An Articulation of Becoming: Transformation and agency through studio inquiry

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis employs a research-creation methodology to examine the relationship between an artist and their body as experienced through the multifaceted role of identity. It responds to the role of agency in artmaking through the practice of performative photography while developing a series of works featuring dynamic images of the body in motion. The study examines the history of movement in photography, interpreting aesthetic outcomes and contemplation of performing for the camera. With a feminist/ethnic (Other) lens, the art practices of four performance artists from Cuba, Chile, and Colombia are explored, and their artistic approaches are observed through themes of exile, the political body, the collective body, and ritual. The research is carried out while considering how this author's work is impacted by her identity and lived experience. The studio inquiry discusses the exhibition titled *Impulse: A Photographic Exhibition on The Articulation of Becoming,* where this work was presented. As a research-creation, it employs performative photography to analyze the transformative ability of art that connects the self to the collective narratives. Themes of identity and selfhood, as well as notions of the body in art, can be valuable creative access points in the domain of art education, demonstrating that art as pedagogy can bridge knowledge across disciplines, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of our socio-cultural contexts.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures ..... *vii*

Introduction *1*

Chapter I *4*

Positioning **4**

Chapter II: Literature Review *7*

Historical Underpinning **7**

Movement in Photography 7

Futurism and Anton Giulio Bragaglia (1890–1960) 7

Eadweard Muybridge 10

Étienne-Jules Marey 10

Performing and Photography 11

Resonance: From one artist to another **16**

Ana Mendieta (1948–1985) 17

Lotty Rosenfeld (1943–2020) 19

Janet Toro (1963–) 22

María Teresa Hincapié (1954–2008) 25

Theoretical Framework **29**

Feminism, Art and the (Ethnic) Other 29

Chapter II: Methodology *35*

Research-Creation **35**

Research-for-creation 37

Research-from-creation 37

Creation-as-research 38

Procedures 39

Data Collection and Analysis 41

Chapter III: Walk with me: A Descriptive Encounter 45

Artistic Concept and Interpretation 55

Chapter IV: Multiple Understandings 67

Discussion of Findings 67

Conclusion 71

Educational Significance 73

References 75

List of Figures

Figure 1 *White Shirt series* 1

F**igure 2** *Entrance view of exhibition* 45

Figure 3 *Detail of Cabello No. 1* 46

Figure 4 *Detail of White Shirts: Suspended* 47

Figure 5 *View of left wall of exhibition* 48

Figure 6 *View of left wall and detail of White Shirt No.2* 49

Figure 7 *View of back wall and detail of White Shirt No.3* 50

Figure 8 *Detail of Gestured Rhapsody No.1* 51

Figure 9 *Detail of Gestured Rhapsody No.2* 52

Figure 10 *Detail of Susurro de pelo No.1* 53

Figure 11 *View of right wall and detail of Susurro de pelo No.2* 54

Figure 12 *Cabello No.1* 56

Figure 13 *Susurro de pelo No. 1* 58

Figure 14 *White Shirt No. 1* 60

Figure 15 *White Shirt No. 2* 61

Figure 16 *White Shirt No. 3* 62

Figure 17 *White Shirts, Suspended* 63

Figure 18 *Gestured Rhapsody No.1* 64

Figure 1

White Shirt series

Note. [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares (2023).

Introduction

The inspiration for this thesis emerged from an existing interest in the subject of the body in art. This endeavour is the centre of my interdisciplinary art practice whereby I examine human expression and experience. The historical underpinnings provided the necessary foundation upon which to build my own interpretations. I was inspired to create a photographic body of work where I experimented with movement employing my own body and explored diverse rendering techniques with digital photography. Daily ritual experiences became a focus, while observing routine gestures, such as buttoning a shirt, became a concept for the work.

