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by

Adriana Cristina Corral

2013

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In Search of a Voice

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

Jeff Williams

John Stoney

In Search of a Voice

by

Adriana Cristina Corral, B.F.A.

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013

Dedication

I want to dedicate this work, research, time, effort and my heartfelt passion for art to my loving family; my brothers, Pablo, Vito and Luke; my sister Brisa, and brother-in-law, Rick who have cared and helped me from the moment I moved to Austin and began this new journey. My eternal gratitude and love is for my parents, Rose and Pete Corral. I carry you both always with me; this is for all the hard work you did in helping me achieve my dreams and being an amazing testament to hard work, dedication, support and love. In loving memory to my aunt, Dr. Martha O. Corral who was an incredible anesthesiologist, mentor, a strong woman who helped so many other women and taught me to always give back to women. To my godfather and uncle, Dr. Carlos H. Corral for being a great example and being so gracious. Mia Villarreal-Corral for your constant love and support and to coattail riding! To my best friend and life partner Vincent Valdez, thank you for being an amazing testament to what it takes to be a dedicated artist and working hard every step of the way. We will do great things, I promise! Tatiana Reinoza for your support, encouragement and help with my work from the moment I stepped into the MFA program and in writing my thesis. Theresa Valdez for your love, support, and insightful ways of helping me to have a voice through text. Cecilia Balli, you are an exemplary force and I thank you for the roads you have endured in order for me to expand on this body of work. Much due credit to Professor Ariel Dulitzky who took the time to listen and guide me along with my ideas and objectives, set up introductions to work with highly respected professors that could facilitate me within my work, reminded me of the reality of violence not only in one region of the world but in many others, and provided specific books that would reveal other artists work of the same

vein, I am so blessed to have had this opportunity to work with you. This body of work is in honor of the women who have lost their lives in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico and may we find solutions to these violent crimes.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Professor Margo Sawyer for her commitment, support, encouragement, and guidance. This body of work was able to come together in a readily manner with the assistance of Professor Ariel Dulitzky, who was a prime source of inspiration in his efforts as lead prosecutor in the Campo Algodón case. His patience, time, and encouragement proved to be enlightening and valuable to me and to the creation of the work. I would also like to thank Beili Liu, Jeff Williams, Michael Smith, Ken Hale, Jack Stoney, Theresa Hubbard, Michael Ray Charles, Charles Hale, Sandra Fernandez, Cecilia Bali, Hector Dominguez-Ruvalcaba, Amy Hauft, Doug Dempster and Luis E. Carcamo-Huechante; for there commitment in helping me achieve my goals.

Abstract

In Search of a Voice

Adriana Cristina Corral, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Jeff Williams

As a native of El Paso, Texas my work reflects on autobiographical narratives and violent events that have taken place along the US-Mexico border. For the past two years my research and artwork have focused on the *Femicidios* (women murders) in Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua, Mexico). The specific case of Campo Algodón (2001), where eight young women were found in a mass grave in the center of the city, led me to investigate and produce a group of works in reference to loss, justice, memory and erasure. My purpose is to create works that inform the viewer of something that has occurred and continues to happen. My artistic approach involves concept, research and process, which eventually result in installations and sculptural objects.

My aim in this thesis is to outline my research methodology and explore the intersections of my work with theoretical discourses in art, human rights, and neoliberalism. With a minimalist aesthetic, my work often masks the labor intensive process involved in research and production. By mining the archives of classified documents used in international human rights courts, I use this material as the base for

my work. The nature of this material often dictates its visibility or illegibility as a classified source that cannot be revealed. This body of work requires collaboration across disciplines in which the research and communication with specialists have helped in the formation of each piece.

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In Search of a Voice

Since the 1960's thousands of women have been killed through the same *modus operandi* of kidnap, rape, and murder in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Mexico saw an increase of murders after the NAFTA agreement in 1994. With the intention of building a better future and creating a job market that could cater to American companies the arrival of *Maquiladoras* (factories) generated an influx of migrants (primarily women) from the north and south of Mexico. With the large incursion of women at the *maquiladoras* a noticeable amount of women began to disappear and murders rates increased. Young women, usually students, maquiladora workers, or both were found in deserted areas or mass graves. Their remains are often so disfigured or decomposed that identification is nearly impossible. Many of these cases have remained unsolved for lack of prosecution, organized crime and widespread fear throughout the surrounding area. Navigating between these two spaces of Juárez and El Paso, and processing the aforementioned violence that occurs is integral to the formation of my work.

My interest in violence against women began when my parents explained to me that Juárez was not a safe place for a young girl to visit by herself. To go, they said, I needed their consent. My visits to Juárez were either to see family members, friends of my parents or to watch my brother's polo games. My father was at one time a consultant to many American companies who had an interest in manufacturing products in Juarez and often facilitated in finding them locations to produce these products. On one occasion, my father took me to see some of the *maquiladoras* he worked with in Juárez. This visit stayed with me and sparked a strong interest and raised many questions.

Another event that struck a cord with me was an incident that had occurred to my grandmother. She told me a story about a time when she used to work in Juárez. There was a plan to kidnap and dispose of her, but when the event was to take place my grandmother was able to escape. She never again returned to that job nor prosecuted the men who planned to commit such a violent crime. This posed many questions for me but ultimately I found myself asking, what exactly did she do to get out of that situation and how many girls have pleaded for their lives and were not able to escape.

These were situations that raised my initial interest. However, it was not until I was attacked by a known assailant that I began to realize the real nature of a violent sexual assault. Fortunately, I too was able to fight my way out of the situation and escape. However, like my grandmother I did not prosecute the perpetrator because of the fear. Fear that he would do something worse later. Now that I look back at these events there are so many things that I would change about how I handled the situation. Now that I am working on this body of work I see how many families and mothers who lose their daughters to violent crimes do not say anything because of fear. Their fear is that if they say too much they, or other family members, will be killed. Most often it is fear that keeps us silent.

