolded child encouraged by his family and friends to break open a piñata that slides along a cable, likely pulled by an employee of the house. In the background, behind a street that defies spatial and perspectival logic, volcanoes rise, a reference to the colonial city of Antigua and the Guatemalan collective imagination. As in many of the artist's paintings that draw from a celebration or a social rite, *The Piñata* alludes to issues of the country's history of race and class inequality, and the existence of Spanish colonial dominance to this day.

POPULAR CULTURES

Benvenuto Chavajay

b. 1978, Guatemala

180 Kilometers PPP (180 kilómetros PPP), 2005

Mixed-media (latex, rubber, and wood)

Courtesy collection of Hugo Quinto & Juan Pablo Lojo,
Guatemala City

Born in San Pedro La Laguna in the Lake Atitlán region, Benvenuto Chavajay's artworks are inspired by themes of identity, place, and resistance. In this sculptural installation, the artist merges synthetic and organic objects. Chavajay deconstructs an ordinary sandal and creates a wall relief in

the shape of the lake where he grew up. For indigenous residents of Guatemala, the sandal has come to replace the more traditional caite footwear, suggesting the erosion of local customs with the rise of consumerism and globalization. According to Chavajay, plastic, which appeared in his village in the 1970s, transformed his culture. He states, “For better or worse, the plastic which reached the indigenous communities, changed their whole cultural, social, and anthropological structure. The culture became sort of ‘plasticized.’ It was no longer a question of the natural order of things. That material left its mark on us.”

Using the sandal again and again for various series of artworks, Chavajay has transformed the object into a metaphor for the journey, its tracks, wanderings, crossroads, and encounters, as well as a symbol of Guatemalan-ness. Chavajay graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City. He further studied at the National University of Costa Rica and most recently graduated from ESPIRA/ESPORA School of Art in Nicaragua.

POPULAR CULTURES

Darío Escobar

b. 1971, Guatemala

Untitled (Sin título), 1998

Mixed-media (cardboard, plastic, gold, and pigments)

Courtesy the Artist

Conceptual artist Darío Escobar studied architecture and graduated from Rafael Landívar University, Guatemala City, and also studied visual arts at the National School of Fine Arts, Guatemala City. He has garnered international attention for artwork that merges precision and meticulous technique, traditional Guatemalan crafts, Maya mythologies, Spanish Baroque and Catholic influences, and mass-produced materials from popular culture and sports (such as soccer balls, pool cues, skateboards, and bicycle wheels). His resulting artworks, whether sculptures, paintings, or installations, are intentionally hybrid references to the diversity that make up the Guatemalan consciousness.

Here, a cup from a well-known fast food chain is intricately coated with gold leaf and the typical decorative motifs of Catholic religious Baroque imagery. By endowing a waste product, and one that originates from popular culture and transnational corporate enterprises, with the formal and symbolic components of a religious belief system, Escobar generates an analogy between the indoctrinating possibilities of both elements while at the same time upending notions of the sacred and the profane. The use of gold leaf to “bling out” an ordinary cup also symbolizes Guatemalan bourgeois preoccupations with wealth and ostentation.

POPULAR CULTURES

Luis González Palma

b. 1957, Guatemala

Lottery #1 (Lotería #1), 1989–1991

Hand-painted gelatin silver prints with mixed-media

Courtesy Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara

Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis

Foundation

Luis González Palma was born in Guatemala in 1957. He studied architecture at the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, Guatemala City but had an abiding interest in art, painting and photography and eventually opened up a portrait studio. In 1987 he and artist Moisés Barrios founded the Galería Imaginaria in Antigua, Guatemala, an important center of creative activity hosting the country's dissident artists right after the worst years of the civil war.

González Palma is a pioneer of the Postmodern photographic movement in Latin America. Renowned for his body of "psychological portraits," the artist documents the plight of the indigenous Maya and ladino people of Guatemala. Symbolism is key in his work, and he regularly employs a sepia filter in order to further intensify and communicate the suffering felt by the native people of his homeland as well as to stress a distance between the viewer's gaze and the subject. To exaggerate the distress inherent to his works, he ages his works with paint, asphalt, or even alcohol.

The **Lottery** series explores issues of identity and memory. It comprises nine images of the 54 cards that make up the universe of the traditional lottery game, which is widely disseminated in Mexico, and frequently played in Guatemala. González Palma recreates the figures in question with portraits of Guatemalans and objects that refer to the popular imagination. He also explores silence and the gaze in order to speak to centuries of domination and a culture of violence and divisiveness that plagues the country. The photographs are an eloquent and formally sophisticated example of using elements of popular culture to explore identity.

POPULAR CULTURES

Carlos Mérida

b. 1891, Guatemala, d. 1984, Mexico

In Major Tone (En tono mayor), 1961

Gouache and watercolor on Amate paper

Courtesy Private Collection, Santa Barbara

Among the most celebrated artists in the exhibition, Carlos Mérida was born Guatemalan and spent most of his life in Mexico. He was one of the first Modern artists to fuse European abstract painting with Latin American themes and subject matter, particularly those related to his native and adopted countries. This work is a tribute to the musical universe which was a great interest to the artist throughout his life. In this large-format work, a group of characters, possibly musicians, are fragmented into an

arrangement suggesting the rhythm from a musical composition with its horizontality, repetition, and variation of geometric forms. The title underscores Western music theory: a major tone (sometimes also called a whole tone) is a second, spanning two semitones.

