Of Flesh and Fruit

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

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Artist Statement

Exalting the overlooked and exposing truth is a sublime act. By resurrecting ancient pre-Columbian ceramic forms, I invoke the rich visual language of my ancestors to address the systemic impact of colonization on indigenous peoples and the natural world. I combine various techniques using globally sourced ceramic materials and stained glass to create ecovative sculptures. Through the hybridization of pre-Columbian forms with iconic contemporary imagery, I revive indigenous knowledge and provide new narratives from the diverse Latinx diaspora in the US. The hybrids assert their autonomy, challenge pervasive Western ideologies, and ask viewers to consider the past, present, and future.
Lost epistemes: Narratives in pre-Columbian Art

The collection of pre-Columbian ceramics at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) sparked a deep curiosity and sense of awakening in me. Hours flew by as I studied the figures, their gestures, and the miniaturized worlds depicted by the artists. Metaphoric imagery was depicted on ceramic and gold objects alike. I imagined the massive pair of ear spools (fig.1)\(^1\) adorning a Moche ruler's ears and considered what such meticulously crafted objects had to say about its owner and their position in society. I envisioned the ceramic spout vessels being activated in shamanic ceremonies in front of thousands of people through ritual drinking, perhaps used to celebrate a fruitful hunt or the end of a drought. The incredibly rich visual language invented by pre-Columbian people is evidence of their advanced civilizations from an ontological and phenomenological framework.

Although vast regions and cultures of Abiayala\(^2\) (the Americas) were represented in the museum collections, dating back to 7500 BCE, the figurative ceramics produced by the Moche from Peru, and the Colima from Mexico were the most enthralling.

The Moche civilization of Peru (100-800 CE) produced elaborate earthenware vessels that depicted their complex spiritual practices and sociopolitical hierarchies. They used a metaphorical visual language in place of a formal written language. They perceived time anachronistically, and viewed life and death as a continual cycle in which the deceased could be summoned through rituals. The portrait vessels are exquisite and show us the faces of the ancient rulers (fig.2). The representational vessels functioned as

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\(^1\) All referenced images can be found in the appendix.

\(^2\) In *Revealing Rebellion in Abiayala*, Hannah Burdette postulates on page xi, “The term Abiayala ... derive[d] from the Guna (Kuna) language of Panama”... is ‘an alternative name for the Americas’... and “an alternative to the geopolitical boundaries imposed on the American continent through the process of conquest and colonization.” “Abiayala refers to the Americas as a whole, not only the region south of the U.S.-Mexico border.”

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pedagogical tools that were used by elites in rituals associated with natural and supernatural phenomena and recorded important historical events, acting as sociopolitical propaganda (Stone-Miller 84).

The Moche adopted the stirrup-spout vessel from their ancestors, the Cupisnique who invented the style circa 1800 BCE (fig.3). The clever spout design prevented the evaporation of the precious liquids it held, which may have been water, blood, psychoactive plant essences or chicha, a maize beer (Stone-Miller 104). The two spouts' convergence into one may also signify ancient Peruvians dualistic ideology. The Moche continued Cupisnique traditions by incorporating their motifs in the construction of new narratives (Cordy-Collins “Archaism” 208). They used innovative mold-pressed techniques to create multiples (fig.4, see appendix) that were distributed throughout their kingdom and served an important pedagogical role similar to scrolls and books in Western cultures. Moche vessels depicted complex interconnected dualities, such as sexual practices associated with reproduction and death, as well as chaos and order (Stone-Miller 15). Most of the spout vessels in museum collections were unearthed in tombs, which were not static resting places for the deceased. They were active sites accessed by elites who invoked dead ancestors by drinking from transcendental heirloom ceramics. The diverse range of stirrup-spout vessels (fig. 2-11) depicting birthing scenes, coitus, anal sex, and fellatio (fig. 5-7) were found alongside portrait, sacrifice, and warrior-themed. They were all linked metaphorically to revival, fertility, and agricultural abundance since they contained fluids, such as water, chicha or blood, just like human bodies (Weismantel “Pots of Flesh” 32).

3 If images do not appear within the text, please refer to the appendix.
4 In “Moche Sex Pots,” Mary Weismantel provides in depth analysis of how the Moche metaphorically linked sexual acts, such as coitus, fellatio, and anal sex, to higher states of being, reproduction, and agricultural fertility. These pots were buried with the dead to provide nourishment in the afterlife and were accessed during coronations of new rulers, fortifying their power through ancestral bloodlines.
The Moche created zoomorphic ceramic drinking vessels to depict shamanistic rituals associated with spiritual transcendence. They were used as propaganda by elites, who acted as powerful mediating earth deities (VanPool 700). The Sacrificer Scene Bottle (fig.9) was an important symbolic motif for the Moche people. It was a status symbol used by a powerful ruler during chaotic times to show his military might and ability to restore order. This stirrup-spout vessel shows a shamanic ruler standing over the headless corpse of another zoomorphic supernatural being. He is shown wielding a tumi knife in his left hand, which was the ritual instrument used to decapitate warriors, and a monstrous animal head in his right hand. This ruler's power was articulated by the defeated corpse and his physical attributes showing his transformed physical form as a supernatural being. The Moche depicted “human and animal/plant states of being” or composite images to convey their deep connection to natural and supernatural forces (Rebecca Stone-Miller 113). Moche shamans and elites transcended the earthly realm into the supernatural and underworld realms by altering their states of consciousness with sacred plants and physical acts. They consumed maize beer and hallucinogenic plants, fasted, participated in sexual acts, and performed bloodletting rituals in which they drew blood by stretching their ears to leave the earthly realm and enter the spiritual world (VanPool 698). The visions experienced during shamanic ceremonies gave rise to the complex imagery in their art. The powerful decapitator-shaman in the Sacrificer Scene Bottle possessed the power of the jaguar, portrayed by his fangs, snake tail, and feline headdress. His large bulging owl eyes demonstrated his supernatural vision. Rebecca Stone-Miller attests that this kind of composite image was derived from the Moche’s observation of powerful animals and transcendence of their essence into symbolic imagery. The Moche revered Tyto alba contempta owls for their uncanny “nocturnal hunting prowess, indebted to its silent flight and magical sense of sight (that we know as echolocation)” ... and “serve as ideal models for Moche sacrifice as well, because they
capture their prey and bring it home to decapitate, eat whole, and regurgitate the bones" (113). Biomimicry may have been the root of sacrificial practices. The Moche viewed death as a cyclical part of life. The Moche believed that sacrifices would ensure blessings from the gods, such as a fruitful harvest season and protection from destructive forces, such as earthquakes and droughts.

