

PERSPECTIVES ON
THE CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN
LATIN AMERICA,
THE CARIBBEAN
AND AFRICA

EDITION 03
C&AL 2020
AN ART
MAGAZINE

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AMÉRICA LATINA



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FRONT COVER

Naomi Rincón Gallardo,
Resiliencia Tlacuache,
performance, 2019.
Photograph: Claudia López
Terroso. Courtesy of
the artist

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EDITORIAL

We need to talk... It feels like there has never been so much
urgency nor so many ways to network and cultivate dialogue as
we are all experiencing right now. On a personal scale. On a local
scale. On a global scale. On countless digital devices. In Webinars,
Instagram-Live-Videos, digital conferences.

Welcome to our first C&AL Interview Issue. This 3rd edition of
our print magazine seeks to reflect what we at C&AL do most
of the time: discuss and connect – with artists, curators, critics,
academics, and cultural producers. We see the launching of this
print issue as an opportunity to elaborate on what it means to
talk globally.

The print issue opens with features on two artists that are part
of this year’s Berlin Biennale, one of the first large-scale art events
to convene again physically: Alina Baiana and Naomi Rincón
Gallardo talk about their artistic practices and the works they are
contributing to the Biennale. The cultural mediator Luciane Ramos
Silva and member of the magazine O Menelick 2º Ato spoke to
the curatorial team of the Frestas: Art Triennial about the process
of putting together such an event in these challenging times.
Finally, Leticia Contreras reflects on her recurring examination of
making and dismantling the idea of “home” and its many modes
of belonging.

Let’s start the conversations!

The C&AL Team

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Contemporary And América Latina
(C&AL) is a dynamic, critical art
magazine focusing on the connections
between Afro-Latin America,
The Caribbean and Africa.

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ART AS *COUNTERSPELL*

By **FÁBIA PRATES**



ALINE BAIANA creates an installation for the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in response to environmental crimes, referencing the devastation caused by mining in Brazil.

Aline Baiana, Polluted Paraopeba River one year after the crime at Brumadinho, January 25, 2020.
Research image. Courtesy of the artist



Aline Baiana, Polluted Paraopeba River one year after the crime at Brumadinho, January 25, 2020.
Research image. Courtesy of the artist

“As news of the death of the Doce River and pictures of animals and people dying in a sea of mud reached us, I began to think about how the risks of mining and its process of environmental destruction are obliterated from the final product.”

Brazilian Aline Baiana presents an installation piece at the Berlin Biennale that references the collapse of two tailings dams which, combined, resulted in nearly 300 deaths and left behind an array of damage to the ecosystem. The artist collected materials from the devastated surroundings of Brumadinho, in the state of Minas Gerais, a place that has paradoxically become known for two reasons: as the location of the world’s largest open-air contemporary art museum, Inhotim; and as the stage of what is considered one of Brazil’s worst environmental crimes.

Born in Bahia, the artist moved to Rio de Janeiro as a teenager and now lives between Brazil and Berlin. In an interview, she recounts “the discomfort, outrage, and anguish” that typically permeate the genesis of her works, analyzes the current precariousness of Brazilian cultural production, but concludes: “One thing I’m certain of is I’m not in this alone.”

C& AMÉRICA LATINA Could you tell us a little about your path as an artist?

ALINE BAIANA I went to film school, then worked with photography for a long time, but decided to take a step back from that to pursue a degree in Environmental Management and work for an NGO. That was the year Rio+20 took place and I was able to participate in the People’s Summit, a transformative experience for me that gave me greater awareness of certain memories and my ancestry and completely changed my commitment to the environmental and human rights struggle. In 2012 I also got a scholarship to attend the course “Art Outside the Cube: Artistic Actions and Political Reactions in the Contemporary Art Sphere,” at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts, in Rio de Janeiro.