Having family in the political circuit from the past and present in Mexico City and Juárez has opened my eyes in how the governments, judicial systems and social classes operate. The experience, observation and research allow me to react and bring these varied elements together to study and create a body of work of the intersection between politics, class, and business from one city to another. Having family and friends on both sides of the border instilled an anticipation of fear and an in depth awareness of how rapidly the brutalities can escalate. When I began my Masters at The University of Texas

at Austin I came in with the intention of working on a body of work in reference to the violent crimes in Juárez and it was here where the research started to take course.

Research Methods

When I first began the research for this series of work in 2010, I found an article in the El Paso Times written by a local journalist. The article named a professor from the University of Texas at Austin's Law school, Ariel Dulitzky as lead prosecutor in the case of Campo Algodón.¹ Dulitzky accused the Mexican government of state violence on their failure to "protect the young women in Juárez and failed [policy] to properly investigate the slayings."² On November 7, 2001 eight young girls were found violently murdered and disposed of in the center of the city in a cotton field in Juárez. The hyper-visibility of this location "was the ultimate act of defiance in a city known for defiance."³ According to anthropologist Cecilia Balli, "If violence indeed works as a method of communication, these murders of women were trying to say something new and different."⁴ As leading expert of the Inter-American Human Rights system Dulitzky, defended three of the victims' families in the Human Rights International Courts in Chile. This was the first and only *femicidio* case to have reached the Human Rights International courts.

After reading this article I contacted Professor Dulitzky to learn more about the case. He explained his role as the attorney and offered a wealth of information regarding the case and the names of other professors that could assist me in expanding my research. During one of our scheduled meetings Professor Dulitzky provided me with classified documents to explore, study and examine the Campo Algodón case from the legal point

¹ Dulitzky serves as director of the Human Right's Clinic, director of the Latin American Initiative and was recently appointed by the United Nations Human Right's Council to a working group specializing at enforced and involuntary disappearances.

² Ariel Dulitzky as quoted in Diana Washington Valdez, Title, El Paso Times Newspaper, date, page#

³ Cecilia Balli, "Murdered Women on the Border: Gender, Territory and Power in Ciudad Juárez" (PhD diss., Rice University, 2009), 40.

⁴ Balli, 40.

of view. This marked the beginning of an on going collaborative research which serves as the basis for the series.

In addition to working with Professor Dulitzky, I began working with literature specialist Hector Dominguez-Ruvalcaba from the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Dominguez-Ruvalcaba specializes in Juárez's gender violence and organized crime as represented through art and print culture. I also held studio visits and interviews with Professor Balli from Anthropology, whose work examines the murders of women from an ethnographic perspective by working with the victim's families. These scholars travel along the border and other parts of Latin America, treading where only few go. Observing and studying the legal systems, they engage with victims and their families, offer insightful discussions, interviews and accounts with victims of the reality of what we do not see in the mass media. The interviews and conversations with Dulitzky, Dominguez-Ruvalcaba and Balli have inspired me to create several works within the Campo Algodón series. The work of these scholars has also helped me to create my own path in researching the murders of women in Juárez. These relationships have created a bond of friendship and an acute awareness of the tragedies.

Process

During the process of my work and research many times I find myself internalizing and becoming personally connected to these tragedies and events. It is ultimately my goal to translate this sense of mourning, silence, outrage and memory through installations and sculptural objects. While I am conducting my research there is point at which my process steps in and I pay attention to the formal elements of color, shape, economy and balance. With a minimal aesthetic the installations that I create use a variety of other mediums; video, ceramics, photography, printmaking and sculpture. Other factors that come into play with my work include the following: the idea of impermanence, repetition, and a physical act or a removal has been bestowed on each of the pieces. Each of the works that I create goes through a process that is carried out with a considerable amount of time, care, and fragility. Their temporality and the recycling of materials allude to loss, memory and display this vicious cycle that continues to plague the city. Reflecting on Balli's comment about the location of Campo Algodón and murderer's method of communication, each installation or performance is in the center of the space that it encompasses. I too am making a statement however, on restaging the discovery of these disfigured bodies, but rather than finding the unsightly remains, viewers find a memorial. Lighting is another element that can be seen throughout each of the works in that it sets the tone for the viewer either evoking various moods of sympathy, confusion, anger, and hope.

I explore and use material that I collect from my research to reveal my process. When I first began to read the vast amount of documents as well as other sources of information it took me to another level of understanding these violent acts. Most often my works are accompanied by text that explains the conceptual meaning behind the

works giving the viewer or “reader” the opportunity to invest themselves in it, similar to Teresita Fernandez’s visual practice.⁵ Through the stark black and white nature of the written text from the documents at times I felt even more lost, confused and increasingly questioning myself and the system. Commenting on this aspect of disappearing into print, Balli noted

These acts of violence—in a city that functions of its women—transpire daily, at all hours of the day. But they disappear into tiny, irrelevant news print, if they register in the public record and the public consciousness at all.⁶

In an effort to not have these victims’ names and legal documents “disappear” I use them to remind the viewer of the reoccurrence of these offenses. In reading the classified documents I felt an urgency to use them as primary material and convey what I was experiencing.

In the case when handling the classified documents, I use a common printmaking technique where I transfer the text by placing an individual document on the wall and rubbing the paper on the backside firmly with a moist acetone cotton ball. This technique allows me to transfer the ink from the document onto the wall. Each document receives the same treatment. When transferring the text from the paper I repeat the same actions repetitively displaying a kind of physical action by touching, rubbing and transferring information. Layer upon layer of text enables me to blur the final image on the wall, only revealing hints of text, forcing the viewer to take a closer look. This result is an obvious hidden truth in plain site and this final result parallels the tremendous obscurity and erasure that is associated with these crimes (Plate 1 and 2).

⁵ Miller, Margaret, Stringfield, Anne, Hickey, Dave, Norr, David Louis, Volk, Gregory, and Carlozzi, Annette Dimeo, *Teresita Fernández: Blind Landscape* (Kunstverlag AG: JRP Ringier, 2009), 124.