The other pre-Columbian object that fascinated me and spurred a five year investigative series of canine stirrup-spout vessels is the rare Colima dog effigy in LACMAs collection that dons a human face mask (fig. 12). The Colima potters, who preceded the Mayans and flourished between 300 BCE and 300 CE, produced two types of xoloitzcuintli (hairless Mexican dog) water vessels. The more commonly produced vessel was a burnished redware dog with a single spout on either the head as shown in the 3-D CAT scan (fig. 13) or integrated as part of the tail as shown in the Dog Vessel (fig.14). The dog was believed to be a guardian of the dead, who guided the spirit by its tail on the journey through the various levels of the underworld (“Gods and Monsters” 4-5). The dog form was intended to appeal to the “monstrous, doglike deity, Xolotl,” the god of fire, lightning, deformities, and protector of the sun as it passed into the underworld (Ibid. 4). The human face mask worn by the dog seems to signify an added layer of protection for a particular person as it relates to the lifesize funerary masks placed on the faces of the deceased (fig. 15).

The Moche and Colima cultures lived symbiotically within their natural world and used hand-made metaphorical objects to record and generate knowledge. The cultural objects were activated by elite shamanic rulers, priests, and priestesses in
lively rituals involving music, dance, and ingestion of mind-altering substances to demonstrate their spiritual and political power. In the museums where I first encountered these objects, they were sterile artifacts, decontextualized, and served as a reminder of the destruction and looting of cultures perpetrated by Spanish colonists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Castillo B. xiii). Many of the ceramic and gold objects were unearthed unethically in funerary chambers and shaft tombs (Castillo B. xii, Mountjoy and Sanford 317). Their provenance is often dubious, and the Western institutions that possess them continue to profit from cultural exploitation in the form of museum admittance fees and fundraisers that display them as exotic objects. I began to ask, could there be a way to redress institutionalized theft and the destruction of pre-Columbian cultures? Could a revival of lost epistemes be used to honor their rich history and release them from hegemonic institutions?

Western vs. Non-Western Epistemes — Art as Political Praxis

The ancient funerary chambers were sacred active sites that linked the Moche and Colima to ancestral power. Both cultures viewed time as a cyclical phenomena and practiced rituals that allowed them to connect with the deceased and supernatural deities. These pre-Columbian cultures and their Western counterparts invented symbolic objects to convey complex ideologies. Paul Mathieu affirms, “That is what we humans do, we conceptualize the world, through consciousness. We do it by creating myths, fictions, narratives, theories, histories, symbols, signs and images”(273). This led me to question why pre-Columbian rituals and the production of important cultural objects ceased to exist, and why Catholic-based Western rituals and symbols persist. A systems theory approach helps reveal the subsystems of this inequity.

As a point of departure, I focus on European contact in Abiayala in the fifteenth century, which marked the beginning of colonialism and the spread of Western mythologies/ideologies that gave rise to hegemonic institutions. I investigate the
connection of foreign interventions in Abiayala up to the present using postcolonial research to show how indigenous people have been affected. Their cultural practices and holistic worldview vanished due to Western imperialism, which was validated through the lens of Catholicism. In response to this research, I apply decolonial theory through praxis to address the lack of indigenous art forms and culture. Carolina Rios Lezama explains, “through the reclaiming of Indigenous knowledges and engaging in Indigenous spiritual practices, Latinx and Chicana women are participating in processes of decolonization that are reconfiguring cultural and knowledge production” (15). In an attempt to redress European exploitation throughout the Americas, I create interventionist installations, inserting pre-Columbian epistemes in Western institutions. I reveal the systems of inequity by transporting viewers to another realm that makes the past, present, and future visible. This method of using time anachronistically is directly influenced by the Moche and Colima cultures as well as by the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, who interpreted time as the ancient pre-Columbian people understood it. In chapter II of his doctoral thesis, “The Multiplicity of Conscious States The Idea of Duration” written in 1889, he explained the complex theory of time as pure duration (77). Bergson stated that all organisms exist because of their creative ability to adapt and endure the adversities of life. Endurance occurs in space, whereby time is space (104-139). Essentially, he viewed time in a naturalistic way, as a qualitative multiplicity or accumulation of memories and intellect experienced by living organisms, not as a mechanistic, quantitative phenomenon measured with numbers, which he referred to as a homogeneous medium (87). When Europeans adopted this quantitative method to explain the abstract concept of time and natural phenomena, they lost touch with the essence of life and pure duration, viewing time objectively instead of as an organic whole composed of moments from the past coalescing and occurring simultaneously.
Bergson understood time as a cyclical phenomena that was activated by the senses (111). This was a concept the Moche and Colima cultures were attuned to. I apply Bergson’s theories of time to construct an installation that is cyclical in nature and transports the viewer through different moments in history by activating the visual, olfactory and auditory senses. I re-interpret Bergson’s notion of pure duration in the context of colonization and European dominance over pre-Columbian people and animals, who have a shared history of enduring the negative impact of a mechanistic world view.

