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## Arquivo

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### *The Performatic Archive of Fundación YAXS*

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#### **Prologue: The Game of *Yaxs***

YAXS began, not with a document, but with a game. Jacks, in English; a game with multiple names and variations across time and across the globe. How to play: either alone or seated in a circle of friends, begin by scattering ten *yaxs*, these small, crystalline objects consisting of diverging branches (today's version of the toe bones of sheep, or small stones, with which children in ancient times played). Now, toss a small rubber ball in the air, and, before it lands, scoop up one of the *yaxs*, using only one hand. Repeat, until all the pieces have been scooped up. From there, as you progress in dexterity, grab two at a time, then

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three, then four, and so on, until you have mastered the choreography of collecting all ten before the ball hits the ground. A child's game, sure, but also, simultaneously, a cross-cultural ludic ritual.

In Guatemala, *yaxs* is a traditional game, once played with stellar metal crosses. Now, in their place, you will likely find plastic, “nearly weightless, soundless, with neither temperature nor tradition.”<sup>1</sup> Fundación YAXS, a Guatemala City-based non-profit centre for research and education in contemporary art, took inspiration from the titular game and its rhythms, its traditional and resourceful nature, and its distortions and fluxes. With a desire to reverse the plasticization of the traditional game—and no less in protest and resistance to correlative cultural standardization and conformity—Fundación YAXS' founder and director (and former clinical psychologist) Paulina Zamora set out to find a way to make the *yaxs* pieces from metal once again. After a year of research and experimentation with metalsmiths in Sacapulas, Quiché, Guatemala, the process had been perfected.<sup>2</sup>

In Guatemala, the word *yaxs* contains a grammatical error. In Mayan languages, the 's' is implied within the 'x.' But Fundación YAXS maintained this 's,' with it, in their nomenclature, asserting both ancestral cultural patrimony and its distortions and resignifications. Most importantly, the 's' belies the overt privileging of plurality as they open up multiple spaces for the exploration of

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<sup>1</sup> Zamora, Paulina. Personal interview. 11-12 December 2017. My translation.

<sup>2</sup> See [vimeo.com/127663048](https://vimeo.com/127663048) for a beautiful look at the process.

artistic practices, research, experimentation and creative processes as a form of emancipation.

### **Introduction: Personal Positionality, Performatic Archives**

This article teases out some of these spaces—physical, discursive, and affective. By engaging with the particularity of the manifesto as speech act, textual and performative,<sup>3</sup> by thinking through private (spatial) interventions as a response to state inaction and corruption, and by highlighting the primacy of the body, I intend to gesture towards Fundación YAXS’ performatic qualities as a way to situate and contextualize the project as one that allows for communion and resistance. However, I do so primarily through my own idiosyncratic description, and my interpretation of interviews and conversations that have taken place between myself, YAXS founder and director Paulina Zamora, and Nora Pérez, YAXS’ current Artistic Director. Experiential learning and conversation have been my research methods;<sup>4</sup> as a researcher-artist who has spent time at and with Fundación YAXS in several capacities,<sup>5</sup> I have been long

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<sup>3</sup>Following Diana Taylor, I use the word ‘performatic’ as the adjective for performance. The word ‘performative,’ while sometimes employed as well, has a specific linguistic meaning, following J.L. Austin, as an instance in which language becomes action, for example the declaration of ‘I do’ and ‘I now pronounce you...’ at a wedding. Cf. Taylor, Diana. *Performance*. Trans. Abigail Levine. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016. 118-120; Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> These conversations have taken place in a mixture of English and Spanish; the linguistic slipperiness adds another level of possibility for misunderstanding, mistranslation, and lacunae, which I acknowledge as a part of the practice/experience, and a reason to eschew the notion of mastery or expertise in favour of personal positionality.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, as a library user, a participant in the *Universidad de verano* workshops (2016), a volunteer-from-afar, an interloper in the collective, and a researcher-artist-in residence (2017).

