

Viaje a la Luna



## *Viaje a la luna*

**Lola Álvarez Bravo**

**Manuel Álvarez Bravo**

**Emilio Amero**

**Diane Arbus**

**Nina Canell**

**Marc Camille Chaimowicz**

**Ajit Chauhan**

**Federico García Lorca**

**Rosalind Nashashibi**

**Francesco Pedraglio**

**Tania Pérez Córdova**

**Álvaro Urbano**

**Danh Vo**

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by Rodrigo Ortiz Monasterio

Diego Villalobos

## *Viaje a la luna*

The exhibition begins with a script titled *Viaje a la luna*, written in 1929 by the Spanish poet, playwright, and artist Federico García Lorca, and intended to be directed by the Mexican artist Emilio Amero. The film, which began production in Mexico City in the early 1930s, was subsequently abandoned following the poet's tragic assassination in 1936. Over time, the only surviving traces of the project would be Lorca's script and a couple of photographs taken on set by the Mexican artist Lola Álvarez Bravo. Eventually, the project faded into obscurity, becoming an unrealized artwork—an enigma in history.

In grappling with the absence of both the artist and artwork, the exhibition attempts to imagine what the film might have been like, through the social context that produced it in the 1920s. The exhibition also draws a line to the 2020s, as fascist ideology is again on the rise with countries around the globe becoming more insular. *Viaje a la luna* becomes an exercise in speculative fiction through the form of an exhibition, in attempting to fill in the void left by Lorca's premature death and incompleteness of the film.

Federico García Lorca was born in 1898 in Fuente Vaqueros, Granada. In his short life, he published thirteen major works of poetry and theater that centered Andalusian culture and Spanish folklore through an avant-garde lens. A homosexual poet and playwright who focused on the stories of marginalized figures and communities, Lorca's work—perceived as left-leaning and socialist—was provocative in conservative right-wing circles. Through themes of passion, repression, and death, he investigated gypsy culture, the plight of rural workers, and the repression of women in Spanish society. Among his best-known poetic and theatrical works are: *Romancero Gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*, 1928), *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*, 1933), *Yerma* (*Yerma*, 1934), *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (*The House of Bernarda Alba*, 1936), and *Poeta en Nueva York* (*Poet in New York*, published posthumously in 1940).



In June 1929, aboard the *Olympia*—sister ship of the *Titanic*—Lorca arrived in New York City to study for a year at Columbia University. After experiencing heartbreak from a passionate relationship with the artist Emilio Aladrén, and grappling with the success of *Romancero Gitano*, Lorca found himself at a creative and emotional crossroads.

In New York, Lorca set out to find a new voice. Confronted by the infinite skyscrapers and bustling streets, he soon encountered the rich art scene of the Harlem Renaissance, via his friendship with the writer Nella Larsen. Finding affinities between the social discrimination of the Romani in Spain and African Americans in the U.S., Lorca would write to his parents about the insatiable appetite of American capitalism and its stark class disparities. These would become more visible after the collapse of the stock market just months later.

The political climate of the 1920s in the U.S. was marked by conservative, nationalist politics. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Great War (later called World War I), the country experienced a surge in anti-communist and anti-socialist sentiment. Meanwhile, in Spain, the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera had been established in 1923, and the country was economically reeling from the Rif War with the Barber tribes in Morocco. It was in the heart of this North American metropolis that Lorca connected with intellectuals and artists from the Spanish and Latin American left, such as Fernando de los Ríos, José Vasconcelos, María Antonieta Rivas Mercado, and Emilio Amero.

A cinephile, Lorca was introduced to Amero's film work by Rivas Mercado. Amero's most recent piece at the time, *777*, now lost, is described as an abstract film, featuring superimposed images of machines and mechanical gears common in assembly-line manufacturing. Likely influenced by Fernand Léger or Oskar Fischinger, Amero's interest in cinema—the most modern medium of the time—made film an ideal tool to explore the conditions of contemporary life and the increasing impact of technology. Impressed, Lorca befriended him and wrote a film script for Amero to direct.

Written one afternoon in Amero's apartment, *Viaje a la luna* was conceived as a silent film composed of 72 loosely connected sequences. It is the work of a dreamer—Lorca's poetic response to the chaotic, alienating energy of New York. Entirely visual in its form, the film presents the city as an abstract inner landscape, filtered through Lorca's surrealist imagination. Using mystical, romantic, and coded imagery of violence, Lorca evokes themes of societal repression and personal persecution. The script, as notes the renowned Lorca scholar Ian Gibson, "does not describe a journey to the moon, but rather a symbolic voyage toward death in search of unattainable love. From the haunting opening sequence—'from the white bed against a grey wall, where the numbers 13 and 22 emerge from the sheets in pairs until they cover the bed like ants'—to the final image of the moon and wind-blown trees, the film unfolds like a dreamscape."<sup>1</sup>

Read alongside his New York poems, *Viaje a la luna* becomes a deeply personal narrative of Lorca's anxieties. This is especially evident in sequence 36—"Double exposure of iron bars passing over a drawing, *The Death of Saint Radegunda*"—which resembles two of Lorca's drawings from the same period, both featured in the exhibition. In each artwork, the dying figure resembles the poet himself, lying on a table with several wounds. One of these drawings, dated "New York, 1929," bears the same title as the film sequence and captures the symbolic violence and vulnerability at the heart of Lorca's vision.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after completing the script, Lorca departed for Havana, Cuba, and later, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Amero returned to Mexico City in 1930 and began production with some of the most prominent artists of the Mexican avant-garde, including Lola and Manuel Álvarez Bravo.