With the studio practice of performative photography, I aimed to bring forth a convergence of movement as an aesthetic and metaphorical device, the topic of (under)representation experienced by women artists in art history, and narrative as a form of evocative expression, all viewed through the lens of the feminist/ethnic (Other). This study is informed by my lived experience as a Chilean-born woman living in Canada while embracing the fact that my identity swings back and forth within the ethno-cultural hybridity of that experience.

Employing research-creation methodology, I sought connections between my creative work and that of other artists. Under the heading of Resonance: From one artist to another, I have described and analyzed the work of the Colombian María Teresa Hincapié, the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta and two Chilean artists—Lotty Rosenfeld and Janet Toro. Research-creation facilitated the process of making and research that focused on responding to central themes surrounding the role of agency, the body and identity; transformation through art processes; and with new knowledge, negotiation of ways to enhance the lived experience and influence change in the broader social context.

The in-depth examination of these women artists' works introduced valuable insights as I situated them and their work within their ethnocultural and historical contexts. Navigating through the common threads and uncovering the key differences between their experiences and my own, I found a path that restored a sense of belonging. From there, I was motivated and inspired to explore further feminist histories (in art) that differed from those I had exposure to in academia. This analysis highlighted the persisting gaps in information that hinder the development of scholarly discourse and impact the terms of visibility and representation among marginalized demographics. I draw on the insights of scholars insisting that we need to steer

away from universalized narratives in feminism and art history if we want to accomplish any significant advancement. I signal the lacunae of available resources and the enduring issues this field of study experiences generation after generation within academic and artistic spaces.

The work is both an aesthetic exploration and a critical interrogation. It culminates in a photography exhibition that illustrates the trajectory of an in-depth examination of the role of the body in art amidst the frames of subject, material and medium. The body can become a space of meaning from which to build or reconstruct identity and the search for the self within the broader context of society through a universal collective knowing where we can reimagine and rewrite histories together through art and pedagogical approaches.

It features *Impulse: A Photographic Exhibition on The Articulation of Becoming,* a photographic installation that documents a three-year artistic exploration of the body, movement, and performative photography. The work fosters a critical awareness of the political body and a deeper understanding of how interlaced the personal experience is with the collective narrative.

Chapter I

Positioning

The self-portrait paintings by Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) were among the first images I saw of a woman in art. Those images marked my perception of women in art, but more importantly, of women artists who portray themselves in their art practice. Women have been less frequently recognized as artistic pioneers within art history paradigms than male artists. Numerous women artists have paved the way for greater inclusion and representation in artistic and academic spheres; however, the gap persists, even today, and for artists from Latin America and within the Latinx diaspora, the gap is even wider. Despite the many efforts to facilitate visibility and inclusion for this marginalized group, which I identify with over the last twenty-five years, the lacuna of accessible information and scholarly discourse remains.

It is from the position of a Latina artist, having been exiled[1] from my homeland of Chile, that this study aims to examine the emergence of agency through artistic processes that employed performative photography as its method. In my experience, the artmaking process is filled with numerous revelatory moments while encountering many elements that influence creative decision-making throughout, including viewing and analyzing the work of other artists, which has profoundly impacted how I understand my artistic practice. After attending a workshop where the participants engaged in a series of exercises aimed at defining and visualizing the meaning of resilience through body movement, I revisited the works of many female performance artists while observing how they navigate concepts of the body in their practices. The lasting effect of this full-day workshop guided me to look more closely at my creative

[1] Chile's coup d'état occurred September 11, 1973. Among the thousands of victims of the civil-military dictatorship (1973–1990) were my father and my uncle. I was two years old when my mother and I arrived in Ottawa in 1975.

practice concerning notions of performing and photography. Concepts reveal themselves to me through images in visual epiphanies, which are sometimes difficult to explain in writing or verbally. As an interdisciplinary artist, I have explored painting, primarily mixed media and working with fibres. I have integrated photographic images into my art for as long as I can remember. What I create connects to themes of identity, memory, family histories, and more.

