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Senior Project

My artwork in process

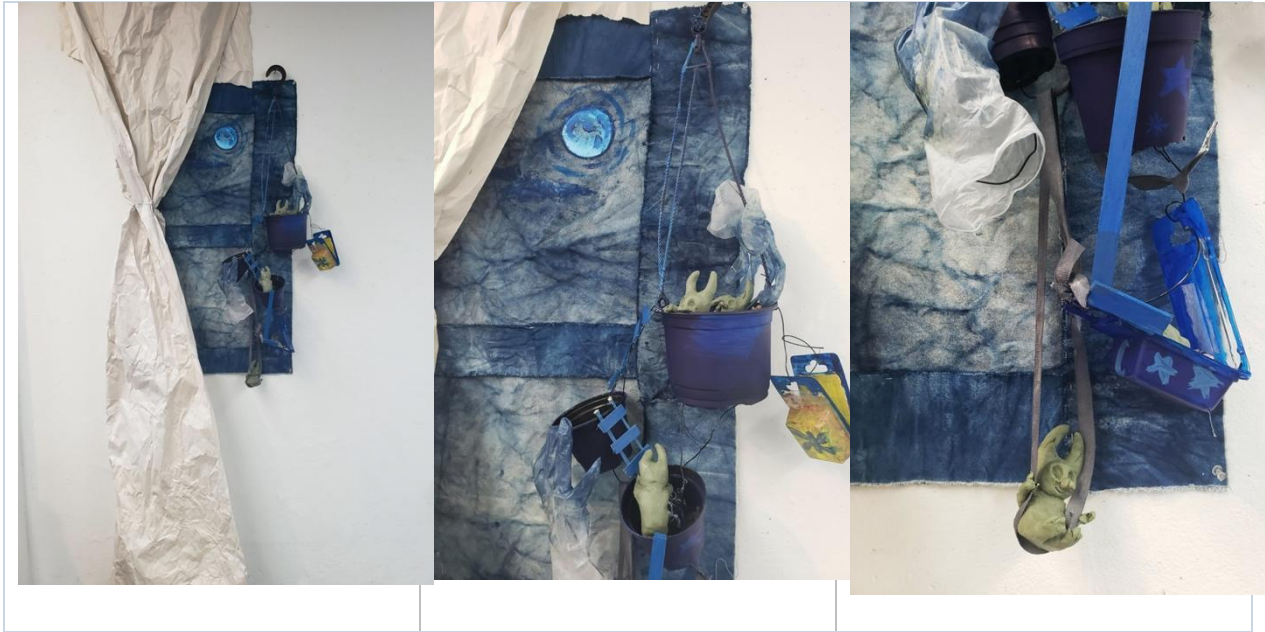
It begins when I search within me, my dreams, visions and several encounters with death. There you are in my mind, I feel sadness and the only song that brings me to you is “Cold” by Jorge Mendez.

My imagination cruises through endless ideas for an artwork, but my hands beat me to it. My wrists hurt from sewing, painting for hours, and mixing colors yet I can’t decide which path to follow. I explore broad mediums and materials and ideas, maybe that’s the problem. I have endless ideas, memories and opinions that can’t fit in one artwork or art form. I write stories, doodle in my sketchbook, and look at other Latin American artists to find answers to describe my artwork. But sometimes the answers I’m looking for are through process of experimentation with paint or in contact with unconventional materials like recycled pots, acorns or various forms like video, audio, painting, sculpture, installation and drawing. My artwork is a multimedia process that includes three-dimensional objects, narrative using symbolic figures and objects, and emotion in color. The Symbolic artwork's content reveals a history of colonialism and indigenous beliefs in Latin America, specifically Ecuador: traditions like *Día de los Difuntos* (All Souls Day) that are iconic for their *Gua-Gua's de pan* (Bread in shape of a baby) and *Colada Morada* (Fruity drink, lit. "purple strained juice") to represent death in family and friends. I include personal events, emphasizing on imagery of women, and excerpt historical

poems to decolonize what a status of a women means. Then I push further in my flags which I believe speak for history and current events in Latin America: questions of politics, citizenship, nationalism, and Decolonial theories. All these precursor ideas share the rich materiality, colorfulness and subtle narratives that emerge from my biculturalism-and exist in the world I have created for them.