Over the next two years, a time of many street protests in Brazil, I did stencilling and collages on the streets in an attempt to

merge the demonstrations with the daily life of the city. From there, I started my own research and artistic production, working on videos, objects, and installations. In 2019, I was invited by curator Claire Tancons to participate in the “Look For Me All Around You” platform at the Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber, in the United Arab Emirates. And in 2020, in spite of everything – and “everything” this year is an awful lot – I’m happy to have been invited to the Berlin Biennale by such a special curatorial team.

C&AL Social criticism and political thought are key elements of your creations. Could you talk about this?

AB For me, being Latin American and, more specifically, Black and Brazilian, a separation between art and politics has never existed. From the beginning, what led me to make art was indignation, perhaps



Aline Baiana, Decommissioned gold mine, Minas Gerais – Brazil, January 2020.
Research image. Courtesy of the artist

“I like to imagine works of art as a sort of counterspell for capitalism, patriarchy, racism, alongside others in the anti-colonial struggle.”

my motivation is what the Zapatistas call “la digna rabia.” My work generally arises from a discomfort, outrage or anguish. In the research process, which is often painful, I come to understand why and how to deal with this. I try to look for ways to question the ideas that sustain this world, and share other worlds in which those ideas are inconceivable. The shape that each piece takes, as well as the mediums and materials I use, come to me during this research process.

C&AL Feminist and environmental themes, and racial issues are part of your work. How does the current situation in Brazil specifically influence your production in that regard?

AB The situation right now in Brazil is really bad. There is an extermination plan. When I say that in my research I look for ways to question the ideas that sustain the world where these atrocities take place, the world I speak of is a patriarchal and white world. And questioning the ideas that support it has become even more pressing at this moment. We have to tear down the structures that oppress us and that have allowed a monster to take power over lives it clearly doesn’t respect. I’m not so naive to think that a work of art has that kind of power. I like to imagine works of art as a sort of counterspell for capitalism, patriarchy, racism, alongside others in the anti-colonial struggle.

C&AL How was the process of creating the work you made for the Berlin Biennale?

AB *A cruz do Sul* (“The Southern Cross”) is a piece that I developed in the aftermath of the environmental disaster in Mariana, in the state of Minas Gerais, when a Samarco (Vale and BHP Billiton) dam burst, unleashing a tsunami of mud and mining waste, and causing death and the destruction of ecosystems from Minas Gerais to the coast of Espírito Santo. As news of the death of the Doce River and pictures of animals and people dying in a sea of mud reached us,

I began to think about how the risks of mining and its process of environmental destruction are obliterated from the final product. And also thinking about this place that we have historically occupied with other countries in the Southern Hemisphere as a source of natural resources to be exploited and exported until exhaustion, for the profit of a few and at the expense and suffering of many people.

The work is an installation piece that reproduces the Southern Cross constellation out of fragments of rock from which some of Brazil’s most exported mineral products are extracted. In order to see the rocks laid out as we see the constellation in the sky, you have to stand in a specific spot, marked on the ground by a compass rose with references to mining and positioned on iron ore collected in the region of Brumadinho, the stage for another major environmental crime. The South point is marked with mud from the Vale dam that burst in Brumadinho, also in the state of Minas Gerais, and which is polluting the Paraopeba River.

C&AL How important it is to be present at the Biennale at such a unique moment in time?

AB At this dark time in Brazil’s history, in which the Ministry of Culture was dissolved, cultural production is being sabotaged and professionals in the art world are getting fired, I realize how extremely valuable the opportunity to participate in the Berlin Biennale is, and with a piece that addresses something as serious as mining.

C&AL What projects are you working on currently?

AB I’m working on two projects: one that I’d like to produce in São Paulo and another in Pará. Mercury contamination in the Tapajós River due to illegal mining has serious consequences for the people who depend on the river for absolutely everything, and the lack of access to clean drinking water makes people drink mercury-contaminated

water and become ill. I’m also starting some preliminary research in Germany, still at a very early stage.

