

# mujer artista speaking in tongues

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## MUJER ARTISTA: A STARTING POINT

by Cecilia Araneda and Praba Pilar

In late 2014, we, Cecilia Araneda (filmmaker, curator) and Praba Pilar (interdisciplinary artist), informally met with Monica Martinez (visual artist) to talk about our experiences as Latin women artists working in a context of larger pan-national arts institutions that view us as 'others.' Though we all knew of each other, we did not know each other personally.

Though from vastly different regions in Latin America, with Cecilia and Monica from Chile, and Praba from Colombia, we found common ground. We were comfortable despite our differences in age, artistic discipline, family histories, country of origin – much could be left unsaid, as it was already understood. In this first dialogue we set an intention for *Mujer Artista* to collectively generate paths forward from a foundational understanding of where we have come from. Over time, Araneda and Pilar emerged as the minders of the process.

Araneda initiated this process without a preconceived endpoint, which mirrors her highly process-based and experimental approach to filmmaking, a methodology often at odds with some of the accepted working processes of the discipline. On a parallel trajectory, she has been developing a curatorial practice that is interventionist in that she seeks, through dialogue, networks and resources, to provide artists who work outside established arts institutions possible entries. Coming from a cultural history of resistance to inequity, it is in Araneda's nature to challenge the status quo to make room for the overlooked.

For over two decades Pilar's hybrid interdisciplinary practice has connected technology, ideology and performance to challenge prevalent notions that technology innately provides benefits to humanity. Her overarching project is to disrupt passivity, develop agency and fight the destructive techno-logic that is most revealed by our current climatic chaos. Her experience of migration, transience and exclusion, and her history of emergence from centuries of violence in Colombia, has focused her artistic and educational practice on community and resistance.

*Mujer Artista* has been shaped as a challenge to established norms of art institutions, through collective dialogue and approaches, and as much auto-curation as possible. Over time, the initial group of three expanded to involve more artists, including dancers Alexandra Garrido, Camila Schujman and Ilse Torres; visual artists Carolina Araneda and Francesca Carella; and multidisciplinary artist Mariana Muñoz. We also made important connections with other local Latin women artists who did not formally enter the collective, but provided us with a heightened awareness that the community of Latin women art practitioners exists much more deeply in this city than we were initially led to believe.

*Mujer Artista* begins from where we come: We are Latin women traversing a canon populated by men. We work without privilege. We carry the weight of our cultural histories, which are often brutal and tragic, and burdened by paradoxes. We are visibly different, identified as the 'other.' We are never quite made to feel at home.

nuestro trabajo es sumamente personal y es el product de penas complejas

*our work is extremely personal and is the product of complex toil*

mujerartista.ca

## SPEAKING IN TONGUES

by Cecilia Araneda and Praba Pilar

The waves of settlement that came to different territories starting in the late 1400s forever changed Abya Yala. While many came to conquer, others were fleeing oppressive experiences that they paradoxically then inflicted on the peoples of this land. These waves of settlers include the poor, the persecuted, the exiled, the refugees, the displaced, those seeking to preserve their language, and those seeking freedom of religion.

Across Abya Yala colonial powers have tried to control, eliminate or destroy Indigenous peoples, cultures and languages. In the countries we are from, all former Spanish colonies, the Spanish crown legislated the elimination of Indigenous languages and imposed the Spanish language. In 1669 King Charles II issued a decree banning the use of any language other than Spanish throughout the Spanish Empire. By 1770, King Charles III issued a further decree, the "Real Cédula de Carlos III" which called for the outright elimination of all Indigenous languages.

We speak in tongues as we reflect on the contradictions and uneasy mixings which present an underlying quality that finds no easy comfort, as voice, language and literacy are powerful, they transfer knowledge, cultural practices and history. Across cultures, religions and time periods, authority has sought control of language as a foundational tactic for the domination of targeted people.