fascinated with the project's mandate and trajectory, its architecture and ambience. However, I come to this writing with no pretensions of expertise: I am not an historian nor am I a performance scholar per se; I am not Guatemalan, although I have spent some significant periods of my life on Guatemalan land. I write from the position of a Canadian woman of European descent who grew up on Saugeen Ojibway land in southern Ontario, and on Tz'utujil/Kaqchikel Maya land in Guatemala. I write from the position of *beside*.<sup>6</sup> From this vantage point, here I contribute a poetic reflection on one node of Guatemala's contemporary art ecosystem. Through a sketch of YAXS, I offer some situated knowledge about Guatemala and its artistic communities; insight into space, collaborative groups, and community relationships that are little discussed.

In addition to writing from a particular personal positionality, I also write from a specific historical moment: as 2018 draws to a close, a caravan of Central American (mostly Honduran) migrants draws closer to the U.S./Mexico border. An unprecedented hysteria has followed this caravan, touting it as an 'invasion' of the worst types of humans, intent on spreading diseases and moral depravity across the United States while depriving U.S. citizens of jobs and entitlements and wreaking violent havoc. While the pitch of the recent hysteria may have been unprecedented, the caravan itself is nothing new; a similar caravan

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<sup>6</sup> Here I am indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's articulation of *beside*, which "comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (8). My dissertation work on human rights accompaniment, *al lado, afuera. // beside, outside*. (2018) explored the complications of transnational solidarity with a focus on this position.

organized by Pueblo Sin Fronteras, marched to Mexico City (some members going on to seek asylum in the United States and Canada) this past April. The Pueblo Sin Fronteras caravan has been taking place annually for fifteen years, marching together for safety and as a political gesture to raise awareness for the issues facing Central American refugees.<sup>7</sup> In this moment of seemingly unprecedented xenophobia and politically-motivated fear mongering it is all the more imperative to celebrate hemispheric relationships, engage in the messiness of collaboration, and acknowledge the complicated memory work that is taking places in geopolitical spaces like Guatemala and artistic research spaces like Fundación YAXS.

At the core of the YAXS project is its archive; the ways in which this document collection and its architecture are opened up and activated—in a word, *performed*—form the parallel heart of this reflection. A performance and its documentation, like the archive and the repertoire, are profoundly and inextricably linked. Diana Taylor’s groundbreaking *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003) is the touchstone for how we think about their interconnectedness. Taylor’s analysis of the interplay between material archives and ephemeral embodied repertoires as

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2018/04/07/world/americas/ap-lt-mexico-migrant-caravan.html> Accessed 8 April 2018; Kinosian, Sarah. “US recognizes re-election of Honduras president despite fraud allegations.” *The Guardian*. 22 December 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/us-recognizes-re-election-of-honduras-president-despite-calls-for-a-new-vote> Accessed 13 August 2018.

existing in a constant state of interaction<sup>8</sup> animate my thinking around the YAXS project. Employing performance as methodological lens and way of knowing—as “embodied praxis and episteme”<sup>9</sup>—allows Taylor to focus her analysis on the methodological implications of revalorizing expressive, embodied culture. This, in turn, she believes, has the effect of challenging the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies that has prevailed since Conquest. The notion that written culture seemed easier to control than embodied culture relegated “nonverbal practices—such as dance, ritual, and cooking, to name a few—that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory” to a subordinate position, no longer “considered valid forms of knowledge.”<sup>10</sup> Performance studies thus allows us to take the repertoire of embodied practices seriously as a system of knowing and transmitting our knowledge. This has the effect of questioning the scriptocentrism that has allowed language and writing “to stand for *meaning* itself,”<sup>11</sup> and this challenging of scriptocentrism has deep implications for decolonizing practices and the (re)assessment of creative research. In the case of Guatemala, one could argue that since the Conquest, and in an ongoing project, much of embodied knowledge has been devalued and lost.<sup>12</sup> However, so too have many supposedly-enduring material archives.<sup>13</sup> It is

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<sup>8</sup> *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 25.