Three dimensional structures:

My hands work as fast as my thoughts to create, and put together an underdeveloped project in front of me. My mind begins thinking of an idea that will fit the material, once I decide the narrative I choose the colors. The challenge I faced in three-dimensional objects is to create another language that doesn't translate into painting. For example: In *Mis demonios del Sueño* (My sleeping Demons), I have five little creatures in oil-clay in five poses that represent my sleeping disorder as a student that show variations of energy levels during the night. This installation piece has a whimsical and magical structure of building that represents magical stories seen in Latin American short stories inspired by *duendes* (Goblins) that are acting at night causing mischief around the house. The colors I use are variations of blues to represent a calm energetic night. The use of plant pots, balsa wood, and nail containers help construct the form of the house of the little demons. I use recycled canvas dyed in Indigo as a window and a frame. The curtain is a long loose paper that I formed to break the framing image.



Mis Demonios del Sueño (My Sleeping Demons)


They stand in contrast with other three dimensional artworks I have made, like a relief sculpture of the indigenous Sun God *Inti* of the Inca empire in plaster, where I came to the realization that I made an artifact instead of art. Unlike *My Sleeping Demons*, that is rich in material experimentation, color and surreal composition. My three-dimensional objects awaken an *anima* (soul) through playful combinations of structures that are whimsical and imaginative. The material like plant pots, dyed gloves and nail containers become homes and decorations for the creatures and activate space in the composition. The color choice invites the painting language into the visual narrative. In sum, *My Sleeping Demons* represents my approach to unify sculpture and painting.

Narrative:

My dreams and visions become short stories to develop into artwork. I find that my most interesting paintings are the short stories of spiders: being chased, challenged to fight and metamorphosed into one. However, my most meaningful stories include figures of South American traditions to tell personal events of childhood, representation of family and cuisine.

For example, in my *Día de los Difuntos* (All Souls Day) series of paintings I explore narrative in the world of folk culture in Ecuador. The series of artworks become symbols for family, unity between the living and the dead and mythical expressions through flat color and shape to connect visions and dreams into reality. Hence the use of flat color to divide space in the paintings and physical textures as process of experimentation to create a foreground. The five artworks are in a linear narrative. The series begins with two prints called *The Birth*, the second is a painting of the *colada morada* swirling in turmoil, the third is the baby bread holding a pancreas at a birthday party and has words and sentences in Spanish and English that hint at my grandfather's death by pancreatitis, and the fourth painting ends with a family portrait of baby breads set up on a table in celebration of All Souls Day. In each work the detail is key to understanding the story, silly symbols, sweet hearts drawn on the chest, and words connecting to relationships in the narrative:

“Death and grief ran through my mind as I thought of his departure, my grandfather has passed away”. -Visions

	<p>Yo cuido tú Páncreas (I'll take care of your Pancreas)</p>
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This series particularly delves into my earliest encounter with death as a child. I was only three when my grandfather passed away at the age of fifty. I have no recollection of him, but

when I was fifteen years old I had a vision of looking at him holding me as I tried to walk in a white dress. When I asked my mother about it and she said she remembered that moment and was surprised I knew about it since there were no photos. They also welcome experimentation because it helps shape a world for my artwork to live in. Artist like Paul Gauguin, Ignacio Iturria, Cecily Firestein, Jessie M King and Remedios Varo are my top influences when telling stories through my artwork.

Ecuadorian Culture:

“The contrast between my memories and experiences in Ecuador with my life in the US has been central to my practice, which uses personal narratives as a gateway to explore broader questions of place, identity and nationhood.”

