

June 30, 2021

The Roar, the Rain, and the Spiral

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THE ROAR

Night has fallen on the jungle. It's pitch-black, as there are but few power resources in the community. Activity begins as soon as the first rays of sun are visible, and when the sun is down it's time to rest. We are in the bedroom—myself, the teenage votan who is my assigned guardian, a compa from Los Angeles, and her votan, a young mother—when we hear a distant roar from the top of the ceibas. It's not a jaguar, but the sound saturates the jungle and expands into the darkness. Heavy, but not threatening. What is that? El saraguato: it's calling the rain, my votan informs. A black-haired, gentle creature, it's also known as a howler monkey even though its voice is more low-pitched than sharp. A dense, quiet rain followed immediately. We are in the Zapatista Autonomous Territory in the south

of Mexico, close to the Guatemalan border. More specifically, in the community of Santa Rosa. I'm one of two thousand students attending the Escuelita Zapatista (Zapatista School) and am currently in the "first grade."

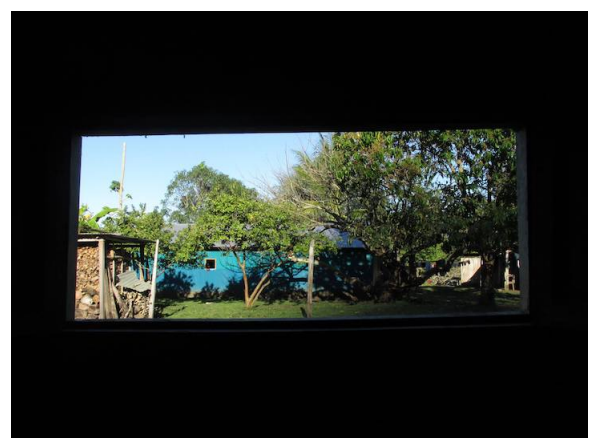
Recalling this experience from 2014 is an opportunity to examine collective and autonomous models of popular education for a curatorial practice in transition. Interlaced with this, I consider another space of shared learning and organizing within my more familiar urban context, the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU).

Perhaps paradoxically, I attended the Escuelita Zapatista in Chiapas while in my second year of a curatorial studies program at the University of Southern California. One path of private institutions and government scholarships and another still viewed as illegitimate, despite the fact that Zapatismo, as a movement, has impacted pedagogical forms throughout Mexico and abroad. Growing up in Mexico City, my first exposure, as for many Mexicans, came via radio, rock concerts, newspapers, and the writings of Subcomandante Marcos in the midst of the 1994 uprising. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)

(re)invigorated a spirit of alternative, collective work that linked '90s youth with the legacies of the 1968 student movement and the 1985 Mexico City earthquake,¹ as well as numerous Indigenous projects with less national resonance. Zapatismo is part of an inheritance of 500 years of Indigenous revolt in Latin America that developed from agrarian campaigns since colonial times into more complex formulations of Indigenous autonomy over the last century.² The movement's unique visuals and poetics have been one of its most revolutionary tools, from the symbolic black balaclavas and red bandanas hiding their faces and highlighting invisibility, to performance actions like a silent march with 20,000 members, asking afterward, "Did you listen? It's the sound of your world crumbling. It's the sound of our world resurging."³ The complex cooperation among Choles, Zoques, Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Mochos, Mames, Tojolabales, Lacandones, and many others is too often reduced to a temporary romantic guerilla effort or the domain of one character—the prominent Subcomandante Marcos—despite this autonomous project being sustained for more than twenty-five years while facing daunting challenges and direct violence from the government. The trust in

communal life and its corresponding precarity is often dismissed when viewed through modern, progressive lenses.

The main objective of the Escuelita was to spread the word about "un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos" (a world where many worlds fit), a call to organize and understand each other's histories so as to build awareness of the multiple fronts against the violent world resulting from neoliberal colonialism. The urgency of a global network of resistance has been reaffirmed over and over again since 1994, even more so in our current times of extreme nationalism, where borders are entrances to concentration camps, the planet is collapsing, and a virus has underscored every disparity.