The project would not be completed.

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1 Ian Gibson. *Federico García Lorca* (London: Farber and Farber Limited, 1989), 276

2 Gibson, 276

On August 16, 1936, at the age of 38, Federico García Lorca—the most renowned Spanish poet of his time—was kidnapped by anti-Republican fascist rebels and executed sometime between 2 a.m. and 3:30 a.m. He did not die alone. It is believed that Lorca, along with others, was buried in an unmarked mass grave between the towns of Alfacar and Víznar, about seven miles from his home in Huerta de San Vicente. The site is now a park that honors those killed and disappeared during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>3</sup> A commemorative plaque there reads, “LORCA ERAN TODOS.”<sup>4</sup>

\*

It is unknown when Amero officially decided to halt the filming of *Viaje a la luna*. Over time, rumors circulated that it was in protest of Lorca’s murder; others speculate that a love affair had emerged between them while in New York, and that the project was abandoned out of heartbreak. What is known is that the film—or what little of it was completed—was stored at Mexico’s Cineteca Nacional (the national cinematheque), then housed in Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City. Tragically, a fire in 1982 destroyed most of the building, reducing more than 2,000 films and artworks to ash. Among the lost materials was Amero’s *Viaje a la luna*.

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3 The Spanish Civil War was fought between 1936 and 1939. It is estimated that during the conflict 500,000 to 1,000,000 people died, and about 130,000 to 150,000 disappeared or were executed. The fascist general, Francisco Franco, would subsequently rule Spain until his death in 1975.

4 Stephen Roberts. *Deep Song: The Life and Work of Federico García Lorca* (London: REAKTION BOOKS LTD, 2020), 9

This exhibition is haunted by the past: by Amero's unfinished work, Lorca's murder at the hands of fascists, and the resurgence of far-right ideologies that—then and now—promote an insular worldview. Such violent agendas are veiled in rhetorical strategies that, in times of crisis, scapegoat political minorities through lies and “alternative facts” that appeal to cultural biases. If fascism is an ideology of homogeneity—a singular narrative, culture, or belief system—it is unsurprising that artists and intellectuals are often the first to be suppressed.

Similar to ideology, art relies on belief. It constructs a framework where the artist sets the terms of engagement, where anything is possible. While fascism demands coherence and submission, art opens spaces for contradiction, multiplicity, and doubt. As curator Aram Moshayedi notes, “Art remains the sphere where approximations of fact and truth are deployed alongside myth and deception, as a way of negotiating and undermining strategies of absolutist power and voices of so-called authority.”<sup>5</sup>

We have been here before. In conjuring the specters bound to *Viaje a la luna*, the exhibition reflects on the question *what would the film have been like?* This, of course, is impossible to answer, for ghosts tend to speak through echoes.

In thinking through this question, we contend with everything around the project, and *speak nearby*, as the filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha would say. Exhuming the past—what could have been, what still might be—the exhibition becomes a *mise-en-scène*, where the artworks do not directly attempt to reconstruct the film, but rather operate as annotations or footnotes. It is within these margins that imagination and possibility is privileged over resolution, and the question *what would the film have been like?* Is rephrased as: *why do we make art in times of uncertainty?*

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5 Aram Moshayedi. *Stories of Almost Everyone* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2018), 21



14 Emerging from the political and cultural shifts of the Mexican Revolution, Emilio Amero (1901–1976) was a key figure in the modern art movement and an early member of “El Sindicato,” led by Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. After moving to New York in 1925, Amero began experimenting with film and photographic techniques. His abstract *Photogram* works from the early 1930s, made by exposing hardware on light-sensitive paper, reflect a fascination with the mechanical world. At the same time, he remained connected to rural Mexico, capturing small towns on the brink of disappearance. In two quiet photographs from 1940, a pair of yoked oxen evoke a fading rural way of life. Made around the same time *Viaje a la luna* might have been produced, Amero’s photograms offer a glimpse into what the film could have looked like, while his photographs capture a world at the threshold of change, where the oxen become stand-ins for figures caught in the crossroads of modernization.