C&AL Do you believe it’s possible to talk about a new way of making art after the pandemic? What consequences have you seen, for example, in conducting projects since then?

AB It seems hasty and arrogant to want to speculate about a post-pandemic world, when I can’t even wrap my head around what I’m experiencing right now. One obvious and painful consequence is the distancing. But one thing I’m certain of is “I’m not in this alone.” My work is linked to a network of people who are also dealing with this subject in some way and these meetings and exchanges are a very important part of the process. An imaginary exists around artistic practice in which artists create alone in their studios. My practice is the exact opposite. The first thing I do is meet and talk to other people. The work begins in those exchanges. ■

—
FÁBIA PRATES is a Brazilian journalist.
She currently writes on topics related to culture and behavior.

**READ OUR
INTERVIEW WITH
FRIDA ORUPABO**
ON
AMLATINA.
CONTEMPORARYAND.COM

Mexican artist NAOMI RINCÓN GALLARDO, a participant in the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, formulates a feminist, decolonial and anti-racist critique of Eurocentrism, extractivism and the creed of progress.



TELLING STORIES *ANIMATED* BY DESIRE

By MARIE-LOUISE STILLE



both images Naomi Rincón Gallardo, *Resiliencia Tlacuache*.
Performance, 2019. Photograph: Claudia López Terroso.
Courtesy of the artist



Naomi Rincón Gallardo, *Resiliencia Tlacuache*. Performance, 2019.
Photograph: Claudia López Terroso. Courtesy of the artist

“By anti-racist and decolonial feminism I mean a feminism that tries to unravel Eurocentrism and the self-imposed image of the superiority of European whiteness and the geopolitical North.”

C& AMÉRICA LATINA What are the topics you want to address in your art?

NAOMI RINCÓN GALLARDO I consider myself a feminist, decolonial and anti-racist artist. I am interested in what I call the creation of counter-worlds or alternative worlds in the Global South, specifically in Mexico; a creation which nonetheless reverberates with other environments and is interconnected with the Global North. In my work, I have addressed the demands and advocacy of racialized women for self-determination of their bodies, their territories and their body-territories. I have also worked on processes of extractivism, body domination or body control.

I am interested in the different ways of telling stories that are animated by desire. Moreover, everything is viewed through a queer lens, thus giving space to fantasy, to dreams, to affection. I collaborate with a lot of people and I consider it an investigative process where I organize and articulate different methods and inquiries, which I then craft together and in which certain interests and theoretical influences materialize.

C&AL What does decolonial and anti-racist feminism mean to you?

NRG When I speak of an anti-racist and decolonial feminism, I am referring to a feminism that is not only concerned with gender issues, but also seeks to dismantle the asymmetrical ways in which these issues are historically established. With “decolonial”

I am referring to a series of practices and theories generated in the Global South. I attempt to understand the decolonial as an embodied practice and theory; something you can smell or dance and which emanates from specific physical bodies.

I understand decolonial feminism as a type of feminism that tries to listen, is informed and willing to learn, and which tries to create a different kind of politics; supportive politics that provide resistance and alternatives to the epistemic practices and ways of life guided by the Global North. By anti-racist and decolonial feminism I mean a feminism that tries to unravel Eurocentrism and the self-imposed image of the superiority of European whiteness and the geopolitical North.

C&AL How do you reflect this in your artwork?

NRG There is a critical perspective towards Eurocentrism, extractivism and the creed of development, as they are all based on the control of other people as well as on a supposed superiority rooted in violence. This is what I want to point out and what I am trying to dismantle by welcoming other forms of relationships within the working processes and summoning voices that have hitherto been silenced. Voices of women who have fought, who resist, and who defend their right to a voice, a territory and to self-determination.

C&AL What kind of projects are you currently working on?