⁶ Balli, 52.

With this installation, *Campo Algodón, Ciudad Juárez, 21 de Febrero del 2007*, I have been able to exhibit in various locations while still following a strict procedure. Traveling with the documents has required me to obtain permission from Professor Dulitzky; release forms for assistants aiding me in the installation of the piece, keeping the documents with me at all times, once the installation is completed discarding the documents at the location of the install by burning them and then sending the ashes to myself in Austin, Texas. Art historian Miwon Kwon states

Traveling site specific art works, despite the once-adamant claim that to move the work is to destroy the work. Concurrently, refabrications of site-specific works, particularly from the minimalist and postminimalist eras, are becoming more common in the art world. The increasing trend of relocating and reproducing once unique site-bound works has raised new questions concerning the authenticity and originality of such works as well as their commodity status.⁷

Campo Algodón, Ciudad Juarez, 21 de Febrero del 2007, conceptually applies to “traveling site-specific,” because I am retelling this specific event that has its moments of reaching mainstream media through news or print, informing people of these tragic events however, it is quickly dissolved until it is retold again. The site-specificity recalls the tragedy at Campo Algodón and is imprinted directly on the gallery wall becoming temporarily part of the space. This installation was fortunately selected for the International Sculpture Center for Outstanding Student in Contemporary Sculpture and travels throughout the nation at various museums. This opportunity allows me to retell the event in different cities over and over. When the exhibition is deinstalled the piece is painted over and wiped clean as if nothing happened, until it moves to the next location and is retold again.

⁷ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specificity and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 31.

Left with the ashes I was then inspired to create the next installation, *Ofrenda* (Offering) (Plate 3 and 4). I have presented an altar-like setting by placing eight handheld hammered vessels in the center of the space for each of the eight young women that were found in the cotton field in November of 2001. Using a metal smith technique to create this piece, each vessel was hand-hammered out of copper and then dipped in liver of sulfur giving it the gunmetal coloring. Burning the classified documents from the previous installation in a ritualistic manner I rested the ashes in the center of the vessels. Placing the vessels on a platform in the center of the room allows the viewer to walk around the vessels giving him the opportunity to contemplate the absence and loss of these victims. There is a sense of ambiguity when looking at the layered text and there is a sense of ultimate loss in viewing the installation with the vessel and ashes.

Afterwards, I felt an urgency to create an installation that displayed a sense of mourning for these victims. I honored this display of mourning by using the image of the Virgin Mary, a sacred symbol in Catholicism as well as to many around the world, especially those in Latin America. This began to take shape through my conversation with Professor Cecilia Balli, anthropologist at The University of Texas at Austin, who also worked on this case. In a conversation Professor Balli recalled Irma Monreal, mother of victim, Esmeralda Herrera, stating she could relate to the Virgin Mary because of the loss of her child in such a violent and tragic manner.

In the installation *Madre* (Mother) I chose to use a classic and sacred Immaculate Conception Virgin Mary statue to cast a clear resin mold imbedded with hand-picked cotton (Plate 5 and 6). This laborious process of creating the mold resulted in a transparent/ghostlike silhouette that is imbedded with the cotton. Inadvertently, the cotton traveled to her head and stomach as if to convey a message of love between mother and child.

The Immaculate Conception Mary was specifically chosen because she embodies faith, strength and hope even when there is none. She is respected and carries a power of protection evident in her arms and hands as they extend out to those who seek hope. The pillar that the Virgin is mounted upon is from a cemetery in Mexico City circa 1890's. It was attained from a shop in the states that imports relics. The pillar emits a dilapidated presence in itself, displaying its age through its weathered paint from being exposed to the elements. Both the Virgin Mary and the pillar are extremely fragile in their own right; one fragile to the visible decay and structure and the other to its materiality. This piece also calls the viewer to walk around it in the same way that *Ofrenda* (Offering) does. As in the previous installations the dim lighting creates a silent and contemplative atmosphere for the viewer.

In my solo exhibition *Voces de las Perdidas* (The Lost Voices) at the Mexic-Arte Museum, in Austin, Texas, I was asked to collaborate with Clay Imports Artesanal ceramic company who is based in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, Mexico (Plate 7 and 8). After working on several body bag pieces I had an accumulation of body bag tags and with the timing of this exhibition it allowed me to recreate ceramic body bag tags for the deceased victims. All of the tiles were strung and suspended from the ceiling cascading throughout the space with paths of entry allowing the viewer to be immersed in volumes of murdered victims names.

With the same methodology of using the classified documents I felt it necessary to use the soil where the eight victims were found in the cotton field to make the clay tiles. The soil was obtained by Clay Imports Artesanal who produced the tiles in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, Mexico. Each handmade tile was then glazed and printed on with the authentic body bag tag information used in Juárez. Some of the tags hold information

of the victims murdered while others may not even hold a name for those who have desolately disappeared.

After completing these works I felt a resistance to be silent and this anger fell over me like a veil. “Break the Silence” is a phrase that seemed to reoccur throughout the research and in a conversation with Theresa Hubbard. She noted how fragile the tile tags were and asked about the outcome if something happened to them, a break of some kind. With these thoughts in mind it ultimately led me to shatter and destroy each ceramic body bag tag. Once again, I worked with Clay Imports Artesanal who made 450 body bag tags out of clay for the performance piece, *Quebrar el Silencio* (Break the Silence) (Plate 9 and 10).

During my performance of this symbolic destructive act, I physically broke each body bag tag in the form of clay tiles. Where as the last installations brought people close and invited them in the space to contemplate and witness this complex event, this particular performance piece was in contrast with its loud and powerful action. The performance is a protest to those who have not been prosecuted due to the lack of justice for the women who have been raped, tortured, and killed. The tags are stand-in’s for the still bodies that can only be heard through the outcry of their loved ones.

