

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE TIME MACHINE

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

in Visual Arts

By

Beatriz Cortez

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The thesis of Beatriz Cortez is approved:

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## Dedication

For my family

## Acknowledgements

The work that comprises my thesis project for the Masters Degree in Studio Art is only possible because I survived a war and was able to process what that meant for over two decades in the United States, where I have made my new home. I first settled in Mesa, Arizona, then in Detroit, Michigan, and finally in Los Angeles, California. Surviving is never a *fait accompli*, and it is only possible thanks to an ever-expanding community. Creating the work that I have produced during my time as a graduate student in the Art Department at California State University, Northridge, has been part of my own personal labor of mourning for the loss that war and immigration brought into my life. Conversely, and of equal importance, it has also been a celebration for the life that immigration and the healing power of time have allowed me to have.

The conceptual dimension of my work is informed by my background as a literary and cultural critic, and by my conversations throughout the years with many friends and colleagues, particularly those who share my passion for the exploration of memory in the aftermath of a war. I must thank them, especially Ricardo Roque Baldovinos, Douglas Carranza, Silvia López, Yansi Pérez, Héctor Leyva, and Leonel Delgado Aburto. I also had the support of a community, and of my friends and colleagues in Central American Studies, including Freya Rojo, Celia Simonds, Karina Zelaya, Nancy Pérez, Marvin Villanueva, and many others too numerous to mention, but all important.

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was respectful and friendly. And she was a great role model for me because she was able to keep a very organized career as a professor and a very successful career as an artist with incredible levels of energy and enthusiasm.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	viii
Introduction	1
Background	2
Theoretical Framework	5
Influences	7
The Work	8
<i>American Dream Blues</i>	8
<i>Twenty Years</i>	9
<i>Childhood Bedroom</i>	10
<i>Unknown</i>	12
<i>The Books of Memory and Hideout</i>	12
<i>Echoes and Memories</i>	15
<i>The Books of Memory II</i>	16
<i>The Two Lavas</i>	16
<i>The Time Machine</i>	17
Conclusion	19
Works Cited	20
APPENDIX	21
A. Images	21

## ABSTRACT

### THE TIME MACHINE

By

Beatriz Cortez

Master of Arts in Visual Arts

My work explores the human condition at the intersection of issues such as war and immigration, where race, class, ethnicity, and culture contribute to the complex portrayal of human experience. As human beings we are vulnerable to the violence that we can inflict upon one another. However, individual suffering and mourning is invisible, and in the aftermath of a war, memory is constructed collectively. As this labor of mourning enters public space, it gains new meaning and it becomes part of the universal experience.

I am particularly interested in the inadequacy of words to explore experiences of war and loss. I am convinced that the visual arts convey the human dimension of these experiences. My sculptures and installations are built with organic materials such as soil, grass, or lava; building materials such as wood and metal; and technological components such as sound and video. Through these elements, I construct spaces that speak about loss, immigration, persecution, fear, hiding, and censorship.

As a survivor of war, I understand that context of fear, where people hid their ideas, opinions, and perspectives. My installations generate similar reactions and gestures as viewers



interact with spaces that include false walls behind which they can experience and reflect upon what it means to hide in a confined space, burned books that speak about censorship, grass that occupies the space transforming it into a symbol of life. Ultimately, my work invites the viewer to imagine the masses of the dead as a multitude that demands the recognition of their murder.

## **Introduction**

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As a survivor of war, I understand the context of fear, where people hide their ideas, opinions, and perspectives. My installations generate similar reactions and gestures as viewers interact with spaces that include false walls behind which they can have the experience of what it means to hide in a confined space, burned books that speak about censorship, grass that occupies the space transforming it into a symbol of life. Ultimately, my work invites the viewer to imagine the masses of the dead as a multitude that demands the recognition of their murder.

## **Background**

I was born in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, to a middle class family. My mother worked as the Protocol Secretary to the United States Ambassador and my father was the Director of Marketing and Sales at a company that produced flour and pasta. They had worked hard to get to that place in their careers, but as the youngest of their three children, I missed their financial hardships. I had a privileged education at a Jesuit school known for its high academic standards, where I studied from second grade until I graduated from high school. I excelled at different subjects, art and literature in particular. However, my high school did not have a track to study in the arts or the humanities. There were only two track choices: biology/chemistry or mathematics/physics. I chose the latter and did well in algebra, calculus, physics, and demography. In the afternoons, I went to private classes where I studied English, ballet, piano, guitar, and painting. In this way, I had the opportunity to study with several renowned Salvadoran painters from previous generations, among them Miguel Ángel Orellana, Manuel Elías, Antonio García Ponce, and Mauricio Linares Aguilar.