- Karina Aguilera Skvirsky

To understand why I choose themes from Ecuador you must know a little about my life. I was born in United States, but left at a young age to live in Ecuador for twelve years. After arriving in the United States to complete my degree I was culture-shocked, and having two nationalities meant merging both cultures, languages and ideas, to fit my new life which influences my artwork. Now I must think of two audiences when I present my art and try to unify both cultures all over again. To make it simpler for myself I tried conceptual and minimalist methods to expand my artistic language, opening further possibilities for materials and expression in art. This approach delved into topics like politics and planted questions about my identity as a woman. I experienced life in two different cultures, and analyzed my stance on identity and the environment. The artist I choose for my assimilation are Karina Aguilera Skvirsky’s photographs where displacement, hybridity and journeys are shown in Guayaquil,

Ecuador; Pedro Figari's painting on representation of landscape and people in the 1900's Uruguay where he captures culture by showing customs, and paints from memory to create an intimate relationship with his motifs; Frida Kahlo's representation of biculturalism in her painting *My Grandparents, My Parents and Me*, express her family tree through portraits and landscape; Estelle Maisonett, who through collaged signifiers creates narrative on figure relationships, location and interpretation of identity inspired by her own life in NYC. These artists help me understand that identity and biculturalism can be celebrated through art, and give me the answer that the only place for my artwork to live is in one I create for it. It is not limited to one art form, expands themes through symbols, and the imaginative. Which lead me to explore a vast art practice, craftiness and integration of unconventional material from my Ecuadorian culture.

Symbolic Motifs:

My symbols involve people, objects and language from my bicultural roots from South American indigenous belief and colonial celebrations. I have chosen as symbolic figures baby breads from All Souls Day and pre-Columbian artifacts to simplify and abstract my figure sculptures. Some symbolic figure is inspired by mythical beings like goblins, Ecuadorian cuisine, beliefs, Andean fauna and flora in landscape. The work shows my fears hidden from family, the reevaluation of community of friends and desires in relationships.

Some inspirational artists I see are: Ortega Maila's sculptures of people in sync with abstract spirituality emanating from stones; Venezuelan sculptor Juan Pablo Garza who utilizes hard material to create objects that activate spaces through preconceived ideas of indigenous imagery and his imaginative forms; Oswaldo Wayasamin uses symbolism on themes of

Indigenous Diaspora and Cubism in portraiture that shows emotion of suffering and hope; Joaquin Torres-Garcia later artworks include the creation of his own symbols through everyday objects in cities set up in irregular reticules similar to comics. Tisla Tsuchiya, a Peruvian artist, uses symbolic figures from indigenous belief and abstracts them using flat color contours and visual grouping to create new symbols for narratives; Leonor Fini uses symbolism in themes of desire, fear and surreal compositions to show visions with embodied female figures; Lastly Lucia Hierro uses signifiers to represent biculturalism within New Yorker culture through language, food and objects.

These artists show me that symbols are created by experiences with language, material and conceptual narrative. By applying their methods, I begin to sketch ideas of creatures, dreams and addressing my own meaning to color. For example: In *the Metamorphosis*, I begin gluing pages of sketches of the metamorphosis with written story lines that leads to the transformation.