Non-Western cultures aligned themselves with nature, incorporating animal and plant motifs in their mythology. They viewed their consumption of animal flesh as a cannibalistic act, equating animal lives with human lives, which is one reason they sacrificed so many humans to appease their zoomorphic gods. They revered animals for their incredible capabilities and practiced shamanic rituals that connected them closely with the land and its energy. Lezama attests,

Indigenous knowledges are about a worldview that is cognizant of a deep spiritual connection to animals, plants, water, and other living things, making Indigenous knowledges inherently tied to the Land. The indigenous worldview understands Land in a context of culture and self-determination that is based on reciprocity, which contradicts the eurocentric worldview that emphasizes Land as property (19).

Western knowledge and culture was based on a very different set of mythologies. The eurocentric mechanistic worldview arose from Catholic ideology. They believed they had a god-given right that entitled them to everything in the natural world, including

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5 In chapter III, “The Organization of Conscious States Free Will,” 140-141, Bergson made the connection between mechanistic world views and theories of environmental determinism, which dominated much of the racist eurocentric ideology in the late 15th century. This mechanistic worldview is one reason why European empires plundered other countries without remorse.
people (Restall 133). Sadly, this pervasive worldview entrenched its myths and institutionalized its ideology on a global scale.

As the daughter of a Salvadoran war refugee who witnessed gross social inequalities in an urban concrete jungle and who also benefited from the great equalizer of the US, I am compelled to fight for those who have fewer rights. Andre Breton, Leon Trotsky and Diego Rivera exclaimed, “True art ... insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time — true art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society” (533). Through interventionist art installations, the didactic elements of my work function to enlighten viewers and inspire a sense of connection with the marginalized people in society. My series of Modern Natives (fig. 16-21) re-envisions ancient practices to highlight indigenous descendants’ voices. Like the Moche, who co-opted Cupisnique forms and iconography, I borrow from ancient cultures and subvert the prestigious use of these cultural objects by elites to honor the ordinary, yet extraordinary living mestizo immigrants. As America’s underdogs, they power the economy in massive ways, making up a large portion of the service sector. By merging the Moche portrait vessel with the Colima dog effigy, I subvert its funerary function to honor the living descendants of indigenous people who survived European colonization. The hybrids are linked to specific Latin-American immigrants whose stories are accessible to the public in the form of tiny handmade books (fig. 22). The book covers are made of an ancient self-glazing clay body known as Egyptian paste or faience which acts as a tangible connection to Egyptian culture via ceramic objects, such as this zoomorphic Sphinx of Amenhotep III (fig. 23). The books serve as a reminder that most Latinx immigrants have African

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6 In chapter 7, “Apes and Men - The Myth of Superiority,” Matthew Restall articulates how the eurocentric superiority myth arose from Christian-Catholic theology. The Spaniards justified their conquest by dehumanizing indigenous people, proclaiming them to be barbarians because of their lack of a formal written language, pagan religions, sexual practices, and naturalistic worldview. Cristopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, and the early colonists viewed themselves as divine superior beings. This hypocrisy is revealed in their barbarism towards the natives as revealed later on in Bartolomé de las Casas 1542 account sent to Prince Phillip II of Spain.
ancestry due to the Transatlantic slave trade, which exploited millions of Africans throughout Abiayala.  

As a person of mixed ancestry, including indigenous heritage from Peru and El Salvador and colonial roots from Spain, Portugal, and the Congo, I sought a deeper connection to the extinct cultures I first encountered in museums.

**Systems Theory Approach**

Analysis of the institutional power structures that exist shows a direct connection between European colonization and the decimation of indigenous ways of life. Jean-Paul Sartre described colonialism as a system that used economic, social, and psychological tactics. Europeans overthrew indigenous governments with military force and superimposed their own system of government by dividing communal land and bribing local elites to act as their vassals. They massacred, enslaved, and forcibly acculturated the indigenous populations to adapt to their mechanistic worldview (30-47). European countries such as Spain, Portugal, England, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands colonized the Western hemisphere beginning in 1492, which gave rise to the globalized political economy known as capitalism. The Spanish were the first to exploit sacred indigenous natural resources, such as gold, silver, sugar, cacao and indigo from Latin American colonies. They used religion as a tool to justify violent imperialism and enslaved millions of indigenous people from Africa and Abiayala to extract as much value as possible from the stolen land. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI granted his homeland, Spain, “the

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7 George Reid Andrews highlights the percentage of Afro-Latinos throughout Abiayala and brings attention to the initial use of the European census as a taxation tool to charge non-whites higher rates based on the social construct of race and racial hierarchies. These discriminatory practices sadly persist in the 21st century in new forms. The census is used as a tool by corrupt politicians to disenfranchise minority communities and diminish their electoral power through a practice known as gerrymandering.