1. Emilio Amero  
*Photogram*, 1932  
Vintage silver print on paper on mount  
9 5/8 × 7 5/8 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment
2. Emilio Amero  
*Photogram (star pattern)*, ca. 1932  
Vintage silver print on paper on mount  
9 3/4 × 7 3/4 in.  
Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment
3. Emilio Amero  
*Amero Picture Book XXV*, 1940  
Silver gelatin print  
10 7/8 × 13 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of Galería López Quiroga, Mexico City
4. Emilio Amero  
*Amero Picture Book XVIII*, 1940  
Silver gelatin print  
11 × 13 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of Galería López Quiroga, Mexico City

16 Lola Álvarez Bravo's (1903–1993) photographs and photomontages recorded the transformative years that followed the Mexican Revolution. From documenting the modernization of cities to the rural landscapes of the country and its people, Álvarez Bravo was a key figure in the Mexican artistic vanguard of her time. Along with her husband at the time, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, she was part of the film crew that worked on *Viaje a la luna*. Her behind-the-scenes documentation remains the only existing visual record of the film's production. While the film would have moved, these stills—presented here as a digital slideshow—hold their breath forever. Also included in the exhibition is a dreamlike photomontage titled *Computadora I*, c. 1954, which fractures and reassembles Mexican urban life by layering typewriters and mechanical components into towering structures that loom over two figures. Another photograph captures a mural in progress by Diego Rivera, made for the Health Secretariat building in Mexico City. Álvarez Bravo focuses on a then-controversial panel featuring a nude woman; her image reveals not only the mural but also the scaffolding, the unfinished edges, and Rivera himself stepping back to assess his work. Álvarez Bravo didn't just document art—she questioned it. Her photomontages rearrange reality to show its seams, while her photographs of murals expose the labor behind the masterpieces. Through her lens, even a finished painting stays alive, as if it were still being made.



5. Lola Álvarez Bravo  
*Computadora I*, c. 1954  
Silver gelatin print  
9 7/8 × 8 in.  
Courtesy of Galería López Quiroga, Mexico City
6. Lola Álvarez Bravo  
*Fresco de Diego Rivera en la Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia representando la salud*, 1941  
Silver gelatin print  
8 1/8 × 10 in.  
Courtesy of Galería López Quiroga, Mexico City
7. Lola Álvarez Bravo  
*Viaje a la luna*, 1931  
Digitized black and white negative [projected], Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Lola Alvarez Bravo archive,  
© Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona Foundation
8. Lola Álvarez Bravo  
*Viaje a la luna*, c.1931  
Digitized black and white negative [projected], Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Lola Alvarez Bravo archive,  
© Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona Foundation
9. Lola Álvarez Bravo  
*Unknown*, n.d.  
Digitized black and white negative [projected], Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Lola Alvarez Bravo archive,  
© Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona Foundation

18 Manuel Álvarez Bravo (1902–2002), the seminal Mexican modernist photographer, was part of the *Viaje a la luna* crew, along with his wife at the time, Lola Álvarez Bravo. It was around the time the film was in production that he captured this 1935 portrait of Amero. The image shows Amero on the expressionist staircase set, his light suit contrasting with the geometric shadows. His downward gaze and relaxed posture—one hand in his pocket—reveal an artist at work. As both documentarian and creative collaborator, Álvarez Bravo’s composition preserves the innovative spirit of Mexico’s artistic renaissance through his characteristic interplay of architectural form and dramatic light.

## 10. Manuel Álvarez Bravo

*Retrato de Emilio Amero* [Portrait of Emilio Amero], n.d.

Silver gelatin print

8 × 10 in.

Courtesy of Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo SC/Casa MAB

20 Diane Arbus's (1923–1971) photographs capture the sublime within the everyday, and the private worlds of ordinary people. In *The House of Horrors, Coney Island, N.Y. 1962*, Arbus reveals a fantastical scene constructed from plywood and paint, inviting viewers into a world both artificial and deeply suggestive. Federico García Lorca, who visited Coney Island during his time in New York, was similarly captivated by the theme park's blend of spectacle and dread. His film script, *Viaje a la luna*, transforms these mechanical amusements into metaphors for persecution and fear. In Lorca's vision, the thrills of the funhouse become unsettling reflections of psychological unease.

## 11. Diane Arbus

*The House of Horrors, Coney Island, N.Y. 1962* / printed by Diane Arbus  
1962–1963

Gelatin silver print

7 1/4 × 10 3/4 in.

© The Estate of Diane Arbus, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

22 Drawing attention to the material and immaterial forces that shape our natural and built environments, sculpture, for Nina Canell (1979), is a form of relation. In *Pebble Conveyor*, and *Tectonic Tender*, both 2023, Canell presents two motorized conveyor machines. In the former, a pebble is caught between two opposing rollers, making its movements unpredictable, yet monotonous, and in the latter, a saucer plate with water and found debris balances back and forth between the rollers. These mechanical systems are unsettled by contrasting energy motions: the transformation of a material, from object to debris or dust, and the subversion of the conveyor machine, from assembly line production to sculptural material. Like two opposing tectonic plates, Canell's sculptures generate friction—felt and unfelt, visible and obscure—between movement and stillness, material and metaphor.

## 12. Nina Canell

*Pebble Conveyer, 2023*

Conveyer, pebble

11 × 34 × 17 in.

Courtesy of the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

## 13. Nina Canell

*Tectonic Tender, 2023*

Conveyer, plate, water, debris

11 1/2 × 34 5/8 × 35 in.