Zapatista Autonomous Territory, 2014. Photo by Daniela Lieja Quintanar.

I. Curatorial Terrain: Collective Models

After attending the Escuelita Zapatista, I was not sure about what to do with what I had learned and experienced, but the questioning helped me to think of curatorial practice as an extension of my life rather than a "profession," and inspired a commitment to learning more about both my formative experiences in Mexico and my presence in Los Angeles. Curating became collaborative, working in active coalition with an art community, grassroots social movements, and collective life.

Locally, the most supportive platform has been Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in Hollywood, where I have experienced a deep resonance with the history of a diverse community of voices pushing radical thinking and practice since the 1970s. It was there, in 2017, that a large, yellow Aztec sun was painted as a mural on a black background wall in the venue's storefront gallery. It was a recreation of a common backdrop used in the early performances of El Teatro Campesino, born from the fields of Central California and the struggles of the United Farm Workers movement. The curator Samantha Gregg and I organized the

exhibition *El Teatro Campesino (1965–1975)* to (re)locate the working class theater group within the history of contemporary art and under the banner of social practice. During its first decade, El Teatro was dedicated to educating farm workers about their struggles through representative short stories (actos). Oppressors were depicted with pig masks and simple signs hung around the necks of the actors that indicated roles: El Patroncito (owner/boss), La Migra (ICE), and Campesino. The signs were made with cardboard and marker, a particular *rascuache* aesthetic.⁴ Our research focused on collective work rather than any one leader. An important female voice among the group, Diane Rodriguez (1951–2020), shared that "If you want a movement, you have to sacrifice," referring to the commitment of creating political theater on the road for long stretches of time. Rodriguez was a tireless writer, producer, and advocate of the Chicano contemporary theater field who recalled El Teatro as top-tier education, "a PhD program," superior to the kind she had once sought to find at a university. Within the structure of a *familia*, members of the troupe educated themselves through collective study of Nahuatl, Mayan Cosmogonies, and Marxism—not to

mention a lot of poetry. With their alternative educational and political model in tow, they brought exploratory theater from farm to farm.



Installation view of the exhibition *El Teatro Campesino (1965–1975)*, June 28–August 13, 2017 at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Courtesy of the artists and LACE. Photo by Chris Wormald.

I. Urban Territories: Collective Models

Decades after the EZLN declared war on neoliberalism, the largest city in the wealthiest state in the U.S., Los Angeles, has over 60,000 houseless people. Evictions proliferate as developers use the pandemic to accelerate construction of luxury housing. A year after the Escuelita, I had the opportunity to join a meeting of the School of Echoes in the offices of Unión de Vecinos, a community organization founded in 1996 in L.A.'s Boyle Heights neighborhood.⁵ A group of organizers, popular educators, and artists were analyzing the forces of gentrification and

their harsh impacts on working-class communities—in the summer of 2015, this would give rise to the Los Angeles Tenants Union / Sindicato de Inquilinxs de Los Ángeles (LATU / SILA).

Lessons of the Zapatistas are put into practice in Los Angeles. I am a renter, and a member of this movement for the human right to housing that stands against the same systems that have deprived the Zapatistas of control of their ancestral lands. Seeds are planted as tenants newly learn of their rights through LATU's workshops, then cultivated as they understand *their* housing as something defended collectively. Angelenos become aware that their struggle is part of the wider impacts of capitalist housing. Biweekly meetings with neighbors in the various local chapters create space for strategy sessions resulting in direct action: from protests at landlords' houses or government offices to lively, sensory processions featuring mariachi music, multilingual signage, puppets (often of vultures to signify speculators), "die-ins," and more. Tenant associations form building by building, producing yet more spaces that then connect with others at public actions, the union's monthly general

meetings, and annual assemblies. Tenants come to LATU in personal crisis and—far from simply being offered aid—they are welcomed into a movement. All of this fuels the imagination of new systems of housing all together. The saraguato roars to call the rain that feeds the land that grows the corn that provides subsistence for the resistance.

