

*Entre el entonces y el ahora*  
Between the Then and the Now

by Nahún Adalberto Flores

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

SUR Gallery, 39 Queens Quay East #100, April 12–17, 2023  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2023

© Nahún Adalberto Flores 2023

## ABSTRACT

My MFA thesis exhibition, entitled *Entre el entonces y el ahora* (Between the then and the now), and held at SUR Gallery, Toronto, April 12–17, 2023, synthesizes stories of my life journey and processes of making art that emerge from these stories through an interdisciplinary art installation that features two main series of works: *Locating a Distance* and *Borders of Thought*. The first series, *Locating a Distance* consists of mixed media sculptures that explore childhood memories. The second, *Borders of Thought*, is comprised of two-dimensional components that are related to my migratory experiences. To contextualize these two series, I have included in the exhibition a number of short videos that describe the place I come from, the materials I work with, my processes of making, the syncretic beliefs I grew up with as a Mestizo (Lenca and Catholic), and parts of my migration journey.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the land on which I stand and live, Toronto. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississauga of the Credit.

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisors, Dot Tuer and Colette Laliberté, for their patience, hard work, and help in guiding me and helping give shape to my ideas and stories.

Thank you to Catherine Black, for being the external examiner for my thesis defence, to the IAMD Graduate Program Director Jay Irizawa, and to my professors throughout the IAMD MFA program.

Thanks to my IAMD cohort for sharing their knowledge and nurturing me with their lessons.

I am very thankful to the donors of the Percy Atkinson Bursary.

I appreciate the editorial assistance of Ashley Johnson and Beth Kaplan.

I am grateful to Ilyana Martínez, my partner. Without her support and help I would not have been able to complete this program. Thank you to my lovely boy, Pascal, for being a spark in this project.

Thank you to Andrea Martínez Crowther for her wonderful videos.

Z'otz\* Collective has been a great school in collaboration... *gracias Ilyana y Erik*.

I am eternally grateful to my parents who could not see their children grow up, but always wished the best for us. *Gracias a Arturito*, my special brother who helped me see life in a different way.

My deepest gratitude to my older brother, Ramón, my battle partner. He knows where we come from, *y ahí la llevamos*.

Thanks to my family and the people of my village, Villa Santa, in Honduras. I am very proud to have grown up in this generous community.

I am very grateful to my ancestors and the many people I met on my journey to where I am right now.

Thank you to the land, mountains, and rivers that nurtured me and my friends while we were growing up.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Abstract</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	iii
<b>Table of Contents</b>	iv
<b>List of Figures</b>	v
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Context for Making: A Brief Account of My Life Journey</b>	4
<b>Exhibition Overview</b>	11
<b>Reflections on Work and Process</b>	
Series One: Locating a Distance	15
Series Two: Borders of Thought	27
<b>Conclusions</b>	
Act of Writing/Testimonial Remembering	38
Aesthetics and the Creative Processes of a Life Journey	41
<b>Bibliography</b>	45
<b>Appendices</b>	47

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1.</b> Transformation of detergent container .....	12
<b>Figure 2.</b> Component from the series, 'Locating a Distance' .....	12
<b>Figure 3.</b> Component from the series, 'Locating a Distance' .....	12
<b>Figure 4.</b> Components from the series, 'Borders of Thought' .....	13
<b>Figure 5.</b> Items from my collection special objects . ....	13
<b>Figure 6.</b> Stills from a series of videos projected in the gallery.....	14
<b>Figure 7.</b> 'Tree of Light' .....	18
<b>Figure 8.</b> Views of Component 1 from the series, 'Locating a Distance' .....	27
<b>Figure 9.</b> Components from the series, 'Borders of Thought' .....	37

## INTRODUCTION

At the age of six in 1981, my life changed dramatically with the violent death of my father in Villa Santa, a small rural village in Honduras. Up until then my family had lived in tranquility, but this disruption would be the beginning of a life journey that pushed me to leave my place of origin at the age of 13 and led to Canada. It was an incredible odyssey through Honduras, Mexico and the United States. I traveled and lived in many communities where I shared and learned from others, and was helped by mentors on the road along the way.

For more than five years, I have been writing personal stories about this life journey to share with my son. Through storytelling, I have been able to excavate memories from my past and discover a landscape of connections to beliefs, traditions, and experiences with the land and the natural environment. I undertook my MFA studies to explore and expand the relationship of these stories to my material practice as a visual artist. My thesis exhibition and accompanying paper is the culmination of this exploration.

In my thesis exhibition, I respond visually to these stories through the process of working with materials that transports myself to places of memory that connect me with beliefs, traditions, and customs of my village, as well as the natural world. The result is a body of work that emerges from and generates further narratives and stories, some of which I have shared in this thesis paper.

Another fundamental component of my thesis work in the exhibition is the use of discarded objects, which I transform into new objects as spaces to imagine and think. As a complementary element I display disused objects I have been collecting for more than 20 years. They are embedded with memory and invoke aspects of my past, through stories I have of them, such as who gave them to me and how they were used. I am aware of the time that has passed since they were last used.

In my process of making and displaying, I work in a self-referential way with no final destination in mind as a genuine way to create dynamic objects that can function both

as individually and collectively. I both generate and document my visual process through photos, audio clips, sketches, notes and texts, some of which are written directly on the work.

For my thesis exhibition, entitled *Entre el entonces y el ahora* (Between the then and the now) and held at SUR Gallery, Toronto, April 12–17, 2023, I have sought to synthesize and represent these processes of making through an interdisciplinary art installation that features two main series of works: *Locating a Distance* and *Borders of Thought*. The first series, *Locating a Distance* series consists of mixed media sculptures that explore childhood memories. The second, *Borders of Thought*, consists of two-dimensional components that are related to my migratory experiences. To contextualize these series, I have included in the exhibition a number of short videos that describe the place I come from, the materials I work with, my processes of making, the syncretic beliefs I grew up with as a Mestizo (Lenca and Catholic), and parts of my migration journey. I have also provided links to these videos in this support paper for the reader to access.

Envisioning the gallery as a site-specific space of displaying and gathering, I am sharing my work to create a visual dialogue with the viewer. Layered with history, the components of my work are intended as poetic triggers to induce the audience to think about and question social, migration, and environmental issues. My hope is to permeate spaces with objects that summon the audience to imagine, comment, wander and to create their own narratives, and in turn, to be nurtured myself from conversations that emerge from the exhibition.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section is Context for Making: A Brief Account of My Life Journey. Here I explain where I come from and my migration journey to Canada. I also talk about changes in community life in my village and about the syncretic beliefs of Hondurans. In the following section, Exhibition Overview, I describe the components of the exhibition, composed of two series of works, *Locating a Distance* and *Borders of Thought*, video testimonials, and discarded and collected objects as agents that evoke memory.

The third section, Reflections on Work and Process, is where I describe at length the two main series of work in the exhibition. I also speak about the inspiration that fueled their creation. I include personal written stories that serve as a departure to create the visual work. The final section, Conclusions, is about the act of writing and remembering. I also explain how aesthetics manifest through the creative process and feed from my life journey.



## CONTEXT FOR MAKING: A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF MY LIFE JOURNEY

### **Villa Santa**

I was born in 1974 in Danlí, Honduras, close to the border of Nicaragua, and grew up in Villa Santa, a village surrounded by forest and mountains. During my childhood Villa Santa was a flourishing village of about 2,000 people. We produced what we consumed and needed little from the city. The community was dynamic and diverse when it came to trades. Blacksmiths, cobblers, masons, carpenters and seamstresses abounded. In those days modern life hadn't arrived. We didn't have electricity or drinking water but those who had wells gave water to those who didn't. We lived in a communal way where people shared what they had and exchanged what they produced.

[Video Link: Villa Santa](#)

The community also had the Agroforestral Cooperative, *Villa Santa Los Trozos Limitada*, founded in the late 1970s. My father was a member and cofounder of this pine resin cooperative. It served as an important source of income for the community. It unified and empowered people who didn't have access to land. With the income generated from the work in the cooperative, people acquired land and cultivated coffee, and the village grew economically.

### **Lenca Ancestry of Villa Santa**

Villa Santa's population is of mixed Spanish and Indigenous Lenca ancestry and is located in eastern part of Honduras in what is known as Mesoamerica, home of the Copán Ruinas, considered to be the centre of the Mayan civilization before it expanded to other parts of Mesoamerica. Along with the Mayan people, there were other nations, such as Lenca, Tawahka, Xicaque, Pech, Tolupan etc. who inhabited Honduras before the Spaniards arrived. It is believed that more than 800,000 from many nations lived in Honduras, and in a short period following their arrival, that population was decimated to less than 10,000.

At the time of the Spanish conquest in the 1500s, the Lenca people constituted a large population that dispersed to other areas of what is now Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, in order to survive the Spaniard invasion. Together with other Indigenous nations they were grouped together by the Spaniards and labeled as “Indians,” which weakened their cultural identity and enable their domination. The result was the Lenca’s loss of their language and spiritual autonomy. The Lenca and other groups were forced to adopt the Spanish language and religion. Nowadays there are no Indigenous groups who practice autochthonous polytheist religion derived from animism, where people worshipped different deities. Notwithstanding this, many religious beliefs and customs of Mayan, Lencan, and other native groups mixed with the Roman Catholic tradition. This generated new spiritual forms and deities.

In Villa Santa, people reflect this syncretism in the way they live. Funerals, religious processions and other rituals are practices that unite Lencan and Roman Catholic traditions. For example, in funeral rituals we celebrate the life of the deceased with a series of activities that take place during the night. We have collective *resos* (people praying aloud together) that take the form of songs and go on for hours. People cook a variety of foods for the occasion. Coffee, *rosquillas* and bread are served during the night. People form circles and take turns to tell stories or fables that reflect morals with a sense of humour. In some of these circles people recite short verses called *bombas*. In these verses, performed by couples, people respond to each other and improvise in their declamation with a sense of humour. Villa Santa’s people were excellent storytellers. The stories ranged from animal characters to migratory adventures, treasure hunters, myths, and legends.