The decision to explore my body in photography here emerged as I moved closer to embracing my artistic voice. To better understand this process of uncovering or "becoming," my research-creation thesis examines the following questions through performative photographs and the study of movement in photography and Latin American women artists from a feminist perspective:

- How can artistic agency emerge through performative photography practices?
- What role does identity play in the artistic process?
- How does the creative process transform the artist and the work?
- How does emerging knowledge transform the creative process, the artistic understanding and interpretation of the work?

This thesis introduces six series of photographs achieved through performative actions. The process reveals the exploration of performative practice in self-photography whereby I began experimenting with notions of movement and the body. Navigating through theories of feminism in/and art history enabled me to expose the layers of agency, experience, and self-awareness. I was finally comfortable with situating myself and my art practice. These images were presented to the public through an exhibition (see Chapter III: Exhibition), where I briefly describe the installation accompanied by images. The following chapter presents brief historical backgrounds on numerous subjects. For example, an overview of movement in photography through history, a

definition of performance art and photography while analyzing the historical implications, and introduces the performance works of four women artists, which informed much of this thesis.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Historical Underpinning

This chapter provides a brief historical overview of the origins of movement in photography and defines performance art and performative photography according to Latin American feminist perspectives. It features samples of performance works by four pioneering women artists of Cuban, Chilean, and Colombian origins. The theoretical framework presents the feminist/ethnic (Other) perspective on the position of Chicana, Latin American, and Latina women artists within academia and artistic spaces.

Movement in Photography

When I began this project, I was not yet aware of what "movement," as an action, would mean to me and this study. The photo-dynamic images created by Anton Giulio Bragaglia (1890–1960) confirmed my understanding of the direction I was headed with capturing movement. Bragaglia's work was formed during a period in artistic philosophy that was transformative to the history of art. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) published "Manifesto of Futurism" in 1909 (Berghaus, 2001), and, as my search for movement in photography continued, it presented me with the innovative chronophotographs of English photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) and those of French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904). In contemplating my studio inquiry, the representation of movement from an aesthetic perspective alone would play a crucial role in shaping how I could construct a narrative through my photography.

Futurism and Anton Giulio Bragaglia (1890–1960)

Knowledge of the origins of Futurism served to understand its implication for the work of avant-garde artists. The early 20th-century avant-garde movement encouraged its followers to

embrace a fresh modernity characterized by industrialism, innovation, dynamism, speed, and violence (Bowler, 1991; Potts, 2018; Berghaus, 2001). Through his radical Futurist movement, Marinetti aimed to rebuild society and culture by dismantling antiquated traditions and ideas (Bowler, 1991; Potts, 2018; Berghaus, 2001). In painting and sculpture, evidence of this futurist influence is present in the works of Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), for instance, the sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*[2] (1913) and in *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*[3] (1912) by painter Giacomo Balla (1871–1958).

Concerning the medium of photography, I had been especially fascinated by Anton G. Bragaglia and the photographs he produced during this period. Beyond his photographic work, I also became interested in the theoretical expression behind the art. In *Anton Giulio Bragaglia: Photodynamism and Photospritism*, historian Marta Braun (2003) explained that Bragaglia's work was grounded in representing the entanglement of forms, "the immateriality of bodies," the "heterogeneity" of temporal dimensions, and "the dynamism of modernity" (p. 88). The concept of photodynamism, for Bragaglia, was centred on depicting movement as "trajectories" (Braun, 2003, p. 89), and these trajectories were meant to reveal an energy of invisibility. In his 1911 manifesto, *Futurist Photodynamism*, Bragaglia wrote the following:

> We want to render what is not seen on the surface: we want to register the living sensation of a particular reality's deep expression, and we are seeking its sensation of movement because that is rich with magnificent, hidden depths and multiple emotive sources that render it unspeakable and ungraspable. (Bragaglia & Rainey, 2008)

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[2] See Boccioni's artwork here: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/485540
[3] See Balla's artwork here: https://www.arthistoryproject.com/artists/giacomo-balla/dynamism-of-a-dog-on-a-leash/