8 Sartre’s analysis of Frantz Fanon’s book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, provides an in depth explanation of the process of colonization and the division and stratification that occurs to control the masses psychologically. Sartre explains that Europeans are complicit and calls for action to redress these institutional forces.
right to occupy “such islands and lands … as you have discovered or are about to discover” (Mills, et al. 65). The hegemonic church constructed a myth of moral and genetic superiority to grant colonists the right to terra nullius, or “Land belonging to nobody” (Lezama 19) and sent “the Twelve” Franciscan Friars to ‘save’ the satanic souls of the damned in the New World (Mills, et al. 59).

Land was important to the indigenous civilizations and their cultures as expressed previously in Western vs. Non-Western Epistemes. Before European invasion, the indigenous people lived in advanced city-states with social hierarchies with a political economy based on tribute and trade. They ascribed to a holistic worldview, which relied on a delicate balance with nature. Europeans were only able to “conquer” the New World because of existing rivalries between warring city-states. Matthew Restall debunked the myth of Hernán Cortés’ military that supposedly defeated the Mexicas (Aztecs) in Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest. He clarified that Spain didn’t have a formal military in the 1500s (28). When Cortés first arrived with his 250 men, 200 indigenous Cuban slaves, and African slaves in Mexico in 1519, they were almost decimated by the coastal Tlaxcalans. They fled and returned years later and formed alliances with the Tlaxcalans and Huejotzincans who were rivals of the Mexicas and saw an advantage to using the Spaniards against their enemy (44-63). It was their 200,000 warriors who defeated the Mexica empire. Unfortunately, the indigenous people were not equipped to fight the most powerful enemy of all, European germs, viruses, and venereal diseases (Restall 140). The Spaniards took advantage of a chaotic regime change, inserted themselves as the new rulers in the hierarchy by “marrying” elite indigenous women, and took over the existing tribute system. They exploited indigenous people and their land, destroyed cultural objects that they considered idolatrous, and stole objects in which they saw material or aesthetic value. They radically affected indigenous culture with their myths and

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9 The tribute system was based on a social hierarchy and was a taxation system of goods collected by the ruling civilization. When one civilization defeated another, it engulfed it and often adapted its customs and art styles. There was value in leaving the existing sociopolitical hierarchies in place. For an in-depth explanation of the tribute system, refer to https://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/aztec-and-maya-law/aztec-commercial-and-tax-law

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worldview. They inculcated their Catholic ideology and punished indigenous people who dissented, virtually abolishing pre-Columbian religion and cultures. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the communal lands and tribute systems were transformed into feudalistic private plantations to supply European markets. This evolved into the globalized Western economic system of capitalism.

My series of Modern Natives challenge these pervasive Western ideologies by asserting their autonomy and reviving lost epistemes and artforms. They represent extraordinary immigrants and first generation offspring of descendants of colonized indigenous people who survived an oppressive European invasion and overcame extreme hardships. The Modern Natives regard their history and question the perpetual system of exploitation and the future of humanity in a world where Latinx immigrants are treated inhumanely and rounded up in cages by the new Western superpower, the US government.