### **Cold War Conflicts of the 1980s**

Villa Santa is situated about an hour drive from the border of Nicaragua. During the 1980s, this border zone was embroiled in a low intensity warfare conducted by the USA from Honduras against neighbouring Nicaragua, in which a revolution had been won in 1979 by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The US armed contra-revolutionaries in Honduras and used the country as a base for military incursions into Nicaragua to defeat

what was viewed as a communist threat in the context of the Cold War era. Carlos Villas describes, “the permanent presence of American troops, the building of training camps and military airfields, turned Honduras into a country under US military occupation and a launching pad for a war of aggression.”<sup>1</sup>

In the context this Cold War conflict, our village was subjected to war propaganda and horrific situations in which people we knew were killed. Fear, paranoia, and violence affected our everyday lives. Honduras was militarized and de facto occupied by the United States. As Alison Acker writes in her book, *The Making of a Banana Republic*, “from 1978 to 1980 Honduras, got by far the largest share of economic and military aid in the Central American region: \$127.9 million compared to \$71.1 million to Nicaragua.”<sup>2</sup> This economic aid as a means of militarization shifted the dynamic of people’s freedom of expression, making it dangerous for Honduran citizens to protest the use of Honduran territory to fight the Sandinista National Liberation Front. People became aware that their actions, as simple as pointing at someone with your finger, could be interpreted as threatening.

During the years of armed conflict in the 1980s, the Honduran army incurred many human rights violations, such as disappearances, assassinations and the torturing of activists, peasants and members of cooperatives. Foreign intervention caused a lot of damage to Hondurans. We felt impotent to fight against these powerful forces. Alison Acker writes, “by the mid-1980s priorities imposed by U.S. foreign policy had overshadowed all national Honduran concerns. The nation had become USS Honduras.”<sup>3</sup> This situation propelled a lot of people to migrate to other provinces and countries.

### **My Father’s Death**

My life changed drastically when I was in grade one and my father was murdered. My parents were in the process of migrating to the province of Olancho, where they had bought a property. They had already moved to their new place, but had left my older

---

<sup>1</sup> Carlos M. Vilas, “War and Revolution in Nicaragua”, *Socialist Register*, Vol. 24, (1988): 188.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Acker, *Honduras—The Making of a Banana Republic* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988), 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

brother Ramón and me, with his godfather and my grandmother, since we were in school. Early in September 1981, my father returned to the village to buy us uniforms for Honduras' National Independence Day. On his third night in the village, he went to visit some friends. On the way back to the house, he was assassinated, receiving a bullet to his chest, and was later found dead on the road by friends.

There were several hypotheses for his death. Some people speculated that he was killed for money that the cooperative owed him. Others thought he was killed for his affiliation to the Cooperative. My father didn't have enemies and everyone loved him. He had a good relationship with the Cooperative. In those days, many people were mysteriously killed, and no one dared to investigate these crimes.

### **My Grandmother's House**

After the death of my father, my mother had to deal with the corn harvest and tending the cattle on their new property, so I lived with my grandmother for more than a year in Villa Santa. My grandparents had recently separated, so it was just Grandma, her youngest daughter, Ventura and my cousin Leonel, living in the house. My grandma was a rebel for some people and a *bruja* (witch) to others. She was a generous, eccentric woman, attached to her amazing garden where she spent a lot of time. She had a variety of medicinal herbs, floral plants and tall trees. She would take Leonel and me to the mountain quite often where she loaded us up with different wild plants and roots that she later planted in her garden.

Her garden contained plateaus made from earth, where she transplanted wild herbs. She had fences of vines that served as divisions to delimit spaces. We helped to make plateaus and other barrel constructions. She had special compartments in the garden dedicated to species of herbs like the *bauhinia monandras*, *rudas*, *manzanilla* among others. Under tall acacia and *guanijiquil* trees, she had *huacas* where she hid coins and other treasures. The *huacas* were clay vessels hidden under the ground. At first, these *huacas* were secret places to my cousin and me, but as the time went by, she began to trust us. At night we would visit the *huacas* to help her count and move her coins.

### [Video: Huacas](#)

I explored places in the countryside with other kids. We loved to play in the holes people made in the *barrancas* (ravines) to obtain white earth used on the walls of houses. We also went through painful experiences that affected our lives. Some experiences had to do with the lack of water during the summer when the landscape dried up. A sense of sadness overwhelmed me when I heard the cicadas cry as they dissected on the dry trees. That sound lodged in my brain and filled me with emotions. Other painful experiences happened because of tragic situations stemming from the war. We witnessed horrific scenes caused in mined territories. It is painful to talk about it; I omit these horrific stories out of respect for friends who tragically lost their lives.

### **Disappearance of the Old Ways of Being**

As a child, I witnessed how as the years passed, the people of our village began abandoning the old ways of dealing with the land and the natural world. The dynamic of cultivating the land shifted. I remember we used to grow coffee under the mountains without pesticides and using organic fertilizers generated from the coffee shell. This method benefited a whole range of living organisms and the natural environment. These traditional ways were viable and economical for the environment and people. Nowadays coffee is cultivated in barren landscapes with pesticides and imported fertilizers. The ramification of these modern methods of growing coffee are draughts, landslides and other natural phenomena that cause destruction of life and create poverty. They also alienate people from their land and the natural world. The two *moliendas* (sugar mills) and vegetable gardens disappeared, and deforestation became a normal act. Gradually, there was nothing to do in the village, cultivating the land wasn't viable anymore, and it was cheaper to import foreign goods. Honduras was pushed to sign unilateral trade agreements that made it impossible for people to compete with multinational corporations.

### **My Migration Story**

For five years after my father died, my mom struggled in Villa Santa to provide for our family, which had grown to six children. My eldest brother was attending high school in the

city, and five of us were living at home. When I was 12 years old, I wanted to continue my studies but could only go up to grade six in the primary school in Villa Santa. For a year after finishing school, I helped my mom take care of my younger siblings, especially my disabled brother. During that time we had to put my brother in a care facility, which affected me profoundly. Immediately after taking him to this facility, I felt obligated to help my mom financially but there were no jobs in Villa Santa. I decided to leave to find work and went to the banana plantation camps in the Northern Honduras, where I had an aunt. This is where my migration journey began.

I worked in the banana camps for about a year. The situation in the camps was worse than Villa Santa. There were no secondary schools and to survive I had to work about 15 hours a day, earning a miserable salary. This situation pushed me to leave Honduras for Mexico at the age of 14. I worked in Mexico for three years, in several states doing various jobs. I yearned to continue my studies while helping my family economically back home, but with my income in Mexico this was next to impossible. I decided to enter the U.S. to look for more possibilities. I worked for close to a year in Texas. Living and working clandestinely was difficult, and there was no possibility to attend school. Hence, I decided to go to Canada and ask for refugee status. This was an odyssey and I waited in a Detroit shelter for three months until a family sponsored me, since I was underage.

Eleven days shy of my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, I arrived at Windsor, Ontario, where I filed for refugee status. A lovely family helped me adjust to my new life and in less than a year I had legal status and then finished high school. After graduation I moved to Leamington, Ontario, to work in the greenhouses for a year, thus helping to support my family in Honduras. By this time, I had won some art competitions in Windsor, which prompted me to consider attending art school. Later, I moved to Toronto to attend the Ontario College of Art in 1996.

### **Connections and Continuities with Honduras**

Despite being alone in Canada, I maintained deep connections with my family and homeland. A few years after I left Villa Santa, my mom and siblings moved to Tegucigalpa. She became ill and died in 1998. I had to help raise my siblings from a distance, which

was a huge responsibility. I visited them every year and those visits gave me a chance to reconnect with my country and travel throughout. On these trips, I saw drastic changes that had taken place. The level of corruption was intolerable, violence had incremented throughout Honduras. In the big cities, one had to be accompanied with family members at all times and had to be careful not to go out at night for fear of being killed. Daily tragic news was a form of entertainment for some local tv channels. You didn't know whom to trust, the police or gang members. Unemployment was high, people left the country daily in search of a better life.

During my trips back to Honduras, I began to visit and research many rural communities and learn of their struggles. I've traveled and spent a lot of time in many Lenca communities that still maintain their traditions. Seeing how they live and talking to them about their way of life has reconnected me with how things used to be in Villa Santa, and the value we had for the land and the natural world. It reminds me of the teachings of my grandfather. Returning to Honduras also enabled me to engage in artistic activities in the region and connects me with Central American artists. I have gained a depth of knowledge from reconnecting with my past in Honduras that shapes my work. I also explore in my work some of the current issues that are affecting Honduras and Central America, such as migration and displacement, and environmental devastation. The title of my MFA thesis exhibition, *Entre el entonces y el ahora*, reflects these journeys of leaving and returning, and of the memories they evoke. The works in the exhibition are a way of connecting the past and the present and to shine light into our future. They serve as a bridge that connects me to time and space where the emotions produced by experiences of displacement and migration, and memories of village life and childhood, fuel the act of making.

## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

My thesis exhibition, *Entre el entonces y el ahora* (Between the Then and the Now) is an interdisciplinary art installation presented at Sur Gallery, from April 12-17, 2022. It is comprised of two main series – *Locating a Distance*, and *Borders of Thought* – that include sculptural and painting elements, as well as collected objects and video testimonials that explore dimensions of my creative process. All the works in the exhibition are inspired by childhood memories, migration experiences, the land and struggles in my village. They are material and creative expressions of a life journey.

In conjunction with making material objects and paintings for my MFA exhibition, I have been writing a series of autobiographical stories based on specific memories in my life journey. When I focus on a memory that stands out in my life, the writing process drives me to connect it to a landscape of remembrances that makes sense of who I am. Memories are like roots, they connect with one another and are in constant expansion. I use writing as a method of inquiry and, inspired by these stories, I create sculptures and mixed media works, generating further narratives.

The components of the exhibition have been installed in relation to the gallery space to create a cohesive visual composition that works thematically to address themes arising from my life journey:

### **1. Series One – *Locating a Distance***

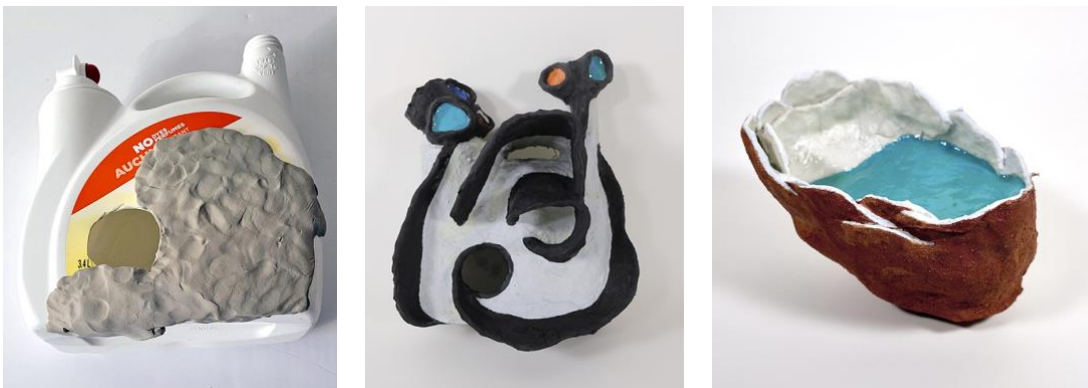
*Locating a Distance*, which is divided into two parts – a floor installation and sculptures on plinths – is featured in the main gallery. The floor installation is made of small sculptural components and sawdust. I use sawdust as a material to delineate the space, to create disruption, and to make patterns and marks. On top of the sawdust, I configure the small sculptures to respond to and establish a dialogue with each other and with the space. They are made of air-dry clay, earth from Villa Santa, cheesecloth, organic pigments, and rabbit-skin glue. Some sculptures are repurposed from discarded objects. I use cardboard and



plastic containers to make bases for some components. They are covered with earth to serve as camouflage.