POPULAR CULTURES

Eny Roland Hernández

b. 1981, Guatemala

Lineage Devil from **Big Hell** (*Diablo de alcurnia de Infierno grande*), 2016

Digital photography, exhibition copy

Courtesy the Artist

Eny Roland Hernandez is a photographer whose large-scale multipart photo murals have had an impact in Guatemala City because they have provided a space for Guatemalans to see and understand themselves. For this series of photographs entitled **Big Hell**, Roland Hernandez riffs on the popular image of the Catholic religious painting known as *Anima Sola* or Lonely Soul, which depicts a woman chained and engulfed by the flames of hell. The title alludes to two well-known Guatemalan sayings: "Small town, big hell," and "Antigua Guatemala, the city of eternal roses and old gossips."

With each photograph in the series, the artist wrote an accompanying prayer. For *Lineage Devil*, the prayer is:

Thank you, Angel of Hell for keeping so many generations of my family pure and with European blood in the veins; for not having forced us to mix with this race of lazy Indians and, besides, to be direct descendants of important settlers. I thank you for the privilege of my family helping to maintain the little morality and decency that remains in this town that we want, because it is a pure and true antiquity that never had need to emigrate to the capital. The old days were always better. Amen.

The combination of text and image ridicules the bourgeois purity of the ruling classes of Guatemala that supposedly descended from European colonizers, which has been a source of pride but which continues the racism rooted in many segments of the Guatemalan culture.

POPULAR CULTURES

Francisco Tún

b. 1948, d. 1989, Guatemala

Smoking (Fumando), ca. 1972

Acrylic on wood

Courtesy La Colección Wolf Bauman, Guatemala City

Of humble origin, Francisco Tún attended school through the third grade, after which he taught himself painting and drawing. Throughout his life, riddled with addiction to drugs and alcohol, he was repeatedly incarcerated, but he never stopped making art that reflected his experiences.

Guatemalan art critic Guillermo Monsanto stated, "Tún is unique in his genre. He copied no one. He belongs to no 'school'. He can be compared with no one. And therein lies the value of his work."

Tún's paintings combine opaque colors in red, yellow, ochre, blue, and maroon to create compositions that include flattened shapes of buildings and of small figures in a variety of situations, mostly rural scenes. Tún's landscapes describe the desolation of certain Guatemalan communities but, above all, the feeling of solitude and emptiness in which the artist himself probably lived. *Smoking* depicts a semi-urban landscape characteristic of his essentialist style. Also included are a series of figures; one of them smokes a cigar of *tusa* (the dry leaf of the corn cob), which is a common practice in the rural areas of the country.

POPULAR CULTURES

Dagoberto Vásquez

b. 1922, d. 1999, Guatemala

Sketch for the mural Economy and Culture (Boceto para el mural Economía y cultura), 1963

Graphite on paper

Courtesy the Heirs of Dagoberto Vásquez, Thanks to Rodrigo Vásquez Bianchi, Guatemala City.

Dagoberto Vázquez was a Guatemalan sculptor, painter, and printmaker who was part of the Generation of 1940s,

an association of young left-leaning writers, artists, and intellectuals founded in 1941 and aligned with the democratic ideals of the 1944 revolution. He studied at the National Academy of Fine Arts from 1937 to 1944, as well as at the School of Fine Arts and the School of Applied Arts in Santiago, Chile, from 1945 to 1949. He also studied at the Faculty of Humanities of University of San Carlos of Guatemala, from 1956 to 1959. He was commissioned to complete several public murals in the city of Guatemala and is known for a style that utilizes formal and compositional synthesis, distinctive economy of line, and classical elegance.

The work here is the final sketch for the mural Economy and Culture on the Bank of Guatemala's eastern facade. Commissioned by the architects Jorge Montes and Carlos Haeussler, Vásquez' mural takes advantage of the casting technique *in situ* and in which, through a series of stylized personages characteristic of his work, proposes an interrelationship between the human collective identity and the theme of bank's setting, the national economy.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Marilyn Boror

b. 1984, Guatemala

Dictionary of Forgotten Objects (Diccionario de objetos olvidados), 2016

Digital print on paper

Courtesy the Artist

Marilyn Boror studies, researches, and analyzes the indigenous languages of her native Guatemala, focusing on the power of the word as a historical repository for cultural identity. She compares and contrasts the Spanish language with the architectural form of words and the relationships between word, image, and meaning. Boror's text and image-based works do not only contain textual analysis, but highlight the use of language as a way to understand the culture of those who use it.

In this work, Boror examines the cosmovision (the way of understanding time and space) of Kaqchikel, an indigenous Mesoamerican language and a member of the Quichean-Mamean branch of the Mayan language family, spoken by the indigenous Kaqchikel people of Central Guatemala. The different levels of intensity in which the pages of this personal dictionary are printed allude to the various degrees to which certain words are disappearing in Kaqchikel.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Daniel Chauche

b. 1951, United States

Left to right: *Father - Son, San Juan Chamelco (Padre - hijo, San Juan Chamelco)*, 1993

Butlers of the Brotherhood, Nebaj (Cófrades mayordomos, Nebaj), 1989

Autodefensor, San Juan Atitlán, 1989

Dance of the Deer, Santiago Atitlán (Baile del venado, Santiago Atitlán), 1988

Don Lázaro, Todos Santos, Huehuetenango, 1987

All works: Silver gelatin on paper

Courtesy the Artist

Photographer Daniel Chauche, born to a French father and an American mother, studied art at the University of Florida where, in 1979 he earned an MFA. In his early 20s, Chauche moved to Guatemala and subsequently gained international recognition for his straightforward, photographic portraits of the country's landscapes and inhabitants. Dated between 1987 and 1995, the photographs shown here were later brought together in a portfolio titled **Being a Chapin Man** which documents diverse "chapines," a nickname for people from Guatemala, said to have its origin in a form of footwear (chapines) that Guatemalans were known to wear when travelling.