La Metamorfosis

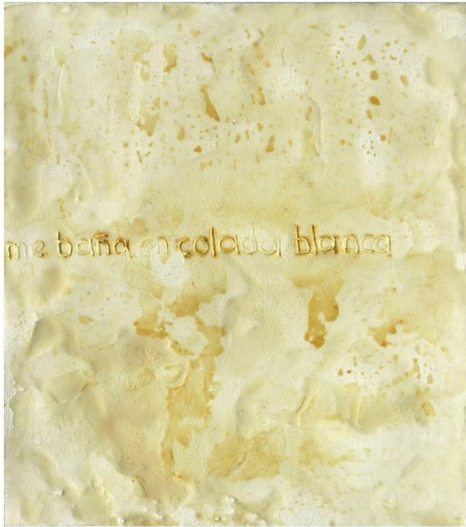
The Metamorphosis

Then I make pours of iridescent medium with pink as the vapor that transforms me into a spider. Once the pour is dry I work with the texture by redrawing the composition. I limit my palette to black and white at first, and create further textures into the composition. These textures begin on the wall that represent a hairy tarantula. I make windows like tunnels with crosses on them. The tunnels show entrance and exit, while the cross is a sign of exorcism. Pink representing the mystical and, femininity and blood, while green represents earthiness, ground and nature. The transformation of myself is to show emotion in painful events from childhood into womanhood.

Symbolic colors:

I make my colors symbolic by using them flat or in washes as a source of landscape and choose limited palettes to bring meaning to objects and words. My first color layer is chosen by my connection to subject matter and the idea. I later revisit the color wheel and search for discordant colors to decide the objects' color. The next layer varies from pours, stencils, experimental processes and lines to create narrative. One of my earliest examples of using symbolic colors is in my *Life Book*, where I make washes, include names, phrases and songs to pages for a book. It is an autobiography in Spanish and English about my feelings, my friends, family, songs, and events that impacted me during times of great uncertainty. These ephemeral pages are chosen to be done in a non-archival paper because of the idea that my life is transient on earth, and will wither away. An artist I found that has a similar approach to my *Life Book* is Janneth Mendez, an Ecuadorian artist who uses bodily fluid, language and surfaces to create narrative that show her emotional state and create a space to express her opinions and ideas for

example *Organic Writing Series #13*. I look at her pages for inspiration in my work like *Girls Bedroom* which was one of my first artworks of symbolic color.



Serie escritura orgánica # 13, semen, cera de abeja/lienzo, 32 x 26.6 cm, 2001

Janneth Mendez
Organic Writing Series #13
Semen, bee's wax, 32x26,6cm
2001



Kimberly Jimenez
Girls Bedroom
Acrylic, collage, 20x16 inch
2019

In my pages, I try using washes more often to represent emotion and minimalistic compositions to focus on color. Once the color is put down, I think of phrases, people or words when observing the page. *My Life book* collects several materials to experiment on creating atmospheric space on paper.

My paintings from *All Souls Day* series, have flat colors and abstractions of forms that dive in space and re-unite by overlapping shapes and figures. Each object I address in the painting has a meaning that adds to the narrative. My most relevant art piece with symbolic color is *Reunidos Finalmente* (Finally Reunited). The painting is a story of someone opening the door to a dark room where my maternal grandfather's photograph is hanging low on the wallpaper near four baby breads representing my family, and the colada morada symbolizing our death

through washes of color seen in the pitcher and the basket. The painting began by using green as my tonal palette to symbolize my mother through her favorite color. The wallpaper on the wall is the recipe to making the *colada morada*, and the cloth was going to be a pattern from a poncho I own that symbolizes indigenous tradition. This painting was the most challenging, because I kept painting over objects, because my Anglo viewers saw the colors as Christmas which frustrated me into constantly changing the color. So, I left the painting aside while I moved on to other projects.



Top image is Finally Reunited painting in progress.

The bottom image is a print of the painting.



Two artist that I looked at were Genieve Figgis and Ciaran Murphy as my inspiration for creating washes, pours and layers of color that conceives meaning in their paintings to fit as visual narrative. Unfortunately do to Covid-19 I was unable to finish *Finally Reunited*.




Colonialism:

The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting its resources.