In my youth, our house was full of art, music, and literature. My two brothers played classical guitar, the eldest was a gifted musician from a young age. He often taught me about music theory and composition. While I was never a talented musician, I was able to read music and play the piano and the guitar. When the time for my *Quinceañera* or 15<sup>th</sup> birthday came, instead of a traditional party, my parents bought me a used upright piano. I loved playing the piano and the guitar in my youth, and I still enjoy playing music. Those experiences taught me about Salvadoran and global composers, music appreciation, and the importance of daily practice.

My father was a singer. He was not a professional, but he was talented and served as the official singer at family gatherings and parties. His repertoire was vast, including everything

from Mexican *Rancheras* and Sinatra, to the European arias sung at the opera by Pavarotti and Plácido Domingo. Everyone in the neighborhood knew about his talents, and they would often come looking for him to sing for them. I also remember that he was able to record some of his songs professionally, and he even made a video and sang on television. In his youth, my father had also been interested in theater and in acting. At the time, there was no television, so at the age of 17, he got a job in a radio-soap opera where he was in charge of creating the sounds that were part of the narration.

My mother was an avid reader. I remember our house, full of books. There were books next to my mother's bed, in the hallway, bedrooms, and dining room. Some of the books were covered with giftwrap. Those were the books that were censored during the war, but somehow, my mother had acquired them and placed them in our bookshelves. My mother often attended art openings and book presentations, so our books were often signed by their authors. My mother's love of art and culture was reflected in our home, where we had an interesting collection of original paintings made by local Salvadoran artists.

There are two events that changed my life completely. The first one was the war. I grew up while El Salvador was engulfed in a violent civil war that lasted twelve years and resulted in a death toll of over 75,000 people. I was nine years old when it began. Growing up during the war meant that many of my memories from childhood are about death, about people being murdered. I saw dead people up close, I heard helicopters and shootings, and these are images that I remember vividly. One particular memory I have is the image of a huge pile of shoes that was left in the middle of a plaza after government forces shot into the crowd that attended Bishop Romero's funeral. He was murdered by a death squad while giving mass on March 24, 1980. I was 9 years old.

The second event was the experience of immigration. It was traumatic having to leave my country and the safety of my home at the age of 18. I was filled with a sense of loss and loneliness that lasted for years. I was forced to leave before completing my second semester of art school in college, and it took me almost four years to establish myself in my new home in the United States and to continue my education. I had studied art in El Salvador and in Arizona, but the impact of the war and the displacement of immigration compelled me to change course and study the recent history of Latin America as a way to understand the war that had so dramatically impacted and changed my life. After I completed my undergraduate degree in History I decided to continue my graduate education in literature in order to study the prolific literary production that emerged in the aftermath of the war. It was in this way that I built a successful career as a cultural critic and as a professor of Central American Studies at California State University, Northridge. Despite this, I never felt completely fulfilled because I had not been able to complete my career as an artist.

Immigration has also given me many gifts, and having access to a formal education in the arts has been one of them. I have been able to study with great artists, and had the opportunity to work on interesting projects at the Arizona State University Art Museum in addition to an independent studio practice. In this way, my artistic production continued. Currently, my teaching job affords me the time and means to produce my work, while my research contributes to the conceptual depth of my artwork. In 2009 I enrolled in the Master of Arts program at California State University, Northridge. This has allowed me to dedicate time to my artistic investigation of the issues that have concerned my critical and artistic practice throughout the years: memory, war, immigration, and the human condition through these experiences.

## Theoretical Framework

The Truth Commission for El Salvador, established by the United Nations to investigate human rights abuses during the 1980-1992 war in this country, issued in 1993 its report titled *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador*. While the report addressed the need to purge the national armed forces of human rights violators, the report's main objective was to declare the inauguration of the peace period and to establish a process for national reconciliation. Because the commission had a limited number of months to examine thousands of cases, it was only able to document 32 illustrative cases. More than 80% of human rights violations were attributed to the government forces and to the death squads.