NRG I consider my latest works to be a trilogy with a focus on female figures who resist or rebel against processes of extractive industries. In these processes, life is intimately linked to the possibility of premature death, since the places affected by extraction become battle grounds for territorial conflicts and dispossession. These forms of dispossession expose entire populations to a toxicity, to – often violent – disputes over territory control and to processes of militarization and paramilitarization that create vulnerability and where certain forms of life and bodies are converted into disposable objects. Premature death or increased vulnerability are present in necropolitical processes in which it is decided who will die and who can be expended and intoxicated.

C&AL Tell us about your piece for the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in 2020.

NRG The work is called *Resiliencia Tlacuache* and is inspired by a series of interviews I conducted with a Zapotec activist in Oaxaca, Mexico, who was involved in defending a territory where a Canadian company built a mine. This woman was ambushed, and those who did it tried to murder her – but she survived. *Resiliencia Tlacuache* is a work of fiction in which four characters meet in a territory threatened by mining extraction. I chose the Tlacuache [the term for “opossum” in Mexico and Central America] because people who endure numerous attacks and beatings are called “tlacuachitos”: animals



Naomi Rincón Gallardo, *Resiliencia Tlacuache*. Performance, 2019.
Photograph: Claudia López Terroso. Courtesy of the artist

that have the capacity to play dead when they are beaten, for example when they try to steal chickens. Thus, after the ambush, the perpetrators thought they had managed to do away with the activist, but she was able to save herself. It is a piece inspired by Mesoamerican myths in which the creation of the world is superimposed with the mining conflict.

C&AL What does it mean to you to be part of the program of the Berlin Biennale, which this year is marked by the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting travel limitations?

NRG I am happy. I am very excited, but at the same time, I am very sad that this year’s event will take place under those circumstances. I would like to go to Berlin. I am happy to work with a group of curators who position themselves as feminine.

C&AL How is your work affected by the events our planet is going through, such as the pandemic and the various local and international crises caused by it?

NRG Right now, Mexico is facing a deeply severe economic crisis made even worse by the pandemic. This has tremendously affected the artistic and cultural community, whose working conditions are very precarious. I am currently part of the National System of Art Creators 2019-2022, funded by the National Fund for Culture and the Arts of Mexico, and their support has allowed me to continue working. However, in the light of recent events, some of the ideas I had already been thinking about and working on have now become even clearer to me; the possibility of a simpler way of life, finding other forms of sustainability in everyday life and changing certain priorities and way of living. ■

**BLACK LIVES
MATTER, DON
QUIXOTE, AND THE
SPANISH HERITAGE**

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—
MARIE-LOUISE STILLE, who conducted the interview, is a Berlin based culture manager as well as Social-Media-Manager and author for C&AL.

PLURALISM

IN



Thiago de Paula Souza, Diane Lima and Beatriz Lemos: Frestas's curatorial team. Photo: Indiara Duarte

CURATORIAL FRAMING

By LUCIANE RAMOS SILVA

DIANE LIMA, BEATRIZ LEMOS, and **THIAGO DE PAULA SOUZA**, curators of the latest edition of Frestas, a project organized by Sesc São Paulo in Sorocaba, Brazil, talk about the research process that preceded the exhibition, the challenges of discussing policies of access, and ways of presenting space for artistic practice that can overcome constraints imposed by a lack of financial structure.

“We have to reflect on who is watching and how that gaze is mediated. We learned that we need to complexify what we understand about visibility and how we want to be seen or represented.”

C& AMÉRICA LATINA What desires motivated the curatorial design for Frestas, given that each of your paths in curation has been characterized by the presence of discourse which is critical of normalities defined by Eurocentric, patriarchal, and imperialist models?

DIANE LIMA Since we work collectively, our greatest challenge was embracing the fact that what motivated us was the desire to approach the very process of producing an exhibition, its agreements and disagreements, as a critical and conceptual object. Looking closely at the strategies and negotiations that we made during the process, we realized that they opened up a reflexive framework that did not end with us, but that grew both from and beyond us.

C&AL Collective curation allows for the amplification of different perspectives. Could you talk a little about your work as a trio?