Courtesy of the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

24 Marc Camille Chaimowicz (1947–2024) was a pioneering artist who merged fine art with design, creating work that blurs the boundaries between functionality and poetic contemplation. His pieces—delicately patterned rugs, sculptural lamps, and sleek magazine racks—carry an intimate, autobiographical quality. Chaimowicz transformed the everyday into evocative artworks, challenging distinctions between art and life. Through his subtle and immersive environments, he redefined contemporary art, where beauty, memory, and quotidian gracefully intertwine.



14. Marc Camille Chaimowicz  
*Lamp 11*, 2014  
Collage on fabric, wood, metal  
66 15/16 × 11 3/4 × 17 3/4 in.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Marc Camille Chaimowicz; Gaga, Mexico City;  
and Andrew Kreps, New York
15. Marc Camille Chaimowicz  
*Magazine rack*, 2014  
Stainless steel and wood  
18 1/8 × 17 7/8 × 8 1/2 in.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Marc Camille Chaimowicz; Gaga, Mexico City;  
and Andrew Kreps, New York
16. Marc Camille Chaimowicz  
*Piano Stool (Burgundy)*, 2014  
Walnut and velvet  
12 5/8 × 16 1/2 × 17 3/4 in.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Marc Camille Chaimowicz; Gaga, Mexico City;  
and Andrew Kreps, New York
17. Marc Camille Chaimowicz  
*Bedroom Rug*, 2015  
Wool rug  
37 3/8 × 70 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Marc Camille Chaimowicz; Gaga, Mexico City;  
and Andrew Kreps, New York
18. Marc Camille Chaimowicz  
*Bedroom Rug*, 2015  
Wool rug  
37 3/8 × 70 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Marc Camille Chaimowicz; Gaga, Mexico City;  
and Andrew Kreps, New York

26 Ajit Chauhan's (1981) erased postcard series exists between the visible and the imagined. By carefully scratching and removing sections of vintage postcards—drawing through erasure—he overlays images of blooming flowers and waterfalls with delicate spider webs suspended with water droplets. For Chauhan, the web becomes a way to think about interdependence, where each droplet then becomes a stand-in for a moment or event, where nothing exists in isolation. The postcards he selects, often featuring blooming flowers or cascading waterfalls, are already images of transience—beauty at its peak, a moment just before disappearance. By veiling these scenes with webs, Chauhan both preserves and disrupts their stillness, turning each into a meditation on memory, impermanence, and perception.

19. Ajit Chauhan  
*Afterthought, 2023*  
Erased postcard  
14 1/8 × 16 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of the artist

20. Ajit Chauhan  
*Trio's, 2023*  
Erased postcard  
14 1/8 × 16 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of the artist

21. Ajit Chauhan  
*Place Position, 2023*  
Erased postcard  
14 1/8 × 16 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of the artist

22. Ajit Chauhan  
*Yield, 2023*  
Erased postcard  
14 1/8 × 16 7/8 in.  
Courtesy of the artist

28      Made during his self-imposed exile in 1929, Federico García Lorca's (1898–1936) New York drawings reveal what his poems could only imply. Sketched in notebook margins and on scraps of paper, these haunting images—faces with hollow eyes, bodies twisted like roots—capture the private fears behind his book *Poeta en Nueva York*. In them, Andalusia's ghosts collide with Manhattan's shadows, and the hand that once traced the poetry collection *Romancero Gitano* now draws its nightmares in pencil and ink.

## 23. Federico García Lorca

*Muerte de Santa Rodegunda, Nueva York, 1929*

Ink, graphite, color pencil on paper

11 1/8 × 8 3/4 in.

Collection of Fundación Federico García Lorca; Consorcio Centro Federico García Lorca, Granada

## 24. Federico García Lorca

*Autorretrato con animal fabuloso en negro, ca. 1929–1930*

Ink on paper

7 3/4 × 6 1/4 in.

Collection of Fundación Federico García Lorca; Consorcio Centro Federico García Lorca, Granada

## 25. Federico García Lorca

*Dos figuras sobre una tumba, ca. 1929–1931*

Ink on fabric paper

9 7/8 × 8 in.

Collection of Fundación Federico García Lorca; Consorcio Centro Federico García Lorca, Granada

## 26. Federico García Lorca

*San Cristóbal, ca. 1929–1932*

Ink and color pencils on paper

8 3/8 × 6 3/4 in.

Collection of Fundación Federico García Lorca; Consorcio Centro Federico García Lorca, Granada

30 *Denim Sky* by Rosalind Nashashibi (1973) is a feature-length film in three parts, made between 2018 and 2022 in London, Lithuania, and Scotland. The cast includes the artist, her two children, and a close-knit group of friends and collaborators. Loosely inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Shobies' Story*—in which a spaceship team must develop crew mentality to navigate non-linear time—the trilogy explores alternative family structures, intimacy, and collective experience. Though grounded in the present, the film evokes a speculative, dream-like world through subtle shifts in framing, editing, and sound. As time unfolds across the trilogy, participants age, relationships shift, and the boundaries between fiction and lived experience blur, inviting the viewer into a narrative that is at once familiar and strange. Also included in the exhibition is *Hairnet and Hyacinths*, 2024. This painted portrait of a woman, her eyes replaced by hyacinth flowers, questions the act of seeing and the nature of representation. Referencing *Oedipus Rex*, Nashashibi replaces violence with softness, using flowers to evoke tensions between masculine and feminine power.