According to Marta Braun (2003), Bragaglia was motivated by a desire to "render the invisible with the camera," and engaged in two experimental photographic projects: the first (in 1911) aimed to illustrate the dematerialization of the body's gestures through photodynamics, and the second (in 1913), he aptly named photospiritist (p. 86). The resulting images revealed what, according to Bragaglia, was an authentic dematerialized phantasm (Braun, 2003, p. 86). His photo experiments emerged when the "avant-garde, science and pseudo-science" were converging, and he firmly believed that photography held a transcendent ability (Braun, 2003, p.86). An additional point of view, as Braun proposed, is that while this method of art production contains a "transcendental force," it also reveals a "scientifically faithful pattern of a particular movement," which generates an enmeshing of art and science (Braun, 2003, p. 90). He considered this as the scientific foundation needed to support the Futurist endeavour.

The allure of Bragaglia's photographs was first elicited from observing the aesthetic renderings of his images. I came to learn of *photodynamism* after I had already started experimenting with my own photography. Upon encountering Bragaglia's photodynamic images[4] and reading the literature about his photographic theory, I began to look at my work differently and understood that, perhaps, my intention to capture movement aligned with his on a metaphysical level. Putting aside the *Futurist* panorama, I recognize in my work the energy of the traces of movement or, better yet, the aura of the movement; however, I also perceive it through the notion of transition. I knew beforehand that capturing movement was vital to my project and that photography was the method I wanted to employ to do just that. I wanted to know what movement looked like between the beginning and the end.

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[4] See Bragaglia's *Change of Position*, 1911 here: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283267

Eadweard Muybridge

Among the archive of photographs, I immediately noted the grid configuration of each motion series developed by Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904). Muybridge became famous thanks to his many images of landscapes, including those of Yosemite in California (Warner Marien, 2002). Through this popularity, Muybridge was commissioned to investigate the movement of horses (Braun, 1984), specifically, to answer the question that so many artist-painters had debated for centuries: When do a running horse's hooves make contact with the ground, and when do they not? Muybridge's photographic work was a breakthrough in the phenomenon of movement, ultimately making him world-renowned. He evolved his studies and recorded the movements of many subjects, human and animal, from what I observed, included capturing various movement narratives of people performing ordinary acts, such as washing.

Étienne-Jules Marey

Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904) began his career as a physiologist studying the phenomenon of movement through the graphic method technique. This involved tracing the movement of both living and inanimate subjects while creating graphical visual representations that could then be analyzed (Braun, 1992, p. 4). When Marey discovered Muybridge's 1878 famous study of horse movement, "The Horse in Motion[5]," it inspired him to continue his life's work and dedication to science, developing and applying photographic methods to scientifically prove how mobility/locomotion occurs in humans and animals, and even in the movement of air (Warner Marien, 2002). Many ground-breaking inventions were made possible due to Marey's scientific determination. One notable invention is the gun camera, "with which he made

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[5] See Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion*, 1878, here: https://www.loc.gov/item/97502309/

exposures rapid enough to record the bodily movements of a bird in flight"[6] (Warner Marien, 2002, p. 212). While Muybridge's explorations of movement eventually integrated performative characteristics, Marey's goals remained scientifically driven. My interest in his photographic works lies in his portrayal and sequential depiction of movement, which remind me of video stills. Both Muybridge and Marey's work with photography and movement are credited with influencing the development of cinema (Warner Marien, 2002).

Performing and Photography

> Since the 1960s, artists have used their bodies to challenge regimes of power and social norms, placing the body front and center in artistic practice—no longer the object depicted in paintings, or sculpture, or film, or photography but the living flesh and breath of the act itself. For some, performance refers to performance art or body art or live art or action art, terms that accentuate both the centrality of the living artist in the act of doing and the aesthetic dimension, "art".
>
> —Taylor, 2016, p. 1

The scholar, professor of Performance Studies, and author Diana Taylor (2016) asserts, "performance is not always about art" (p. 6). While not easily defined, performance practices seem boundless with the number of "at times conflicting, meanings and possibilities" (Taylor, 2016, p.6). I imagine it has something to do with its entangled beginnings. Whereas performative photography, or "performed photography[7]", as cited by author and scholar Philip Auslander (2016) in his essay "Photography and performance," is defined as work created by artists who "stage performances and photograph them." (p. 235).