TPS All curation is collective to some extent, which doesn't preclude hierarchies from forming. This isn't always very apparent, but any exhibition of this size goes through a never-ending series of conversations, negotiations, and studies that no single person is capable of doing alone. Understanding the contradictions inside us, our common interests, not silencing conflict but negotiating it, whether that's through arguments based on scientific data, or tarot readings. One of the first things we did was ask to work with a team that wasn't dominated by white people, as is the general rule in Brazilian artistic institutions.

C&AL Pluralism is one of the show's propositions – where did you look to and what layers did you delve into to establish this pluralism? Which bodies will be visible, given the raciality that hierarchizes knowledge and ways of producing knowledge?

TPS The three of us bring very different worlds to the table, both in relation to our

practices and our interests. And that was the initial idea of pluralism for the project. From there, we started to expand on our conversations with artists – whether they're from Sorocaba, São Luís do Maranhão, or Johannesburg. As far as visibility goes, you have to always be careful with the tactics you choose, as we also have to reflect on who is watching and how that gaze is mediated. We learned that we need to complexify what we understand about visibility and how we want to be seen or represented. But opposing the commodification of knowledge, agendas, and experiences is not an easy exercise, since being visible produces recognition, which produces wider circulation, and powers the whole game.

C&AL A country of continental dimensions like Brazil has regional singularities. What was it like seeking out artists from far and near, and putting together the curatorial team?

DL We decided to take a research trip precisely to allow us to get to know places that would have been unlikely otherwise. We traveled for about 40 days through the North and Northeast of Brazil, visiting places like the Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous lands and the city of Boa Vista, in Roraima; Belém, Pará, Manaus and Careiro Castanho and the area around the Tupana River, in Amazonas; Alcântara and São Luís, in Maranhão; Serra da Capivara, in Piauí.

TPS In addition, from the outset, our engagement with Sorocaba was and still remains our primary challenge. The interior of São Paulo state is a very complex region, marked by a silencing of the Black and indigenous presence and the glorification of the Bandeirantes. How could we revisit the city's dark past, celebrated there to this day? Our initial steps were to listen, to try to understand how groups were organized, how these local actors dealt with issues that were so dear to us. So, we traveled to places that hold symbolic, political, and historical value

for Brazil and for the world. They are hotbeds of resistance against the relentless threats they're subjected to, and very emblematic places to think about for other global projects.

C&AL In recent years, Brazil has experienced multiple precarities which have been brutally exacerbated by the pandemic. How can you make this visible in a show like Frestas?

BEATRIZ LEMOS Bringing to light discussions on policies of access and how they operate in a way determined by markers of class and race in the context of Brazil, has been one of Frestas's critical underpinnings – understanding it as a platform for creation, not only in the development of the exhibition, but in its broadest and most complex sense of action.

TPS Most of the artists we work with live in precarious situations and this permeates their choices to some extent. Many of them have already fabricated in their work ways of living beyond the controls imposed both by the violence that characterizes us and a lack of funds. The pandemic hasn't necessarily made us focus more on this precarious system, as it already haunts the research of many of the participants and therefore the exhibition. Perhaps now, with the pandemic, some discussions have been made more visible. Still, we aim for the project to function as a kind of portal that can project participants' artistic practices beyond the constraints often imposed by a lack of financial structure. And that this helps us to feel, even if fleeting, some relief or respite.

C&AL The idea of a “crack” [“fresta,” in Portuguese], as conceived by the institution, is as follows: “a passage, a split, a rupture, i.e. an opening to a new democratic place of activity.” Does this resonate with the movement you created to frame this curatorship?

the crack begins within

sept 5 – nov 1, 2020

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TPS From the very beginning, we discussed ways to open up and play with the format. Fortunately, Frestas is just at the start of its story and this opens up space for experimentation. One experiment was our invitation to a group of 15 artists, participants in the project. We created a sort of study group that went on for about two months, and the idea was that we could reassess the curatorial design, the exhibition, discuss each artist's individual projects as a group, how to link them together in the exhibition space, and in dialogue with the educational program. In general, this is already the work of curators, but we took the opportunity to expand a little and question those boundaries of performance and participation. Although hierarchical, it's an attempt to really imagine organizational and curatorial work in a more plural way.