Mirna, Pipil and Maya descendant (fig. 16) is an homage to my mother who escaped the violent military dictatorship in El Salvador that persecuted indigenous farmer unions, student protest groups, the clergy, and other democratic reformers between 1932 and 1992 (Schmidt 20). The right-wing military dictators that plagued El Salvador were descendants of Spanish colonists who first invaded Cuzcatlán in 1524. Pedro de Alvarado claimed the region as part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala and renamed it, El Salvador, which translates to “The Savior.” This designation was part of the etymological hypocrisy used to cover up the extreme violence used to subjugate the indigenous Pipil Indians. Some of the religious leaders had a conscience. Friar Bartolomé de las Casas denounced the savagery of the Spanish colonists in a seminal work written in 1542 titled, “A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies.” He reported that colonists brutally hacked pregnant women apart with their swords, decapitated men for sport, and smashed children’s heads on rocks (Schmidt 35). The
Spanish invaders used the myth of divine moral superiority to dehumanize indigenous people, massacre, and enslave them on their own land, steal their resources, and claim their territory for the Spanish Crown under the auspice of spreading their superior faith to the barbarians in the new colonies (Restall “Apes and Men”). They exploited sacred indigenous plants, such as cacao from Izalco in the 1500s (Sampeck 5), and indigo in the 1700s (Reiche 25 and Schmidt 36). In the 1800s, coffee was added to the list of lucrative cash crops. In 1811, a priest led the first indigenous rebellion in the colonies demanding independence from Spain (Schmidt 36), surely inspired by Haiti’s successful independence from France in 1804. The rebellion was squashed, but in 1821, El Salvador won its independence along with the rest of the Captaincy General of Guatemala, which included Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Chiapas, Mexico. Colonialism had transformed the entire region and left it struggling to regain autonomy. Between “1843 and 1900, there were twelve revolutions, five coup d’etats and two presidents executed by firing squads” in El Salvador (Schmidt 38). This instability was a direct result of the colonialist system that had created two classes, the ladino aristocracy (Westernized descendants of Spanish and indigenous people) and a displaced indigenous peasant population who were turned into a poor laboring class forced to work for starvation wages on plantations. Two political parties fought to control the economies in the regions, the right wing conservative ladinos and the left wing landless poor.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the ladino elites were in business with US transnational corporations, such as Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, and General Foods, who profited from the cheap coffee produced by exploited indigenous laborers (Frynas and Pegg 143). In 1903, when the leftist President of Nicaragua, José Santos Zelaya, tried to incorporate El Salvador into the United Provinces of Central America, the coffee oligarchs asked the US to intervene on their behalf (Schmidt 40). Zelaya’s land reform policies, which reclaimed privatized land and returned it to indigenous people, threatened the Salvadoran-US business interests. President Theodore Roosevelt intervened by helping the right-wing conservative party assassinate the
leftist President Aruajo, who was replaced by the Melendez family dictatorship (Ibid.). The US supported oligarchs who ensured a steady supply of cheap products. In 1932, thousands of farmers rose up under the leadership of left wing labor leader, Agustín Farabundo Martí, and overtook Izalco, reclaiming indigenous lands. The new right wing Dictator Martinez used the national guard to massacre 30,000 indigenous people within a month (Lindo-Fuentes 253). The cycle of uprisings and government massacres continued and worsened. In 1980, emboldened by the Sandinistas who liberated Nicaragua from the-US backed dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Dower 59), coffee plantation workers unionized and joined student groups, small farmers, and the clergy to protest the corrupt government, demand land reform policies, free access to education and healthcare, and living wages. The right wing military dictator responded by torturing and massacring 75,000 people over the course of 12 years. These coffee death squads or private corporate assassins were directly funded by the US government through military aid packages and loans distributed by the World Bank. Many of the Salvadoran military leaders were trained by the US Army School of the Americas or SOA (Gutirrez). The Moakley Report revealed that “48 of the 69 Salvadoran officers cited by the U.N. Truth Commission for human rights violations had been trained at the SOA” (Ibid.). When the nationalist Sandinista party overthrew the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua in 1979, 15,000 SOA-trained Nicaraguan soldiers fled to the neighboring countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, joining despotic leaders (Dower 59-60). US Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Carter, Reagan, and Bush used taxpayer money and enacted foreign policies like “Dollar Diplomacy” and the “Good Neighbor Policy” to protect and expand business interests in Latin America continuing where Spain had left off. The neocolonial systems emerged under the guise of democratic neoliberalism to take advantage of unstable developing countries. Wayne Ellwood explained how the Harvard business graduate, Robert McNamara, who had served as the former US Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, resigned from his position to serve as
the President of the World Bank. McNamara increased US capital by creating a system of indebtedness throughout Latin America and contracted huge loans to the South in the 1970s — both for development (essentially defined as basic infrastructure to bring ‘backward’ economies into the market system) and to act as a bulwark against a perceived worldwide communist threat (41).

US intervention in Latin America was justified by Cold War rhetoric. Politicians claimed it was better to support right wing conservatives in order to repress Soviet socialism from spreading in the Western hemisphere. However, there was a major conflict of interest since US corporations profited from the “civil wars” it funded and armed. Ellwood pointed out, “credit lines became almost limitless — particularly if the governments in question were fighting on the right side of the Cold War and buying large quantities of armaments from Northern suppliers” (43). The troubling fact is that the US helped despotic dictators massacre indigenous people to rob them of their land and covered it up (Krauss 2). The connection between US business interests, foreign policy, and military involvement in El Salvador erupted in coffee boycotts throughout America and protests demanding the closure of the corrupt School of the Americas (Frynas and Pegg 143-144). The historian, Dr. John W. Dower confirms, that between 1948 and 1990 the US government “secured the overthrow of at least twenty-four governments in Latin America, four by direct use of US military forces, three by means of CIA-managed revolts or assassinations, and seventeen by encouraging local military and political forces to intervene without direct US participation, usually through military coups d’état” (57).

Bribery is perhaps a more accurate description of these methods. The US army’s School of the Americas, which was established in 1946, was responsible for training 59,000 military and police officers from twenty-three Latin American countries in counterintelligence and counterinsurgency (Dower 58). These officers were trained in terrorism, kidnapping, psychological and physical torture. Dower stated, “A striking
number of its graduates were to become prominent leaders in the “dirty wars” that would ravage Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama and Nicaragua (59). In 2000, after years of civil protests, the SOA closed. A year later, it reopened under the new name, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), in an attempt to cover up their horrible reputation for training military assassins and dictators (Gill Location 4006).

Mirna’s childhood friends joined the guerilla movement known as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) to defend their villages against the death squads. In 1982, my grandfather helped her flee to California after sending his wife and eldest daughter. She was granted asylum by the country that funded the military dictators in her homeland and generated dangerous instability. Mirna is an intelligent woman from an upper class family who could have pursued her dreams in El Salvador, but instead had to flee her war-torn country. She found employment in the service sector as a nanny and domestic house worker and helped raise two children for working parents in NY. By exhibiting her atop a Mayan pyramid pedestal covered with coffee beans, she stands as a proud survivor of a neocolonial agenda that enacted repressive policies to eradicate indigeneity.