## 27. Rosalind Nashashibi

*Denim Sky*, 2018–2022

Single-channel 16mm film transferred to HD video, color, sound, 67:00

Produced by Denna Cartamkhoob, cinematography by Emma Dalesman

Courtesy of the artist and Grimm Gallery

## 28. Rosalind Nashashibi

*Hairnet and Hyacinths*, 2024

Oil on canvas

15 3/4 × 11 3/4 in.

Private collection

32 Francesco Pedraglio (1981) uses storytelling as a tool for decoding intimate encounters with both mundane and historically complex situations. He explores how the acts of narrating and staging shape the relationship between teller and listener, revealing the fantasies and fictions that make up our reality. As part of his ongoing *Autobiography of a Museum* series, Pedraglio composes a narrative from the perspective of the Wattis. Told through a set of staff keys—from office and storage keys to the curator’s house key—Pedraglio scratches their silhouettes into the museum’s walls, exposing layers of sheetrock and paint from previous exhibitions. A graffiti of sorts, this quiet intervention leaves a speculative trace of those who move through the institution: staff, artists, and the public. Here, buried memories, invisible routines, and idle fictions accumulate in the museum’s unconscious.



## 29. Francesco Pedraglio

*Autobiography of a Museum (that which opens, that which closes, that which keeps things safe, and that which makes things possible), 2025*

Scratched graffiti on the wall

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

34 Tania Pérez Córdova (1979) approaches sculpture as an event—one shaped by time, context, and use. Her works explore how objects shift in meaning as they circulate, often blurring the line between fiction and reality. Rooted in narrative and performativity, her sculptures reflect quiet transformations, inviting viewers to consider what an object was, is, and might become. In her commissioned sculpture *Protest*, 2025, Pérez Córdova creates a fountain in the form of a rain chain, fashioned from aluminum pots and pans that are melted and transformed, producing forms that are abstract yet familiar. Referencing the *cacerolazo*, a form of protest where demonstrators bang pots and pans, the fountain slowly drips water mixed with artificial saliva, echoing the tension between political urgency and muted resistance. Also included in the exhibition is *El aire hoy (Air purifier)*, 2025—a sculpture whose circular form at a distance resembles a moon, but upon closer inspection, is made of mesh with embedded particles of destroyed private information: credit cards, paper documents, etc. With this work, Pérez Córdova reflects on the materiality of data privacy, and the infrastructures of power that are not seen but felt, through which sensitive information is transformed, obscured, but never fully erased.

## 30. Tania Pérez Córdova

*Protest, 2025*

Silencing chain (melted aluminium pots, galvanized wire rope), artificial saliva and water

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, Guadalajara, Mexico City

## 31. Tania Pérez Córdova

*El aire hoy (Air purifier), 2025*

Aluminum, fishing tackle, anti-hail mesh, industrially destroyed private information, binder, room air circulation

3/4 × 39 3/8 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, Guadalajara, Mexico City

36 Álvaro Urbano (1983) creates immersive environments that blur the lines between fiction and reality. In his commissioned work, *Viaje a la Luna*, 2025, he transforms the gallery into an introspective stage where Federico García Lorca's symbols become quiet actors. A theatrical light projects the silhouette of the window from Lorca's bedroom in the Huerta de San Vicente, the family home in Granada, Spain. Moonlight illuminates 38 hand-painted concrete pomegranates scattered across the room. The pomegranate functions as a sort of wordplay in Spanish, since both the fruit and Lorca's hometown have the same name, and the plant thrives in the hot, dry summers of the area. The number of fruits is a poignant reference to Lorca's death at the age of 38, assassinated by a nationalist militia from the Franco regime. Two drawings by Lorca, made during his time in New York, appear like cryptic notes left behind. Draped curtains soften the space, evoking both domestic intimacy and theatrical illusion. Here, memory, architecture, and longing converge, as Lorca's presence is conjured not through likeness, but through atmosphere—an archaeology of desire unfolding in staged light, where objects whisper.

## 32. Álvaro Urbano

*VIAJE A LA LUNA (Pomegranates)*, 2025

Spotlight, gobo, concrete, paint

38 elements

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, Guadalajara, Mexico City

38 Through personal and collective histories, ready-made objects, and an interest in both iconic and overlooked figures, Danh Vo's (1975) work constructs narratives that question the power structures of liberal societies. Included in the exhibition are two versions of the same work: *A las cinco de la tarde, a las cinco en punto de la tarde*, 2018, a text piece drawn from Federico García Lorca's famous poem *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, which mourns the death of the poet's friend and famed bullfighter. For this work, Vo asked his father, Phung Vo, to handwrite the poem's repeated lines marking the time of death. An untitled silkscreen version of the same work was produced in 2022 for the Feria de Abril in Seville, Spain. In presenting both the original and the copy—a readymade of sorts—we are reminded of the atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes in the past and of the contemporary resurgence of authoritarian governments and right-wing nationalism.