<sup>12</sup>Guatemala is a majority-Indigenous country, and Indigenous cultures, and their repertoires of behaviour that transmit cultural memory, have been targeted by the State in various ways that have been proven to be nothing short of genocide. Cf. Rothenberg, ed. *Memory of Silence*.

the desire to contribute to (re)building a material and ephemeral repository of cultural memory that is at the centre of YAXS - its intentions, mandate, and its physicality.

### Casa YAXS

Fundación YAXS is based in Zona 1, the historic centre, of Guatemala City. After an extensive search for an appropriate headquarters, Zamora and the YAXS team painstakingly renovated a historic 1920s home over the course of many months.<sup>14</sup> Much like the game of *yaxs*, this newly-restored house retains many of its original features—from the art deco chandelier to the dark wood trim and ceilings to the playful impish sculpture in the central courtyard—while taking on a contemporary specificity. The historic center of Guatemala City, containing within it the National Palace and the adjoining public square in which countless acts of State—and citizen protests—have taken place, has been the epicenter of political, cultural and artistic events in the city. Zona 1 is also home to the vibrant pedestrian mall on Sexta Avenida, the central market, the original headquarters of the national post office, and the Kaji Tulam/Casa de la Memoria memory museum, and CALDH (Centro Para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos/Centre for Human Rights Legal Action), to name but a few of its diverse spaces. It is among these neighbours that Casa YAXS stands, this cozy

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<sup>13</sup> See pages 14-15 for a discussion of, for instance, the challenges facing the Carlos Mérida Museum of Modern Art's collection, and the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional as an accidental rediscovery of an attempt to 'forget' a large part of the country's history.

<sup>14</sup> Documentation of the restoration process is available here: <https://vimeo.com/159091181>

yet labyrinthine house, that contains within it the heart of Fundación YAXS' operations as well as bedrooms for artists in residence, a shared kitchen, communal open-air *comedor*, rooftop workshop, large meeting space, a library specializing in (but not limited to) contemporary art, and YAXS' historical archive.

Make no mistake: Casa YAXS is not an art gallery. While it contains within it many aspects – and is imbued with the possibility to be many things – a site of art-world commerce is not one of them. Fundación YAXS is unconcerned with – or, one might even say, in opposition to – the commercialized aspects of artistic production. Instead, YAXS focuses on education through talks, workshops and seminars; a specific pedagogical program for children and teenagers; the support of research-based art projects through local grants and international residencies; and an historical archive.

Through these intertwined initiatives, Fundación YAXS puts forward two specific mandates: to be a space of respite where artists and cultural workers can stop, breathe, ask questions and share knowledge, without the pressure of producing saleable art objects; and to be a physical site where curators, critics, theorists and other professionals can convene to explore Guatemalan art in an immersive, site-specific, and culturally nuanced way. Adamantly not an exhibition space per se, nor a cultural centre, nor an appendage of the State, YAXS focuses on its identity as a center for documentation and research in contemporary art.

## The Archive and the Manifesto

The Fundación YAXS initiative, entwined as it is with the archive at its core, was first conceived of in 2011. Zamora was researching artists' manifestos and came across a digitized copy of the only known manifesto in the history of Guatemalan art, the "Manifiesto Vértebra," a document with which the artist collective Grupo Vértebra<sup>15</sup> asserted the tenets of their collective's ideology and practice, first published in the newspaper *El Imparcial* in 1969. The only digitized and publicly disseminated copy is a reprint that appeared one year later in the *Alero* magazine of San Carlos University in Guatemala City.<sup>16</sup> This digital circulation was only made possible by accident, as an original copy of the magazine was found in a bookstore in an alley of the historic center of Guatemala City. The original copy of the *El Imparcial* newspaper is stored in the historical archive of CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica/Center for Regional Research in Mesoamerica), and in the National Newspaper Library. If a document like this has been forgotten, wondered Zamora, how many are in similar predicaments? What has happened to our cultural heritage?