US Intervention in Abiayala (fig. 24), Land Theft (fig. 25), and Chemical Warfare (fig. 26) are sculptures that address the systems of inequity through a postcolonial approach. They are metaphorical sculptures made of red earthenware, the same clay body used by the Moche and Colima cultures of Abiayala. The mold-casted strawberries with hand-built leaves address the current refugee crisis and modern forms of exploitation.

Neocolonial practices established by the US-based World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) acted in unison to further destabilize the independent countries in Latin America and created a dependency system that benefited US businesses. US Intervention in
Abiayala links the violence that was perpetrated in Latin American civil wars to US proxy wars and highlights the continuing arms deals that have led to the influx of refugees seeking asylum in the United States. It’s not a coincidence that the World Bank began operating the same year as the School of the Americas in 1946. The World Bank financed despotic rulers who pocketed the money and left their countries responsible for repayment of huge debts (Ellwood 43). The IMF forced their structural adjustment programs (SAPs) on countries that were delinquent debtors. This inequitable system involved a slew of problematic policies that involved forced devaluation of local currency, weakening government regulations to create favorable conditions for foreign investors, privatizing government businesses, and dismantling local economies in favor of single-commodity specialization to increase export revenue, making countries dependent on imported food for survival. Another condition was decreased government spending on health and welfare programs, which affected the most vulnerable populations (Ellwood 47). Consequently, gangs and criminals proliferated. Violence erupts when people are destitute and have no other means of survival. US gun manufacturers continue to play a major role in Latin American instability. They profit by supplying guns through licit and illicit weapon sales across the border. Jonathan Blitzer of the New Yorker magazine reported in 2018,

It’s estimated that some two hundred thousand American guns are smuggled across the southern border each year. The region that’s been hit the hardest is Central America, where gun laws are relatively strict yet homicide rates are among the highest on earth. Gang wars, massive state corruption, and murderous criminal syndicates are to blame for the violence, but American firepower facilitates it. Gang recruitment, extortion, kidnapping and violence, lack of employment opportunities, and extreme poverty have fuelled an exodus of indigenous emigration from Latinx America. A small percentage of the immigrants who manage to make it past the US-Mexico border find jobs in the agricultural and service sectors of the US.
economy. Most end up in overcrowded, inhumane detention centers that resemble animal cages or in for-profit converted prisons. According to the non-profit organization, Freedom for Immigrants, the majority of unauthorized immigrants detained in US detention centers in 2018 are from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala (Freedom).

*Land Theft* is an illuminated strawberry sculpture that bridges colonial and neocolonial exploitation, transcending time by exploring material agency. Paul Mathieu highlights the global context of handmade objects as powerful agents of change in the sense that objects can be transnational, which “operate beyond geographical borders,” transcultural, “combining various cultures in juxtaposition, blurring identities,” “and most importantly they can also be trans-historical, working timelessly, reuniting past, present and future seamlessly” (269). An accompanying placard informs viewers that colonialism separated the people of Abiayala from their land and symbiotic ways of living in nature. The slump-formed stained glass window in the shape of South America hints at past forms of oppression, while the popular fruit, first cultivated by American Indians in North America, points to current forms of exploitation. Catholic churches used stained glass windows to illuminate and alter the way natural light flowed into churches to inspire awe and exude spiritual power. Light was used to animate religious narrative scenes featuring saints and their god. Although churches are remarkable architectural spaces, they symbolize oppression.
in Abiayala because Europeans used Catholicism as a tool to delegitimize and destroy indigeneity and subjugate people. In this sculpture, the stained glass window reveals a dark interior and acts as a transhistorical altar to the oppressed. The oversized strawberry is linked to the exploitation of Latinx immigrant farm workers who tend to this massive cash crop worth $4 billion. In 2017, on a southbound drive from Los Padres National Forest to Los Angeles, I witnessed a horrendous scene in Bakersfield, California. Hundreds of Latinx workers picked strawberries in a valley that trapped yellow polluted air. There was an acrid odor in the air and the buzz of a crop duster plane spraying chemicals overhead. The workers had no protection against the chemicals sprayed on the crops and their bodies. They covered their bodies from head to toe in the 90°F heat with pants, hooded sweaters and bandanas over their faces, but lacked proper protection from the toxic fumes. I was utterly shocked and horrified at the level of inhumanity and was compelled to create sculptures to raise awareness of our complicity in this current form of exploitation.

Strawberries are amongst the most heavily sprayed crops in the United States. According to the USDA’s strawberry tests conducted between 2015-16, there are over 81 known pesticides used on this fruit (“Pesticides + Poison Gases”). The Washington D.C. Center for Biological Diversity published a report in 2012 that stated, “Many approved pesticides are linked to higher cancer rates, hormone disruption and other human-health problems. Pesticides are a major source of occupational injury and illness for farm workers....” (“Pesticide Lobby”). This cash crop fetches food and chemical corporations millions of dollars in profit earnings each year at the expense of the people working in the fields and living nearby who are exposed to contaminated water and air (“Pesticide Lobby”).