While curatorial practice has allowed me to learn about historical and present-day movements, the learning processes that define LATU have encouraged me to see my surroundings differently, to understand my city through power relations and post-capitalist possibility. What is a future that understands housing as an essential human right? What is a future where communal needs and resources can no longer become privatized?



Documentation of the procession and protest "And Still We Rise / Seguimos en Protesta," March 28, 2021, organized by the L.A. Tenants Union. Photo by Brandon Hauer.

MOVEMENT IN THE RAIN

The family gathers with us underneath a type of veranda that blends seamlessly with the green landscape. We sit facing both the river and the house of the single family that abandoned the cause. They are PRIistas,⁶ the kid says, and their house is the only one with a small wire fence surrounding it. While we read the history of the Zapatista rebellion aloud, the children draw on the floor and listen. Most attention is focused on grandpa Maxi, an elder with greyish eyes and the skin of dried and cracked soil. He explains how extreme poverty and exploitation led them to try to defeat the landlords in the 1970s. Maxi shows me an old Tojolabal—Spanish dictionary and explains to me the importance of his language, and how it has allowed them to organize the rebellion. "Tojolabal" means "human of fair word"—every word has a meaning connecting us and everything that surrounds us. "We had to work under miserable conditions in the field," Maxi continues, "on those lands that once belonged to our ancestors. We couldn't stand the exploitation and decided to wait until night came, until the saraguato called for the rain. At the exact moment the rain fell, we walked out of our houses and

poured deep into the mountains to organize. Bit by bit, word by word the group would keep growing every time the rain came. I can see Maxi's excitement about people coming from around the world to learn about the Zapatista movement now. Being there makes it clear that resistance is an everyday practice, not a goal. Utopia is tangible in Santa Rosa, from the saraguato's sound to the first welcoming words in the dark from a spokeswoman addressing our small group, to my votan helping me walk the muddy path into the jungle while I fell and stood up again over and over.

"Our word is our weapon," the Zapatistas state. We read passages from the Escuelita's four essential books: *Autonomous Government I and II*, *Autonomous Resistance*, and *Women's Participation in Autonomous Government*, a collection of experiences from Zapatista members that prompt conversations about failure and the need to constantly re-imagine.⁷ The family answered questions and shared many stories. We learned together, while Maxi and company were especially interested in stories of other *caracoles*—autonomous organized communities—located deep in the cold

mountains, where life is even more difficult. Oral histories resonate in each place where the Zapatistas have established themselves, shortening the distances between each zone and blurring any isolation. The main assignment following the first grade—"La Libertad según l@s Zapatistas" (Freedom according to the Zapatistas)—was to return to our respective homes and grow the movement in our own ways, proliferating the caracol model. The Escuelita provides seeds from which to grow strategy.

What does a world with many worlds working together look like?



Collective drawing made with our votanes and local children in the Zapatista Autonomous Territories, 2014.

II. Curatorial Terrain: Listening, Coalition

Curatorial projects are opportunities to learn from communities and understand the legacy of their collective work. While researching El Teatro Campesino, Emory

Douglas, the Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party, pointed me toward the Southern California Library in South Central Los Angeles where he told me I would find a 1972 issue of *The Black Panther* newspaper supporting the United Farm Workers' boycott efforts. The electric green front page showing the iconic Aztec eagle over a graphic head of lettuce, waving atop a black flag with "Boycott Lettuce" as a headline, became a part of the show.

In 2018, I had the fortune of collaborating with the curator Essence Harden on the exhibition *Emory Douglas: Bold Visual Language*, where we presented the artist's contemporary work alongside the legendary newspapers and in conversation with other artists from different generations that have continued his legacy of radical aesthetics. The Californian artists Sadie Barnette, Patrick Martinez, Juan Capistrán, and Caleb Duarte shared in a dialogue covering family heritage, Black histories, cross collaboration, and drawing inspiration from social movements.