## 33. Danh Vo

*Untitled, 2022*

Ink and double-sided silkscreen print on paper, writing by Phung Vo,  
38 1/2 × 23 3/4 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York

## 34. Danh Vo

*A las cinco de la tarde. A las cinco en punto de la tarde, 2018*

Graphite on paper

30 3/4 × 27 1/2 in.

Collection Zorilla and Bremermann

Rodrigo Ortiz Monasterio

*Laugh like a ghost and cry like a poet*



What I'm about to tell you might sound a little ridiculous. But it's true. Every word of it.

Let's begin. The idea for an exhibition on Federico García Lorca's work came to me through a ghost. That's right—a ghost, a specter, an entity, whatever you want to call it. The project began with what you might call “a ghost's summons,” which, four years later, became the exhibition *Viaje a la luna*. Looking back, it was as if the ghost pointed me in the right direction, guiding me as I gathered everything. Does it sound absurd? Maybe. But it's the truth. And now I wonder—what was that ghost trying to tell me?

My first encounter with the specter happened in 2021. To be precise, it was a long weekend—the city empty, me alone with no plans. A friend of mine had been insisting for awhile that I meet her stepmother: the one and only Guadalupe Loaeza (best known for her novel *Las Niñas Bien*, a scathing critique of Mexico's high society).<sup>1</sup> Truth be told, I had no idea who Guadalupe Loaeza was—embarrassing to admit, because in Mexico, if you don't know who she is, you're basically a *pendejo*.

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1 Guadalupe Loaeza, *Niñas Bien* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1990), a satirical critique of Mexico's upper-class society through the perspective of privileged women.

So, I played it cool, acting like I knew exactly who she was. Anyway, my friend never pushed too hard—just dropped the occasional *It'd be cool for you to meet my stepmother, you two should talk...*

Then, out of nowhere, that same weekend, she called: “Want to come over to Guadalupe's for lunch? It'll just be me, her, and her husband.”

“What should I bring?” was my reply.

I think I showed up with a carrot cake. Or maybe empty-handed—I hope not, but I don't remember. She sent me the address, and oddly enough, we lived in the same neighborhood, Lomas de Chapultepec.

There I was, right on time, ringing the doorbell. It was one of those old Lomas houses from the 1930s—California-style brick roof, walls draped in ivy. A beautiful home. I stepped inside, and there they were, waiting in the impeccably appointed living room: walls painted *rosa Mexicano*, shelves crowded with pre-Hispanic artifacts, folk art, and Kilim rugs. Guadalupe, dressed in flawless elegance, could've passed for my conservative aunt from Las Lomas—refined, with this inexplicable energy. I introduced myself, and as if on cue, my friend delivered a condensed biography of my life.

We sat down for *botanas*—a sacred ritual in any Mexican meal—and Guadalupe took the invisible microphone. We listened, hypnotized. She’s one of those people whose presence commands the room, whose voice enchants. Meanwhile, her husband sat silently in a corner of the sofa, like a ghost himself in a wine-colored beret. Every now and then, I’d glance over to check if he was awake or asleep. He didn’t say a word—until the nurse walked in: “Lunch is ready, señora.” We moved to the dining room, and the nurse led him away to some distant corner of the house. I never saw the specter with the wine-beret again.

The three of us sat at an oval tulip table with ranchera-style chairs, the place settings as refined as the rest of the house. At some point, I asked where the bathroom was. “It’s in the study, through the door in the living room,” Guadalupe said in a steady voice.

I crossed the living room as instructed and entered the study, a space that felt like an extension of the house, with wooden furniture, a daybed, and a desk at the far end. My first thought was that this was Guadalupe’s workspace. Lined with vintage bottle-green tiles, the bathroom felt frozen in time like the house itself.

There I was, doing what I came to do, when I felt *something*, a chill. A tingling first at the crown of my head, then spreading through my body. Goosebumps. Something was there. I thought it was my friend trying to get in, so instinctively, I called out: “Conchita, is that you? Almost done.” No knock came. Still, that was my gut reaction. I finished up, shrugged it off, and returned to the dining room.

When I think I hear voices, I usually chalk it up to my imagination, and I hate that. But there we were, lingering over coffee during *la sobremesa* (another Mexican tradition that can stretch for eternity), when Guadalupe, without hesitation, told us to follow her on a tour.

From the living room, we went upstairs to her bedroom. I love seeing people’s private spaces—there’s something perverse about peeking into someone’s inner world. It was simple and elegant like the rest of the house. For a second, I thought we’d find the specter sleeping in the queen-size bed. But no—the bed was made. *Where did he go? Do they sleep together, or does he stay in another room with the nurse?* Irrelevant.