The second part of the series is adjacent to the floor works and presents four sculptures on plinths. They are composed of repurposed objects and ceramic pieces and assembled with the same materials as the floor components.

I see these objects as live entities embedded with memories, unfinished and open for transformation. They are members of a community, dynamic and in dialogue not just with each other and the space, but also with the public. I invite people to touch them, to explore their spaces and forms, and feel their textures. Some of their spaces can be seen, while others are concealed from view.



**Figure 1.** Transformation of detergent container, work in progress, 2022.

**Figure 2.** Component from the series, 'Locating a Distance', air-dry clay, cheesecloth, Mesoamerican earth, charcoal, ashes, organic pigments, polymer acrylic, rabbit-skin glue, and plastic detergent container, 17.5 × 11 × 8 inches, 2022.

**Figure 3.** Component from the series, 'Locating a Distance', air-dry clay, cheesecloth, Mesoamerican earth, organic pigments, polymer acrylic, rabbit-skin glue, rabbit-skin glue, 9 × 6 × 6 inches, 2022.

## **2. Series Two – Borders of Thought**

*Borders of Thought* is a two-part installation mounted on the walls of the main gallery space. The first part is comprised of 60 unframed mixed media drawings on canvas, 5 ½ × 8 inches each. They are arranged in a grid of 5 rows with 12 components and take up 90 × 48 inches of the wall. Each canvas is multilayered and can be read individually or collectively, from right to left and vice versa. The pieces convey a sense of history, time and space. The drifting figures within the images search for a place to belong. The second

part includes 6 – 8 mixed media works in various small formats, created on recycled surfaces and exploring the same themes.



**Figure 4.** Components from the series, 'Borders of Thought', mixed media on canvas, 5 ½ × 8 inches each, 2023.

### 3. Additional components of the exhibition

**Objects** – I have placed the reconfigured objects I have collected over the years on a small dividing wall near the main room. I merge some of these with earth to create a scenario with alternate meanings. Through disused objects I excavate memories on both a personal and an historical level. They connect to my history through memories I have of the objects in relation to family and friends. The other wall in this section contains the exhibition text.



**Figure 5.** Items from my collection of special objects.

**Video Projections** – A series of videos is projected on the wall in a separate room next to the main gallery space. The videos, directed by Andrea Martínez, are a testimony of my work in process, my past and the land where I come from. I describe some of the ideas pertaining to

how I make my work and why I choose my materials and how I began to write stories.

Following are short descriptions of the video material:

**Video 1: Autobiography**

In my studio, I comment on why I decided to write personal stories.

**Video 2: Bojotes**

In this video, I talk about childhood memories that inspire part of my creative process for this thesis work.

**Video 3: Villa Santa**

I describe the village where I grew up and objects from my past.

**Video 4: Huacas**

I talk about Lenca culture and childhood places I embody.

**Video 5: Discarded objects**

I describe my connection with objects we consume, and how I transform them in my work.

**Video 6: Earth**

I show samples of earth from Honduras and talk about the relationship I have with the material I use.

**Video 7: Art as a journey**

I describe my working methods and processes I have developed over the years.

**Video 8: Migration**

In this video I talk about how I relate my work to my migration journey.



*Figure 6. Stills from a series of videos projected in the gallery.*

## REFLECTIONS ON WORK AND PROCESS: *Locating a Distance* and *Borders of Thought*

### Series One: Locating a Distance

The mixed media sculptures in *Locating a Distance* are inspired by two personal stories, *Tree of Light* and *Locating a Distance*, after which the series is named. The first story reflects memories of an *amate* tree my grandma had on her property. Below I share the story.

#### *Tree of Light*

We carry vivid and subtle memories that form our identities. I have childhood memories of my village, Villa Santa. I remember the first house where I lived, playing in our garden, climbing trees, eating fruits, cutting sugarcane with my older brother Ramón in our sugarcane plot. I remember getting avocados off the tree, eating mangoes under the shade of mango trees. These memories are fundamental parts of who I am. I carry beautiful and tragic memories of trees.

I remember the time my father took me to a new property he acquired in a part of Honduras far away from our village. This place was unpopulated and mountainous. Walking into the forest with my father was an experience that left a mark upon me. Huge trees hosted various animal species like monkeys, sloths, parrots, macaws and thrushes. All kinds of animals would form part of the symbiotic symphony in this paradise. Parrots camouflaged within the various green forms of the tree branches would emit a variety of sounds and I'd get goose bumps witnessing this scenario. These are the last memories I have of my father.

My father's property adjoined my grandfather's land. Years after my father's death I would spend time during school vacations with my grandfather. We would have long walks while talking about nature, politics, music and Honduran history. He loved to have complex dialogues with me and said I was an old man in a child's body. From time to time, beautiful and tragic memories of this place come to mind. One of my hardest and saddest experiences happened while my uncle and I walked under the mountain. A branch from a tree fell on my uncle's head and killed him.

My uncle was a very generous person. He was 31, and considered as a son by my grandpa, although he was his brother. "Nature is beautiful and ugly...we're all that, Balladares". My grandpa said. Balladares was the

nickname my grandfather gave me. He'd name everything, animals, trees, special places of the land, people, he would even name his corrals. He was a generous man, attached to the land and the natural world. People and animals loved him.

In Villa Santa, after my father's death I spent a lot of time with my grandma. She had a big, beautiful garden with all types of local medicinal herbs and plants. My grandma was a rebel. My grandpa bought his property far away from Villa Santa and my grandma didn't want to follow him. She said he bought that place without consulting her. Therefore, he didn't need her.

My grandma's garden was a special place. I'd spend a lot of time playing there with my cousins. I knew a lot of secrets of this garden. My grandmother had *huacas* (places where Indigenous people buried treasures) where she kept old coins at different locations in this garden, and I knew where they were. At night she'd ask me to help her moving things around from the *huacas*. She'd trust me, and I'd keep her secrets. She also had an *amate* tree in the corner of the garden, close to the main road.

The *amate* tree is meaningful for Mesoamerican people. Aztecs and Mayans would use bark from this tree to make paper. Aztec codices and Mayan documents are written on *amate* paper. In my village there are mythological beliefs attached to this tree. Some people were afraid of this tree at night. They thought that at night the devil would go there to do his business. This tree never flowers. The *amate* at my grandma's would give many fruits every year, but we never saw her flowering. This was a mystery and a subject of many beliefs. One of them was that she'd flower at midnight, and whoever would see her, became a very rich person. However, in order to do that, that person had to wrestle with the devil and defeat the big guy.

The tree at my grandma's place was quite peculiar. She was about 12 feet tall, with a circumference of 30 feet, having thick branches with a rare trunk and bark. It was hard to distinguish the trunk from her roots, which expanded and had rare organic shapes. She was old, giving a lot of shade and was home to many animals. I loved to play under her and she was easy to climb. I could hide there and people wouldn't see me.

The objects I have made for the *Locating a Distance* series are nourished by the memories I have recounted in *Tree of Light*. In the making of the objects, I work from my subconscious, starting with no preconceived ideas of a final destination, using all my senses and intuition. Through the fluidity of this material process, memories emerge. I am transported to the *Amate* tree of my childhood, and the syncretic beliefs it embodies. As a Mestizo, I carry transcultural beliefs that nourish what I do, similar to how the Bolivian cultural theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui imagines that:

“Puedes liberarte de los fantasmas del pasado y hacer de este una Fuente para imaginar el futuro. Hacer del pasado un enorme reservorio de experiencias valiosas tanto del lado Indio como del otro lado. Puedes hacer del Mestizo un ser active como una acción de emancipación.”  
(You can free yourself from the past and make it a source to imagine the future. Make the past a huge reservoir of valuable experiences both on the Indigenous side and on the other side. You can make of the Mestizo an agent of emancipation).<sup>4</sup>

The first piece in the series, named after the story *Tree of Life*, is hollow and multi-layered. The memories that emerged from its making, some dear and others tragic, form the dichotomy of this work. I render some of these memories visible, the vivid colours on top representing light as the most important element of life. Beneath the surface there are other memories I keep hidden as I work through the layers, deforming and transforming the object.

---

<sup>4</sup> Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Conversa del mundo, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui y Boaventura de Sousa Santos”, October 16, 2013, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjgHfSrLnpU>. (accessed October 20, 2022).



**Figure 7.** 'Tree of Light', air-dry clay, cheesecloth, Mesoamerican earth, organic pigments, polymer acrylics, and rabbit-skin glue, 10 × 10 × 10 inches, 2022.

The next group of components in the series, entitled *Locating a Distance*, were inspired by a story of the same name from when I was 7 years old. Below I share the story and a video that reflects some of the elements from the story and the making process.

[Video Link: Bojotes](#)

### ***Locating a Distance***

Leonel, my cousin, perspires as he makes a circle with a long stick in the dirt of the ground on the patio of my grandmother's house. The game of *mables* (marbles) we play requires a circle, and in the centre we place the marbles. We mark the centre with a white chalk drawing or sometimes we just scratch the ground with a long wood stick, if we don't have chalk. Leonel loves to draw the circle. He makes it perfectly round and draws the marks we have to follow to play the game.

Edgar, my younger cousin, and I wait under the acacia tree, while he does all the work. We can place as many marbles as we want in the centre. Edgar and I love to do that and Leonel permits us that chore. Once we've done this, we start the game. Our *moloncas* (shooter marbles) are bigger in proportion to the pack we place in the centre. From a marked position, we throw the *moloncas* towards a straight line marked about eight meters from the circle. Whoever gets closer to this line, wins the right to go first. From that straight line, we turn around and throw our *molonca*

into the circle where the marbles are. We aim to strike as many marbles as possible and make them bounce outside the circle. That rarely happens, but you never know all the possibilities that exist in a throw.