Douglas's aesthetics powerfully framed a Black radical politics that was keenly aware of other struggles and worked in solidarity

against U.S. imperialism—work continued by the Zapatistas decades later. With the Black Liberation movement as the center of a spiral, so to say, Douglas depicted the fight against police brutality and housing discrimination and countered with vibrant, colorful visions of justice.

Solidarity among struggles permeated the show—we presented a series of colorful embroideries by a Zapatista women's collective as part of the Fresno-based Duarte's *Zapantera Negra* project. Large tapestries of Douglas's iconic images combined with Zapatista iconography, the result of an encounter between the Minister and these revolutionary women in Chiapas in 2016. The bold lines of Panther aesthetics converged with the embroidery of Indigenous traditions and dense imagery. One such combination featured a Black female figure wearing a flowery *huipil*, holding a weapon in the shape of an ear of corn. *Zapantera Negra* was about linking movements across time, geography, and language to meet in a shared visual tradition of rebellion. The exhibition travelled to the Southern California Library afterward, adding to this coalition of communities.



Installation view of the exhibition *Emory Douglas: Bold Visual Language*, July 8–August 26, 2018 at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Courtesy of the artists and LACE. Photo by Chris Wormald.

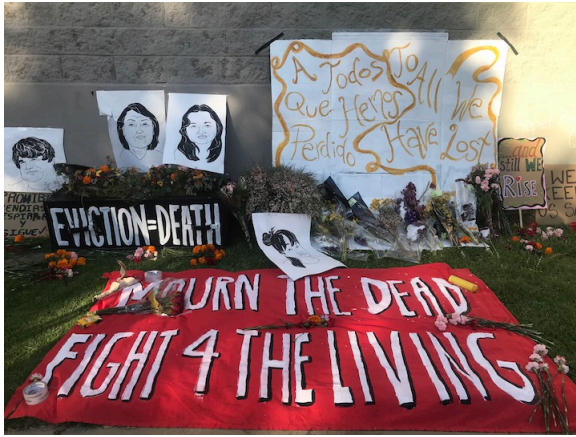
II. Urban Territories: Listening

The emphasis on listening to the community inherent to LATU shares roots with the practice of the artist collective Ultra-red, who since 1994 have demonstrated an experimental approach to political movements and long-term solidarity through sound. Members founded the School of Echoes in the early 2010s, another collective that in turn co-founded LATU. A single pivotal question motivated both initiatives: "What are you hearing in your community?"

LATU affirms its movement, in part, with an annual assembly where the different local chapters reflect on their work and strengths. In preparation this past year, members interviewed one another,

focusing on those suffering the crises of 2020 to the extreme, in particular undocumented and working class members. This tenant inquiry process, inspired by the radical Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, was collectively analyzed and presented via points of provocation, celebration, and consideration for what has been learned so far and how LATU might continue cultivating these seeds of tenant revolution. The importance of oral histories learning within the community, is a strategy that both LATU and the Escuelita Zapatista use to catalyze popular education throughout the movement.

In the case of a collaborative curatorial practice, exhibitions become temporary spaces of learning and sites of encounter between movements and artistic practices, inviting connection and (potentially) weaving a larger web among those working to transform the world into one of autonomy and plurality.



Altar prepared by members of the L.A. Tenants Union following the procession and protest "And Still We Rise / Seguimos en Protesta," March 28, 2021. Photo by Daniela Lieja Quintanar.

MESSAGES FROM THE FUTURE

The water runs down from the mountains as a stream that traverses the Santa Rosa community. During last night's rain, minuscule ancestral creatures crawled out from their shells and hurriedly swam down the hill, disappearing completely. They were organized, certainly, and seemed to know we were coming to bathe in the fresh and crystalline river. This sacred place provides all of the town's water. Somebody spots a caracol: it is white and small, with a spiral starting at its tip and growing in circles to form a cone. We're all fascinated by its texture, with markings almost like engravings or hieroglyphs: maybe it's a code. Our votanes look amused. Once we see one, hundreds of caracoles start appearing. They're all around us. There's

another type recalling the shape of a snail, but not exactly, as these are circular but flatter in a pale, mustard yellow color with an even more delicate texture resembling the lines of a fingerprint. At the beginning we thought they were empty and quiet; however, the Zapatistas teach us to listen to silence. Only then are we able to hear the secret messages from the future inside.