When I began breaking each tile I first noticed the sound of a loud crash that echoed in the space. The flying shards forced the viewers to dodge and protect themselves from this act. Then, it was the way the fragments dispersed evenly throughout the space, creating a unified circle from where each break took place. As in the *Madre* installation where the cotton inadvertently took its own effect within the statue, another unexpected effect occurred with the broken tiles. As the circle enclosed with the shattered tile fragments, it became more difficult to break and hear them. As the density of the pile grew I noticed the sound of the shattering tiles was not as loud and

clear but more muffled as compared to when I began the performance. In turn I am reminded of these families that unite each other because of their tragic losses. They seem to form this unending circle as they struggle to have their cries for justice heard and not muffled with threats of fear.

The performance piece and the accumulation of fragments that laid in this pile forced me to not think only about the eight women that were found in the cotton field but also of the many others that have been murdered in the same manner throughout the city. “These names are not found in scripted monuments or memorials, not celebratory, fading away,”⁸ this quote by Doris Salcedo became so befitting because those chosen words were an eloquent description of my works. Exploring text once again, I turn to research the names of victims found slain in Juárez. I was able to locate many of the names from blogs, newspapers and various websites. In addition, I came across a listing of dates and locations matched to the many unidentified bodies. From that point I typed each name that I found, creating my own database.

Collaborating with my fiancé, Vincent Valdez, in his solo exhibition titled, *America’s Finest*, we created a piece using the names of the men and women who served in the current wars in the Middle East (Plate 11 and 12). These names were chosen because they suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and committed suicide. Mimicking the landscape found in many of Valdez’s previous works, we divided the gesso board at the horizon level. With the same transfer application we placed the names below the horizon line layering the names on top of one another.

With this piece in mind along with the database of women I had created with my research I was given the opportunity to create an installation titled *Memento* at the Visual

⁸ Princenthal, Nancy, Basualdo, Carlos, and Huyssen Andreas, *Doris Salcedo* (New York: Phaiden, 2008), 11.

Arts Center for the exhibition, *A Nation Under Fear* (Plate 13, 14 and 15). This summer my trips to Italy and Paris proved to be inspiring and extremely informative. Weaving through open spaces that integrated inlaid ground marble tombs in churches, duomos, and cemeteries inspired me to create a similar pattern within the layout of my installation.

Thinking about the architecture at the Visual Arts Center I used the horizon line of a landscape to divide the walls signifying a division of life and death.

The inhabited world within boundaries then, can be usefully ascribed a syntax of place, path, pattern, and edge. Within each of these four, architectural ordering arrangements can be considered which are made to respond to the natural landscape as well as to human bodies and memories.⁹

Just as these women's bodies were eventually revealed in a certain landscape, in a somewhat pattern my intention was to not have there memory displaced as there identities were so often done. Repeating the earlier technique of using acetone to transfer text onto the wall, I then transferred the victim's names on the wall creating a horizontal band surrounding the space. The names that extend throughout the space have moments of clarity and erasure that convey several concepts for me, in that it mimics the last breaths seen on a flat line monitor, landscape, and the division of life and death. After transferring the text to the wall I was left with numerous sheets of paper listing the victims names. I then decided to burn these papers in a ritualistic manner and create a cremation burial plot that lies in the center of the space.

There is a desire to individualize the women at times, especially when there are about five thousand unknown murdered women and roughly eighteen hundred known. At times, the challenge for me is how to individualize these mass murders when there is rampant impunity and eighty percent of these crimes go unpunished.

⁹ Bloomer, Kent C., Moore, Charles W., and Yudell Robert J. *Body, Memory, and Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 78.

There is something to be said with each of the text pieces that I am creating in that they are ephemeral. My installations convey elements of a monument in the way of commemorating the murdered victims however, after each installation the walls are painted over and the piece no longer exists. The ephemeral nature of the work parallels these murders in that each time they are told in the news or courts they have a moment of validity and potency and then disappear or fade out, creating this vicious cycle that repeats itself over and over.

In this body of work I am interested in dematerialization because it directly relates to the *femicidios* in Juárez. Kwon states

Concurrent with this move toward dematerialization of the site is the simultaneous deaestheticization (that is, withdrawal of visual pleasure) and dematerialization of the art work. The “work” no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process, provoking the viewers’ critical (not just physical) acuity regarding the ideological conditions of their viewing. In this context, the guarantee of a specific relationship between an art work and its site is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship but rather on the recognition of its unfixed impermanence, to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation.¹⁰

Each of the works are dematerializing through the unavoidable deterioration from the outdoor elements or from the actual break down in the physical sense implemented by me. In a sense the irony is just as these tragedies should stop and be deemed unrepeatable, there is a perpetual repetition of obliterating and resurfacing in the continuation of these tragedies that parallels that same ongoing process in my selected works. Many people have tried to fight the judicial system or have done an extensive amount of research but sadly the circumstances have not changed and the murders continue to rise. “The problem, as I came to learn, is that violence obliterates any neat sense of before, during and after; it disturbs, temporarily if not long-term, one’s

¹⁰ Kwon, 24.

understanding of time and space.”¹¹ Most often my practice depends highly on the research and subject matter that I obtain from sources such as classified documents, interviews with involved families and professors and even retrieving earth from an actual site where murdered victims were found.

During my independent study, sculpture Professor Jack Stoney suggested I should take an interest in working with those living and dealing with the loss of loved ones. I received the Junco Scholarship research grant where I was paired up with May-ek Querales in Mexico City. Ms. Querales is also in her final year of completing her Masters in Anthropology. This grant allows us to work on the ethnography in Juárez while exploring the culture phenomena through our different mediums and addressing the subject matter of impunity and loss as a result of an unjust political system. With the granting of this scholarship we were able to conduct the majority of our research and travel to El Paso, Texas, which became the central meeting point for expanding our time and work. Recalling Professor Stoney’s suggestion of meeting with family members of lost victims, and working and traveling with Ms. Querales, I was motivated to inquire about existing organizations designed to aid these survivors of violence.