As a psychoanalyst, Zamora maintains a very strong interest in text and language. Artistic manifestos, she believes, are the textual translations that buttress the positions from which artists produce their work. The "Manifiesto

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<sup>15</sup> Grupo Vértebra consisted of Marco Augusto Quiroa, Elmar René Rojas and Roberto Cabrera.

<sup>16</sup> "Manifiesto Vértebra" *Alero* 1 (July-August 1970), <https://educacion.ufm.edu/manifiesto-vertebra/>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

Vértebra” resonated with Zamora as, not only an historical document that is central, if rather little known, in the history of Guatemalan art, but as a public and declarative gesture. Indeed, manifestos are performative texts, seemingly written to be declared aloud—performed with and through the body. The manifesto intends decisive action, a rupture. Indeed, as Martin Puchner claims, “it is in this history of rupture that we must locate the particular performativity of the manifesto. The manifesto does not merely describe a history of rupture, but produces such a history, seeking to create this rupture actively through its own intervention.”<sup>17</sup> If the manifesto is a performative speech act, the archive is also a manifesto: a bringing-to-light, a manifestation, of the ephemeral non-material of performance. The archive is where the evanescence of performance condenses, finds material form (if always other and inadequate), through texts, photographs, videos and other traces. The archive is where the residues of this change-of state reside.

### **Historical Memory, Public Access**

Artistic and cultural production in Guatemala—and throughout the Hemisphere—has always been produced upon the deadly backdrop of colonial violence. While the historical trajectory of Guatemala —from Conquest to coffee boom, the arrival of the United Fruit Company, the 1954 CIA-backed coup that followed the Ten Years of Spring, and the ensuing 36-year-long internal armed

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<sup>17</sup> Puchner, Martin. “Manifesto = Theatre.” *Theatre Journal* 54.3 (Oct., 2002), 449-465.

conflict that ended with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996— is outside the scope of this article,<sup>18</sup> historical and socio-political context is something that always shimmers and boils just under the surface of even the most seemingly-apolitical cultural production.

Historical memory, for Fundación YAXS, means challenging the status quo of the State, not through direct action related to the genocide case against former president Efraín Ríos Montt (like CALDH) or to the disappeared and murdered students, activists, and union leaders (as is the case with the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional). Rather, YAXS' archive pushes back against the fundamental disinterest and contempt that the State shows when it comes to preserving cultural heritage. Zamora blames state corruption for the lack of even the most basic preservation measures, such as the fumigation of the Carlos Mérida Museum of Modern Art. Zamora sees no possibilities for partnership or support from the State, and has created Fundación YAXS, at least in part, to push back against this historical amnesia, and to work towards raising awareness about the relevance of creating archives to preserve Guatemala's invaluable legacy.

Twenty-one years after the signing of the Peace Accords, there might be a perception, in some spaces, of Guatemala being a place overwhelmingly

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<sup>18</sup> For this history, see Grandin, Greg. *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000.; Nelson, Diane M. *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.; McAllister, Carlota and Diane M. Nelson, eds. *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013.

compelled to grapple with historical memory. The reality is, however, according to Fundación YAXS' Artistic Director Nora Pérez,<sup>19</sup> that there is very little governmental interest in historical memory; little access and few places to learn, with most people unaware of the few memory museums and education initiatives that do exist. Pérez believes that the middle and working classes in Guatemala know little of their history, and that there are very few resources with which to learn. Literature remains nearly inaccessible for all but the wealthy, and most museums still have not even included the internal armed conflict to their collections or narratives, least of all with a critical lens.

On the other hand, however, there are private initiatives, activists and non-governmental organizations that have made great efforts and strides to raise awareness of the country's history. The Kaji Tulam/Casa de la Memoria memory museum is one such initiative, a permanent public space (in another restored house) in Zona 1 that explores Guatemalan cultures, histories and resistances in a vibrant and embodied interactive exhibition. *Prensa Comunitaria's* hybrid journalistic-activist investigation is another way in which communities are narrating their own histories. Fundación YAXS has partnered with and supported *Prensa Comunitaria* in the past, as they do with many social organizations in artivistic<sup>20</sup> actions, such as the collective Nos Duelen 56 who have been maintaining public pressure on those responsible for the fire in the

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<sup>19</sup> Pérez, Nora. Personal interview. 13 December 2017.