Once we've taken these initial steps, we take turns to shoot our *moloncas* from the edge of the circle. We follow the order of who won the right to go first. Then when our turn comes, we kneel on the ground to flick our shooter *molonca* from the edge of the circle to hit the group of marbles in the centre. For this move, we place our left hand on the ground to support our right hand from which we flick the shooter out of the fist with our thumb, aiming to hit the pack of marbles and bounce some outside the circle. Sometimes we aim our *molonca* to the nearer marble, because it is easier to hit it out. If we're effective in our objective we gain the right to shoot again, and that means more possibilities. We keep the marbles we knock out in our pockets and at the end of the game when there are no marbles left in the circle, we count them to see who won the game.

The colours of the marbles are beautiful and seductive. Leonel has a huge collection that he has won from other kids...he is an expert! He's one of the best players in the village. Edgar and I aspire to be good players, but that comes with practice, Leonel says. We spend a lot of time playing marbles, but there are other games that keep us busy too. Sometimes other kids come to play with us. The bigger the group, the more fun it is to play. In Villa Santa, it's fun to play marbles during the summer. We can play it everywhere because of the dry terrain. In winter we play other games because of the mud.

One of our favourite games takes place in the lagoon of Don Marcial. It's a manmade lagoon that adjoins my grandmother's property. This lagoon doesn't dry out in the summer despite that all the trees surrounding it were cut. A small creek that comes from the forest feeds her. In the summer Villa Santa is a dry place. A sense of sadness overwhelms me when I hear the cicadas departing melodies, as they dissect on the dry trees. I don't know whether they struggle to escape from their hell or if they just shout a frantic goodbye. That sound gets into my brain and seeds a valley of emotions.

In summer, we have a lack of water in Villa Santa. Few people have deep wells on their properties. Most people don't have this privilege and depend on the people who have them. My grandma has a well where we



obtain our drinking water. Some people get up at 2am to carry their water. Sometimes they have to wait for the wells to pour water.

Leonel and I love to play with clay. We cut through the wire of the fence that separates Mr. Marcial's property from my grandmother's, to get through to the lagoon to play. We carry clay from the lagoon to my grandma's property, where we make different objects with it. Leonel brings a lot of clay because he makes adobe blocks using a mould. His adobe blocks are relatively small, 4" x 6" x 2", but he requires a lot of space for them to dry. I carry clay to make *bojotes* (small sculptures). Sometimes I help Leonel carry clay for his adobe blocks and I love to see him working. Leonel builds amazing structures with his adobe blocks. These structures resemble dwellings of communities, which look like villages similar to Villa Santa, made of adobe.

I envy Leonel's ability as builder. He spends a lot of time making these formations, and it requires concentration. These constructions have multiple interiors, doors, windows, patios, and they connect to each other with roads and paths. I imagine entering these interiors. Sometimes when he is in action working, I help him to carry the adobes, but he doesn't allow me to get my hands into his creations. I don't dare to touch his formations, as I'm aware of his temper, especially when he is working.

Leonel lives with my grandparents. He's the oldest grandson. His mother, my oldest aunt Amanda, gave birth to him at the age of 17. My grandparents kicked her out of the house and took Leonel away from her because she had him out of wedlock in a time when that wasn't permitted. I've been living with my grandmother for about a year. For me life was different and beautiful, until my father was assassinated about a year previously. Presently, my mother is away dealing with a property she bought with my father faraway from Villa Santa. People say amazing things about this property, but now that my father is dead my mother has to sell it, due to the difficulties of finding someone to take care of it. It is located in a mountainous zone, isolated from the city. It takes more than two days to get there in a car, and about four hours walking from the village where the road ends. You arrive there walking or riding on mules or horses. In winter it's difficult to get there because of the narrow muddy road.

For me, living away from my family has been the most difficult thing I have experienced. I miss my father, my mother and my brothers, the

dog, the horse, the cows and my donkey Gorrion (Sparrow). My older brother, Ramón, lives with his godfather, and my younger brother, Arturo, with my mother in this isolated region. Arturo is a special child. He doesn't walk, doesn't talk, and depends on my mother for everything. He's six years old. On Sundays, Ramón comes to play with me for a few hours. Ramón is the same age as Leonel. I get so happy every time he comes over that I don't want him to go away. But he cannot live here with my grandma, because he fights with my cousin Leonel and that would be too much trouble for my grandma to deal with.

Leonel mistreats me sometimes. He is jealous of the attention my grandma and my aunt give me. He says they treat me differently because I am a 'daddy and mommy's' son. When we go to the forest to fetch firewood, he overloads me with too much firewood, and when I refuse to carry the heavy loads, he hits me and says ugly things about my family and especially about my father. That hurts me. I feel completely impotent with my father gone and unable to protect me.

Once Leonel tried to hit me. I grabbed a long stick from a bunch of driftwood and hit him on the head but he wouldn't stop and so I hit him again and again. Then he ran away and I, as if possessed by a mighty force, followed him with the stick in my hand. He bled, while I ran after him, crying hysterically. I pursued him until we got to my grandma's house. He had injuries on his head, and I trembled, crying inconsolably. My aunt Ventura tried to comfort me. I had a fit of anger and couldn't stop crying until I fell asleep. In my sleep I dreamt that I was playing with my father, wrestling on the savannah. Then he would chase me and I would chase him, and we had the ability of crossing each other without touching...I liked that. Then he'd tell me the morals of fables, while I sat on his lap. Suddenly, I woke up and my father was not there. I realized I was dreaming and that I had to get used to this new life without him. Meanwhile, Leonel stopped bothering me and started to treat me with respect. He says I am a fiend when I get angry.

From then on, we spent a lot of time playing different games. We played a lot with clay in the lagoon. Now that Leonel sees in me the brother he doesn't have, he takes care of me. We joke about it with each other.

A few weeks later we played in the lagoon in our underwear. I made my *bojotes*, and he dug out clay to take back for his adobe blocks. Then he found a turtle that was about 6" long. He grabbed it and while I was concentrating on my *bojotes*, he placed the creature behind me, wanting

to scare me. The turtle grabbed my underwear in her mouth and he pulled her, but she wouldn't let go of my underwear. We were sweating under the sun, trying to get the turtle off my underwear. We had heard turtles won't release things until the sea rumbles. But how could we know when the mighty sea would rumble when we lived so far away from the sea? Leonel didn't know what to do, and we were scared of going back to the house with the turtle still hanging from my underwear. We thought my grandma would punish us for doing things like that to each other. After pulling the turtle for a long time, Leonel got tired and stopped. So the turtle released my underwear and fell to the ground. We went home scared and didn't tell anyone about this situation; it became one of our secrets.

I remember once we went to eat *matasano*, a fruit similar to quinces. Leonel climbed a *matasano* tree and the branch on which he was standing broke causing him to fall about 15 meters. He hit his head and was unconscious for about 30 minutes. I didn't know what to do and cried, devastated. We were 40 minutes away from our house. I remember seeing him on the ground with his eyes closed not moving. I'd shake him and talk to him but he wouldn't respond. I had seen dead people before. I remember seeing my father in his coffin with his eyes open, looking nowhere as if in an empty temple, lightless. Terrible things came to my mind. I wanted to run away, I wanted to disappear...I wanted the earth to swallow me as she had swallowed my father. Questions came to mind, what would I say to my grandma? We were on someone else's property stealing *matasanos*...that's a wrongdoing! I was crying, when suddenly Leonel woke up. He asked me what had happened. Then he got up and we went home. We never told my grandma and my aunt about it.

Writing stories like *Locating a Distance* helps me connect my present life and my artistic practice to cultural aspects of daily life in the village where I grew up in Honduras. The patterns of memory that emerge in these stories shape the way I see and think about the world. Mario Benedetti tells us in one of his haikus, "*Cuando uno viaja, también viaja con uno el universo*" (when one travels, the universe also travels with us).<sup>5</sup> As a child, I loved to play with clay and would spend a lot of time with my cousin, Leonel, under the sun

---

<sup>5</sup> Mario Benedetti, *Rincón de Haikus* (Paraguay: Visor Libros, 1999), 94.

consumed in making small objects that became my universe. For this sculpture series, I return to that sense of play from my childhood, utilizing recycled objects, Mesoamerican earths, air-dry clay, cheesecloth, rabbit-skin glue, polymer acrylic and organic pigments.

For this series, the found objects I use to make the sculptures, as well as the ceramic objects in my studio that I am on the verge of discarding and repurpose, are an essential aesthetic and conceptual component of my work. The found objects I pick up on the street are containers of history, environments and symbols of waste. I approach them as treasures; entities that light up ideas and are economically viable for my pocket and the environment. Italo Calvino tells us about objects:

The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things:  
pincers point out the tooth-drawer's house; a tankard, the tavern;  
halberds, the barracks; scales, the grocer's.<sup>6</sup>

When I find objects that interest me, I bring them to my studio and see them with a different eye. Mundane and discarded items become spaces that trigger my imagination with a spark of reinvention and memory. Spending time with them helps me establish a close relationship with them, communicate with them, and consider them for future assemblages. Many questions come to mind, such as, how can I deconstruct them and strip them of their utilitarian nature? How can I transform them into aesthetic agents?

#### [Video Link: Discarded objects](#)

Building on top of other creations to layer spiritual significance was a recurring aesthetic for Mesoamerican people, a practice that has continued through colonial times. We have examples of pre-Hispanic sites, such as the Aztec Templo Mayor, of Tenochtitlan, which is now Mexico City. Elias Beck writes, "the ruins of Templo Mayor show that the additions to the temple were literally built on top of the old structure, thus creating many different layers to the temple that show its history with each layer."<sup>7</sup> It is this ancestral aesthetic that

---

<sup>6</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* translated by William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Elias Beck, "Tenochtitlan", History Crunch. August 15, 2018, [https://www.historycrunch.com/tenochtitlan.html#/. \(accessed October 1, 2022\).](https://www.historycrunch.com/tenochtitlan.html#/)

shapes my fondness for covering, deforming, and transforming materials in my work as a way to add layers of history, activating the discarded and turning it into a dynamic entity.