The spiral shape of the caracol (snail / seashell) is an important symbol in ancient cultures, but it also represents a way of approaching the world. A spiral form is concentric and continually expanding, thus enlarging and containing more. In the high-tech ancient Mayan observatory of Chichén Itzá, spiraling architecture provided myriad views of horizons, stars, planets, and changing seasons—marking multiple times at once both terrestrially and cosmically. The Mayan world connected holistically to the universe. It's this multidimensionality that makes the spiral a tool for creating, one used in my curatorial practice as a part of decolonial strategy.

The Zapatistas are dispersed throughout the high and low lands of Chiapas, a vast area that goes from foggy, forested mountains to rainforest. They use the

caracol as a political geographic form that articulates their extensive autonomous territories.⁸ Each local caracol is an advanced form of organized self-government where *las juntas* (assemblies) gather to discuss broad issues of concern to the community. Since the movement is composed of many different Indigenous groups, each with unique ancestral languages and traditions, the caracol structure acknowledges this complexity while functioning as a means of communication.

The educational experiment of the Escuelita began in 2013 when the Zapatistas announced a call for individual activists and collectives from around the world to attend the first grade, marking the tenth anniversary of the creation of the five principal caracoles: Oventik, standing for "Resistance and rebellion for humanity"; La Garrucha, "Resistance towards a new sunrise"; Morelia, "Whirlwind of our words"; Roberto Barrios, "Speak for us all"; and, the first one established, La Realidad, "Mother of the caracoles, ocean of our dreams," where I was welcomed. Upon the creation of seven more caracoles in 2019, Subcomandante Moisés of EZLN stated

Caracoles will be like a door from which communities come and go; like windows to see ourselves inside and out; like speakers to send far our word and to listen to the word of those from afar. But overall, to remind us that we should watch over and be aware fully of the many worlds that inhabit this world.⁹

The double use of the caracol—as internal forum and external outreach—has been crucial for the Zapatista movement, remaining in dialogue with other worlds as a survival strategy that develops an international matrix of care and absorbs new models.

The Escuelita's "classroom" involves learning directly from the everyday life of the community, spending time inside the autonomous territory with a host family. Sessions in the caracol of La Realidad included a night of dancing and live music, collective meals, and speeches by members of the junta, as well as Q&A sessions that sometimes ended in more questions, jokes, or even riddles, a particularly Zapatista style. The collective organization—each community, each family, and each individual within each autonomous caracol—demonstrates the potential of a model that would serve us all.

III. Curatorial Terrain: Autonomy

Without reaching for parallelisms or trying to force the model of the caracol to work in a different context, I refer to it when cultivating a critical practice that seeks out decolonial experiments under the westernized concepts of art and curating.

Multidimensional, multidisciplinary, spiraling projects can open a practice to greater collaboration and coalition with future, past, and present social movements. Spiraling allows for expansive perspectives and continually new awareness of our surroundings. I believe an exhibition is both a space of learning and of action, where different practitioners can gather, plan, organize, and experiment. I liken it to a temporary autonomous zone that allows me to join my collaborators and audiences, in tracing different forms of politics, a collective laboratory for testing alternative models. In 2019, for example, I worked with a group of artists to create the exhibition *Unraveling Collective Forms*, at LACE, which employed and explored collective autonomy and group manifestations as challenges to hegemony.