Chauche strips the composition of superfluous subject matter and poses the figure against a stark white background, using a portable portrait studio that he carried

around the country, even during the most dangerous years of the war. The immediacy and intimacy of the portrait keep the eye focused on the subject, allowing him to be regarded as an equal. The men in this series stand dignified with a quiet intensity that belies the racial and cultural associations often pejoratively used against them.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Jorge Chavarría

b. 1978, Guatemala

Left to right: *Reina (trans woman)* from **Us (Reina (trans) de Nosotros)**

"Thanks for the photo."

Mario (sugar cane cutter) from **Us (Mario (cañero) de Nosotros)**

"...well, I fight to protect my family, when they get political power they forget us."

Emanuel (programmer) from **Us (Emanuel (programador) de Nosotros)**

"...I also build houses, because we have to do something for the people... and what do you do?"

Ingrid (domestic worker) from **Us (Ingrid (empleada doméstica) de Nosotros)**

"My family lives at Sololá and Spikey is my best friend."

All works: 2010

Digital print from 120 mm color negative, exhibition copies
Courtesy the Artist

Born in Guatemala city in 1978, Jorge Chavarría studied systems engineering at the San Carlos University of Guatemala, Guatemala City and is a self-taught photographer. **Us** represents ordinary citizens in their typical surroundings, yet wearing Guatemalan sashes originally reserved for heads of state. By dressing each subject in this way, the artist portrays a nuanced, diverse, and humane picture of the Guatemalan population; one that does not easily fit into simple categories or castes that have so often been used in colonialist histories to separate and control populations. Alternatively, by each citizen wearing this symbol of Guatemalan statehood, Chavarría also seems to suggest that the atrocities of war are not carried out anonymously, that each citizen is implicated and at the same time responsible for the events in their territory. The artist has stated, "This proposal is a reflection of our societies, especially the Guatemalan one, that is always divided and diverse. It shows that from any position in which it is the observer, their actions and decisions tend to have long-term impact and influence on the future of all of us, as a nation, and not the almighty savior leader. Each one is largely responsible for its present condition, its future, but somehow, the way each one takes his life, because directly or indirectly affects the lives of others, of us."

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Luis González Palma

b. 1957, Guatemala

The Critical Gaze (La mirada crítica), 1998

Photography and mixed-media

Courtesy Sol del Rio Arte Contemporánea, Guatemala City

Luis González Palma was born in Guatemala in 1957. He studied architecture at the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, Guatemala City but had an abiding interest in art, painting, and photography and eventually opened up a portrait studio. In 1987 he and artist Moisés Barrios founded the Galería Imaginaria in Antigua, Guatemala, an important center of creative activity hosting the country's dissident artists right after the worst years of the civil war.

González Palma is a pioneer of the Postmodern photographic movement in Latin America. Renowned for his body of "psychological portraits," the artist documents the plight of the indigenous Maya and ladino people of Guatemala. Symbolism is key in his work, and he regularly employs a sepia filter in order to further intensify and communicate the suffering felt by the native people of his homeland, as well as to stress a distance between the viewer's gaze and the subject. To exaggerate the distress inherent to his works, he ages his works with paint, asphalt, or even alcohol.

This photograph of a woman with a measuring tape around her head references the practice of phrenology, a pseudo-medicine focused on measurements of the human skull, based on the concept that the brain is the organ of the

mind, and that certain brain areas have localized, specific functions or modules. Developed by German physician Franz Joseph Gall in 1796, the discipline was very popular in the nineteenth century and was used as justification for European superiority over other "lesser" races. By wrapping this woman's head with a tape, the artist suggests that racist strategies are still employed to justify inhumane acts.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Luis González Palma

b. 1957, Guatemala

The Critical Gaze (La mirada crítica), 1998

Photography and mixed-media

Courtesy Sol del Rio Arte Contemporánea, Guatemala City

Luis González Palma was born in Guatemala in 1957. He studied architecture at the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, Guatemala City but had an abiding interest in art, painting, and photography and eventually opened up a portrait studio. In 1987 he and artist Moisés Barrios founded the Galería Imaginaria in Antigua, Guatemala, an important center of creative activity hosting the country's dissident artists right after the worst years of the civil war.

González Palma is a pioneer of the Postmodern photographic movement in Latin America. Renowned for his body of "psychological portraits," the artist documents the plight of the indigenous Maya and Mestizo people of

Guatemala. Symbolism is key in his work, and he regularly employs a sepia filter in order to further intensify and communicate the suffering felt by the native people of his homeland, as well as to stress a distance between the viewer's gaze and the subject. To exaggerate the distress inherent to his works, he ages his works with paint, asphalt, or even alcohol.