When I am receptive to the physicality of objects, a world of possibilities unveils itself. This urge pushes me to consider the materiality and the history they embody. After I carefully contemplate my recycled treasures for some time, I consider the prospect of intervention. As I work on several objects at a time, I respond playfully and gradually transform them. I find angles that generate new ideas, in the spirit of Gaston Bachelard, who tells us in his book, *The Poetics of Space*, to “contemplate with a reflective eye the crack in an old wall. And each of us has seen a few lines on the ceiling that appeared to chart a new continent. For there is a map of the universe in the lines that time draws on these old walls.”<sup>8</sup>

The Mesoamerican earths of different colours that I cover these objects with convert them into dynamic spaces that transport me in time and shine a light onto memories that I had forgotten. The texture, colours and smell of the earth take me to the village and to the place where we played with my cousin in the lagoon, where we extracted clay to create objects. Memories of my dad telling us stories of migratory journeys, ancient places, adventures and myths of humans being transformed into animals or other beings are revived. All these memories are triggered by my imagination through transformation of materials and objects.

### [Video Link: Earth](#)

The beauty of process-based creation is that characters appear, disappear and evolve over time. Natalie Loveless writes, “research-creation, taken as critical interdisciplinary praxis, asks us to attend to how we habitually justify our research through disciplinary stories, those that we tell and those we have been told along the way.”<sup>9</sup> Through the process of creation, I visit spaces of memory, and of imagination through books I’ve read or stories I’ve been told.

---

<sup>8</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1969), 144.

<sup>9</sup> Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2019), 18.

Shapes of animals appear as components in this series. I have many memories of birds, one is of a bird we called *Juan Caáo*. This mysterious bird would come every evening to sing from a tall pine tree that was close to our house. I never saw this little friend; just heard him sing and imagined his form. People believed he would guard us at night. His song was sad, loud and repetitive. It made me imagine and sense things. It also made me feel sad and on occasion angry. When I started to mimic him, my mom would ask me to stop. It was believed that when you mimic this bird terrible things could happen to you. I didn't listen to my mom and continued imitate him. I was about five years old and as stubborn as a donkey. My mom had to drag me inside the house. She told me we had to respect animals as they had reasons to communicate that we didn't understand. The next day I woke up with a terrible fever that lasted for three days. I had nightmares; I dreamt the *Siguanaba* (a Mesoamerican supernatural character) dragged me by the hair and threw me into a winch shaft. Suddenly, I woke up sweaty and scared in my dad's arms. I learnt my lesson. I had to pay attention and listen to my parents. This memory of Juan Caáo is inherent in these pieces, as are many other memories of animals, and mythological beliefs.

Through the process of making this work, I tap into the syncretic culture of the village, which as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes, is one of respect for animals and nature:

Lo que Occidente ve como objeto, las comunidades Indígenas ven como sujeto. Los ríos, los árboles, los animales nos dicen algo, nos avisan, nos previenen, nos informan... debemos respetarlos y escucharlos." (What the West sees as an object, the Indigenous communities see as a subject. Rivers, trees, animals tell us things, they warn us, they prevent us, they inform us...we must respect and listen to them.)<sup>10</sup>

Some of my sculptural pieces remind me of the *huacas* my grandmother had hidden in her garden. They make me consider *huacas* as enclosures of our ancestors, gateways to our past that are alive and can show us other possibilities of relating to the world. They remind me of the utilitarian objects we used, such as *apastes*, big clay pots, that people had in their kitchens under earth plateaus to preserve and keep water fresh. During those days, we

---

<sup>10</sup> Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Historias debidas VIII: Siliva Rivera Cusicanqui", Canal encuentro, April 18, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q6HfhZUGhc>. (accessed October 20, 2022).

didn't have refrigerators in my village, nor running water. Water was valuable and considered sacred. They also preserved a variety of grains and seeds.

In my process of making, I work on many components of the sculptures at a time using clay. I love to play with the flexibility of clay and for me it is a material that my hands relate to. I can add and subtract shapes, incise marks, deform, transform, and join other materials to it, while the clay is wet. The clay I use is air-dry clay and is not fired. It has its restrictions, though since it dries quickly and once it's dried you cannot incise marks. As I work, I embody my childhood memories of clay. For children objects are subjects, living things they communicate with. That's how I remember it. I remember making clay objects. These *things* were alive...they'd talk and listen to me, they possessed feelings, they'd cry and laugh as they dialogued with each other and with me. They mirrored me, and served as cathartic vehicles that helped me unload situations that affected me during those days. I created meaning through them; they reflected my emotions, beliefs, behaviours, and moral values from the fables my father told us. They represent my initial ways of communicating visually through the making, and the reasons I am here and do what I do.

The organic shapes I make take me to my childhood places, but also, when reconfigured collectively, of distant places from other times, such as archaeological sites, and terrains I've visited throughout Mesoamerica. Emmanuel Guigon writes in the book, *Viaje a la semilla*,

La arqueología resulta así un fermento extraordinario para la imaginación, ya que establece el inventario de los objetos inanimados que solo adquieren sentido dentro de una acción de la que no disponemos de ningún testimonio." (Archaeology turns as an extraordinary ferment for the imagination, because it establishes an inventory of inanimate objects that only make sense inside an action in which we don't have any testimonials).<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Guigon, *Viaje a la semilla* (Teruel: Museo de Teruel, 2000), 47.



**Figure 8.** Views of Component 1 from the series, 'Locating a Distance', air-dry clay, cheesecloth, Mesoamerican earth, organic pigments, polymer acrylics, and rabbit-skin glue, 16 × 9 ½ × 11 inches, 2022.

## Series Two: Borders of Thought

*Borders of Thought* is inspired by stories I wrote about my journey of migration, first to Northern Honduras in the banana plantation camps, then in Mexico, the US. and Canada. The mixed media drawings on canvas synthesize memories and thoughts I have about people I met on the road and of places I lived where there was little chance to pursue my dreams. These personal stories help me to reflect on life in the banana camps and the reasons people migrate in search of a better life. Below I share a video and a story that reflects my situation as a 13-year-old kid living in the banana camps.

### [Video Link: Migration](#)

#### *Life in the Camps*

The air felt hot and humid. It was getting dark. While Toño prepared the light lamp, I grabbed Chema's bike, and headed to the store through the small dirt lane that would lead me to the main camp road. On the way there I met Arnulfo, my friend. He asked me, *alero* (meaning friend) are you coming to the *reventón* (party) tonight? He went on saying, Los Gatos Bravos are enlivening it...the best band we have! I said, "*Alero* I feel a bit tired from work, besides, Christmas is a day away."

Arnulfo, a friend from work, was 17 years old, *mulato*, slim and tall. He loved to party. He would go from party to party throughout the camps every weekend. I enjoyed dancing, and Los Gatos Bravos was one of my



favourite bands. Besides, the day before was my birthday. I didn't mention it to my friends. I remember in my town my mom would always celebrate it with family and friends. I said to Arnulfo, "I'll see if I can convince Chema and Toño to come with me." The party would take place in the community centre of Corozal 2.

Once in the store I picked up bread and other groceries we needed for dinner and headed back to the house. In the house I asked Chema and Toño if they were coming to the party. Chema said after working all day, who wants to go dancing? Chema behaved like an old man. He was 15 years old, a year older than me. He would save money to help his mom who lived in Lempira, a place about five hours away from Corozal 2.

Toño said, "Tomorrow is Sunday...we can rest all day. We deserve to have some fun." Arnaldo said, "Be careful, I heard there are a lot of crazy people in La Loca." Arnaldo didn't like to go to parties.

Corozal 2 was known as one of the craziest colonies in the banana camps. People called it *Colonia Loca*, meaning crazy colony. The camps were divided into colonies in the banana plantation fields. They were populated with people who worked in the fields. These people came from different parts of Honduras.

I shared accommodation with four other friends: Arnaldo, Miguel, José Maria (Chema) and Antonio (Toño). We shared Arnaldo's house. Arnaldo, Miguel, and Toño were brothers. The adobe house was small and didn't have utilities. It sat on a property of 3 hectares of land outside Corozal 2 on the way to Colonia Caimito. We carried the water from a well Arnaldo had made with his brothers.

Arnaldo, a single 25-year-old, was different from the rest of the villagers. He was knowledgeable and critical of the political system. He used to work in the Tela Railroad Company & United Fruit, the corporation that owned all the banana fields and houses on the camps. Arnaldo was expelled from the company because of his affiliation to the union (SITRATERCO), which defended the workers labour rights. Arnaldo fought for the property he owned, which had belonged to his grandparents and was taken away. He says his grandparents used to own a lot of land before the Company settled there. They were dispossessed of it for the purpose of growing bananas.

He had no access to electricity and water. Since he couldn't work in the company any longer, he found other ways of earning his living. He was

a moneylender. People he knew would come to him if they had an economic problem. It was better than going to the *Comisariato*. The *Comisariato* was a system the company employed to deal with workers problems. Workers would buy food, and other utensils there on credit and pay a high interest rate to the company. The credit was discounted from their payments every week. The company would import these products from the US. Arnaldo wouldn't charge people high interest as the company did.

Chema, Toño and I worked in a banana co-operative field. It was a corporation owned by a group of associated millionaires. We would commute to work by bicycle. In order to be on time, we would leave at 5am from the house. It took us about two hours to get there. Our wage was close to a dollar a day. We would finish working at 5pm depending on the season, sometimes we had to stay late. We got a few cents as incentive for staying late.

The banana fields were immense. The landscape was uniformly green, divided by small dishes and huge channels. The environment was like hell, hot and humid. There was no air on the flat plains. We would drink water from the field, and it was always hot. Arnulfo, my friend, knew all the work by heart. He showed me some tricks to work fast because there was always someone pushing us.

Arnulfo had work experience in the camps. He shared accommodation with other friends close to la Lima, the nearby city. He'd smoke marihuana and would drink alcohol a lot. He behaved like a brother to me. Although he had his addictions, he wouldn't induce me to try them. He'd protect me from other workers. I remember once I had a problem with a fellow worker. This worker kept calling me names. He would call me "*gringo pobre*" (meaning poor gringo) because I refused to wear a hat and my hair was reddish due to sunburn. This fellow used a huge, sharp machete to cut the fruit from the banana trees. I would pull those banana bunches with a thin iron bar through rolls on a cable hoisted about 4 meters high above the ground.