Chemical Warfare was made to expose a major polluting industry that profits from human exploitation and suffering. Bayer AG was one of the six companies that merged to form IG Farben, the chemical company that supplied the Nazis with Zyklon B, a pesticide used as a lethal gas. Today, Bayer produces toxic agricultural...
chemical pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and growth enhancers which poison vulnerable migrant farm workers. Bayer AG purchased Monsanto in 2016, the company that lost a lawsuit for sickening workers with carcinogenic pesticides, and who was also known for patenting indigenous plants and genetically modifying their DNA to stop them from seeding. The agricultural chemicals migrate into municipal waterways, which poisons millions of unsuspecting Americans. The chemical warfare on the 'other' persists. Bill Snape rightfully proclaimed, “We can't sacrifice human health and the environment to pesticide-industry profits . . . The Clean Water Act can help stem the toxic tide of pesticides in our waters, and it's wrong for special interests to interfere with that protection” (“Pesticide Lobby”). Bayer is a huge corporation that has a fraught history, and it is unsettling that they exert so much control in agriculture as well as the drug sector, which benefits from increasing numbers of sick people. This appears to be a major conflict of interest.

 **Collateral Damage, Maya descendant, Guatemala (fig. 19) and her counterpart Grieving Father and Daughter, Guatemalan refugees (fig. 20)** were made in response to the US’ actions of defending an illegitimate border that should not exist in the first place. The US-Mexican border became a bulwark for the people who migrated freely from the South.
to the North before Europeans arrived and claimed their land. In 1819, an invisible territorial boundary was invented in the Adams–Onís Treaty between the United States and Spain, in complete disregard of American Indian sovereignty. *Collateral Damage* affronts viewers with the human cost of militarizing borders. This fictitious mother, who perished scrambling over the barbed wire wall, symbolizes the unaccounted immigrant deaths that occur each day.

_Grieving Father and Daughter_ is an illuminated sculpture with a stained glass insert on the father’s chest that serves as an altar to all of the immigrant families who have been separated at the border. Their hands are covered in the same gold glaze as *Collateral Damage*, showing their connection to the mother figure. They are exhibited on a concrete pedestal with partial wire fencing to simulate the detention centers (fig. 30) that are profiting from the refugee crisis. Dana Nickel reported in _The Globe Post_, “CoreCivic and GeoGroup (GEO) have acquired billions of dollars in revenue from the for-profit prison and detention center systems in the U.S. and abroad since the 1980s.” The article reveals how the two major transnational corporations have influenced lawmakers to pass favorable legislation through political donations, which sustains their business at the expense of US taxpayers and Latinx immigrant suffering.

_Banana Republics_ (fig. 31) is an homage to the indigenous men, women, and children of Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Columbia, and Ecuador who were forced from their land and exploited as workers on banana plantations owned by United Fruit Company (UFCO). This company operates as Chiquita today. These
countries were known as Banana Republics because US fruit companies held tremendous amounts of political influence on their governments. Schlesinger and Kinzer attest, “the greatest segment of the economy — an investment of nearly $120 million — was in the hands of American corporations, primarily the United Fruit Company” (50). The company discovered the fruit in Jamaica in 1870 and began exploiting it throughout Latin America in 1885.

During the postcolonial aftermath in Guatemala, the land and people were assaulted as one dictator after another took what they pleased. Various peasant uprisings took place on banana plantations owned by the giant US corporation, which were met with violence. Eventually in 1945, a popularly elected left wing President named Juan José Arévalo took office and dismantled UFCOs monopolies on land and the railroad transportation system, and created new businesses to break up the US monopolies on its trading ports and electricity (Schlesinger and Kinzer 19 and 53). He enacted agrarian reform and reclaimed land that the US had purchased from corrupt presidents and gave it to poor farmers to plant food to decrease their dependency on foreign imports. The land he reclaimed wasn’t being cultivated (Ibid. 50). He created schools, free health care, and passed labor laws to protect indigenous people and grant them living wages. In 1951, President Jacobo Arbenz took office and vowed to rid Guatemala “of the Latifundios [giant privately owned farms] and‘... ‘cultivate uncultivated lands and those lands where feudal customs are maintained ...” (Ibid. 52). UFCO demanded Guatemala pay them $16 million for the land seized under the land reform acts. Arbenz counter-offered its actual value, $627,572 (Ibid. 15), to which they refused. UFCO started a massive million dollar public relations
campaign to convince the government officials and the American public that Guatemala had conspired with Soviet socialists to take over Central America and the US-Panama trade canal (Ibid. 94-97). This was another country in which the US used Cold War rhetoric to back a right wing military leader. A CIA officer and UFCO shareholder named E. Howard Hunt selected Carlos Castillo Armas as the new dictator (Ibid. 122) and paid “Liberation” soldiers “$300 a month in wages” to fight communism by massacring civilians (Ibid. 19). They launched attacks from a military base in Honduras, and sent American soldiers to bomb towns in P-47 planes (Ibid. 21). 200,000 Guatemalans were killed. Similar interventions occurred in the other Banana Republics.

My anthropomorphic illuminated bruised banana sculpture is another transhistorical altar to the poor who were massacred and to those who are still exploited on plantations today. The form references pre-Columbian ceramics that incorporated plants as their way of honoring earth’s gifts. The banana, which was a natural gift and source of food for people from Abiayala and the Caribbean, became a source of oppression under Western capitalist corporations who viewed it as another cash crop.

Bananaman, Ecuador, Quichua descendant (fig. 32) weeps for he is too weak to continue working on Dole’s plantations from exposure to toxic pesticides. He weeps for his ten year old son and twelve year old daughter who continue to work for the wealthy landowners in order to eat. Dole, like many large agricultural corporations, uses harmful chemicals to maintain monocultures that attract pests. According to the New York Times journalist Juan Forero, Dole, Del Monte, and wholesale suppliers such as Costco and Wal-Mart, fuel child labor by setting the unfair prices they’re willing to pay. Adults and children who work on these plantations are exposed to a slew of toxic chemicals and ultimately pay the price with their health.