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[6] See Marey's *Bird in Flight*, 1886, here: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/286544

[7] In his essay, Auslander (2016), credits senior curator (of photography) at the Guggenheim, Jennifer Blessing, for coining the term in 1997.

On the other hand, as editor of the book *Performance and Cultural Politics*, Elin Diamond (2015) offers a simpler definition of performance (art): "a doing, something done" (Taylor, 2016, p. 6).

This perspective provides a more malleable interpretation where I can position the work I created with performative photography. This method is a form of making that merges two artistic disciplines: performance and photography. I interpreted this approach through self-photography employing my body as the subject/object and recognized that the method can occur with intentionality but that, by fusing these two disciplines, the outcome can be just as unexpected. I view my doing, that is, performing, for the camera to be an intimate act. There is a dialogue between the self, the body, and the apparatus capturing the image that is iterative. In my case, the dialogue with my art continued throughout the printing process to the installation of the work until it was presented to the public. Conversely, performance art, known as a time-based art form, has been linked with live events that engage the body and is typically associated with the presence of an audience.

The origins of performance art can be traced to the early twentieth century, at first embedded with futurist ideas. Futurism, as mentioned, wanted to revolutionize culture, resulting in staged live musical and theatrical events intended to disrupt society; they introduced "art-as-action", according to Marinetti's concept of arte azione (Berghaus, 2006, p. 254). After Futurism, Dadaism emerged as another avant-garde art movement with its own controversial and disruptive agenda. At the time, artists not only responded to the conflict and suffering of World War I, but they were also motivated by the changes happening in society and aimed to "challenge" Europe's "strengthening of its sociopolitical borders" (Nailor, 2015, p. 103). Dadaism is linked to having a lasting impact on performance art (Fusco, 1996, 1999). Although

the movement itself was short-lived, the Dadaist influence filtered through the decades, emerging in the forms of "surrealist film, freeform jazz, and stand-up comedy" (Nailor, 2015, p. 108) and other art movements in the United States, known as Happening and Fluxus.

Meanwhile, in another part of the world, various popular forms of emerging performance art practices are connected to "the sainete criollo[8], to the Mexican carpa[9], to the tropicalist cabarets of the Caribbean[10] and their television equivalents"; these sought to tap into the "melodramatic exaggeration" and induce "audience engagement" (Fusco, 1999, p. 7). This performance art lineage extended into the second half of the twentieth century, during the 1960s, '70s and '80s, notably into other parts of the world (Fajardo-Hill, 2012, p. 2; Alcázar, 2020, p. 226), with key women artists emerging from Latin America, Mexico and within the Latinx diaspora, such as Argentinian, Marta Minujín (1943–), Brazilian artist, Martha Araújo (1943–); and Venezuelan artist Antonieta Sosa (1940–).

In their efforts to provoke affective responses and (re)awaken public consciousness, performance artists employ strategic devices such as "paradox and contradiction, with pastiche and juxtaposition," additionally aiming to challenge existing ideas (Alcázar, 2020, p. 277). While approaching performance amid oppression, Chilean artist Janet Toro's first public performance was titled *Dos preguntas* (*Two Questions*) (1986). For this occasion, she was accompanied by another artist friend, and together they stood in the middle of Paseo Ahumada, a busy

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[8] See definition for sainete criollo here: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100436955

[9] See definition for Mexican carpa here: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095551276

[10] See definition for Tropicalismo here: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/helio-oiticica-7730/story-helio-oiticica-and-tropicalia-movement#:~:text=Tropic%C3%A1lia%20was%20a%20creative%20movement,regime%20of%20the%20military%20government.

commercial avenue in Santiago, Chile, each holding a sign: one said, "Why are you sad?" the other "Why are you smiling?" (Alvear, 2015).