One day at noon this guy made fun of me, calling me names. I called him a name too. He responded angrily and insulted me. I said to him, *viejo pendejo* (idiot old man) if you want me to treat you with respect you have to treat me with respect too. He said, bastard son of a bitch, you feel you're a grown up, no!!! He jumped up and grabbed his machete and tried to hit me. I grabbed an iron bar and said to him, don't you dare get

close to me. Arnulfo heard the situation and ran, grabbing his machete and challenged him to pick on someone bigger, not a child like me. The guy feared Arnulfo and backed down. Later on Arnulfo told me, "Be careful Nahúm, we don't know who's working here. I've heard of cases where workers have been assassinated in the fields and covered with banana leaves. No one knows where we work and with whom. If we're killed our family wouldn't know anything about it."

Later on that Saturday I persuaded Chema and Toño to come to the party with me. We got there around 10:00 pm and the band would start playing at around 10:30. The DJ played dance music. The environment vibrated with coloured lights, sounds, and spirit of the people made you forget your daily struggles. We enjoyed the party till dawn in the morning. I'd never been to a concert of Los Gatos Bravos.

*Borders of Thought* consists of two groups of work. For the first group, I chose 60 uniform sized paintings, each 5 ½ inches wide x 8 inches high, made on canvas. I approach the making of these paintings and their installation as I did my migration journey, always open to possibilities, paying close attention to the edges that emerged on the road. I wasn't in a hurry to get somewhere because I did not have a destination in mind. Anywhere served as a place for me to get to know people, learn and situate myself in relation to the environment and other migrants I met on the road.

The theme of migration is recurring in my work. Experiences in the banana camps allowed me to meet and work with people who came from different parts of Honduras. People like Arnaldo revealed a world I didn't know through his conversation. His critical point of view of the Honduran system made me think about other possibilities for the future and the opportunities young people like me didn't have. This harsh reality prompted me to leave the country in 1988. I left Honduras in search of a better life. As a dreamer, I suspected that other ways of living were possible, and as a citizen of the world I felt no one could truncate my right to migrate. Each step I took was driven by circumstances, doubts, chances and luck. In my journey, encounters with people were brief. One learns to let go of relationships, to drift away on the thresholds. Life is a passenger train on endless routes. One learns to

detach, live with little, and be ready to move. As Gloria Anzaldúa says in her book *Borderlands*, “to survive the Borderlands you must live *sin fronteras*, be a crossroads.”<sup>12</sup>

My memories of migration teach me how important relationships have been for confronting adversities and overcoming obstacles. *La vida es un regalo; no pedimos nacer...simplemente somos con el universo*. No matter the circumstances one is born into, every person has dreams, goals, and illusions. We have the right to pursue our dreams no matter the limits.

I pushed the boundaries and followed my dreams to escape a reality I didn’t ask for.

Fernando Pessoa writes in the *Book of Disquiet*, “life is full of paradoxes, as roses are of thorns.”<sup>13</sup> We must embrace life, but that doesn’t mean we have to conform to the norms that restrict us and oppress us. In an abstract and poetic way, through the praxis in this series I reflect some of these concerns.

To leave Honduras I had to subvert borders. Due to my economic conditions, I didn’t have a passport, and for me to think of getting a visa to enter any country was unimaginable. *La vida es una Cegua*, (Life is a shape-shifter, a myth of shifting realities). From a distance and at first view life seems beautiful, but when one gets closer, it’s not what it seems. At least that’s how I learned to see it, and that’s how I see this body of work; its textures and chromatic quality at first glance seem aesthetically pleasing, but when you look closer the work becomes more foreboding and complex. The moment I decided to migrate I had to pay close attention to my surroundings. I learned to live in the borders and to ignore them. I learned to see from two places at once, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes:

Living in two cultures results in ‘seeing’ double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. Removed from the culture’s center, you glimpse the sea in which you’ve been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands–La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book, 1999), 195.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, (London: Penguin Press, 2015), 322.

<sup>14</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “Now Let Us Shift”, Duke University Press, September 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375036>, 49. (accessed July 15, 2022).

When I arrived in México, I changed my name and chose another identity. No one knew my original name or my background. I felt it necessary to distance myself from my past in order to survive. I describe my arrival in Mexico in the story I share below.

### *Window to the Journey*

Tired and sweaty, I open my eyes; there's a deafening noise coming from outside the train. Through the window, I see people wearing colourful clothes, animated by the bright light of the sun. It's a beautiful day.

I ask myself, where are we? Are we close to Veracruz? What time is it? People outside are selling food and merchandise, and inside the train, sellers offer their snacks to passengers. The last time I ate was yesterday noon. I check my wallet and find a few thousand Mexican pesos, about five dollars. I know I must save this money to buy a bus ticket once I get to the city of Veracruz, in Eastern Mexico. The fact is that I don't really know where I'm going. Yesterday on the train, I heard there's a lot of work in Cordoba, a city two hours away from Veracruz City. Veracruz and Cordoba are on the way to Mexico City. I have to decide where I want to go.

I believe it's about 9 am. I'm becoming familiar with some of the passengers around me ...I've been watching them for more than fifteen hours.

I have nothing with me. My only belongings are the clothes and shoes I wear. Ah, I forgot to mention my Mexican charro, my hat. I am fourteen years old.

The day before yesterday two friends and I decided to take this journey. I met Hector and Daniel in the banana fields in Chiapas, Mexico where we were working along with many people from different countries. I'd worked at the plantation for 5 months. It was almost impossible for us to save money there. We earned less than a dollar a day and worked Monday to Saturday from 7 am to 5 pm. On Saturdays we would get out at 3 pm to wash our clothes. A lady at the plantation was in charge of cooking for us; we had to pay for our food. We slept on the floor and we didn't have a kitchen or washroom where we lived, which we shared with 20 other people. Most of our co-workers were Indigenous people.

On Saturdays the workers would go to the brothels in the nearby town, Ciudad Hidalgo, and spend their wages. It was hard for me to see my

co-workers broke and hungover on Sundays. I wondered if they had any family, any dreams or aspirations? What did they want to do in life?

Hector and Daniel were older than I - about 25 and 30, with professional backgrounds, but they had the same concerns. I was from Honduras, Hector from El Salvador and Daniel from Ecuador. Hector was fleeing the armed conflict in El Salvador. He lost everything at the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Thieves stole all his money, which is why he had to work in the banana fields. A similar thing happened to Daniel.

During the five months I worked there, I'd saved about fifteen dollars. Hector and Daniel's goal was to get to the US. They had family there. I wanted to leave and try to get to the US too. We had been talking about leaving for a long time. We thought we should go before the weather changed. We heard that from September on, the Arizona desert where we'd end up got extremely cold at night and in the morning.

In late July, we made the decision to leave the infernal place where we worked. We left at 6 am on a Monday. We paid a coyote (someone who guides illegal immigrants) to take us to Tapachula, a city in Chiapas close to Ciudad Hidalgo. It took us about four hours to get to Tapachula. We had to walk and sneak around some immigration checkpoints. Then someone picked us up in a car and dropped us in Tapachula. From there, we took a bus to Escuintla, a small city close to Tapachula, on the way to Veracruz. In the bus, my friends were sitting side by side when immigration officials approached them and asked them for identification. They got nervous and didn't know what to respond so they were taken off the bus. I sat away from them, beside an older man, with my charro hat on trying to look Mexican. Everything I owned was in the suitcases that got off the bus with Hector and Daniel.

Now I have just the clothes I have on. I'm dirty, smelly, hungry and extremely thirsty. I know I should buy something to drink. My grandfather used to say you should drink a lot of water to avoid getting dehydrated. He said you could live for a long time without eating, but not without water. I loved my grandfather. We used to spend a lot of time together, listening to music while drinking coffee. During school vacations I would go to his farm. He would talk to me as if he were talking to an old man. He said I had the brain of a grown up.

I hate my memories. I want to forget things, but it's impossible. About a year and half ago I had to leave my village, I had to leave my mother and

my two younger brothers and my sister, I had to leave my horse and my dog, my grandmother and grandfather, my cousins and my friends. One day I faced taking Arturito, my severely disabled brother, to the orphanage where he could be properly taken care of. He needed all my attention and care, and I had to go to work to help Mamá and my other siblings. Luckily, we also had Ramón, my older brother who worked in the city while studying.

My mom was young when Papá died. My father was murdered because of his affiliation with the agroforestal cooperative in my village. After his death, mom had three fleeting relationships that ended up with my two brothers and my sister. The fathers of my younger siblings denied their responsibilities as parents. We had a huge burden. And now my mom is dying. She has a deadly heart disease and it is painful to see her suffering. We hope that surgery will prolong her life. I barely managed to complete grade six, because I had to take care of my siblings and work to help my mom.

After we took Arturo to the orphanage, I wanted to pursue my dream of becoming an artist. Sometimes I couldn't sleep, I had such huge dreams. My head used to get so big that I couldn't stand it, well, till Arturito woke up and made his sounds, calling me. Then I came down to be with him and get back in touch with reality. I love to dream; I love to wander in my head. That's the place I am free, my escape. One day I want to study to help mom with my siblings. For that I need to forget my past.

I want to change my name. From now on I've decided that my name will be Dénis. 'Nahúm' is too much of a burden. Dénis is light and fresh and easy to pronounce.

The train is full and hot. I have to be careful not to talk to strangers. There are men walking around, looking for illegal immigrants. They carry a stick. They're called *los garroteros*. I've heard they steal immigrants' money and then hand them over to immigration officials. I see some of them walking in the aisles. They're unfriendly and they whisper to each other.

A well-dressed man sits beside me. I look at his wristwatch. 3pm. I'm terribly hungry and my belly makes weird sounds. I'm afraid the neighbour is listening to them. He asks me, "Where are you going?"

"To Veracruz," I reply. He asks, "That's where you're from?"

I say, "No, my uncle lives there."

It's a lie; I have no one there. But I have to speak as little as possible. My accent is different, and people will notice I'm not Mexican.

The man introduces himself, then asks my name. I tell him my name is Dénis. He looks at my clothes then he says, "I've never heard that name before." I say nothing.

The train stops for a few minutes in a small town. People selling food and handicrafts get on. My seat-mate buys a *torta*, a Mexican sandwich. Then he asks me if I want one. I say "I have no money". He says "I'll buy it for you". He also buys me cool water in a plastic bag. I gratefully thank him.

The torta is of chicken, cheese, fresh tomatoes, lettuce, onions and hot Mexican sauce. Mmmmm! It is the most delicious sandwich I have ever tasted.

After eating I fall asleep and wake up again to the noise of the city of Veracruz outside the train windows. The stranger, my belly saver, is not there. He got off while I was asleep. I am impressed with the city. I've never seen a huge city like this before. Now I have to decide what to do. I am fourteen years old with five dollars in my pocket, in a big city for the first time and I don't know where to go. But there's something in my stomach. I'm sure everything will get better now.