As part of the related programming, the artists Jorge Gonzalez and Mónica Rodriguez organized *Ensayos Libertarios: Maaynok (Libertarian Essays: Making)*, a Tongva–Boricua craft-learning and reflection space. Julia Bogany (1948–2021), an educator long dedicated to the work of visibility for the native Tongva people and their histories, began by welcoming a group of participants to Kuruvungna Springs, an Indigenous landmark located near Santa Monica—the tiny piece of land was rescued in the 1990s and now guards the memory of an over-8,000-year-old sacred buried site that was erased by colonialism and L.A.'s growth. Bogany brought us to the last remaining stream, a small symbol of endurance surrounded by sprouting *eneas* (cattails) that were and still are used for weaving baskets, though nowadays the community must source them elsewhere. We discussed the importance of natural materials to Tongva culture—ancient knowledge taught through oral instruction—that emphasizes the cycles of life and direct engagement with the land, forced aside by urban (i.e. capitalist) development.¹⁰ The site is testament to the incredible resilience of Bogany and her people, who continue pushing to relearn nearly erased traditions, including the

rescue of the Tongva language and craft traditions.



Mónica Rodríguez, Jorge González, and Julia Bogany at Kuruvungna Springs, 2019. Photo by Lluvia Higuera.

The following day we gathered again at LACE, inside of the installation *Una extranjera peligrosa* (A dangerous foreigner), which unified two different explorations of radical education. One was an anarcho-feminist library in-progress imagined by Rodríguez while researching the Puerto Rican writer and labor union leader Luisa Capetillo, whose educational project consisted of reading political texts aloud to cigar factory workers as they rolled tobacco, disrupting production with learning. The other was based on González's project *Escuela de Oficios* (School of Crafts), a collective learning platform that responds to the omission and abandonment of artisanal techniques and their histories both around it in situ where presented and in Puerto Rico in general. In

the gallery, González installed two key elements: a handcrafted, circular carpet of woven cattail and a theater curtain with delicate radial structures (soles), a tradition passed from the Canary Islands. There, in this place of conjuncture, Bogany taught the importance of weaving for Tovaangar natives and discussed the roles of making and listening in her preservation work.

Visitors to *Unraveling Collective Forms* were first greeted by a work from the Tongva artist Mercedes Dorame, *The Wind Is Speaking – Ahniiken Shishiinamok* (2019), along with her series of photographs documenting symbolic inscriptions upon the land surrounding L.A. A large, cinnamon-colored oval on the floor was filled with salt, stones, and shells, plus replicas of Tongva star ritual objects. Red threads sprang forth and climbed up to the ceiling, articulating this area as native space. Dialogue is weaved further with the artist Cecilia Vicuña's *Chancanni Quipu* (2012), a poem on unspun wool installed adjacent to a silver sequin sign reading "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," in Urdu, an artifact from the performance *اجنبی ملن Ajnabi Milan* (Strangers' Union) by Arshia Fatima Haq that was presented at the opening. Throughout the rest of the

exhibition were more areas of interaction and gathering.

Rodriguez and Gonzalez invited people to sit comfortably low to the ground in a semicircle, with Bogany seated on a chair in front of a table where she displayed customary Tongva crafts. It was a seamless transition from learning how to make a Tongva toy to weaving a basket together with Gonzalez's guidance, all the while participants took turns reading Capetillo's essays for the group. A critical, spiral moment crossing times, generations, cultures, languages, and forms of knowledge. It is in such spiraling where we see each other and enter into truly fluid dialogue—from localized knowledge toward outward connection. Just as the Zapatistas build in constant alliance with other movements around the world, so too does tenant organizing, operating from the block to the bigger picture,¹¹ and so as well can curation.

I seek opportunities to create autonomous settings among massive institutional structures—neither locating art in spaces of privilege nor romanticizing it as a vehicle of justice in and of itself. In solidarity with social movements and

community, I hold dear the insistence of the radical artist and art historian Mariana Botey [now Mariana Wardell—Eds.] that we must "redefine and push art in its inflection as an immanent field of transformation of the order of imagination, subjectivity, critique, and truth and live it as a space of expression of freedom."¹²



Installation view of the exhibition *Unraveling Collective Forms*, April 3–May 25, 2019 at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Courtesy of the artists and LACE. Photo by Chris Wormald.

III. Urban Territories: Autonomy

It's difficult to navigate between formal curatorial practice and autonomous activist projects: sometimes they polarize and reject each other, but it's in that tension where I operate. Experiencing the Escuelita, where I participated and learned as an ally, and LATU, where I am a member on the inside and a contributor to the collective effort, has challenged me to consider how spirals might inform my work.