<sup>20</sup> 'Artivist' = artist-activist; term coined by artist Tania Bruguera

Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción shelter that killed 56 girls on 8 March 2017, through, for example, performative actions in public spaces and poster actions in the streets.<sup>21</sup>

It is in this context of State inaction, corruption, impunity and ineptitude in which private citizens and social collectives must take on the tasks of holding public figures accountable, bringing corrupt officials to justice, and finding ingenious ways to preserve the artistic patrimony and cultural memory of the people. Shortly after deciding to embark on the project of the YAXS archive, the team met the family of Tasso Hadjidoudu,<sup>22</sup> a person tasked with just such a monumental project. Born in Belgium to Greek parents in 1921 and immigrating to Guatemala in 1949, Hadjidoudu had taken on the task of keeping everything he could get his hands on related to art and culture in Guatemala, from his arrival until his death in 2012. A portion of Hadjidoudu's collection was soon temporarily loaned to YAXS to preserve, classify, digitize and code for full public access by 2018. After publicly announcing the work they were doing with the Hadjidoudu documents, other individuals with pieces or collections began to approach the YAXS team with one common denominator: that they must allow public access to the materials.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.prensacomunitaria.org/guatemala-estado-femicida-exigimos-justicia/> Accessed 9 November 2018.

<sup>22</sup> <https://aprende.guatemala.com/historia/personajes/biografia-de-tasso-hadjidodou/> Accessed 9 November 2018.

### **“Archivo Abierto”**

YAXS’s main goal to create a physical space that promotes the study and research of contemporary art in and of Guatemala is entwined with a desire for accessibility. Open access to the public, free of charge and through various channels, is crucial to this project. As is the case with the Hadjidoudu collection, the main sources of the pieces that make up YAXS’ archive have come, on temporary loan, from collections of private individuals (including artists) who participated, directly and indirectly, in certain relevant events in the history of art and culture of Guatemala from the 1960s to the present. Additionally, the team, with some regularity, visits second-hand bookstores to make acquisitions that form part of the YAXS collection of textbooks, artist books, exhibition catalogues, audiovisual material, correspondence, manuscripts, unpublished texts, photos, posters, brochures, programs, invitations, notes, artist proofs, first edition books, scripts, sketches, collages, graphic works, zines and notebooks.

Once Casa YAXS was acquired and restored, the team turned to adapting the space for humidity, temperature, light and ventilation control, taking into account the specific variants of the tropics. In parallel, the team worked on the acquisition of adequate furniture and equipment, and the development of a classification system, a registration form, and software. They worked with renowned Guatemalan art historian and curator Rosina Cazali for six months as a content consultant, generating a list of publications to be acquired and, in many cases, tracked only the physical copies in order to be able to digitize them. To

date, among the collections of the archive and the library, Fundación YAXS has more than 4,000 books and 100 boxes of documents that are currently being cleaned, classified, coded (including summaries and critical commentary when warranted), digitized and stored.

### **Activating the Archive**

The archive is at the heart of Fundación YAXS' initiatives. The physical contents and the architecture that contains them is the tangible form it takes, but it is not limited to these forms alone. There are publication projects, activities that bring the contents to life, and artistic residencies for research within the collection. Fundación YAXS' archive, Zamora claims, is only different from that of a university or a museum in scale, not in identity or intention. Fundación YAXS' goal is that their archive be not just a place where documents are stored and services are provided, but rather a vital space, measured not by the number of documents it holds, but rather, by the ways in which the transmission and understanding of its contents are fostered. In order to activate the archive in this way, Fundación YAXS has created the Archivo Abierto program, in which, at regular intervals, one personal archive of a cultural figure or contemporary Guatemalan artist a from different creative discipline (visual arts, music, theater, dance, etc.) within the archive will be opened up, its contents exhibited in a dynamic way, and a small risograph publication created.