While working on *Borders of Thought*, the memories recorded in this story resurfaced, and the process was cathartic. For this series of paintings, I had begun with a large canvas, using earth, gel medium, organic pigments and acrylic paint. As I worked on this piece, I obsessively layered and scraped off material to reveal and create marks. I used spatulas, large and small brushes, rags, scrapers and body movements to establish a mental connection. Emotions and thoughts form part of the process. The canvas accumulated chromatic layers and textures and problematic characters. One day, I destroyed it by cutting it into small uniform pieces. In the act of cutting, I saw the canvas as a living subject, something that disturbed me. I violently peeled off some of the textures from the components and reversed them, then adhered them back to the canvas.



I love to deconstruct, destroy, uncover, reveal and create. It is an archaeological process where I uncover history. It makes me think of history as a sleeping monster that can wake up when you least expect it. The small formats allow me to work introspectively. Through texture, marks, transparency, text and characters that emerge with the fluidity of materials, I connect with an infinite panoply of experiences, of people I have met on the road, of other migrants and people from villages and cities where I have lived. I approach each small painting as a threshold, something magical where I create narrative space. I rework them using ink, organic pigments, earth, acrylic paint, polymer, and transfers of photographs I've taken during my travels in Honduras, Mexico, the U.S. and Canada.

I work quickly from one work to the next, spontaneously populating the components with linear and dark depictions that are simple and naïve in nature, but evoke issues from an intuitive level. The surrounding environments animate these strange characters, reflecting a dichotomy between light and dark. They are fractured, headless, anthropomorphic characters; some inhabit multiple personalities. I respond viscerally to these characters with written phrases. They make me think of how we're pushed to adopt other identities when we cross borders. Sometimes we forget where we come from in this process of transformation. As Stuart Hall writes:

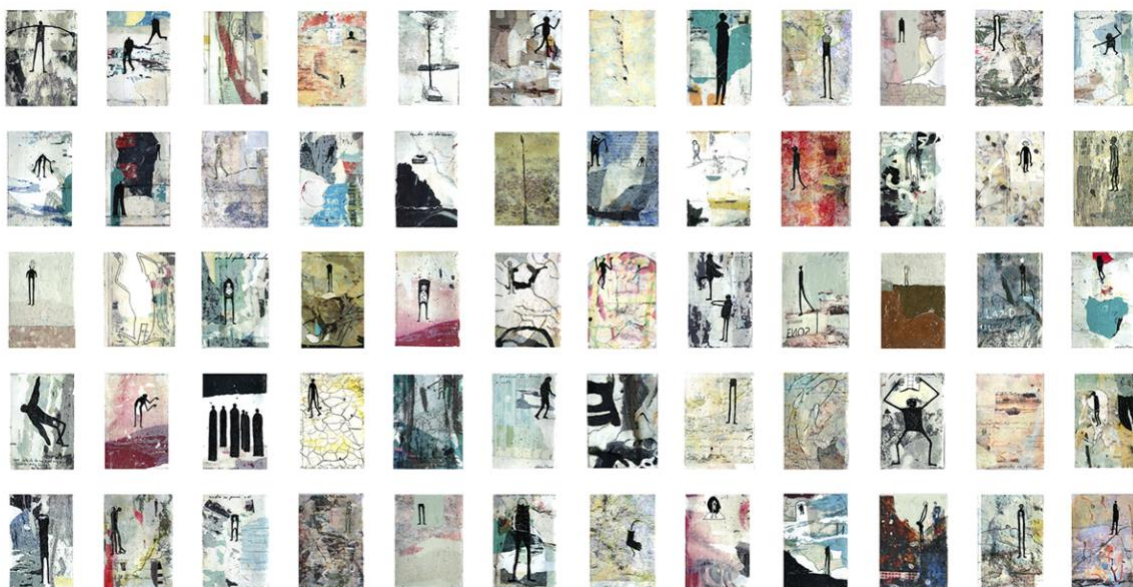
Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might represent ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

I find great freedom and comfort working in this impromptu fashion because I am able to establish a certain kind of communication with myself. It is like a mirror reflecting images of memory that surface in the poetic language of drawing. Fernando Pessoa writes in *The Book of Disquiet*, "writing is like paying myself a formal visit."<sup>16</sup> I feel the same thing with drawing.

---

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Thousand Oaks, California, 1996), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, (London: Penguin Press, 2015), 341.



**Figure 9.** Components from the series, 'Borders of Thought', mixed media on canvas, 90 × 48 inches, 2023.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Act of Writing/Testimonial Remembering

Writing personal stories impels me to delve into my past, leading me to many memories and long-forgotten situations. The act of writing connects me with my roots and informs me of whom I am. Digging into these experiences, I discover scenarios that reveal a landscape of situations that help me make sense of the place I come from, and why I do what I do.

Roberto Calasso tells us in his book, *El Viaje del Mito*: “Las historias jamás viven solitarias, son ramas de una familia que hay que recorrer hacia atrás y hacia adelante” (Stories never live alone, they are branches of a family that you have to go backward and forward).<sup>17</sup>

When analyzing these stories, I believe that they are about living and learning in the community, building relationships and sharing experiences with other migrants on the road, including survival strategies. I also inquire into my syncretic Lencan and Catholic beliefs. This is a way to research my past and build bridges to my forebears.

The idea of writing personal stories emerged when my son, Pascal, was three years old. He came to my studio, looked at a photograph of my mom and asked who she was. I told him she was his grandma, and he asked me, “Where is my grandpa?” I realized I didn’t have a photograph of him. At the time I lost my father, people rarely took photos in Villa Santa. Pascal continued asking questions about my father, my family and the place where I grew up. For a long time, I tried to shut the door on my past, and avoided talking about it. When you have a child who inquires about your past, it is better to confront that reality. That’s when I decided to write personal stories, so Pascal could learn about my background.

### [Video Link : Autobiography](#)

When I decided to go back to school for my master’s degree, I chose to explore this possibility. Of course, many questions emerged. How do I respond to these stories in a language that is not literal, but visual? How do I activate the past and what medium

---

<sup>17</sup> Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmo and Harmony* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama SA, 1990), 18.

should I use? What values can I share from my experiences and my Lenca and Catholic beliefs as a Mestizo, through my work?

As someone who lived clandestinely and on the margins as an “illegal” migrant, how do I create work that comments on themes of migration and the issues that push people out of their communities? Do I want to respond to these issues graphically or in a poetic form?

Reflecting on written personal stories from my past, I identify cultural structures that help me think and reflect on how I conceive life; finding value and meaning in my visual work and daily living. Metaphorically we are vessels, containers of treasures, seeds from our ancestors; we carry the virtue of nurturing over transcultural systems. Michel Onfray writes in his book, *A Hedonist Manifesto*,

The artifact is not an end in itself; it indicates something beyond itself, theoretically something greater than itself. The aesthetic movement has meaning when there is an initiation in a specific place, where codes have been handed out, and where those who embark on an aesthetic journey are given the means to understand the code.<sup>18</sup>

We carry substructures from our upbringing that guide us and help us through our life journey. These codes manifest unconsciously in our daily acts. In the making of this work I did not have an ideal destination; I embarked on a journey full of adventure, fuelled by the elements of memory, which serve to illuminate the way.

I depart from the experience of my grandma’s garden as a core component that helps give form to the world. I embody this garden as my genesis where many things happened. It reflected my grandma’s syncretism through her wild and domestic herbs, and her hidden *huacas* and cherubs that extended through the corridor as part her Christmas *nacimientos*, formations that composed this wonderful place. This space resonates with my Catholic beliefs of the Garden of Eden, in contrast to the natural world reflected in Lenca stories that my father used to tell my brother and me. I think of the spaces in Lenca stories as an

---

<sup>18</sup> Michel Onfray, *A Hedonist Manifesto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 90.

infinite garden, uncontrolled, and where living things matter equally and are all interconnected and in constant transformation.

I use the *garden* as a conceptual research framework. It helps me to examine the Lenca and Catholic traditions in my search for meaning through the act of making. As a process-based artist I respond to my personal stories utilizing research/creation methods. I think with poets Mario Benedetti, Fernando Pessoa, José Luis Borges, Roberto Sosa, and writers Italo Calvino, Roberto Calasso, Gaston Bachelard, Roberto Castillo, among others. I am influenced by the theorists Gloria Anzaldúa, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Natalie Loveless, José Bautista Segales, Katya Mandoki and Enrique Dussel. Influences also come from my ancestors, and mentors I met in my migration journey, and people I relate to daily.

I document the stages of my process to reflect on once I am away from the studio. I take notes of ideas, observations and memories. I keep an archive of the process that helps me to see the progress. Through the photos, I contemplate and reflect on the spaces and forms of the component. Seeing the object two-dimensionally in a photo, one has the advantage of exercising vision, at the same time that offers possibilities of imagining spaces, paths, examining details that are taken for granted when dealing with the physical piece.

Although expressing myself on camera is difficult and unpleasant for me, I was able to clearly summarize some of my life experiences through the videos included in the exhibition. Since the process is the fundamental part of my visual work, it is important to share with the audience hints of how I work, how I deal with objects and materials, and the journey of transformation of the objects. The short format of each segment showcases a concise idea, and together they give shape to my vision and philosophy. I feel the director, Andrea Martínez, captured the essence of what is most significant to this project, and want to thank her for making the videos.

[Video Link: Art as a Journey](#)

## **Aesthetics and the Creative Processes of a Life Journey**

Aesthetics is in everyone and in things we see in nature. It has to do with our perception of the world. Katya Mandoki tells us, "Aesthesis is a condition of live beings."<sup>19</sup> Children are receptive to their surroundings, the environment where they grow up. They see and think about things differently from adults. As kids we learned to read animal behaviour. Roosters for example, danced and extended their colourful wings to seduce the females in the brood. Pigs are enthused and make happy sounds while running when they sense winter is coming. Male turkeys go through a performance ritual to attract the females. The behaviour of animals captivates me. Katya Mandoki writes,

It is necessary to insist that aesthetic enunciation is not restricted either to the human being, because we find it unfolded through the animal kingdom in the proud step of the peacock when extending its fabulous feathers, in the bower bird that adorns its nest to attract the female, and in mating rites among diverse species.<sup>20</sup>

One of the necessities for living creatures is spatial. Through our body we have a close relationship with the world. Beauty is a condition of all living things.