In spite of its good intentions, the Commission promoted the idea that the victims and those responsible for the crimes were joined in a similar experience of war: "The victims were Salvadorians and foreigners of all backgrounds and all social and economic classes, for in its blind cruelty violence leaves everyone equally defenseless" (3). As a result, this crucial document for the construction of the peace process in El Salvador is also a document that makes racism and classism invisible, and that erases the responsibilities of the perpetrators. Even worse, it is a report without the historic context that might have allowed readers to understand the causes for this war, and to establish a distinction between those responsible for the atrocities and their victims.

The revolution in El Salvador was the result of a series of factors, particularly the unequal distribution of the country's resources, the unfair working conditions, and the repression that the civilian population was forced to endure. The political persecution and violence in the 1980s generated massive immigration waves (Baker-Cristales 41-43). The majority of Salvadorans who migrated to Mexico, the United States, and other countries around the world came from the

working and middle classes. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services report indicates that Salvadoran migration to the United States increased exponentially during the 1980s and 1990s (quoted by Baker-Cristales, 41). Settling in their new context in the United States has not been an easy process for Salvadorans, particularly because they have had to deal with a new cultural context, a new language, new concepts of what modernity, productivity, work, and culture mean. In addition, their settlement in the United States has been complicated by their status as a community that is formed, by the most part, of undocumented immigrants. As U.S. anthropologist Beth Baker-Cristales explains, nowadays, Salvadorans “constitute the second largest group of undocumented immigrants in the United States, following Mexicans” (43). After the war, Salvadoran migration to the United States has continued due to political insecurity and in the search for a better life.

Meanwhile, building peace on a clean slate has been the institutional agenda in El Salvador. However, for the victims, both those who stayed and those who left, there is no such clean slate, and time has slowly allowed for the reflection and collective mourning for what took place years earlier. I see my work as part of that process of constructive memory through diverse means, in this case, through the visual arts.

## Influences

There are several intellectuals that inform my work. As I explore the concept of war, I often refer to philosophical, political, and historical works. Among these, Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* gives an account of the ways in which the recent post 9/11 wars have generated a sense of vulnerability for people in our society, and how we operate based on fear. Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* presents an account of the way in which concentration camps during World War II produced evidence that the human condition was not to be taken for granted, that humanity can be lost to human beings. Agamben's *Means without Ends* reflects upon the role of the refugee and/or immigrant in our understanding of the human condition. Antonio Negri's concept of the multitude as an organic mass that cannot be defined and hence cannot be stopped by the modern state informs my work as well, particularly as I imagine the masses of the dead as a multitude that demands the recognition of their murder.

Furthermore, my work inserts itself as part of the discourse of contemporary art in Central America and globally. Among the artists whose work impacts my work are Mayra Barraza and her exploration of humanity in a society plagued by violence; Walterio Iraheta and his critical view of the national landscape, of human absence, of immigration; Regina José Galindo and her exploration of violence, particularly on her own body; Alejandro Santiago's monumental piece on immigration titled *2,501 Migrants* which invites me to reflect upon the ways in which immigration can be represented visually; and Doris Salcedo's work on memory and the absence of people who are no longer present, among others.



## The Work

My work has undergone a slow process of transformation from painting to sculptures and smaller objects, to the construction of installations where memories could be experienced or observed from afar, to the construction of full-fledged installations and spaces that lead the viewer to recreate memories with their mind and body, as well as to have brand new experiences. As I construct these spaces I consider the role of the viewer in my work and envision the viewer's interactions with the space. I construct spaces that might invite the viewer to replicate a gesture that was common among the civilian victims of the war, such as hiding in fear while peeking through a hole to see who is on the other side. I am interested in generating an interaction between the viewer and the space that might construct a metaphor for the impossibility of reconstructing memory completely, or a movement that might physically recreate a memory from childhood. In addition, I am interested in the ways in which a viewer might be implicated with the work, even if metaphorically. For instance, I might construct a space that forces the viewer to make a choice between doing something familiar, such as playing, as opposed to doing the work of dealing with memory in the context of the aftermath of a war. These interactions play an important role in the construction of meaning.