This photograph of a woman with a measuring tape around her head references the practice of phrenology, a pseudo-medicine focused on measurements of the human skull, based on the concept that the brain is the organ of the mind, and that certain brain areas have localized, specific functions or modules. Developed by German physician Franz Joseph Gall in 1796, the discipline was very popular in the nineteenth century and was used as justification for European superiority over other "lesser" races. By wrapping this woman's head with a tape, the artist suggests that racist strategies are still employed to justify inhumane acts.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Renato Osoy

b. 1974, Guatemala

ENTER INSIDE EXIT OUTSIDE EXIT INSIDE. A Research-Based Artistic Intervention on the Mejia Photo Collection From The Centro De Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamerica In Guatemala (ENTRAR ADENTRO SALIR AFUERA SALIR ADENTRO. Intervención Artística a partir

de una investigación sobre el Archivo Mejía del Centro De Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamerica, Antigua Guatemala), 2012

Artist book

Courtesy La Fototeca, Guatemala City. Production: Renato Osoy, Graphic Design: Ina Kurthen, Interventions in the text: Ina Kurthen and Renato Osoy.

ENTER INSIDE EXIT OUTSIDE EXIT INSIDE is an artist book, using the photography archive of CIRMA, the Mesoamerican Center for Regional Research as source material, some of which he appropriated and manipulated. The artists stated that the project aimed at questioning socio-anthropological concepts in order to make them more “liquid and manageable,” as to generate new visions and discussions about the constantly debated questions around collective identity, the contemporary cultural fluxus, the Latin-American status, and even to the condition of being Guatemalan.

The project is a study of a photography archive mostly made up of ID-size photos of civilians, army members and policemen. Osoy cut these images and recombined them to create portraits that are the combination of different people, or he simply cut the photos, suggesting a fragmentation of the identity of the Guatemalan people. The works with the manipulated photographs are collated with graphic and conceptual text exercises many of which address the issue of cultural and racial identity and how

that has determined the way Guatemalans relate to each other.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Alejandro Paz

b. 1975, Guatemala

Faja (No translation), 2001

Single-channel video (color, sound) (29 min. 19 sec.)

Courtesy the Artist

Alejandro Paz studied architecture at the Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala City and has worked on architecture and design projects in Guatemala, Central America, and the US with the award-winning firm Paz Architecture. In the field of visual art, he creates conceptual works that address social and political aspects of the construction of identity, in both individual and social contexts.

This video, documentation of a performance in which the artists paid an indigenous woman to walk on a treadmill until exhaustion, is at once a play on words and a commentary on the long march of indigenous people toward justice, equality, and human rights. In it, the woman is pictured walking on a treadmill, or *faja* as it is called in Spanish, in a seemingly endless cycle. The woman's dress—a multicolored blouse called a *huipil*, a *corte*, which is a woven wraparound skirt, and a *faja*, or belt—indicates her as Maya. The image of this Maya woman moving on a

luxury sports machine forward and yet not advancing provokes an uncanny feeling of absurdity, discomfort, and shock.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Ángel Poyón and Juan Fernando Poyón

Ángel Poyón, b. 1976, Guatemala; Juan Fernando Poyón, b. 1982, Guatemala

The Poyón Collection (La Colección Poyón), 2014

Mixed-media installation

Courtesy the Artists, Acknowledgements: Anabella Acevedo, Andrea Aragón, Andrés Asturias, Edgar Calel, Rosina Cazali, Alfredo Ceibal, Jorge Chavarria, Benvenuto Chavajay, Cecilia Fajardo – Hill, Miguel Galeotti, Ana Gonzáles, Luis Gonzáles Palma, Mario Ortiz, César Portillo, Cristina Rodríguez, Pablo José Ramírez, Alberto Rodríguez, Iván Rodríguez, Jean - Marie Simón, Sol del Río, Adán Vallecillo, José Roberto Vásquez, Jorge Xiquin, Juan Antonio Calí, Julio Serrano, Felipe Díaz, Maria Jacintaxón, Mario Santizo, Andrea Monroy

The artist brothers Ángel Poyón y Juan Fernando Poyón from San Juan Comalapa in the department of Chimaltenango bring together a “museological” display of everyday objects, visual material, and artworks portraying Maya culture. Shedding a critical light on these items, the artists question how we shape and interpret history, truth, artistic value, and the language of display—and what kinds of biases our institutions express. *The Poyón Collection* is an

incisive and humorous comment on often uninformed portrayal of Maya culture. The objects, images, and videos that make up the collection range from offensive, degrading stereotypes to mythological worship of the Ancient Maya tradition. Like other countries, Guatemala at once uses and misuses the myth and glory of its indigenous past as symbols of identity and greatness, while also denigrating and subjecting its people. This conceptual art installation demonstrates the patronizing view of imperialist cultures written about in Edward Said's seminal book, *Orientalism* (1978), which revealed how imperialism romanticizes and exoticizes the "other" in an inherently political strategy that makes them servile to power.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Pablo Swezey

b. 1959, Guatemala

The Mutt (El Chucho), 1987

Mixed-media (wood, cement)

Courtesy collection of Irene Swezey, Antigua, Guatemala

Pablo Swezey was a pioneer of contemporary and conceptual art and considered a major figure of the 1980s art scene. He received a BA in sculpture from Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas and belonged to the seminal Galería Imaginaria along with Isabel Ruiz, Moises Barrios, and Luis Gonzalez Palma. Galería Imaginaria provided space to experiment and get closer to new and innovative models of artistic production and cultural management–

including curating. Above all, it was a space to unite efforts, share information and ideas, and to thrive in a context that was particularly hostile to contemporary artistic practices and freedom of expression.