On her website, Toro explains *Dos preguntas*[11], 1986:

> For me these two simple questions that appeal to an emotional sphere were subversive, at a time when censorship played a determining role at all levels and the control of authoritarianism infiltrated many aspects of life. On the other hand, the Dictatorship was determined to give a democratic image, but the most insignificant gestures were grounds for repression. In this context, asking these questions meant questioning the limits of freedom. We were still in a curfew, a measure that was lifted in 1987. (Toro, 2019)

Janet Toro's photographic documentation is a lasting record of what took place: the camera acted as a witness, while simultaneously corroborating the event's description. Because of this, we can access a version of the performance via the image of it. Today, performance art continues to be experienced, although through a greater number of methods. Photographs of performances are still being captured and videos are still being made; however, in my experience, the technology offered in our current twenty-first century makes it possible to view live performances from anywhere, thanks to the internet and social media platforms.

Thus opening a discussion over the criteria of performance art and who can call themselves a performance artist. Should an artist perform live with the spectatorship of an audience to be considered a performance artist? My answer is no. Although the author of *Unmarked: The Politics of performance*, Peggy Phelan (1993) posits the ephemeral essence of

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[11] See Toro's *Dos preguntas,* 1986, here: https://janet-toro.com/1986-dos-preguntas/

performance art makes it so that it is fixed in the temporality of the present. It cannot exist outside the present moment; once it has passed, it has passed. If documented via video or photograph, it then becomes something else entirely. Phelan affirms, “performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representation: once it does so, it becomes something other than performances.” (Phelan, 1993, p.146). Nevertheless, I agree with Phelan that when a performance is captured in a photograph or on video, it transforms. As we understand it, this change, in the form of documentation, becomes the record of the event itself. I consider these as translations of a performance, always maintaining the live performance is the primary author. This does not minimize the original act; it just transforms and becomes an extension of what was. It is still performance art, and the artist performing is still a performance artist.

Whether we are referring to live performance or “performed photography”, in either case, the performance remains an ephemeral act while still adhering to its “non-linear structures” (Fusco, 1999, p. 7) and remains unconstrained occurring just about any place, any time, and motivated by any cause.

With performative photography, I sought to experience the agency it could effect through its many facets and procedures. At the moment of performing, my dialogue was mainly with myself, my body, and the camera. When I transitioned from performing and taking pictures to curating and presenting a public exhibition, the photographs emerged as the storytellers of my prior performances.

Resonance: From one artist to another

> In performance art, artists present themselves. In this action in real time, they turn their body into signifier and signified, into object and subject of the action… The artist's body cannot be separated from its social context. It is a symbolic body that expresses problems tied to identity, gender, and politics. We cannot speak of "the body" in general without mentioning the social and cultural conditioning that shape human corporeality. The body is a symbolic structure that is socially constructed.
>
> —Alcázar, 2020, p. 227

In this section, I discuss the work of four artists who I believe have been pioneers in the domain of performance art of Latina America and the Latinx diaspora. As I render homage to their artistic legacies, weaving through a personal narrative of cultural resonance and artistic inquiry, the works of Ana Mendieta, Lotty Rosenfeld, Janet Toro, and María Teresa Hincapié emerge as interlacing threads. I actively sought parallels within each of the artistic practices while examining each of the works outlined. Two of the principal themes important to me were identity and the body. At the same time, I uncovered other themes, for example, land art and exile, as in the works of Mendieta; art in the public space and the collective body, as in the site-specific art actions of Rosenfeld; trauma and the political body as in the performances of Toro; and time and space as in the work of Hincapié. The fusing together of those themes with the theme of transformation enabled me to position the creative work I had been producing.