These words are used to describe a historical turning point in the Americas' history. Our indigenous groups vanquished worldwide and the few survivors are set to live in a hybrid world in which they cannot be a part of unless they pick a side. Their identities questioned, their tradition seen as profane and their ancestry gone. As a Latin American I question my biculturalism through Ochy Curiel's proposal on Decolonial feminism where theories of preconceived ideas of colonialism are rethought by activists, historians, and anthropologist into a new communal practice for developing theories for geo-political and economic structures. The contrast between "colonialism" is hegemonic to privileged ideas including race, class, sexuality and politics, and "Decolonial" is created as a cooperative, inclusion of ideas and theories of marginalized communities, sexuality and politics. I include decolonial practices in my artwork by using craft, and unconventional materials as signifiers. I also use pre-existing symbolic imagery as an inspiration to create new meanings. For example: In my *Flags Series*, I use two pillowcases and a king bed sheet as surfaces to paint on symbols. I semantically detach comforters use for rest and home to address identity and politics. I began listening to Vexillology

with E. Tory Laitila's podcast to understand symbols and learn to transform the bed sheets into flags. *My Flag Series #1*, is the king size bed sheet with the design and colors of the tri-color countries: Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador under the Wiphala Flag (Indigenous Flag from the Andes) to combine both designs, and the canton is the Pleiades constellation represented with spirals as eyes and stars that symbolize new beginnings in Inca Astrology. The reason for re-designing the Ecuadorian flag is because its symbolism doesn't resonate with me or include Indigenous people. In fact, the tri color flag was inspired by Goethe, a German color theorist that inspired the revolutionary Miranda to take on yellow, blue and red for the flags, as these colors were not distorted. Meaning European influence was central and rejected indigenous representation on the Flag. I put it on myself to make a new flag which includes indigenous belief and biculturalisms to decolonize the current Ecuadorian flag through acknowledgement to all people in a complex society with hope. *My Flag Series #2*, is a pillowcase with a tonal palette of red, with the design of the tricolor flags. This flag is the representation of genocide, blood and power. Its center symbol has an antichrist cross with a skull attached to speak for the imposition of religion on indigenous communities and its spiritual genocide. The flag helps me deal with news of families being killed in protests, militarization, and corruption in the government in Lenin Moreno's election in Ecuador. It symbolizes sacrifices, division, death, and abuse of power. *My Flag Series #3*, uses the same design of the tricolor flags in white, black, and gray. The color white is truce, black is death and grey is wounded. The center symbol shows feathers in a circular motion that changes from black and white colors. The feather represents fallen flight and the circular motion is dedicated to George Santayana's quote: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.". This quote resonates with Latin American countries that

have fallen to this historical mistake, and Ecuador doomed to repeat it. Therefore, flag number three leaves doubt whether people are only free through death.

		
<p>My Flag Series #1, Bandera Justa (Just Flag)</p>	<p>My Flag Series #2 La Sangre (The Blood)</p>	<p>My Flag Series #3 Libertad? (Liberty?)</p>

My Decolonial practice became conceptual and artist that I looked and read were: Teresita Fernandez in her use of materials to connect places and space with memory and signifiers; Nelbia Romero practice of Decolonial art by making communal spaces to practice and express her ideas. For example, in *Sal-si-puedes*, she becomes the hegemonic power that locks viewers in a room without their prior knowledge and records it to link her representation of the 1831 massacre of Indigenous Charrúa people to Uruguay's military dictatorship in the 1970-80's. This showed that anyone is accounted as a danger during political turmoil and unpredictability in a civilian's life; Chilean Voluspa Jarpa decolonizes art by utilizing hegemonic institutions to show declassified archives, and leaked documents in Latin American to the audience as an intervention, recollection of events and as a reminder of cultural trauma. She uses various materials that fit her ideals through documentation towards civilians to reveals untold truths.

Lastly, Tania Bruguera who opens conversation in performance through a safe environment for civilians to think on cultural, political and social issues.

These artists have helped me by introducing the practice of research into my work to understand society, culture, and symbols that can be transformed into physical artwork. The combination of their strategies and conceptualism are representation of mutualism which creates a pathway for political ideals, performance and social commentary in art. Therefore, my flag project includes conceptualism, Decolonial practice, politics and research as key processes to understand them symbolically.