His sculptural work incorporated humble materials such as concrete, brick, talcum stone, paper, zinc foil, or broken bottles. *The Mutt* is titled after a colloquial term for dogs and depicts one such animal with a mask typically used for a variety of dances across the country. Like many of Swezey's pieces, this is an exploration of Guatemalan identity, from the language to folk practices to material culture.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Rodolfo Abularach

b. 1933, Guatemala

Left to right: *Figures in the Light (Figuras en la luz)*, 1965

Ink and pencil on paper

Untitled (Sin título), 1963

Ink and watercolor on paper

Untitled (Sin título), 1964

Ink and watercolor on paper

Untitled (Sin título), 1964

Acrylic and ink on paper

All works: Courtesy the Artist

Rodolfo Abularach is considered one of Latin America's most distinguished masters whose works are included in the permanent collections of prestigious art museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC, just to name a few. Born in Guatemala in 1933, Abularach began his formal art training at the National School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City in 1946, and later attended the School of Architecture, where he studied abstract design. In 1958 he traveled to New York on a grant and extended his stay for several years. During this time, he developed a drawing and painting practice with particular fascination toward the use of light and shadow. Stylistically, the artist's work used surrealism and figuration to explore Mesoamerican subject matter and traditions. Beginning in the mid 1960s, he gained

international recognition for an ongoing series portraying the human eye, cropped and close-up. For decades, Abularach fastidiously explored the psychological, spiritual, and symbolic implications of the eye, creating a haunting, mysterious, and mythic body of work. Abularach has also dedicated much of his attention to the subject of light, investigating its symbolic, religious, and environmental associations.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Enrique Anleu Díaz

b. 1940, Guatemala

From The Conquest of Space (De La conquista del espacio),
1969

Ink on paper

Courtesy Colección John Gody, Guatemala City

Enrique Anleu Díaz is an artist, writer, teacher, and musician who studied at the National School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City. Anleu Díaz's gestural work was inspired by Modern Art masters such as Antoni Tàpies and Jean Dubuffet. This work is part of a series created as an homage to the landing on the moon, which took place the year the work was made. Anleu Díaz pays tribute to this historic event while applying to contemporary events his long-standing exploration of texture and abstraction.

In the 1960s, Anleu Díaz was part of the Valenti Circle, co-founded with Marco Augusto Quiroa from the X Gallery. In

the following decade, he joined the second stage of the collective Grupo Vertebra, made up of Roberto Cabrera, Elmar Rojas, and Marco Augusto Quiroa. Their main objective was to reinforce the social commitment of artists to their contemporary life and to perform a testimonial that could express the issues of their time to a broader audience.

Anleu Díaz is also an accomplished musical composer who studied at the National Conservatory of Guatemala and Orchestra Direction with Hans Swarowsky in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Francisco Auyón

b. 1968, d. 2007, Guatemala

Let Him Who is Without Sin Cast the First Stone (El que esté libre de pecados que tire la primera piedra), 1998

Documentation of performance, exhibition copies

Courtesy Fundación Contexto, Guatemala City

Francisco Auyón studied at the National School of Fine Arts, Guatemala City beginning in 1984, and subsequently spent two years learning in the workshop of the renowned Guatemalan artist, Elmar Rojas Azurdia, also featured in this exhibition. Auyón's body of work includes drawings, paintings, and performance that can be characterized as mysterious, raw, and intensely psychological. Inspired by observing regional traditions, folklore, and current events

of his native country, the artist is best known for a series of profound performances from the late 1990s. The work in this exhibition is a document from a 1998 seminal performance, in which Auyón, dressed in black, sits on a white chair blindfolded for two hours, surrounded by stones that the public may throw at him. The title alludes to the Bible's account of Jesus Christ's utterance, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:7) Much of the audience were not aware that this was an artistic happening and were left to contemplate condemnation, forgiveness, and tolerance as well as their own culpability within the context of a turbulent Guatemala.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Edgar Calel

b. 1987, Guatemala

Labyrinth of Birds (Laberinto de los pájaros), 2008

Oil on cardboard

Courtesy collection of Hugo Quinto & Juan Pablo Lojo,
Guatemala City

Edgar Calel was born in Chi Xot, Comalapa, in the department of Chimaltenango, Guatemala, a Kaqchikel Maya municipality. Although he graduated from the National School of Fine Arts (ENAP) in Guatemala City, Comalapa continues to be a source of inspiration for the artist. The region is notorious as a site of indigenous resistance from colonial forces, and witnessed brutality and

violence during the last half of the century under dictatorship and military rule.