In the countryside we encountered wasp nests, which fascinated me. Their circular, organic shapes continue to intrigue me. How do wasps make something so beautiful and effective in collaboration? These creations endure the temperament of time. They create their dwellings on thin branches using light materials, however these structures withstand terrible winds and storms. I believe we humans should pay more attention and learn from these fellow beings, so we can learn to build economical and effective habitats.

The aesthetic dimensions of my work feed from the memories I have of my community and the land. There, aesthetics is a way of life. The houses of the village were made of adobe, or *estacón*, a traditional Lenca form of making houses from earth and wood. People used white and red earth to paint their homes. They had their own way to make and decorate

---

<sup>19</sup> Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002), 73.

<sup>20</sup> Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 131.

their spaces. Some people had niches in their houses, to place their saints, cherubs or other idols. They also had deposits to contain and keep water fresh, and to preserve seeds such as corn and beans. Most people had gardens and orchids. Their kitchens had a window and a *lavador*, a washer that extended to the exterior of the house. The water used to clean the dishes and organic leftovers would flow into the garden and on to fruit trees, serving as fertilizer. People purposefully thought of economical systems that favoured nature.

We didn't have artists, but we had makers. People had their own aesthetics in the way they made things and lived their lives. In our family, my grandma was a good maker. Besides making our clothes, she made her own clay cherubs and earth niches for her Christmas nativity. She was a good chef and made many different types of food, breads and cakes. Her garden, which she constantly transformed and expanded, reflected her creativity and ingenuity. My mom didn't have her gardening skills, but she embroidered and made tablecloths. Friends would come to our place to ask mom to draw designs for them to embroider.

As an adult living far away from my childhood village, I excavate memories on both a personal and a historical level through discarded objects. We are surrounded by objects and are attached to them. Some are useful and others have no practical use but may be aesthetically pleasing. They awaken in us memories that reside deep down in our being. Jorge Luis Borges tells us in the poem, *Things*,

Many things, files, sills, atlases, wine-glasses, nails, which serve us, like  
unspeaking slaves, So blind and so mysteriously secret! They'll long  
outlast our oblivion; and never know that we are gone.<sup>21</sup>

The first time I collected an object was in Windsor, Ontario in 1995. I was walking one sunny morning in a park when a child of about two years old picked up a small rock and gave it to me with a smile on his tender face. From then on, I started to collect, first rocks and then other objects. In his book *Non-things*, Byung-Chul Han speaks of the collector of things as

---

<sup>21</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges: Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin Books 2000), 277.

a history retriever, someone who makes sense of life. He cites Walter Benjamin, who said, 'ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. The collector is the owner par excellence.' Then he states, "For Benjamin, the collector is an utopian figure, a figure saviour of things. The concern of the collector is the transfiguration of things."<sup>22</sup> In my case, the objects I collect, besides being aesthetically valuable, carry narratives that help me make sense of life.

That is the case with a knife I received from my aunt five years ago when I went to Honduras. This knife belonged to my father. I have blurry memories of him. This object brings me vivid memories of him peeling oranges in our first house in Villa Santa. It is a steel blade with a deer antler handle, and a crafted leather sheath. Through this object, I imagine my father with his sheath on his waist, telling my brother and me stories. An object like this helps me to connect memories and tell stories that can lead to valuable knowledge. I intervene some of the objects I collect and transform them to give them back their dignity. This connects to Lencan tradition, where a thing can evolve into something else and can have a cyclical life.

When I began writing stories as a way to transmit my life history to my son, I was unaware of the complexities that this act would involve. Revisiting some of these memories was a challenge and a journey of learning. Some experiences were pleasant and others bleak; I had to decide what to share and what to keep. I knew nothing about the act of writing, and learned about it through this process. Reflecting on these stories, I accept them as lessons about living in a community afflicted by war, conflict and life changes forced upon them by a global economic system.

Rarely do migrants tell their own stories, as other people interpret their lives from an outsider's point of view. I believe it is important we tell our own stories so the situation of migration can be properly contextualized. Questions of why we leave our places of origin, and what is causing this exodus, can be addressed better when we contextualize it globally.

---

<sup>22</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *Non-things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 15.



As a Honduran-Canadian living in Toronto, I am affected by the bleak reality of my country of origin and of Mesoamerica. I left Honduras during the Cold War, which was very damaging to Mesoamerica, causing many people to leave. The Cold War is long over, however the situation for many people has become worse.

My interdisciplinary MFA exhibition tells my story as a migrant. The sculptures and two-dimensional works, the collected and discarded objects, are embedded with and are the residue of memories of my life journey. The video projections document my creative process and my place of origin. Through my work, I respond to the gallery space playfully to create spaces for the audience to imagine, question, and meditate about contemporary issues.

In this accompanying paper, I have shared stories of my life to contextualize the work and its making: stories of my childhood, relationships with the land, and migration experiences. These stories serve as departures for the creation of the work; they unveil a landscape of remembrances. Through the making-process the stories have inspired, I revisit spaces of memory that connect me to my ancestors, illuminating the ways they once lived. During the working process I transcend the materials in a poetic way to create a visual dialogue and a space where the public can imagine, think, and question the causes of migration, social and environmental issues.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abya Yala, Indigenous Cuna people of Panama

Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands–La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book, 1999.

Anzaldúa, Gloria “Now Let Us Shift.” Duke University Press, September 2015,  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375036>. (accessed July 15, 2022).

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*, translated from French by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

Beck, Elias. “*Tenochtitlan*.” History Crunch, August 15, 2018.  
[https://www.historycrunch/tenochtitlan.html#](https://www.historycrunch/tenochtitlan.html#/)/. (accessed October 1, 2022).

Benedetti, Mario. *Rincón de Haikus*. Paraguay: Visor Libros, 1999.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Borges: Selected Poems*. Edited by Alexander Coleman. Penguin Random House: 2000.

Calasso, Roberto. *The Marriage of Cadmo and Harmony*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama SA, 1990.

Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*, translated from Italian by William Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

*El Popol Vuh–Las Antiguas Historias del Quiche*, Tegucigalpa: Editorial Guaymuras, 1989.

Garniga Osorio, Olga. *Calabash tree: morro and jicaras in Mayan myth of the Popol Vuh*. La maravilla del morro. Maya Archaeology, August 12, 2011. [https://maya-archaeology.org/Mayan\\_anthropology\\_ethnography\\_archaeology/](https://maya-archaeology.org/Mayan_anthropology_ethnography_archaeology/). (accessed June 1, 2022).

Hall, Stuart and Paul DuGay. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996.

Hamilton, Megan. “7 Ways The United Fruit Company Devastated Central America.” History Hustle, June 29, 2021. <https://historyhustle.com/united-fruit-company/>. (accessed July 25, 2022).

Han Byung-Chul. *Non-things*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022.

Loveless, Natalie. *How to Make Art at the End of the World. A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2019.

Machado, Antonio. *Caminante*, Madrid, Biblioteca el Mundo, 1998.

Martinez, Renán. “Palma y nostalgia cubren los viejos campos bananeros.” La Prensa, June 10, 2018. <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/palma-nostalgia-cubren-viejos-campos-bananeros-la-lima-JELP1186096>. (accessed July 25, 2022).

Mandoki, Katya. *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002.

Pessoa, Fernando. *The Book of Disquiet*, edited and translated by Richard Zenith. London: Penguin Press, 2015.

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. Historias debidas VIII- Siliva Rivera Cusicanqui interviewed by Ana Cacopardo. Buenos Aires: Canal encuentro, April 18, 2018.

Vilas, Carlos M. “War and Revolution in Nicaragua.” *Socialist Register*, Vol. 24 (1988): 188.

Villa Santa, Honduras, white and red earth, 2019.

Wasp dwellings I brought from Villa Santa, the village where I grew up, 2019.

## APPENDICES

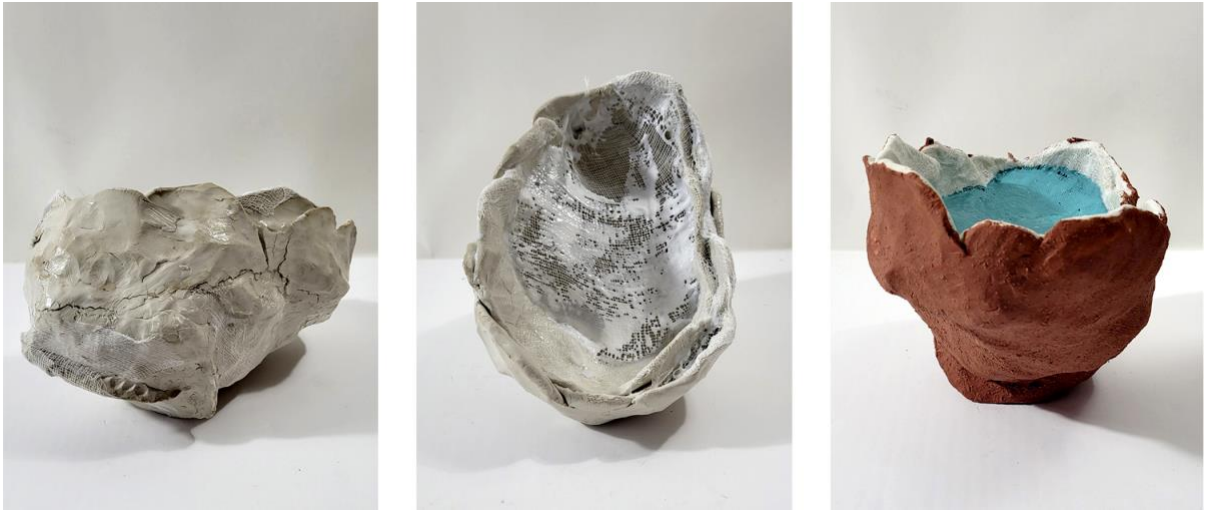
### APPENDIX A: Images of working process



**Figure 10.** Laundry detergent bottle with air-dry clay and cheesecloth.



**Figure 11.** Reusing a ceramic sculpture with various media.



**Figure 12.** Air-dry clay with cheesecloth, rabbit-skin glue and Mesoamerican earth.

## APPENDIX B: Objects



**Figure 13.** Acknowledging wasp dwellings.



APPENDIX C: Images of exhibition installation



**Figure 14.** *Installation view.*





**Figure 15.** Installation of collected and transformed objects.



**Figure 16.** *Installation view.*



**Figure 17.** *Configuration of objects on the floor.*



**Figure 18.** Wall installation from the series 'Borders of Thought'.