### *American Dream Blues*

I began exploring issues of war and immigration through a series of paintings titled *American Dream Blues*. Each of the paintings in the series is a 20" x 24" oil pastel portrait of a Physical Plant Management (PPM) worker at California State University, Northridge, who is also a Central American immigrant. While these workers are largely invisible as they move around the university campus wearing their blue shirts as a uniform, the portraits seek to provide

visibility to each of them. Their individual characteristics, personalities, and even their way of wearing the blue shirt give each of the workers an individual identity and invite the viewer to contemplate their humanity beyond the blue shirt. One of the significant aspects of this series of portraits is that they elicit different reactions from the viewers depending on their own status in society and their own experiences with immigration, labor, class, and education. For some, this is an undesirable service job. For others, this stable job with benefits represents the fulfillment of the American Dream. In addition, the series makes a commentary on portrait paintings as a form of artistic production that historically has been linked to commissions ordered by wealthy patrons. In contrast, in this case it is the artist who has selected the models. Ironically, these models behave as wealthy patrons, often demanding to see the progress of the pieces, sharing with the artist their judgment of the work, and criticizing and/or celebrating the final work. As a result, these working class subjects are able to problematize the production of artistic portraits in a process that gives visibility to issues of class, race, immigration, labor, and the intersection of each of these with the realm of fine arts.

### *Twenty Years*

I began exploring the experience of war through an installation titled *Twenty Years*, during the Fall 2011 semester. This series deals with the construction of historic memory in the aftermath of a war. While the violence of war leaves evidence that we are vulnerable to the violence that we can inflict on one another, the aftermath of war results in an emergent community where memory is constructed collectively. Individual suffering and mourning is invisible. Collective memory allows for the possibility of this labor of mourning in public space. This series includes sculptures, sound and video installations, and a series of photographs that

speaking about loss, immigration, and the construction of historic memory twenty years after the end of a 12-year war in El Salvador.

I was able to exhibit this series of works at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) in Los Angeles. My sculpture *La multitud / The Multitude*, is a grass sphere with an interior sound installation made from a steel wire frame, St. Augustine grass, and a sound installation where the names of the victims of the Massacre of El Mozote in 1981 in El Salvador are read in whispers. The names begin to compound as they multiply, transforming from a singular, whispered name, to a distressing cacophony of the multitudinous dead. It included a sculpture titled *XX* (see fig. 1), which is the name that was assigned to unidentified remains during the war in El Salvador, particularly those thrown in mass graves. It is a sculpture made with unidentified bones cut with power tools at strange angles inside an acrylic display case. This series also included a sculpture titled *The Tree of Memory* (see fig. 2) made with the dead trunk of an orange tree placed upside-down in order to display a segment of the reconstructed root ball with a growing plant of moss.

### *Childhood Bedroom*

At the start of 2012 I began working on a video installation titled *Childhood Bedroom* (see figs. 3 and 4), which was accompanied by a series of photographs titled *Pasaje Los Ángeles, #148*. This piece emerged from my need to see an image of my childhood home, a place that no longer exists as I remember it, a place that I abandoned in haste, without a photograph or a memento to remember it by. For this piece, I recreated my childhood bedroom from memory, building a small model of my childhood bedroom with all its details: the indented bookshelves, the large window with its horizontal glass segments, the tiled floor, the dark cherry doors and

door frames, the closet with its cabinets and hanging rods. The model was made with foam board, wood, cloth, glue, paper, gesso, and digital photographs that recreated my childhood posters placed on the wall. I replicated my bedroom from memory as accurately as possible with the exception of two details: a poster of Bishop Óscar Romero and a birdcage. I did not have the images of Bishop Óscar Romero that I placed on the wall, because during the war these images were censored. In March of 1980, Bishop Romero was killed by a death squad, and having his image on display would have been a way to make oneself a target. But now, in the present, I can amend the past and place his image in my room. The second item, a birdcage, was added because I can no longer remember a time when a small bird with a similar dwelling was not my daily companion, as it is the case now. This piece was important for me because it gave me the opportunity to obtain some closure. I photographed and made video of the reconstructed room daily. This not only allowed me to see once again in life size, the bedroom where I spent so many hours creating my early works, playing the piano, reading, etc., but also the closet where my family and I hid during the final offensive of the war in El Salvador, when the bullets were able to penetrate the roof and ceiling in the rest of the house, but not the concrete ceiling of this closet. It was the last place where I spent time in that house, prior to leaving under very difficult circumstances.

In order to make the video and speak about the ways in which memory had reconstructed the space, I filled the model with soil and plants and filmed it on a daily basis for a period of three months. By the end of three months, the plants had occupied the space completely and transformed the pristine place of my memories into a lush garden of similar beauty resembling the tropics. After this cycle of growth, I abandoned the garden but continued to film its destruction. The video installation, which was designed to be projected life-size onto the gallery

wall, recreated this space as a virtual place as the grass grew and the plants and insects occupied the space with new life, which withers and dies before starting the loop again.