Through paintings, videos, installations, sculptures, and performances, Calel explores specific local knowledge that has previously been obscured or ignored, relating to themes of healing, planting, the body, spirituality, and well-being. This work is a poetic exploration of the meaning of everyday objects and the reciprocal influences between his native Kaqchikel and Western cultures. The installation suggests an attempt to capture the sky in cardboard boxes, with all the symbolic implications of both an idea of heaven and the packaging for common, daily consumer products.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Erwin Guillermo

b. 1951, Guatemala

The Conjuror from Puppets (El prestidigitador de Marionetas), 1982

Watercolor on paper

Courtesy Colección Fundación Paiz, Guatemala City

Erwin Guillermo studied at the National School of Fine Arts, Guatemala City and works as both an artist and a graphic designer. The subject of his artistic practice includes warriors, puppets, animals, still lifes, and other characters loaded with symbolic references. In this work, a conglomeration of animals/figures fill the composition, the title suggesting a character that has the ability to predict or

determine the future. *The Conjuror* is representative of a common practice during the war in which artists used animals to depict sensitive political figures. The name of the series refers to the phrase “puppet rulers,” in which politicians and other leaders are manipulated by outside forces, the ruling elite and the US in Guatemala’s case.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Rodolfo Mishaan

b. 1924, Guatemala

Untitled (Sin título), ca. 1960s

Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas

Courtesy La Colección Wolf Bauman, Guatemala City

Internationally-known painter Rodolfo Mishaan is best known for his bold and colorful abstractions of Guatemalan symbolic elements such as the quetzal (the national bird) and the flag, and his use of gold and silver leaf. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Guatemala City; the School of Fine Arts at Syracuse University, NY; Jerry Farnsworth’s Painting workshop in Cape Cod, MA; the Art Students League, NY; the New School of Social Research, NY; and Columbia University, NY. He exhibited widely in Guatemala and the United States throughout his lifetime. *Untitled* portrays what appears to be a sun rising over the sea or a landscape, with blue fields of color symbolizing the sky. This is a classic composition of Mishaan in which figurative and abstract elements combine to produce a metaphysical exploration of the country and its identity.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Manuel Antonio Pichillá

b. 1982, Guatemala

Knot (Nudo), 2015

Oil on canvas and hand-made textile

Courtesy the Artist

Born in San Pedro Laguna in the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala and of Tz'utujil origin, Manuel Antonio Pichillá is an artist that merges Maya traditions with abstract and conceptual art practices. His work comprises paintings, drawings, sculptures and installation, and he uses materials such as candles, baskets, stones, and threads, which refer to sacred and ritual elements of his people. He almost always works with a reduced palette of four colors--black, white, red, and yellow, which are the four colors of maize and refer to the four cardinal points in the Maya cosmovision.

Pichillá uses the concept of the knot as a recurring motif in his work, which directly alludes to Maya shamanistic and energetic practices that mark the passage of time. He has said, "B'atz is the name of a day in the Maya calendar that means the beginning and the end, to roll and unroll, to tie and untie. The knot is the bond between beings and their beginnings; it is the union that allows them to continue on a certain path. The knot is the articulation between

kinfolks and/or enemies, which maintains a structure and at the same time creates tension between them.”

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Manuel Antonio Pichillá

b. 1982, Guatemala

Quipo, 2014

Oil on canvas and hand-made textile

Courtesy the Artist

Born in San Pedro Laguna in the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala and of Tz'utujil origin, Manuel Antonio Pichillá is an artist that merges Maya traditions with abstract and conceptual art practices. His work comprises paintings, drawings, sculptures and installation, and he uses materials such as candles, baskets, stones, and threads, which that refer to sacred and ritual elements of his people. He almost always, he works with a reduced palette of four colors—black, white, red, and yellow— which are the four colors of maize and refer to the four cardinal points in the Mayan cosmovision.

Pichillá uses the concept of the knot as a recurring motif in his work, which directly alludes to Maya shamanistic and energetic practices that mark the passage of time. Pichilla has said, “B'atz is the name of a day in the Maya calendar that means the beginning and the end, to roll and unroll, to tie and untie. The knot is the bond between beings and their beginnings; it is the union that allows them to

continue on a certain path. The knot is the articulation between kinfolks and/or enemies, which maintains a structure and at the same time creates tension between them.”

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS

Ángel Poyón

b. 1976, Guatemala

Studies of Failure in Time and Space (Estudios del fracaso en tiempo y espacio), 2008

Mixed-media

Courtesy collection of Hugo Quinto & Juan Pablo Lojo,
Guatemala City

Ángel Poyón’s work is greatly influenced by his hometown municipality, San Juan Comalapa in the department of Chimaltenango, which is known in Guatemala as the “Florence of the Americas” because of the many Kaqchikel Maya landscape painters who have lived and worked there since the 1930s to the present day. Inspired by this great legacy, Poyón makes art that is experimental in nature, often utilizing sculpture and conceptual practices.

Studies of Failure Measured in Time and Space is a non-sequential narrative of a journey in which one never gets to land. These studies—taken from drawings by Piet Mondrian—suggest a useless route, as was the project of modernity. They suggest a decomposed compass without north or south, which has to guide us through multiple

times and spaces, contradictory and impossible, and without rest. Of this work, the artist stated, "This is related to all the experience that the immigrant faces, the non-linear complexity of situations."

VIOLENCE & TRAUMA

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

A-1 53167 (Aníbal López)

b. 1964, d. 2014, Guatemala

The Loan (El préstamo), 2000

Pigmented ink prints on Hahnemühle paper

Courtesy Collection of Hugo Quinto & Juan Pablo Lojo,
Guatemala City

A-1 53167 is the number of artist Aníbal López's government-issued ID with which he signed all his artworks, as if to controvert the very idea of identity. In a systematic way, Lopez's artworks attacked and provoked the longheld and seldom questioned moral values of Guatemalan society, which, in many ways, are responsible for the violence and corruption the country has suffered. This conceptual artwork relies on a simple text stating, "On the twenty-ninth of September, 2000, I carried out an action that consisted of robbing a person with a middle-class appearance. Following is a description of the victim, the modus operandi, and the amount stolen, 874.35 quetzales. It ends by ensuring that the wine for this reception has been purchased with that money."