Ms. Querales and I have had a constant dialogue in which we share similar objectives; those being research, readings, artists, and philosophers. The exchange of ideas and research with Ms. Querales has advanced the formation of my artwork leading to my final exhibition. Her body of work serves to identify the underlying truths embodied by victims’ families and by a struggling legal system. She steps into those boundaries interacting with families, asking the questions, and gathering the information; with this she allows me to reach into those same boundaries to feel, to create and bring

¹¹ Balli, 21.

notice and awareness to there plight. Ms. Querales and I are in what seems to be an endless collaboration. Our working relationship embraces my intellectual and emotional being. She continues to be a source of inspiration while teaching me a sense of work ethics, a recognition of challenges and arriving at a point of satisfaction with my creativity.

Professor Dulitzky is involved in seeking justice for victims and their families. He suggested I take an interest and do some research in the field of work that he and others are providing. Professor Dulitzky has recently been appointed to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in South America. He is working towards putting me in contact with UN organizations to find ways of bringing human rights and art together in a shared dialogue. With the help of the Rapport Center and professors throughout the UT campus in the Anthropology department, Spanish and Portuguese department, Law School, English and Art History department, we have created a working group where we can discuss human rights and art.

With the assistance of the Rapport Center and Professor Dulitzky, I was invited to be part of the “Impunity, Justice and Human Right’s Conference” in the Law School this semester. I learned from a legal stance how violence against women, men and children occurs constantly in many regions of the world and the handling of these violent crimes is susceptible to change according to the laws of that country. Balli made a profound statement when she said,

This emerging culture of violence, intimidation and fear is not unique to Ciudad Juarez. It is increasingly reflected along most of the 1,192-mile United States-Mexico border and in other geographic regions that function as “border zones” between countries, local and global interests, traditional and modern cultures, State and economic powers, and between the rule of the law and the law of the streets.¹²

¹² Balli, 9.

It is certain these issues are not unique to any given area, yet efforts to find justice continue through the works of attorneys, forensic anthropologists, anthropologists and UN officials examining the brutality of violence and disappearance cases. In addition to this, they seek constructive methods of improving the judicial system and restoring justice for the families. During the many discussions at the conference, the word memory was often spoken. Memory is what we are left with, the memory of who the victims were, when were they were last seen, what were they wearing, who were they last seen with, where were they found and then it returns back to the memories of who they were.

Returning to the classified documents once again I have chosen to use them in a different manner. As to the previous documents that where encompassing the entire wall, I have taken a set of the classified documents and have transferred one page over another three hundred and two pages to be exact, creating a static image intended to mimic that of the current situation. Immediately following the transfers I shredded each page by hand and ran it through a pulp machine. The laborious process of making the paper has stripped and obliterated the text only leaving microscopic particles of black with a grey tint. Cut into the standard size sheet of paper it no longer holds the importance of what it initially represented in the courts. Though this case went to the International Courts in Chile and won, suing the state for failing to properly investigate these murders, it continues to this day leaving the women of Juárez vulnerable once again and in this stagnant state (Plate 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20).

Expanding my research, I began to look at areal map views of the Cotton Field case that in turn led me to research and locate four other areas where mass graves of women were found throughout the city of Juarez. These locations are named Lomas de Poleo, Cerro Bola, Zacate Blanco, Lote Bravo and the one that I am currently working on

Campo Algodón. Typing the names of the victims from each of the locations I burned the printed pages once again in a ritual manner.

With the cremation burial plot in mind I created an aerial map view of Juárez with the ashes. Most times I feel as if I am working from a distance and this installation/performance depicted that exactly. In the installation I am looking from a distance paying attention to the geography of where five main mass graves were found. Mapping out where the first mass grave was found I mark this spot with pieces of black tape forming an X. I proceeded to mark the location of each mass grave site in the same manner. I then sift a layer of ashes onto the aerial map view shape leaving only one X exposed. As I clear any accumulated ash from the X, I feel as if I am making the sign of the cross as I stroke my finger across it. Each time I reach this step I gently dusted and “blessed” the marked X. I sift red dried pigment over the X representing the blood shed of victims found in the mass graves. This can easily be followed in the documented video available within the installation. After marking the first mass grave I swept up the ashes and red powder pigment and then preceded to layout the second layer of ashes that are subtly tinted. When I laid out the second layer of ashes on the next X mark, the viewer begins to see how the red is slowly filtering through the ashes and becoming another tint of red. After sweeping up the second layer, I continue with the third layer of ashes spreading them throughout and once more adding the red pigment at the grave site mark. With each added layer the viewer can see how slowly, yet pervasively the red pigment spreads into the ashes. As this ground became infiltrated with the red, the viewer can then perceive the reality of the actual bloodshed infiltrating different locations of the city. Many times the murdered victims are found in mass graves yet also at times randomly scattered. As I spread the fourth and fifth layer of ashes and red pigment, the comparison of red ash to red blood becomes self-evident (Plate 21, 22, and 23).

There is a lack of justice and persecution when it comes to the individuals committing these crimes. This implies the city is plagued with injustice and is consumed with the widespread spree of fear and murders. Just as the red pigment became self-revealing within the ashes, the obvious truth of these violent crimes struggles to reveal itself to be heard and seen. Threats of fear are made to cover up and suppress the truth and even drown out the unspoken words of victims and voices of their families.

A piece that impressed me during my travels to Italy this summer was the flooring from the Piccolomini Library in the Siena Duomo. The encompassing repetitive diamond shape tile displays the Piccolomini family crest of a half moon. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini known as a famous humanist in Italy was part of a noble family that dedicated the library to holding his works and the writings of two Popes.

In a conversation with Professor Balli, I was informed of the new memorial site being constructed in honor of the Campo Algodón victims. She stated the victim's mothers were comforted by the site of a memorial yet dismayed at the absence of living vegetation not being a part of this memorial. With this in mind, I designed a display with the body bag tags that I have used in two previous installations. I created an inlaid tomb using these tags and planted grass in between them. I used the tags made of clay to symbolize the cold stillness of death and then used planted grass to represent the hope of life.