Jaimes 24
Western Intervention: Ceramic Installation

“By expanding and reimagining the possibilities inherent in the field of education ... we as scholars, educators, and community activists, can challenge and subvert processes of colonization across a range of geopolitical spaces” (Dei and Jaimungal 8).

I collaborated with the multimedia artist Marco A Barrioz, who created an enormous forty-seven foot long by seven foot high mural to serve as the backdrop for my installation (fig. 33). It was important to transform the white walls of the institutional space to provide context for my work and convey my intention. The Mayan hieroglyphs painted on flattened fruit boxes provide a visual connection to pre-Columbian iconography and geography as well as postcolonial corporate plunder.

I also collaborated with the Samuel Dorsky Museum on the SUNY New Paltz campus and exhibited the common Colima Dog Vessel (fig. 14) alongside my work. Their formal way of displaying the ceramic object as an artifact on a white rectangular pedestal juxtaposes the way in which I activate my work by displaying sculptures on a picnic table, commercial shipping pallets, pyramids, palm fronds, concrete bases, and hanging from the ceiling. I added an addendum in the form of an official exhibition placard placed alongside the Dorsky’s description of the object, in which I inserted the Colima dog narrative and its historical cultural use, how it inspired my series of Modern Natives, and questioned its provenance. Many cultural objects were destroyed and removed from their place of origin and exploited by private collectors and Western hegemonic institutions that classified and displayed exotic objects as symbols of conquest and superiority over indigeneity. Similar to “Kukuli Velarde’s intervention in the Yingge Ceramics Museum’s permanent
collection display” the information I provided in the additional placard “facilitated a new way of engaging with the historical narrative presented by the [Dorsky Museum]...” (Gers 389). This form of intervention gives agency to the invisible cultural producers and their lost epistememes and revives lost cultures within a contemporary critical framework.

**Conclusion**

This didactic installation serves to bridge a gap in the American consciousness to cultivate awareness and understanding of oppressive hegemonic Western institutions. By activating the essence of objects in a transhistorical and transcultural manner, I challenge the Western canons and the capitalist worldview that arose from the destruction of holistic indigenous ways of living. I offer viewers knowledge that might help them make better informed decisions in a global system that relies on the exploitation and suffering of others. Education, political involvement in any form — whether through direct lobbying or art activism — and consumer spending can be used as tools to transform this inequitable system into one that is just. What would the world look like if we redressed some of these transgressions and their hegemonic power and value systems and adopted indigenous holistic ideologies?
Technical Chapter

Val Cushing White Sculpture Body ^9, Hard low-shrinkage, used as a slip stained colored with various percentages of Mason stains ranging from 7% to 15%

Grolleg 25
Custer Feldspar 10
Flint 30
Alumina 5
Wollastonite 10
Bentonite 2
Fine Grog 5
Molochite 15

Custom Clay Body made by altering and adding the ingredients from Cushing's Sculpture Body listed above.

Grolleg 10
Hawthorne Bond 15
Medium Grog 15
Paper pulp 5
Nylon Fibers 5

Robin Hopper Egyptian Paste ^08 fired to ^012

Feldspar 36
Si 18
Kaolin 14
Ball Clay 5
Baking Soda 5.5
Soda Ash 5.5
Ca Carbonate 4.5
Fine White Sand 7
Bentonite 4.5
  + 3% Copper Carbonate for color
### Appendix

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<td>Moche. Ear Ornament Depicting a Warrior. 640-680 CE, Museo Tumbas Reales de Sipán, Lambayeque, Peru, Ministerio de Cultura del Perú. (MNTRS-77-INC-02; S/T1-0:2) <a href="http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/722375">www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/722375</a></td>
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<td>Moche. Fox Runner Effigy Vessel. 400-700 CE, Brooklyn Museum. (36.332_SL1.jpg) <a href="http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/46293">www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/46293</a></td>
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<th>Moche. Modeled vessel with a representation of sacrifice in a mountain setting, Mountain sacrifice vessel. 300-600 CE, Artstor, library-artstor-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003716261</th>
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Jaimes 30
| 11 | Moche V Stirrup-Spout Bottle Modeled in the Form of a Labretted Female Drummer.  
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<td>Colima. Dog with Human Mask. 200 BCE - 500 CE, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (M.86.296.154). collections.lacma.org/node/253621</td>
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Description: Homage to my mother, who escaped the violent military dictatorship that persecuted students, unions, and other democratic reformers during the Salvadoran “Civil” War (1932-1992).


Description: Homage to my grandparents who fled the Salvadoran “Civil” War, a US Proxy War against a popular Leftist government whose goal was to reclaim the land taken by the Fourteen European Families to return it to the indigenous people.
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| 18 | Jaimes, Karen. Head of Household (M.C.), Mexica (Aztec) descendant, Mexico, 2019.  
Description: Homage to Maria who works two jobs to support her family. |
Description: This spout vessel was made in response to the US' actions of defending an imaginary border that shouldn't exist in the first place. The US-Mexican border crossed the people who migrated freely from the South to the North before Europeans arrived. What is the human cost of militarizing borders? |
Description: Homage to Latinx immigrant families in inhumane detention centers. |
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Bibliography


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