### *Unknown*

During the Spring of 2012, I built a sculpture with living elements, primarily, grass (see fig. 5). I constructed the body of a woman with chicken wire filled with soil, covered with cornstarch paste, and planted with wheat grass seeds. The figure had a slit throat and her hands were tied behind her back. To this day the piece continues to exist in the garden where I placed it behind the sculpture studios at California State University, Northridge. For me it was important to document the process of transformation as the grass sprouted, turning the piece into a lush garden, and also throughout the seasons, as the grass grows and dies following the patterns of natural water availability. When I was the one watering it on a daily basis, that is, during the first three months of its existence, it was also important for me to carry out a ritual that allowed me to honor the dead, the unknown dead bodies that are thrown away during moments of war but also that are left behind during the process of undocumented immigration, and also through the disappearance of numerous women in places such as El Salvador, Guatemala or the Mexican town of Juarez. Documenting this process through photographs of daily watering allowed me to construct a symbolic tomb for the unknown dead, to honor the dead, to recover their humanity in spite of not knowing their names.

### *The Books of Memory and Hideout*

My two-part installation titled *The Books of Memory and Hideout*, explored the experiences of censorship, persecution, and hiding. The first one put forth the idea that a library

is a reconstruction of a person's interests, readings, travels, passions, needs, and as such, it can function as a portrait of the person who built that collection. This particular library is mounted on shelves that I made as reminders of the color and materials of the shelves in my childhood home (see figs. 10 and 11). Within them are the books that I have collected since my sudden departure from my childhood home. Absent from these shelves are the books that I collected during the first eighteen years of my life because I was forced to leave most of my possessions behind when I left El Salvador. While my collection includes remnants of my old life, it also includes evidence of my new life with its transnational connections and diverse interests. More importantly, the installation explored the role that books played during the war and continue to play now in the construction of memory. During my childhood and youth, in the middle of the civil war in El Salvador, having certain books of poetry, literature or testimonial narratives, works of art, music recordings, or photographs, could represent a death sentence. I grew up in that context of fear, where people often hid their ideas, opinions, and perspectives. I seek to explore the way in which this fear can be reflected through this installation of my own book collection. The installation included burned books, buried books, books covered with giftwrap as a form of camouflage, books turned into gardens, and books that served as a hiding place for documents, messages, and money.

One of the important pieces included in this installation was a sculpture titled *Clandestine Garden* (see fig. 12), which was a small book that contained documents and messages that was turned into a garden. In order to do so, I inserted cornstarch paste and soil inside some of the seams and planted seeds inside, and I watered the sculpture daily. The grass grew until it surpassed the size of the book and when the book was no longer able to sustain the garden, it began to decay. This sculpture was a metaphor of the ways in which many people during the war

in El Salvador, fearing for their lives, decided to bury their books, especially those that had been censored by the government. These books, many of which continue to exist under ground, have turned into metaphoric gardens.

Another important sculpture that was part of this exhibit was *Mangled Book* (see fig. 15). In order to create this book I made a silicon mold where I made a sculpture of a book made with cornstarch paste that held inside the ashes of a burned book. I then removed it from the mold and I allowed the cornstarch paste to decay over a period of a month. Once it decayed and hardened, the book took on the shape of a mangled book: a burned, contorted, destroyed remnant of what it once was.

Nonetheless, the most important sculpture in that installation was *Burned* (see fig. 13), a large book on Cuba that I burned. For me, it was important to speak about the symbolic destruction of books through burning. This destruction was not carried out by the authorities during the war in El Salvador, rather, it was carried out by the book owners themselves as an effort to survive in case of a sudden search performed in one's home by the state's army. However, I did not want the burned books to turn into ashes, I wanted these books to expand and burn but to also be preserved at a moment just prior to their destruction. As a result, I carried out several experiments with old phonebooks that allowed me to find a process through which my books could be placed in a ceramics kiln and burned, but would not be turned into ashes. An important detail in the process was to limit the amount of oxygen in the kiln. To achieve this I built a small brick fortress around my books, which protected them while providing enough space to expand and contort as they were fired at temperatures close to 900 degrees Fahrenheit. The result represents destruction and beauty simultaneously.

The second part of this installation was titled *Hideout*. It investigated space and the idea of hiding and what that meant for the human condition, especially throughout the experiences of war and immigration (see figs. 6-9). It was constructed inside a room where I built a false wall behind which people visiting my installation could have a remote experience of what it means to hide in a confined space. During the opening for this show I had the opportunity to bring several groups of people and to ask them to enter this space together in order to reflect about the experience of being overcrowded in a small space where one could look outside but remain hidden from those outside the space. Even though this experience could not recreate the fear that we often felt when trying to hide from harm, it did recreate the experience of hiding in an uncomfortable, crowded place.