The toe tags I used in the two previous installations were fabricated by Clay Imports Artesanal; where as in this installation I proceeded to make the clay tiles myself. Under the guidance of Professor Don Herron, this laborious task allowed me to appreciate and learn the process of making each individual tile. In the same vein as when making and cutting the paper sheets, I rolled out slabs of clay and cut out each individual tag. Once the clay tags were cut, dried and then fired in the kiln, I stamped each clay tag

with the appropriate information used on authentic toe tags in Juárez. I proceeded to hand write the names, dates and location of death of the murdered women. During the same time, with the assistance of Professor Jack Stoney, I began to grow grass in the size of a four-foot by eight-foot burial plot. I designed an inlaid tile pattern within the beginning days of planting the grass so that the toe tags would grow together emulating the cycle of life and death (Plate 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28). In the book, *The Modern Cult of Monuments*, Alois Riegl states, “No need to worry about the eternal preservation of monuments, but rather one should be concerned with the constant representation of the cycle of creation.”¹³ In the site-specific installation I once again convey elements of a monument in commemorating the women who were slain.

Just as monuments pass away according to the workings of natural law- and it is precisely for this reason that they provide aesthetic satisfaction to the modern viewer-so preservation should not aim at stasis but ought to permit the monuments to submit to incessant transformation and steady decay, outside of sudden and violent destruction. Only one thing must be avoided: arbitrary interference by man in the way the monument has developed. There must be no additions or subtractions, no substitutions for what nature has undone, no removal of anything that nature has added to the original discrete form. Eventually decay overtakes age-value and the effect vanishes with the disappearance of the last signs of the original creation.¹⁴

In the site-specific installation, *The Numbers Grow*, I installed the piece and then allowed it to take its own course. After a month and a half the viewer can see signs of life with grass that has continued to grow but also signs of death with grass that has not survived and wraps around each ceramic toe tag. Its almost as if this bit of life has died and mummified and formed its own monument for the viewer. This piece has been able to live in the elements but experience moments of life and death.

¹³ Riegl, Alois, “*The Modern Cult of Monuments*,” Its Character and Its Origins’ (1902): repr. *Oppositions Journal*, no. 25 (Fall, 1982), pp. 21-51.

¹⁴ Riegl, “Cult of Monuments,” 21-51.

I recently read an article in the El Paso Times newspaper about a sculptor named Sebastian from Chihuahua, Mexico. His work is to include a “monumental” X sculpture in Ciudad Juárez. The monument is to honor the many who have lost their lives during the drug war and the blood shed. I was immediately reminded of the X marking I used in my performance/installation, *Within the Ashes*. Like my installation the viewer can see the X from an aerial view. The X sculpture has a more masculine approach where as my work has a more feminist and ephemeral methodology. While trying to avoid this more intrusive display, I prefer more of a conceptual, tangible approach while engaging the viewer with actual sources of materials. Those artists that exemplify this are Christian Boltanski, Doris Salcedo, Theresa Margolles, Ai WeiWei, and Teresita Fernandez to name few. These artists use historical events that tie into current contemporary times with politically charged material in a conceptual manner. They have been instrumental in their practice, research and production of their work, which in turn has allowed me to push the boundaries within my process and artwork.

Conclusion

The late sculptor Eva Hesse captured my creative eye and reading about her struggles and perseverance motivated me to pursue the art of sculpture. Her use of materials in sculpture, painting and drawing, with a minimalistic approach, inspired my decisions as an artist and helped me to realize the potential of making work that carries voice. One of the characteristics that we share is ephemerality and dematerialization of the object but my work differs in that it is based on a historical event and seeks to restore the memory of murdered women in Juárez.

This body of work is a collaboration of many professors that have had their hands in facilitating me in different ways. They have allowed me to part of the broader conversation of these violent tragedies while giving me the platform to speak to their classes, engage in panel discussions, using my work for conferences and giving me the chance to share a voice with them. I feel that I have been able to work with a fine group of professors in the art and art history department, Spanish and Portuguese, human ecology, anthropology, and the law school here at UT. With this team I have been able to learn how art and this violent subject matter can speak through many disciplines and come in different forms. I feel that at this point I still have so much to learn, yet I am confident that I have built a solid foundation to continue my work. Through this body of work I hope to give voice to those with unspoken words and bring healing to their families.

In the future I plan to continue my research on violence against women. Expanding on the research I began on Juárez I would like to conduct research on a global scale and work from an ethnographic point of view, interviewing victims and family members. Perhaps departing from this series, which focused so heavily on ephemeral

works, I would like to explore sculptures, performances and installations with more longevity and move toward public art commissions in specific sites where these violent events have taken place.

Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7

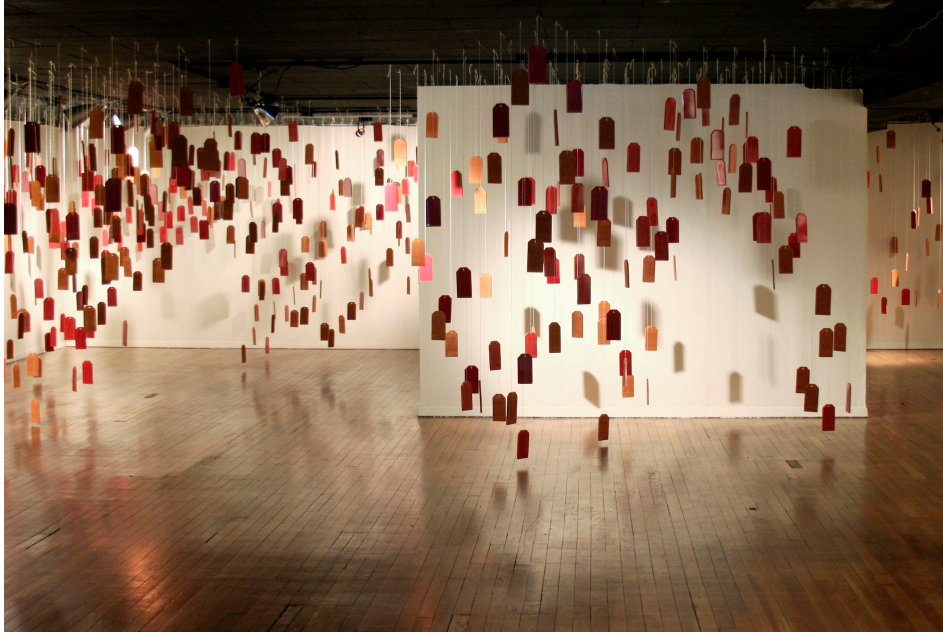


Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11

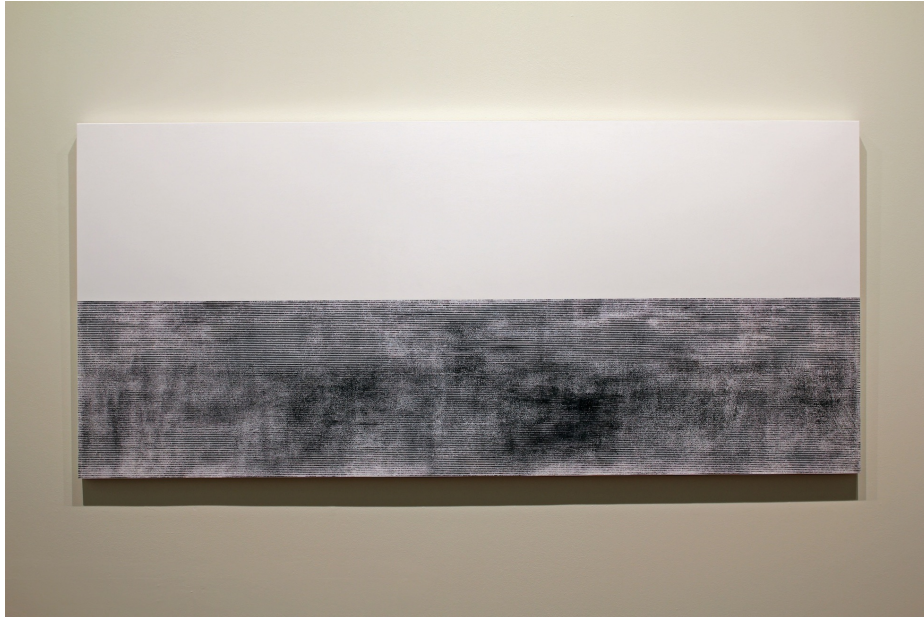


Plate 12

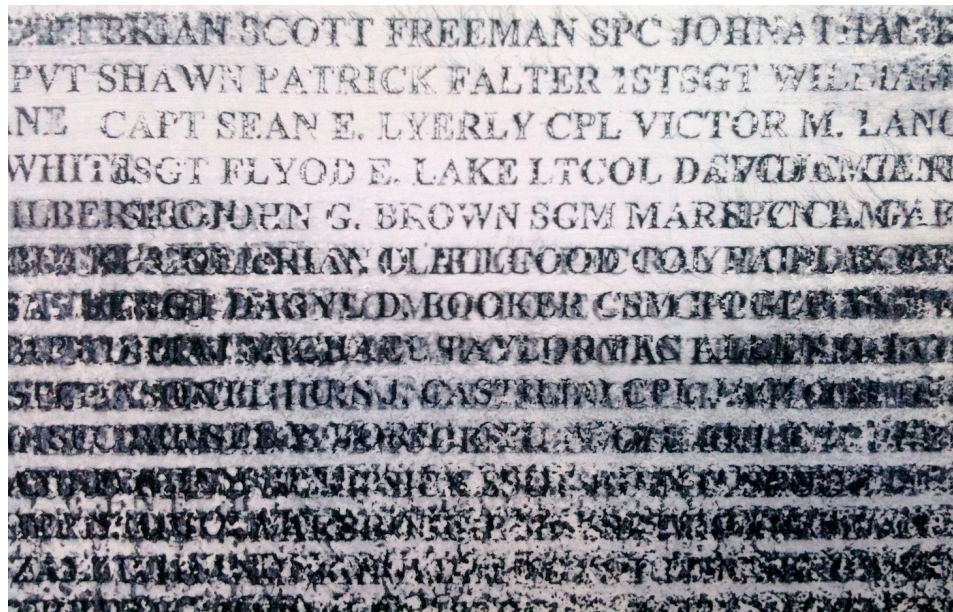


Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15

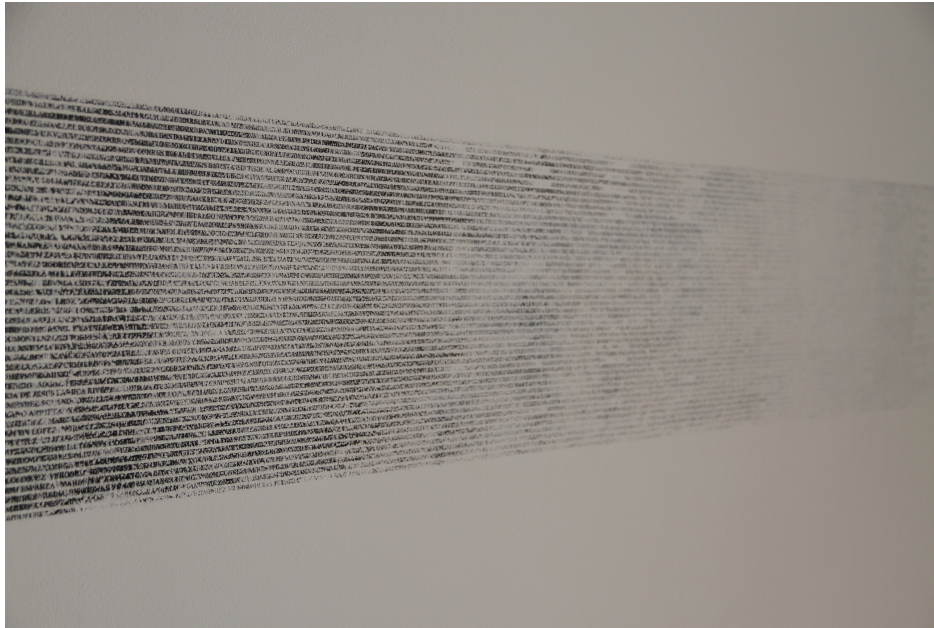