The archive is the heart of YAXS, and the notion of free and public access to the materials is the vital energy that keeps this heart beating within the foundation, and what resonates with the people who are beginning to donate materials to the collection. Zamora believes that all decisions made at YAXS take into account the growth of their collections, and more importantly, the mission of preserving cultural patrimony as a way to exercise a fundamental right. Free and public access is the most central mission of the archive, privileged precisely due to the context in which Fundación YAXS is situated, a context in which there is a profound lack of open access to archives—and a lack of archives themselves. For information to circulate, for the recovery of memory, and for the growth of an informed community—these tenets are central to YAXS' notion of archiving. A documentation centre simply does not make sense if you do not allow free public access to it, Paulina Zamora asserts. This archive is a manifesto; a rupture, a manifestation, a protest, a declaration, a political act.

### **Decolonizing Archives**

The codes and conventions of archiving might illustrate the most fundamental logics of colonization—to classify, rank, and order a field in order to gain power and dominion through this informational mastery. How, then, do projects like YAXS, in contexts like post-peace<sup>23</sup> Guatemala, work in resistance

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. McAllister, Carlota and Diane M. Nelson, eds. *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013.

within these structures? A focus on preserving the cultural memory of the people most often excluded from history's official narratives might be one response, or the notion of open access to all, free of charge and without the necessity of academic or state credentials. Another response might be: collaboration.

Working in relation, creating a networked horizontal structure, and championing the labour and contributions of other initiatives – these are all ways in which collaboration can work to resist the top-down, individualistic and profit-driven nature of today's neoliberal capitalist imperialism. At Fundación YAXS, all team members, visiting artists and grant recipients are invited to tour the the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional, the national police archive—a human rights project and memory museum, a working archive housed in the same formerly-abandoned police barracks in which 80 million secret state documents were accidentally discovered in 2005; now under the auspices of various NGOs and international universities, the AHPN is working to clean, sort, and digitize this incredible wealth of information relating to the activities of the national police and their terror campaign against students, activists, and union leaders during the internal armed conflict.<sup>24</sup>

YAXS also works with the Archivo General de Centro América, the General Archive of Central America, also located in Zona 1 of Guatemala City,

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Weld, Kirsten. *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014.; Heyn-Jones, Zoë. "Performing the *Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional*: Walking through Guatemala's National Police Archive." *PUBLIC: Art/Culture/Ideas*. 57. [Forthcoming]

with the AGCA providing newspaper documents for research projects and with collaborations on various projects currently under discussion. The Fundación YAXS team has also recently participated in two meetings on audiovisual archiving, convened by the Ministry of Culture, and is working with a group of art students from the Escuela Superior de Arte at the Universidad Galileo to present a proposal to the Directorate of Natural and Cultural Heritage to prepare a catalogue of the Carlos Mérida Museum of Modern Art's collection—something that, currently, does not exist.

### **Corporeal Knowledge, Bodily Practices**

Outside of Guatemala, those who are even remotely aware of the country's artistic output, are quick to cite Regina José Galindo and her visceral corporeally-driven performance work as emblematic of Guatemalan contemporary art. However, Zamora believes, it is exactly that type of limited perception that highlights the necessity of an archive dedicated to contemporary Guatemalan art and art history, to narrate this history and the fascinating particularities of its evolution. Zamora points to an expansion of the fields of literature and theater, which predominated in the 1940s and 50s, and the genesis of performance in the late 1960s that was deeply influenced by the political activism in the theater and literature of previous decades. Today, Zamora and Pérez see a beautiful hybrid diversity in artistic practices, with individual and collective public actions, political activism through various media, and a

journalistic focus, for example. Various past NGO projects with gangs have also evolved into a vibrant and thriving hip-hop scene, now established and respected in the country and the wider Central American region.