### *Echoes and Memories*

*Echoes and Memories* opened on December 16, 2012 at the *Museo Municipal Tecleño* in El Salvador. This piece examined the experiences of loss and the reconstruction of memory through my exploration of immigration, censorship, hiding, disappearance, and murder. The exhibition included *Childhood Bedroom*, a video installation that reconstructed from memory my childhood home. It also included *The Multitude*, as a sound installation that filled the largest room. It included a video of burning books titled *Burned*, and *The Door*, which was a wooden door filled with cracks that allowed the viewer to see portions of the video from afar through the cracks. The central piece of this installation was *The Lava* (see fig. 19). It was built with lava from the *Quetzaltepec* Volcano that overlooks the city of San Salvador. The installation was built in an important space for memory in my country because during the time of the war the building that houses this museum was a penitentiary for political prisoners and the room where this



installation was placed had once been the prison's isolation chamber. This installation extracted meaning from lava as a symbol of the place where the bodies of the disappeared were abandoned after their torture and murder during my childhood.

### *The Books of Memory II*

*The Books of Memory II* was built as a white cube that concentrated several of the pieces that had been part of my previous installation *The Books of Memory*. Within this cube, I constructed a space of loss and memory that the viewer could look into, experiencing the contrast of the institutional light of the gallery space and the warm light of the interior space that poured over burned books, grass, and a library that served as a hiding space for censored books, documents, and memories. The piece included a fragment of my own library in order to construct the metaphor that a library was also a place where documents and censored books could be hidden away. The bookshelf filled with books and the door with cracks that closed the space on the opposite side both served as visual obstacles for what was contained inside the cube: a table with several burned books. In order to see them one had to look through the spaces left by the books or the cracks on the door. The books were there but were no longer intact and were no longer reachable.

### *The Two Lavas*

*The Two Lavas*, built upon the experience of my previous lava installation in an effort to make visible the enormous symbolic and real distance that separates the lower and upper class experience of the war in El Salvador. The *Quetzaltepec* Volcano overlooks the city of San Salvador. Its last eruption took place in 1917 when it produced a gush of lava that covered an

approximate area of 6 square miles. These desolate lava fields formed the sublime landscape of *El playón*, the place where the tortured and mangled bodies of the disappeared were abandoned by the government forces and the death squads. However, on the other side of the highway, these fields form the landscape that surrounds the international car-racing track, built by one of the founders of the right-wing political party. Several of the founding members of this political party were linked to the formation of the death squads in El Salvador by the United Nations truth report on the twelve-year war in El Salvador.

*The Two Lavas* (see figs. 20-23) was an installation that covered the gallery floor with black lava rock on the left side and that had a toy car racetrack on the right side. The piece was surrounded by a sound installation that oscillated between one experience and the next: the sound of buzzards and flies or the sound of racing cars, the two contrasting experiences that Salvadorans identify with this sharp and beautiful, unique material, remnant of a violent explosion of the volcano that overlooks the city of San Salvador.

### *The Time Machine*

My thesis installation is called *The Time Machine* (see figs. 24 and 25). This installation speaks of the dual realities of an immigrant who lives in Los Angeles but thinks of her city of origin all the time. The outside wall of the room displayed a projection of the City of Los Angeles viewed from the Griffith Observatory. The inner space of *The Time Machine*, on the contrary, was dark, and spoke of magic, childhood, and nostalgic memories. It reproduced a rudimentary version of a video of San Salvador at night, generated by drilling holes on the wooden wall, and making it possible for the light produced by the video of Los Angeles to create the sparkle of San Salvador at night, thus merging the two cities. The most important aspects of

this piece are the experiences that it might make possible for the spectator: the blinking lights swaying at the rhythm of a swing from which the spectator was able to remember his or her own childhood, the playfulness of suspended reflection, the magic of the momentary visit to that place that we all remember but that none of us can visit completely, our childhood.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the journey through which I completed my graduate studies at California State University, Northridge has been one of transformation for my work. I have been able to continue my exploration of memory, loss, immigration, and war, taking into consideration the content conveyed by the material, the process, and the interaction of the spectator with the space. Thus, I have been able to build installations that include sculpture, painting, video, sound, technology, and found objects, and that seek to extract meaning from the experience they create.