BL Seeing Frestas as a platform, blurring the centrality of the exhibition as a device, as much as possible, has been our exercise in collective framing, both among the three of us as curators, and in dialogue with the institution, the teams invited to the project, and with participating artists. We're interested in critically mapping the boundaries of the non-negotiable, the trapdoors of codes of power, performances of what goes "unsaid," and the inherent potentialities when you dwell in contradiction.

C&AL We have witnessed the ruthless advancement of conservative discourse in various Brazilian institutions, which affects, to a large extent, the enjoyment of art. Particularly in Brazil, there is a tendency to replicate moderate discourse that is sympathetic or even aligned with the hegemonic structures. Curatorship, however, can broaden horizons when it shatters creative monopolies and production circuits. I'd like you to address this issue.

TPS Brazil is a prime example, where cultural extraction happens all the time. Some discussions have been more present in recent years, even in a more conservative context, but I always take them with a grain of salt because of the way they're conducted or appropriated by institutions. Jota Mombaça and Gabi Ngcobo, and others, have both been talking a lot about the appropriation of critical or decolonial discourses by art institutions, or rather, I should say, by Brazilian whites who occupy positions of power within art institutions without being responsible for structural

change. What good is a progressive exhibition program when all or most of the curators in your institution are white? I think that's why it was so important for us to focus, at this moment, on the ways of doing things, and our own ethical stumbling blocks along the way. ■

“Brazilian whites occupy positions of power within art institutions without being responsible for structural change. What good is a progressive exhibition program when all or most of the curators in your institution are white?”

Frestas - Triennial of Arts is a triennial initiative - a project, program and exhibition - organized by SESC São Paulo. It is primarily a trans-disciplinary platform that promotes new actions and reflections in a broader field of the visual arts, engaging the public and the circuit in a more decentralized way. The project takes place at the SESC facility located in Sorocaba, 100 kilometers from the São Paulo state capital. For its third edition, the institution invited Beatriz Lemos, Diane Lima, and Thiago de Paula Souza to form a horizontal curatorial team.

—
LUCIANE RAMOS SILVA is a dance performer, anthropologist and cultural mediator, who lives in São Paulo. She is the co-director of "O Menelick 2º Ato" magazine and project manager for Acervo África.

ERRATA
EXHIBITION
SEP 11–OCT 18

ARIELLA AZOULAY,
PAULINE CURNIER
JARDIN, NEW RED
ORDER AND OTHERS

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REACTING TO SOCIAL EMERGENCIES

By **NAN COLLYMORE**

Texan native **LETICIA CONTRERAS** builds landscapes in her art. Her recurring examination of making and dismantling home is a reflection on her own cultural experience as a “Queer Afro-Xicana Tejana.”

C& AMÉRICA LATINA One of the questions I’m interested in is how you bring the concept of home into your practice – the internal, the spiritual, the ritualistic.

LETICIA CONTRERAS Knowing that those row homes [in Chicago’s Hyde Park Art Center artist exchange, in which Conteras participated in the year 2019] evoke so much history, I wanted to play with the structure and make it more fluid. I was thinking about being on the gulf coast, about our relationship to water and climate change. It’s like this twofold idea of having space to see each other and witness each other’s practice, and to strategize and create visions for the future. I was really impacted by this last round of socially engaged artists who had an installation called *How We Respond to Social Emergencies*.

We have to think about the collective and celebrate collective knowledge. My own roots and knowledge that have been passed down to me are about seeing water as a thing that shapes the world around it and the elements held within its context. About all of the memories, the beauty and joy, and also the trauma that lies within the water and our bodies; and how water shapes communities, lives, and landscapes. So instead of trying to control that, how about negotiating and having a conversation with this environment?