The Zapatista caracol model of support and organization compares with the multiple voices that define LATU's focus on building tenant power with over a dozen locals and numerous tenants associations formed of neighbors in the same building. Both the Zapatistas and LATU trust in autonomy and reject the systems that have cast them aside along with thousands of other Black and Latinx communities, the same system that perpetually dispossesses the working class and disenfranchises immigrants such as myself. Autonomous spaces allow for the development of a political subject that can create an alternative, collective discourse, and then act to dismantle a world that only erases or monetizes us.

In the midst of the pandemic, the Unión de Vecinos–East Side local of LATU created a food distribution system and outreach team to clear up misinformation about the mass evictions that happened despite government claims to the contrary. A team of eviction "rapid responders" showed up to confront landlords who were locking tenants out of apartments while everyone was being told to stay home. The team would ensure tenants were let back inside. This is autonomy in practice: providing

education to know your rights and support for asserting them in recognition that the government was not going to do anything substantial to protect people.



Documentation of a food distribution event put on by the Second Street Tenants Association as part of the Unión de Vecinos–East Side local of the L.A. Tenants Union.

UNIDENTIFIED OBJECTS

It was time to say our tearful goodbyes to the family, seeing ourselves in them and them in ourselves. We grab our backpacks and walk toward the muddy jungle to a road where the dump truck that brought us here awaits. I see one of the little girls from Maxi's family approaching, she grabs my hand, puts something in it, and immediately folds it closed before I can see. She tells me it's a present and runs away. I open my hand and there are two little brown cubes, some type of stone or metal but I can't quite place it.

Zapatismo asks how to organize autonomously, without depending on capital or the state, and offers the answer that "we rehearse, test, and above all, practice utopia."¹³

Many artists have joined both Indigenous movements and housing justice organizations, yet the art community continually remains adjacent to or outright complicit with oppressive systems that demand production while increasing precarity. If there is any way to recuperate art as a tool for the movement rather than a vessel for profit and class status, the art community needs to adapt collectivity in the spirit of Zapatismo, to build solidarity within their field and with other arenas. I aim to move between the arts and the movement as a way of reaching toward the horizon of what I believe is possible, continually engaging with other worlds so as not to fall into isolation and closed-mindedness.

Spaces need to be de-institutionalized and re-imagined as platforms for testing change, not places determined by the funds of the wealthy and dependent on the unequal labor provided by indebted art workers. From Ultra-red to the generation

of los grupos in Mexico, there are numerous histories demonstrating the strength of autonomy and collectivity, urging to be reviewed. I don't wholly deny organizations or institutions, but rather I recognize the power that art workers have to help energize and strengthen social movements.

I curate as an active member of a society dismembered by violence, approaching all of what I have described as a questioning process. Right after finishing the Escuelita, I was unsure of what to do with what I had learned, of what to do with the girl's mysterious going-away present. After a long, meditative trip back to L.A., I realized that they were seeds, revolutionary seeds, to be planted and cultivated in the *tierra* that I share with everyone.



Documentation of *Ensayos Libertarios: Maaynok* (*Libertarian Essays: Making*) at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), as part of *Unraveling Collective Forms*, 2019. Courtesy of LACE. Photo by Tina June Malek.

Daniela Lieja Quintanar is Chief Curator and Director of Programming at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). She works between Los Angeles and Mexico, emphasizing contemporary art and curatorial practices that explore the politics and social issues of everyday life. Recently, she curated Interglactix: against isolation/contra el aislamiento as part of an ongoing project of mapping genealogies of collaborative artistic practices that respond to the violence generated by borders and hostile immigration policies.

1. On October 2, 1968, the Mexican government, led by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), massacred student protestors in Mexico City just days before the opening of the Olympics. This marked an era of students and workers demanding social change while facing brutal repression and a guerrilla war. In spite of the PRI's totalitarian approach, 1968 heralded a flourishing of collective, visionary work across sectors and throughout the country, with artists deeply involved. The catastrophic earthquake in Mexico City on September 19, 1985, necessitated that people gather together to survive in the face of government failure. Groups of neighbors who lost everything took control and a spirit of solidarity catalyzed the entire populace.