Plate 16

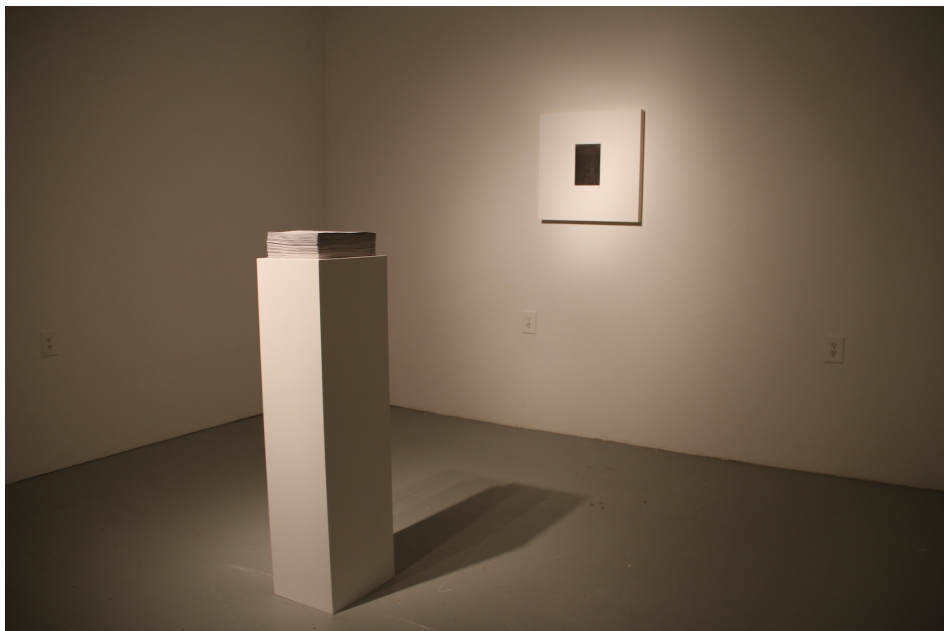


Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20



Plate 21

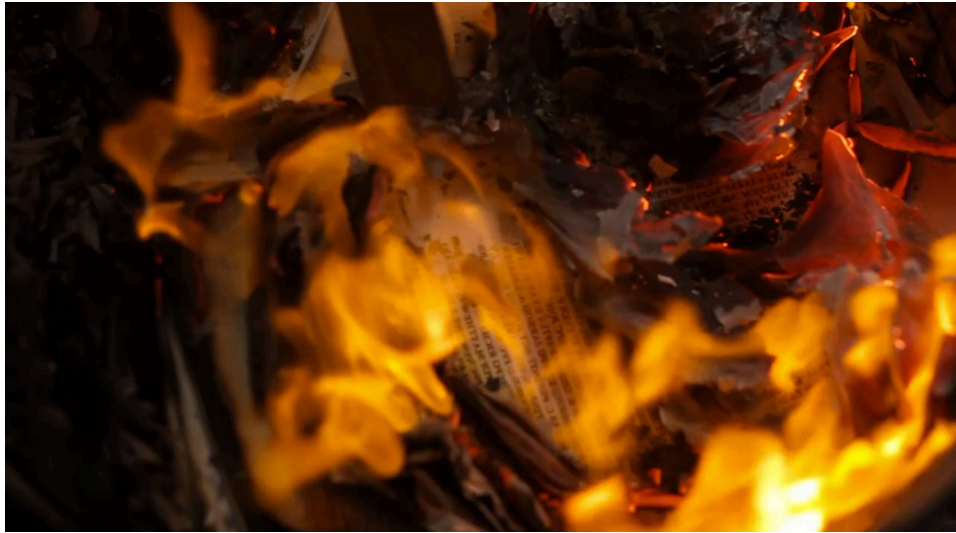


Plate 22

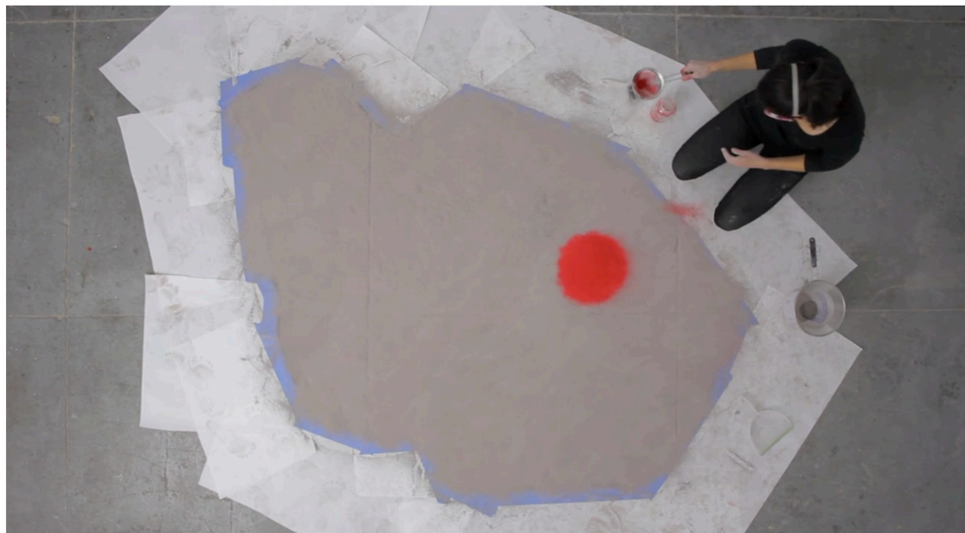


Plate 23



Plate 24



Plate 25



Plate 26



Plate 27



Plate 28



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