We moved to the TV room next door and then down the hall, opening another door to reveal a spiral staircase leading back to the first floor. As far as I could tell, the

only access was from the second floor. And there it was: her world. Her desk, travel photos in frames, shelves packed with her books and others'. Her Herman Miller chair cranked to an absurd height. Notes everywhere.

We lingered (who knows for how long) until Guadalupe said, "Follow me." Back up the spiral staircase we went. Each step was narrower than the last, yet she navigated it effortlessly. This was her domain; she probably knew exactly how many steps there were from the living room to her desk.

We returned to the main room, then entered the room where I'd felt... whatever it was. As she opened the door, she began explaining the history behind one of the portraits. And then it happened again: that chill, starting at the crown of my head, screaming *something's here*.

This time, it was worse. The sensation shot through my whole body. My head felt like it was being drilled by a slow-turning corkscrew. No pain—just presence. I know how insane that sounds. I stayed quiet. All I wanted was for the tour to end so I could bolt.

And just like that, it did. Guadalupe wrapped things up: "Thank you for coming, Rodrigo, such a pleasure. But I must retire; I'm tired."

The first thing I did when I got home was text my friend:

*Conchita, thanks for the invite. Had a fucking amazing time. And Guadalupe? Jesus. What a woman. Listen—didn't wanna say anything there, but... I felt something. A presence.*

She replied instantly:

*In the room behind the living room?*

*First in the bathroom—I brushed it off. Thought it was just me. But then, during the tour, it came back. Stronger. Conchita, sorry to dump this on you, but I had to tell someone.*

Then my phone rang. It was her. I answered, and the first thing she said was:

"No fucking way, dude. You felt it?"

I laid it all out—the bathroom, the tour, the debate in my head ("Didn't say shit 'cause, fuck, I didn't wanna look crazy"). But with her, it was different: "You're my *carnalita*. Had to tell you."

She laughed, her voice slipping into that *Niña Bien* cadence, like one of

Guadalupe's characters:

"Dude, that's wild. It's real—there's something there." Another laugh.

"Wait... you've felt it too?"

“Wey, it’s messed up. Guadalupe and everyone who works there knows there’s a ghost in that room. Actually—” dramatic pause “—I’d already told Guadalupe you’re the kind of weirdo who picks up on this shit.”

Then came the confession, the kind only close friends can deliver:

“Hey... don’t get mad, okay? Swear?”

“I swear,” I said, just to get to the punchline.

“Truth is, I didn’t invite you just for lunch. Or to meet my stepmom. I wanted to confirm the ghost.”

“No mames, you goddamn Conchital! You used me as a fucking paranormal detector?” I shot back, laughing.

*I’m not crazy*—that was my first thought. *Thank God I’m not completely batshit crazy.* And look, I won’t get into the whole backstory, but, since I was a kid, I’ve felt things. Only recently figured out my body picks up on them with that electric crawl at the crown of my skull. Some fucked-up alarm system, who knows.

Anyway, here’s how the conversation wrapped: The ghost haunting that house? A woman. Antonieta Rivas Mercado. Turns out the place was hers back

when they were carving up Lomas de Chapultepec in the early 1920s.<sup>2</sup> She left it to her son, who died in the house of some tragic illness, though not as tragic as his mother’s end.

Which leaves the real question: Who the hell was Antonieta Rivas Mercado? And where does Lorca fit into this mess? Don’t worry, dear reader, I’ll get there. I couldn’t stop thinking about Rivas Mercado—with her tragic life, the ghost had to be hers. So, I dug deeper, and suddenly, everything started falling into place.

A woman ahead of her time, no doubt. Her father was the architect behind Mexico City’s iconic landmark, the Angel of Independence, and she was a writer and playwright who’s been largely forgotten, though she was best known as the patron of the *Contemporáneos*. Married to a man she didn’t love, her real trainwreck of a romance was with the painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, who, let’s be honest, couldn’t care less about her. Their letters show Rivas Mercado’s

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2 Albert Edward Blair (1894–1961) married Antonieta Rivas Mercado on July 27, 1918. A close associate of the Madero family, Blair arrived in Mexico from the United States to join the Mexican Revolution. Their son, Donald Antonio, was born in 1919. The couple lived at the Madero family ranch before Blair became administrator of Chapultepec Heights (now Lomas de Chapultepec).

obsessive passion for a man who remains cold and detached. Oh, and the kicker? Rodríguez Lozano was gay (and in my humble opinion, he strung her along just to keep funding his art). Smart guy, though few artists had lives as macabre as his... but that's another story.

*The Political (and Romantic) Circus:*

Antonieta Rivas Mercado divorce from an older Englishman was scandalous (for the prudes back then). Then came her affair with the Secretary of Education Jose Vasconcelos and her financial support for his presidential campaign, which ended in defeat, exile, and the beginning of her life unraveling. To top it off, she kidnapped her own kid (according to her ex), sparking a bitter custody battle...