This burgeoning history of Guatemalan and Central American hip-hop is something that was completely unknown to the YAXS team—and completely unrepresented in the archive—six months ago. Now, they are beginning to plot the timeline of the evolution of hip-hop in Guatemala as narrated by Fla-K.O., one of the pioneers of the country's hip-hop scene, who participated in the events that led to hip-hop becoming the relatively established cultural force that it is today. For many years, Fla-K.O. has been collecting ephemera from this particular scene, and this is proving instrumental in the ability to trace and generate a timeline of the birth of a hip-hop movement in Guatemala. As a current grant recipient, 2018 will see Fla-K.O. and YAXS preserving, organizing, exhibiting and digitizing his personal collection in order for it to become publicly accessible and made visible, thereby extending an artistic and cultural discipline that has never before been included within the canon of contemporary art or art history in Guatemala.

Challenging the normalized primacy of contemporary performance art in Guatemalan art history does not mean disavowing the body. Rather than posing the question of why performance resonates so strongly with Guatemalan artists and cultural workers, Zamora would rather reframe the question to ask why it is that *bodily practices* more generally reverberate so strongly in this context. The

answer, she states bluntly, is the very socio-political history of the country, with the body being what has been most repressed and punished in Guatemala from the Conquest to the contemporary. An example of this type of historical repression, and possibly the most serious, Zamora believes, is female sexuality. Subjected to violence, forced into prostitution, trafficked into slavery, female sexuality has been condemned by religion, and, until recently, by a State that declared the woman to be unfaithful in any situation in which she has a relationship with someone other than her husband—but the man, only if he is caught *in flagrante delicto* in the marriage bed. Initiation rites of gangs involve severely violating female bodies. And on and on, in a most atrocious spectrum. Of course, these concerns extend beyond Guatemala, and the countries' vast urban-rural divide sees rural, Indigenous, and afro-Guatemalan women additionally confronted by intersecting vectors of racism, classism, and devastating poverty. It is this aspect of corporeality, among many, that animates much artistic and cultural production in contemporary Guatemala. *In the flesh*: this phrase takes on many valences within the Guatemalan context.

Fundación YAXS' perspective on the archive is that it provides a physical space for researchers to work in Guatemala, thereby allowing them to contextualize the materials in a unique way. Guatemala must be experienced *in the flesh*, Nora Pérez claims, in order for the context to be better understood. While archives can offer information, if the culture is not understood and lived, the richness of that research will be diminished. Pérez believes that whatever

research is conducted, it would be much more complete, complex, and full-bodied if the researcher lives, smells, eats, and feels the context. This embodied sensory immersion allows complex issues, such as Guatemala, its context and its problems, to be better absorbed and better understood.

Paulina Zamora believes that if a researcher is not physically present, seeking out the Other and relating to them, that Other is relegated to an object, annulled and negated, and forced to conform to the researcher's expectations and mold. Colonial logic; that age-old positioning of the academic researcher as authority, speaking from on high, without the 'subject' of the research having a voice or a vote, followed by a universal interpretation being circulated, further flattening the Other into a one-dimensional synecdoche. The internet and books *facilitate*, Zamora believes, but do not substitute for the type of embodied learning one can only do in person, onsite, immersed in multiple temporalities at once. After all, as Zamora claims, "we learn about the history of contemporary Guatemalan art backwards and forwards at the same time."<sup>25</sup>

Research itself is—or at least *should be*—a bodily practice, one that responds to site specificity and cultural immersion. Just as Diana Taylor has famously claimed that the archive —seemingly thought to be permanent, enduring, and unquestionable—works in tandem with an embodied, performed repertoire of gestures, songs, stories, recipes, dances, etcetera, in order to

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<sup>25</sup> Zamora, Paulina. Personal interview. 11-12 December 2017.

transmit cultural memory, so too does the embodied repertoire of research works in tandem with the performatic archive of Fundación YAXS.

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