The work transgressed decency and ethical codes, but more importantly, made all members of the audience complicit in his crime. López stated in an interview, "The worst thing is that nobody ever denounced anything. The people drank their wine, and that wine is complicity. No one is saved here and the artist less so. I think I offered a

sacrifice, because I still feel guilty, it still hurts me, it was very strong, to say that the artist has no right to do everything."

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Luis Díaz Aldana

b. 1939, Guatemala

Left to right: *Outside Standing* (*Afuera parado*)

Outside Walking (*Afuera caminando*)

Outside Attacked (*Afuera atacado*)

Outside Dead (*Afuera muerto*)

All works: From the installation ***Outsideinside***
(*Afuera dentro*), 1973

Mixed-media installation (wood, aluminum)

Courtesy the Artist

Luis Díaz Aldana, who also trained and worked as an architect, is one of the most influential Guatemalan artists of the second half of the twentieth century. His groundbreaking installations and precise abstract tableaux narrated the circumstances of Guatemala from the 1960s through the 1980s with an abstract but socially engaged language. Together with Daniel Schafer, he founded the Gallery DS, one of the essential meeting points for artists and intellectuals of the 1960s.

The installation, ***Outsideinside***, featured in the XII São Paulo Biennial, details a number of possible poses a citizen might take in daily life traversing between home (inside)

and the world (outside) during a repressive regime. The robotic, semi life-size figures are seen from above, standing, walking, or dead, projecting their shadow. The panels are installed around a room with dry leaves on the floor which connects them to the country's mostly rural population, and contributes to the broader sensorial complexity of the work. A portion of the installation is presented here.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Jessica Kairé

b. 1980, Guatemala

Clockwise from top left: *CONFORT baton (beige and black)*
(*CONFORT macana (beige y negro)*)

Courtesy Colección JLC, Guatemala City

CONFORT bullet box (CONFORT caja de balas)

Courtesy the Artist

CONFORT grenade (orange) (CONFORT granada (anaranjada))

Courtesy the Artist

CONFORT knuckles (green) (CONFORT manopla (verde))

Courtesy Colección JLC, Guatemala City

CONFORT multicolor grenade (orange, red, light blue, lilac, green and yellow) (CONFORT granada multicolor (naranja, rojo, celeste, lila, verde y amarillo))

Courtesy collection of Christian Ochaita

All works: 2008

Mixed media

Born in Guatemala, artist Jessica Kairé currently lives and works in New York. Kairé combines various media, including sculpture, food, ceramics, and performance to create works that address issues related to her Guatemalan experience, Jewish background, and Latinx identity. In her work she explores themes of violence, underdevelopment, and exoticization as well as gender issues. The selection of soft, stuffed weapons displayed here provide a stark tension between the textures of the “toys” and the violent ways weapons are employed. Playfulness and humor are elements often used by the artist because, she states, “I see them as good entry points to more dense subject-matter, so switching the weapon's typical black, brown and deep green palette for bright colors made sense.”

Kairé is also the Co-founder and Co-director of NuMu (New Museum of Contemporary Art) in Guatemala City, a small, egg-shaped museum that aims to present rigorous contemporary art to the city.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Jorge de León

b. 1976, Guatemala

The Circle (El Círculo), 2000

Documentation of performance, exhibition copies

Courtesy the Artist. Photos: Regina José Galindo / Festival Octubre Azul

Born in 1976 in Guatemala City, Jorge de León is an artist best known for installation, sculpture, and performance art. He graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in Guatemala City and has since exhibited in numerous shows in Europe, Latin America, and the US. Like fellow artists Aníbal López, Regina José Galindo, and Jessica Kairé, de León often uses his own body as a site for investigation and as a metaphor for the larger body politic of his country.

De León acknowledges an autobiographical element in his work with a past that includes gang affiliation, tattoo artistry, and stints in jail before turning to art as a profession. Hence his work often explores the reality of urban violence and petty crime in Guatemala City, relating it to the more systematic corruption that has plagued the country for decades. De León has commented that the elite live by double standards, saying, "They are thieves, but they kill us saying we are thieves ... At least gang members are honest. If gang members rob, they say it. If they take drugs, they say it."

In this seminal work, a photographic document of a live performance, de León is seen sewing his mouth shut with needle and thread as blood slowly drips from his mouth onto his fingers and tissue. The excruciating image shockingly symbolizes the pain of forced silence and its ramifications. Its title alludes to the circle of violence that persists when we are either forced to keep quiet or choose

to do so in response to the tragic events that happen around us.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Byron Mármol

b. 1984, Guatemala

Untitled (Car Theft No. 1) (Sin título (Asalto no. 1)), 2012

Digital photograph, exhibition copy

Courtesy the Artist

Byron Mármol is a self-taught visual artist who lives and works in Guatemala City. His artistic practice focuses on the presentday, lived realities of contemporary life in the city. His photography and video works are inspired by the internet and urban cultures, cosplay characters, security guards, and urban violence, which has become so commonplace as if to be banal, amongst other subjects.