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## APPENDICES

### A. Images



Fig. 1. XX, Unidentified bones, acrylic display case, 20" x 12" x 12"



Fig. 2. *The Tree of Memory*, Orange tree trunk, glue, moss, 38" x 12" x 6"



Figs. 3 and 4. *Childhood Bedroom*, Foam board, wood, cloth, glue, paper, gesso, soil, grass seeds, and digital video. 2:47 min.





Fig. 5. *Unknown*, Wire, soil, cornstarch paste, grass seeds, 72" x 24" x 12"







Figs. 6-9. *Hideout*, multimedia installation, 12' x 10' x 10'



Figs. 10 and 11. *The Books of Memory*, multimedia installation, 12' x 36' x 8'



Fig. 12. *Clandestine Garden*, Book, soil, cornstarch paste, grass seeds, 8.5" x 6.25" x 4.5"



Fig. 13. *Burned*, burned book, 8.5" x 14" x 17"



Fig. 14. *Burned II*, burned book, 6.5" x 8.5" x 6"





Fig. 15. *Mangled book*, burned book, cornstarch paste, 6.5" x 8.5" x 2"



Fig. 16. *The Door*, wood, 106" x 54"

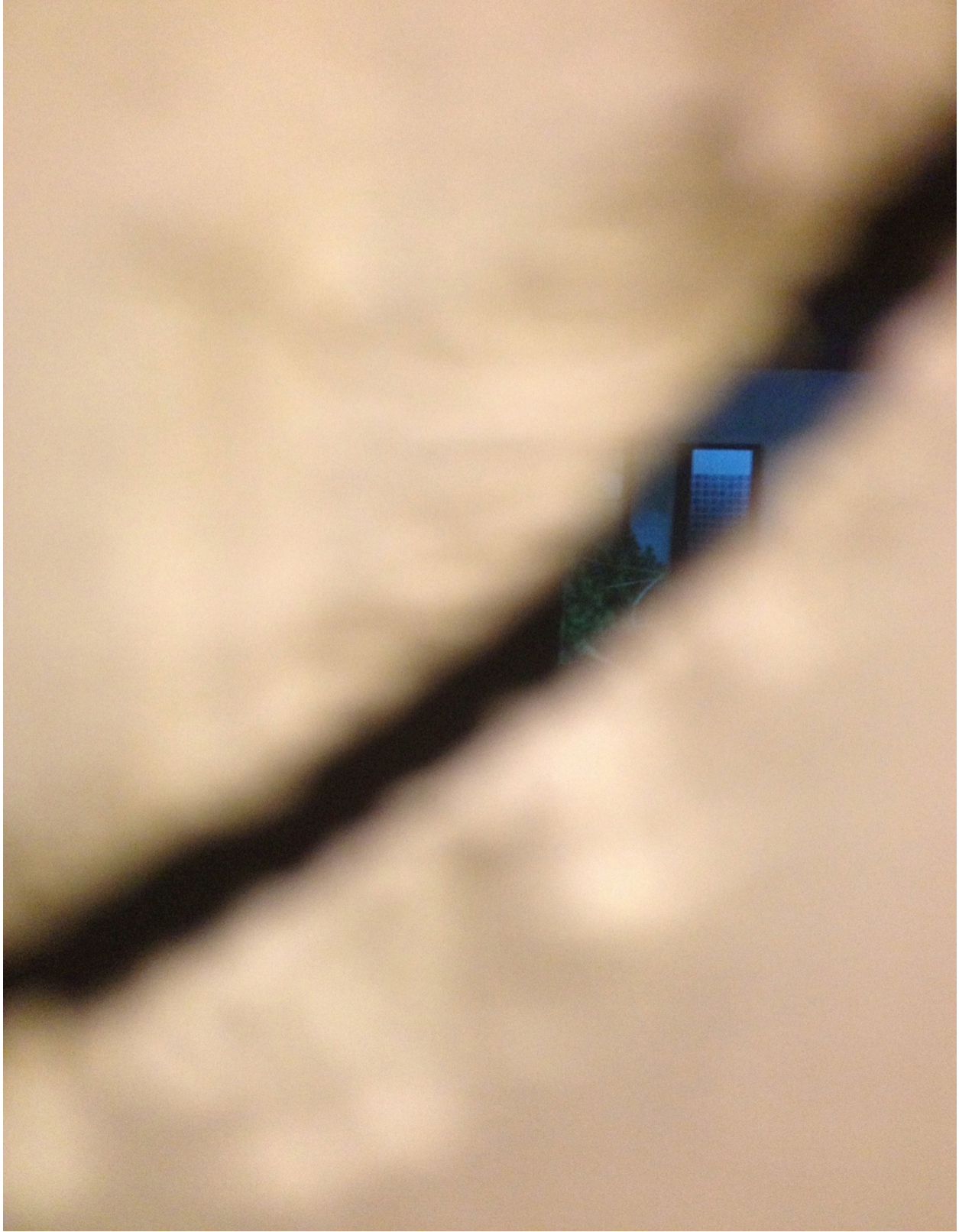


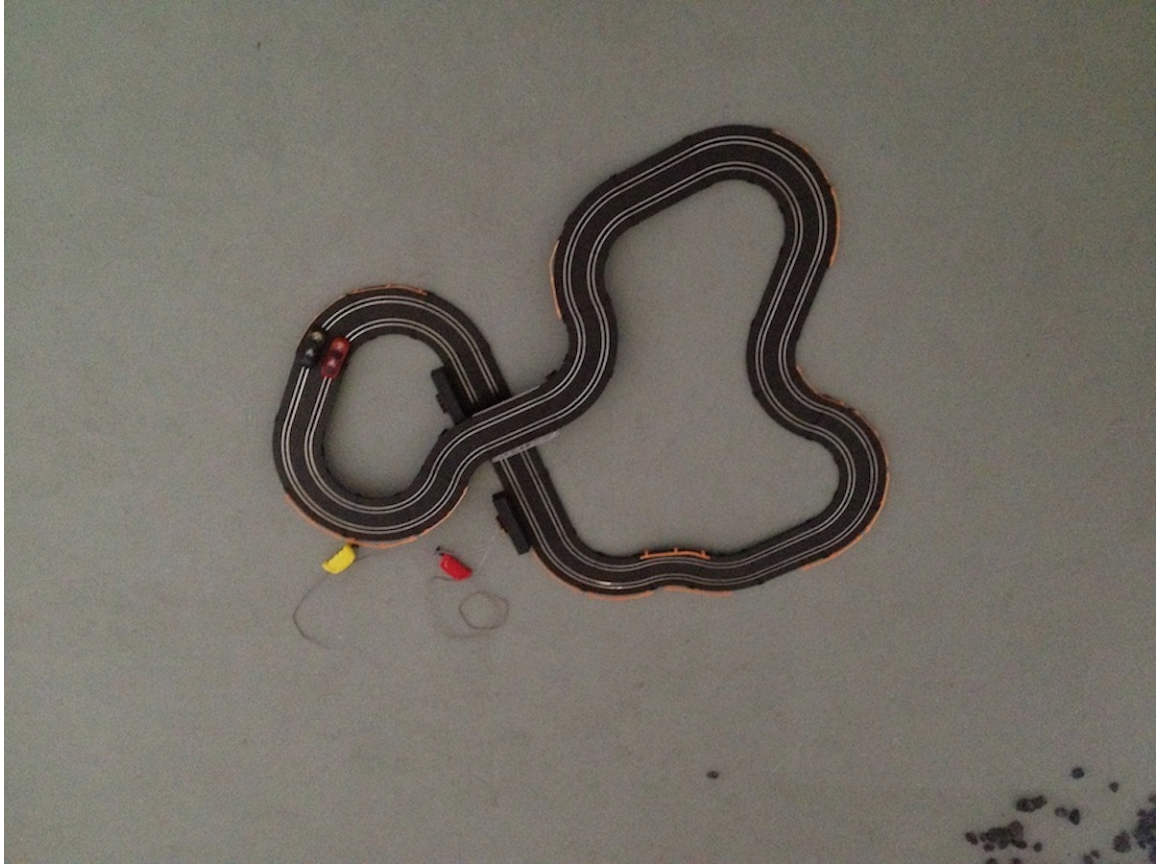
Fig. 17. *The Door* (detail), wood, 106'' x 54''



Fig. 18. *The Door* (inside view), wood, 106" x 54"



Fig. 19. *The Lava*, lava rock and sound installation, 3.17' x 6.51' x 10'











Figs. 20-23. *The Two Lavas*. Multimedia Installation, 12' x 36' x 8'.



Fig. 24. *The Time Machine*. Multimedia Installation. 8' x 6' x 8'.



Fig. 25. *The Time Machine* (inside view). Multimedia Installation. 8' x 6' x 8'.