Feminism:

Feminist academics opened possibilities for gender politics and Latinx art. They question what it means to be a woman in Latin American society throughout history until now. They create new terms for the status of women and challenge presumptions to present artistic expression that includes craft as fine art. For example, Ochy Curiel explains Decolonial practices in feminism by including cultural acceptance between indiginism and colonialism that defines history for all Latin Americans. How questions of women's status plays in society and how colonialism practices are present in current geo-political and economic issues. Rita Segato introduced me to feminism in Latin America and presented issues with institutions not accepting academic works from women. Las Chulas podcast dedicate their platform for feminism, positive and negative narratives on women currently and advertising the arts. Artist that I look up to are performers: Ana Mendieta who used land art, and performance to express her ideas as a transient idea; Leticia Parente's performances challenged themes of conservative presumptions of women by using symbolic object in a brutal manner during dictatorship in 1970's Brazil. One of her

most shocking and symbolic performance to me was *Made in Brazil*, where she passes a needle with thread through the skin of the sole in her foot spelling out made in brazil.

While I revisit these artists, I questioned my status as a woman, gendered political views and how to address them in art. For this practice, I start to take notes on experiences, spaces, poems, and trigger words that serve to connect ideas for the performances to open conversation with viewers that feel the same way. This is seen in *Stories to You*, here a recording on my phone is played walking at night around a Catholic neighborhood talking about experiences as a teenager with catcalling, unconsented kissing, touching, and stalkers. The stories are combinations between events happening in Latin America and United States. In the second performance *Porqué te lo Cortaste* (Why did you cut it), it begins with the creation of a woman figure brushing her hair that is cut while judgmental commentary on notions of women with short hair are spoken. These phrases are in Spanish and English that reflect on my own experience of being judged on having short hair and assimilate in other cultures. In *Mis Huevos* (My eggs), is my Decolonial reaction to the poem "Boletín y elegía de las mitas" by César Dávila Andrade recited by Beto Mendez. I extract female narratives within the poem to reply to machista ideas still present in Ecuador by showing submission, acceptance, until overcoming them.



Porqué te lo Cortaste (Why did you cut it)



Mis Huevos (My eggs)



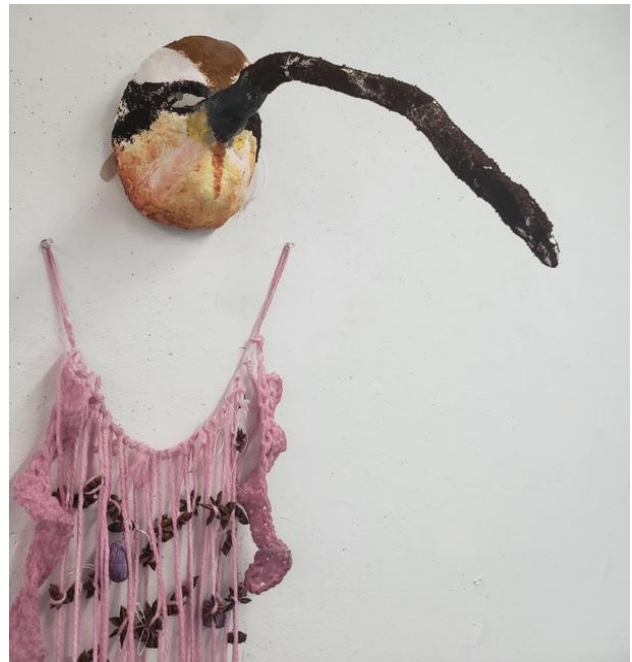
Stories to You

Indigenous:

A category from the language of the colonialists bestowed on people with specific features, beliefs and norm other from European hegemony. This categorization is said to help define a race, a culture, a spirituality, and art. Indigenous art and belief is essential in my artwork because I encourage acceptance and embrace its existence in contemporary art. An artist I find myself influenced by is Faith Ringgold, who mentions in her series of masks, where she is confronted with institutional workers that decide they are artifacts rather than art. As a response, she decides to wear the masks to perform at the opening reception as a protest on underrepresentation of African American art. I think Ringgold's response to art institutions gave her artwork “anima” (soul) which made her artwork symbolic. This soul she creates is what made me interested in showing in my artwork. For example, when I took a class with Esteban Cabeza de Baca he challenged students to create work with extreme limitations which lead me to a ritualistic practice that activated the soul of the artwork. The art I made connected the sculptural with

drawing mediums to create “Mis demonios de Sueño”, land art, performance and most importantly the mask project. The Mask Project truly captivates the indigenous spirituality I the work because, it restricted the use of convention material into craftsmanship. I had to conceptualize the theme of “Año Viejo”, and “Año Nuevo” which is a celebration a day before and after new year’s as a motif. The *Año Viejo* is a paper-mache doll with clothes that represents anyone, and is exhibited throughout the neighborhood until 12 am where a campfire is made to burn the doll as a symbol of goodbye to the old year and cleanse for the new year. This performative act will be part of the mask I have made with my own rituals and desires. The mask I made is a hummingbird endemic to the Andean Region of Ecuador and is colored by spices and tea. This performance is yet to be accomplished, but the mask and garment are complete. This project approaches ritualistic indigenous art in my work.

Mi Año Viejo (My Old Year)



Textiles:

"Everything is falling apart because of lack of connections. Weaving is the connection that is missing, the connection between people and themselves, people and nature." - Cecilia Vicuña

The few artists I have admired for their textile work are: Faith Ringgold with her quilts of her family, ancestors and highlights important thoughts; Daniela Paz Gomez who has recently made a series of fabric works resembling landscape, portraiture and gesture through thread inspired by Chile to connect her relationships; And my influence on historical textiles by Chilean Arpilleras representation of life in shanty towns during 1970's dictatorship, helped me idealize art and activism; Lastly, in her series *Quipus*, Cecilia Vicuña uses thread to connect ideas, space and objects that symbolize connectivity and time. She installs thread where nature and spirituality meets and thread itself as a ritualistic object and pathway for interconnectivity through time, memory and indigenous ceremonies.

My story through thread began during my junior year to connect scraps of material from another artwork. I never thought it would become part of my art practice. Once I began using the needle and thread to draw it became my obsession, I wanted to sew into all my work. I first started by sewing together scraps of stained canvas and making a grid. I would experiment with colors and texture until the squares became harmonious. Then I took inspiration from my pipe cleaner project to make a composition with wire and yard for a performance called *Why did you cut it*.

The meditative state of sewing made my ideas clearer by continuously using the baby bread motif in *Falling*, the materials are scrap of canvas, pants, my cotton painting gloves and embroidery to create the image and sew everything together. *Falling* in the process of making was based on my reaction towards materials that I wanted to connect through a theme. The baby bread is a self-portrait with a dress from when I was three years old and is falling like a ragdoll into a circular shape of hands waiting to catch me. Whether the hands have a negative or positive effect of the baby bread I wanted to make it symbolic as the world.



Conclusion:

My artwork involves research considered when addressing themes, creating symbols, and representing ideas. Explaining my art is difficult because of the broad art forms and language barriers. But most importantly my artwork has evolved from painting and drawing to interdisciplinarity, which allowed curiosity and initiative to create artwork that has been rewarding.

My projects are intimate, and narrates my stories, dreams, events, as a source of inspiration. The use of broad mediums has exalted during my last year thanks to experimentation, and the rootedness in indigenous belief and tradition, feminism influencing themes of my work. Lastly, the baby bread has by far been my favorite motif during my journey through death and life.

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