For *Untitled (Car Theft No. 1)*, putting his own safety at risk, Mármol staged a scene as follows: he borrowed his father's Toyota Forerunner SUV and parked it in a darkly lit, industrial area in a part of town known for carjacking. Inside and on the driver's seat, he gingerly placed a laptop computer, locked the doors, and left. For two days, he staked out the car and on the second day, in the space a few minutes, the car was robbed of its contents. The scene here is the artist's documentation of the actual crime as it occurred. As in his other works, this project conveys the

immediacy of brutality and violence ever-present in the country's capital.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Alejandro Marré

b. 1978, Guatemala

Typical Weapons (Armas típicas), 2010

Mixed-media (wood, rope, traditional Guatemalan toys, studs)

Courtesy the Artist

Alejandro Marré belongs to the generation of artists who transformed the Guatemalan artistic scene immediately after the peace agreements, Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera, were signed in 1996. One of his best known works is a 2000 performance during the festival Octubre Azul, a seminal art event that took art to the streets—including performance—for the first time since the start of the war, in which he married a cow. In this exhibition, the series **Typical Weapons** consists of spell weapons created through the transformation of popular Guatemalan articles such as flutes and hacky sacks sold as souvenirs. They are a reflection of a culture in which violence and disrespect for human life have become deeply rooted.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Roni Mocán

b. 1965, El Salvador

Welcome, 2007

Mixed-media installation (borrowed door mats)
Courtesy the Artist and all welcome mat lenders

Roni Mocán's projects are inspired by common everyday events of daily life. He states, "Something as apparently banal as eating, getting dressed, taking the subway, or even a politician's speech are themes that I like to take and try to expand on, relating them to concepts of identity, place (urban) and marketplace (consumerism), etc." Formally, he works with various media including photography, installation, and drawing, with a restrained, minimal style that often includes a sense of humor, irony, or the uncanny.

For the exhibition Mocán recreates a mixed-media installation comprised of welcome mats borrowed from the local community, originally created in 2007. Through this artwork, Mocán seeks to transform borrowed mats into carriers of a message of greeting, underscoring issues of migration and transnationalism. As a metaphor for the entering of a country, this welcome mat installation underscores the need to address issues that prevent humans from being welcome everywhere.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Marco Augusto Quiroa

b. 1937, d. 2004, Guatemala

From **The Road #4 (De La carretera #4)**, 1969

Mixed-media on wood

Courtesy Galería Rocío Quiroa, Guatemala City

Marco Augusto Quiroa was born in Chicacao in the department of Suchitepéquez Guatemala in 1937. He moved to the capital in 1950, in the middle of revolutionary times, and studied at the National School of Fine Arts (ENAP). He was also a co-founder of the Grupo Vertebra, a collective of artists who pleaded for the social responsibility of art, and founder of the Quiroa Gallery, a commercial space dedicated to promoting the art of his generation. He was also a founding member of the literary group La Rial Academia, along with Marco Vinicio Mejía Dávila and Juan Antonio Canel.

Quiroa worked with oil, watercolor, pencil, monotype, engraving, casting and direct carving. His style was mainly figurative and expressionistic using rich colors and shapes inspired by Maya textile designs. The series **The Road** refers to a common situation in the 1960s: the finding of corpses on the side of the road, most of whom had been victims of the culture of repression and violence perpetrated by the governments since the start of the war. The series is made up of several of these cases, each depicting an individual case.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Elmar Rojas Azurdia
b. 1942, Guatemala

The Beasts from Guatemala My Reality (*Las bestias de Guatemala mi realidad*), 1969

Oil and mixed-media on masonite

Courtesy the Artist

International artist and architect, Elmar René Rojas was born in the department of Sacatepéquez, Guatemala in 1937. He graduated from the National School of Fine Arts of Guatemala; the Pietro Vanucci School in Perugia, Italy; the School of Decorative Arts in Paris; and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Along with Marco Augusto Quiroa and Roberto Cabrera, Rojas was the founder of the Grupo Vertebra, a seminal collective of artists who pleaded for art's social and political commitment in the late 1960s. This work from 1969 is part of a series titled **Guatemala My Reality**, which speaks about what was going on in Guatemala at the time; it belongs to a period of Rojas' work that was deeply engaged with the socio-political circumstances of the country. *The Beasts* shows two screaming figures under the menacing shadow of a soldier, and alludes to the violence that the army perpetrated in the country as early as the 1960s. Rojas moved away from this type of work and into much less politically committed and decorative work, while at the same time strengthening his participation in the political life of the country. In fact, he helped to found Guatemala's Ministry of Culture and Sports. *The Beasts* is an example of how art can yield an active participation in politics while bearing witness to the history of a country.

VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

Francisco Tún

b. 1948, d. 1989, Guatemala

Fusillade (Fusilamiento), ca. 1972

Acrylic on wood

Courtesy collection Sally Kuestermann, Guatemala City

Of humble origin, Francisco Tún attended school through the third grade, after which he taught himself painting and drawing. Throughout his life, riddled with addiction to drugs and alcohol, he was repeatedly incarcerated, though he never stopped making art that reflected his experiences. Guatemalan art critic Guillermo Monsanto stated “Tún is unique in his genre. He copied no one. He belongs to no ‘school’. He can be compared with no one. And therein lies the value of his work.”

Tún’s paintings combine matte colors in red, yellow, ochre, blue, and maroon to create compositions that include flattened shapes of buildings and of small figures in a variety of situations. This painting depicts an overwhelming spatial desolation in which a firing squad takes aim. With disarming simplicity, the artist captures a scene of cruel, unwitnessed abuse, the likes of which routinely took place in Guatemala during the civil war.