The harsh reality: In New York, Rivas Mercado spent more time within the four walls of St. Luke's Hospital (diagnosed with "nervous attacks") than enjoying the artistic effervescence that history books so insistently attribute to her. The poor woman was already showing clear signs that her head wasn't working right (and I say that with respect). Hardly does a ghost emerge from a glamorous and easy life. But that's just my humble opinion.

*777:*

Among her New York friends was Emilio Amero, another Mexican artist fallen into oblivion, who at the time was experimenting with photomontages (like Man Ray's) and abstract cinema. And here, dear reader, is where things get good...

Federico García Lorca had arrived in New York to take classes at Columbia University, though rumors swirled that his departure from Spain had more to do with his unrequited love for Dalí and the bitter discovery that a mediocre sculptor, another of his lovers, had ended up with a woman. Whatever the case, New York transformed him. There, he found sexual freedom and an obsession with Harlem: jazz, Prohibition, sweaty bodies dancing. Lorca collided head-on with the Harlem Renaissance.

Lorca and Rivas Mercado became buddies, and she told him about an abstract film about machines, by her friend Amero. He had created an early abstract short in 35mm titled *777*—now lost—but which we can assume was aesthetically linked to his photograms and photomontages. Years later, Amero would recall: "*777* was an abstract experiment using workshop machinery (stop machines) ... The title came from the gears forming the number 777 when halted." A homemade version, perhaps, of Fernand



*Léger's 'Ballet Mécanique' (1924), possibly influenced by the abstract films of Duchamp or Fischinger that he might have seen in some bohemian corner of New York.*<sup>3</sup>

They say Lorca and Amero first met in the Mexican's apartment on 60th Street, where he hosted film screenings. It's also said that their conversation about Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* sparked their collaboration on the *Viaje a la luna* screenplay.

I like to imagine that encounter, the genesis of their collaboration: both drunk, smoking in the humid summer heat. Sprawled on the floor, Amero watching Lorca scribble notes on scattered pieces of paper. Sweaty, working like machines until dawn, Lorca handing him the pages and saying, "Here's your film script, dear. Now work your magic with this."

No one knows if they spoke again after writing *Viaje a la luna*. Yet, just months later, Lorca returned to Spain. Meanwhile, Rivas Mercado, accompanied by Vasconcelos, arrived in Paris, where one afternoon in 1930, she would

take Vasconcelos' pistol and shoot herself inside Notre-Dame at the age of thirty. That same year, Amero returned to Mexico, where he would co-found the country's first Film Club alongside photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo, muralist Carlos Mérida, and painter Roberto Montenegro.

Meanwhile, in July 1936, the Spanish Civil War erupted, shattering the poet's plans to visit Mexico. He had already booked a passage for the voyage on the invitation of Luis Chico Goerne, rector of The National Autonomous University of Mexico, to deliver lectures on theater and poetry, and to attend performances of his works at Bellas Artes by Margarita Xirgu's company. One day before sailing, he canceled the trip. That same month he was arrested, accused of homosexuality and leftist sympathies. Between August 18 and 19, the poet was executed. His body was never found among the mass graves.

With the triangle tragically broken, in 1930 Amero asked Francisco García Lorca to authenticate his brother's manuscript, which he did. In 1932, Amero began filming *Viaje a la luna* with the Bravos and others. But as if cursed, production was halted. The film was never completed, and the little surviving footage would eventually be lost in one of Churubusco Studios' fires. Perhaps a

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3 Juan Manuel Aurrecochea, "Federico García Lorca y Emilio Amero, cineastas en Nueva York," *Corre Cámara*, June 12, 2023, accessed July 20, 2024, <https://correcamara.com/federico-garcia-lorca-y-emilio-amero-cineastas-en-nueva-york/>, para. 5.

47 sign that the project was doomed never to see daylight. Eventually, Amero moved to the United States, first to Seattle, then Oklahoma, where he taught lithography. But there's always light at the end of the tunnel: in the early 1980s, Amero's widow would find the original *Viaje a la luna* script in a nightstand drawer.

And that's where our story begins...

## VIAJE A LA LUNA

Lola Álvarez Bravo, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Emilio Amero, Diane Arbus,  
Nina Canell, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Ajit Chauhan,  
Federico García Lorca, Rosalind Nashashibi, Francesco Pedraglio,  
Tania Pérez Córdova, Álvaro Urbano, Danh Vo

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exhibition curator Diego Villalobos and learn more about the Wattis.



*Viaje a la luna* is curated by Diego Villalobos and Rodrigo Ortiz Monasterio, with exhibition design by Robin Beard. The exhibition is made possible thanks to Lisa Bransten, with additional support from The Jenni Crain Foundation. Special thanks to the Centro Federico García Lorca, the artists, galleries, lenders, and CCA Exhibitions. The exhibition will travel to the Centro Federico García Lorca, opening October 30, 2025.

The CCA Wattis Institute program is generously supported by Mary and Harold Zlot, San Francisco Grants for the Arts, and The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; by the Leadership Circle: Jonathan Gans and Abigail Turin and Katie and Matt Paige; by Robin Laub, Robin Wright and Ian Reeves, and Curators' Forum members. Phyllis C. Wattis was the generous founding patron.

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