It is this backdrop, acknowledging both the power of language and the danger in speaking a language not understood, that Mujer Artista used as a driving focus for the process-based exhibition *Speaking in Tongues*. The uneasy relationship between English and Spanish that rests within the collective – not all the artists speak or easily understand Spanish, while for others it is their primary language – made us consider broader notions of language, culture, memory and personal identity. Ultimately we staked an iteration that is neither permanent nor transient, but in the liminal space in between.

**Carolina Araneda** is a self-taught visual artist who works principally in photography. *first the ink runs, then the blood runs..* (newsprint textile, 2017) reflects on the impact of language structuring thought and shaping culture. Born in Chile and having arrived in Canada with her family as refugees when she was nine years old, Araneda reflects on language as connected to discrete moments in her personal history and what has been lost in the process of migration from Spanish to English.

**Cecilia Araneda** is a filmmaker who works predominantly in celluloid-based experimental forms. *The Space Shuttle Challenger* (experimental documentary, 9:32 mins, 2017) is a departure from her analogue practice in using solely found footage. Through direct narration that alludes to the writing of a diary entry – cataloguing dates and events, and speaking secrets – Araneda reflects on the personal impact of large events in world history and the small moments of hope that survive. (*The Space Shuttle Challenger* should be viewed from start to finish. It starts every quarter hour)

**Francesca Carella Arfinengo** is a visual artist who works predominantly in print media and textiles. Francesca Carella Arfinengo is a visual artist who works predominantly in print media and textiles. *Placeholder* (wool and cotton woven panel, 2016) considers the act of weaving as a construction analogous to building language. In this context, the materials themselves become words: sheep's wool from Quebec and Peru, cotton dyed with Manitoba Oak bark and mud. This piece explores coexisting multiple identities, strategies of survival and complex relationships with the land that immigrants develop in their host country.

**Alexandra Garrido** is a performer and contemporary artist with an intense interest in relationships, communication and the unique abilities of the human form to express complex experiences. Working with sound artist Joel Mierau, Garrido's *untitled* installation performance (ladder, blue sand, tarp, table/chair and tea set, 2017) reflects on the human relationship to water as determined by location, history, culture and status. The physical demands of moving water, as represented by blue sand, suggests the efforts that go into collecting the resource and our corporal relationship with it.

**Monica Martinez** is a process-based object maker working predominantly in experimental ceramic and photography practices. *janus* (paper, vinyl, found objects and clay, 2017) is a continuation of her works of raw clay interventions/performances that began as way to connect her to the places that surround her by reacting to stationary sites in the spaces she moves through. It speaks to the confusion that comes from trying to reconcile memory, reality, truth and propaganda through the eyes of a person who lives in exile. It considers connection and dislocation within transition and time.

**Mariana Muñoz** is a multidisciplinary artist whose work focuses on social and ethical issues related to marginalization in the West. *Tourist* (poetry, 2016) is a reflection of the artist's experience as an immigrant, exploring notions of home, personal history and identity. Code-switching between English and Spanish is used within the piece, marking a geopsychological rift between then and now.

**Praba Pilar** is an interdisciplinary artist working predominantly in performance art, media art and technology. *Movidas of the Zero Point* (video installation, 2017) reflects on Colombian writer Santiago Castro-Gómez's concept of the 'hubris of the zero point' from his 2005 book *La Hybris del Punto Cero*. This piece considers continent-wide Indigenous resistance to ecocide, and in particular the protection of water, as a common objective that transcends differences of language.

Both alumnae of Winnipeg's School of Contemporary Dancers, **Ilse Torres** (choreographer) and **Camila Schujman** (dancer) and are classically trained dancers. *Cambios, Camila y su Escalera* is a dance work that embodies a vision of identity, different viewpoints, change, the process of assimilation and the learning of life experiences during a period of adjustment from one place to another.



## Mujer Artista Speaking in Tongues

Carolina Araneda  
Cecilia Araneda  
Francesca Carella  
Alexandra Garrido  
Monica Martinez  
Mariana Muñoz  
Praba Pilar  
Camila Schujman  
Ilse Torres

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