C&AL I love how you think about water holding shape, which reminds me of Ellen Gallagher’s exhibition *Accidental Records* at Hauser and Wirth in LA in 2017 and 2018.



Leticia Contreras, *Sabor de...*
Performance, 2020. Courtesy of the artist



“Especially being artists of color, we’re always expected to talk about the trauma and the violence that happens in our communities. But we are complex beings, there’s so much more to us.”



top Leticia Contreras, *Untitled*.
From a series on Mexican-American masculinities, 2020.
bottom Leticia Contreras, *Sabor de...* Performance, 2020.
both images Courtesy of the artist

“...claiming an identity as Afro-Xicana is like
a soft ‘fuck you’ to the establishment...”

It also makes me think about your sculptures
and your choice to work in fiber.

LC I think the fiber takes me back to
being at home and to the traditions that
were passed down to me. I like those
materials because I like to celebrate the
artistry of Abuelita knowledge that isn’t
often celebrated in high art. I like to address
the working class knowledge that is often
practiced amongst people working in
textiles, whether it’s a seamstress or my
grandmother. I’m really interested in the
lineage of quilt-making, especially in the
South. I like the idea of quilt-making as a
storytelling device and also this practice of
keeping you warm and giving you comfort.

C&AL So much about your practice is about
location and place and how you describe
yourself as Afro-Xicana.

LC What was really fun about *How We
Respond to Social Emergencies* is that some of
the artists have known each other for years,
while many of them had never met before.
And to see the synchronicity of the work and
the materials that we are choosing fascinates
me. One of the things I think about with
quilts is the Southern Black tradition, how
the stories were stitched into it, like maps
for guiding you North. Oftentimes when we
think about the Underground Railroad we
don’t think about the huge wave of migration
that went to Mexico, because Mexico had
abolished slavery. I often think of myself as a
Southern/Global South artist and a carrier of
those stories, traditions, and knowledge.

I am highly influenced by embroidery and
how it is used in Mexico to identify your tribe
and your people. It wasn’t until the 1960’s
that we had these other spectrums of colors
because of the artificial colors that were
introduced into the market. Before that we
were working with natural dyes from insects,
plants, and fruits from our communities,
which again brings me back to the loving
tradition and the relationship to the land.

Being creative first off is such a vulnerable
space. Especially being artists of color,
we’re always expected to talk about the
trauma and the violence that happens in our
communities. But we are complex beings,

there’s so much more to us. So, can the other
stuff be celebrated, please?

C&AL This seems very specific to the
South, how does that influence your
approach to work?

LC I’m from Louisiana, from the Black
diaspora and third generation of what we
call Texas, and my great grandparents once
migrated from Mexico. The South West
has been what’s known as Mexico a lot
longer than the United States, and those
are important histories for us to think
about. I think that claiming an identity as
Afro-Xicana is like a soft “fuck you” to the
establishment because we were torn away
from that identity. It also affirms that we
can define home and that home can be in
so many places which, too, is ok. Texas has
this really interesting dynamic, Houston
specifically, because it’s a port city next to
Galveston. It teeters between a Northern and
Southern relationship between Global South
and North and between the South West and
South Eastern historiography. ■

—
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makes brass ornaments in Berkeley California.



both images Leticia Contreras, *Estria Sagrada. Vertigios Preciosos* (Sacred Striation, Precious Traces).
Installation view. Project Row Houses, Round 49: Penumbbras: Sacred Geometries, 2019.
Photograph by Alex Barber. Courtesy of the artist



Leticia Contreras, *Estria sagrada. Vestígios Preciosos* (Sacred Striation, Precious Traces), Installation view.
Project Row Houses, Round 49: Penumbra: Sacred Geometries, 2019.
Photograph by Alex Barber. Courtesy of the artist