2. The author Francisco López Barcena explains that Indigenous movements in Mexico have gone through four cycles of colonialism since the Spanish arrived and identified them as indios, a classification related to colonialism and not culture. The first cycle ran from European invasion to the independence movements, where the Indigenous participated but still were subordinated. The second followed the creation of Latin American states with liberal ideas such as private property enshrined as principle. The third extended from the

turn of the twentieth century to the 1970s and 1980s, when nationalist ideas erased the Indigenous. Finally, the fourth cycle forces remaining communities to live within neoliberalism. See Francisco López Bárcenas, "La autonomía de los pueblos indígenas de México," *Dossier* (April 2019): 117–22.

3. On December 21, 2012, 20,000 EZLN members wearing masks marched in complete silence, leaving their communities and heading into the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. The only communication was a poem that ended with the line "The day that was day, was night. And the night shall be the day that will be day."

"Comunicado del Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional," December 21, 2012, <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2012/12/21/comunicado-del-comite-clandestino-revolucionario-indigena-comandancia-general-del-ejercito-zapatista-de-liberacion-nacional-del-21-de-diciembre-del-2012/>.

4. "Rascuachismo" is quick improvisation using materials at hand, a term often used in reference to working-class Chicano culture.

5. Unión de Vecinos was born from the struggle of the demolition of the Pico–Aliso housing projects. A group of women residents banded together and fought hard for their right to housing in the face of violence and government neglect.

6. The PRI used antidemocratic and violent tactics to maintain its grip on the country for more than 70 years, and remains a powerful party in Chiapas. In 1994, President Salinas de Gortari sent the army in to attack the Zapatistas, while his successor, President Ernesto Zedillo, was responsible for the Acteal massacre, among others. The PRI continues to harass the movement. Despite a violent history, the Zapatistas consider those who accept government aid to be PRIstas, but not necessarily dangerous.

7. These books cover detailed histories, formation, organization, functions, dues, and the obligations of the autonomous governments and communities as well as education, health, culture, politics, ideologies and defense.

8. The form of the caracol is the result of dialogue between Indigenous communities, human rights

activists, intellectuals, and others following the EZLN's armed uprising in 1994. It descends from a form of autonomous organization that came before, called "Aguascalientes," in reference to the revolution led by Emiliano Zapata in the 1910s.

9. Daliri Oropeza, "EZLN anuncia expansión de los caracoles Zapatistas," *Pie de Página*, August 17, 2019, <https://piedepagina.mx/ezln-anuncia-expansion-de-los-caracoles-zapatistas/>.

10. A recent example in Mexico is the "Mayan Train" transportation infrastructure project that is threatening to tear through several Indigenous territories, among them those of the Zapatistas. Promoted with the promise of supposedly positive economic ripple effects, the reality is that this initiative seeks to conscript Indigenous communities into the service of the tourism industry. Native land will be decimated during and after construction. To read more about this impending environmental and cultural crisis, see: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2019/02/13/letter-from-the-zapatista-women-to-women-in-struggle-around-the-world/>.

11. For LATU, this is best exemplified by participation in the Autonomous Tenants Union Network / La Red de Sindicatos de Inquilinxs Autónomos, a "North American collaborative of tenant unions committed to building tenant power," <https://atun-rsia.org/>.

12. Mariana Botey, "Just Art / Arte Justamente: State of Exception," trans. Sara Solaimani, *Field Journal* 2 (Fall 2015): <http://field-journal.com/issue-2/botey>.

13. "CGT Saluda a la Escuelita de la Libertad Zapatista y a la Cátedra Caminante 'Tata Juan Chávez Alonso,'" August 15, 2013, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2013/08/15/cgt-saluda-a-la-escuelita-de-la-libertad-zapatista-y-a-la-catedra-caminante-tata-juan-chavez-alonso/>.

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