Ana Mendieta (1948–1985)

> Having been torn from my homeland during my adolescence, I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb. My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe.
>
> —Mendieta in Rauch and Suro, 1992, para. 7

Most of the art world knows Ana Mendieta through her performances, her "earth-body" works and sculptures. However, there is one early series of photographs that intrigued me. It was the 1972 photographic series, *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints-Face)*[12]. In this series, Mendieta's body and face are shown pressed up against a glass panel; this performative action is one of distortion and deliberate manipulation. Of the 69 images there are 13 self-portraits, head shots that I wish to discuss. Kelly Baum (2008), author of "Shapely Shapelessness: Ana Mendieta's Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints-Face)," described this work as marking "the beginning of Mendieta's sustained experimentation with body art" (p. 81); evoking female/ethnic discomfort and violence, and with the nuance of mimicry, she was "brandish[ing] the grotesque like a weapon" (p. 87).

The seriality of the images proposes a moving narrative, temporal and transformative. As Baum (2008) explains, the composition shifts from frame to frame, yet she continues to press her face against the glass; in some instances, parts of her hand are revealed while she holds the glass to her face, and we are reminded of the artist's intentionality. The grotesque is employed here and each frame shows the face of a grossly distorted and warped Ana (p. 86-87). By my observation, she confronts the viewer through this lens, at times looking straight at us, other times her expressive gaze is averted. I am persuaded to keep looking, observing the distortions, the moment her skin is pressed into the glass, and which parts are not. At the same time, there is

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[12] See Mendieta's work here: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/untitled-glass-body-prints

an active attempt to discern the reality of her true image. In these photographs, I can only presume, that she is tapping into Dadaist-like influences, as she "force[s] a confrontation with the abject, thereby triggering affects which overpower a subject, demanding its attention" (Nailor, 2015, p. 105).

Similarly, (in the studio inquiry I present here,) I employ seriality (sequence) as a device to create an unfolding narrative; I employed the cropping device as a method to draw in the viewer; and I manipulate the technology to generate images that are sometimes anamorphic.

Ana Mendieta's influential artistic practice, in the 1970s and '80s, is among the many that would reveal the voices of women artists speaking from beyond the margins where they were confined. Today, her legacy is closely guarded by the Estate of Ana Mendieta[13], and her work is represented by the Galerie Lelong & Co, although much of her work is up for public consumption on the internet. I believe that the point of departure for Mendieta's artistic practice is largely influenced by her experience as a woman of exile; a notion with which I connect deeply.

Authors of the article "Ana Mendieta's Primal Scream", Heidi Rauch and Federico Suro (1992), ascertained that Mendieta began the *Silueta* series (1973–1980) during her student years in Mexico. For Mendieta, the experience of being in Mexico was "like going back to the source, being able to get some magic just by being there" (Mendieta in Rauch & Suro, 1992, p. 48). There is nothing more resonating to me, and I recognize the feeling of getting "back to the source." As a displaced person myself, although arriving in Canada in my early years, the feeling

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[13] The website of the Estate of Ana Mendieta, LLC can be accessed here: https://www.anamendietaartist.com/

of loss is still present. After more than forty years of "naturalization," for me there is a continued search for kinship and "home".

In one phrase, Ana Mendieta perfectly illustrates what it is to be exiled from one's homeland: "I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb" (Mendieta in Rauch and Suro, 1992, para. 7). When a person is given no choice but to uproot, relocate, and separate from one's family and community, the displacement is abrupt and traumatic.

In "Ana Mendieta: "Pain of Cuba, Body I am"," professor and author devoted to modern and contemporary art of the Americas and Europe, Kaira Cabañas (1999) recounts that Ana Mendieta was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1948, left Cuba in 1961, accompanied by her older sister, and arrived in the United States among the thousands of children flown out of the country through an initiative called "Operation Peter Pan"[14] (p. 12). Through the many performances, such as in the *Silueta* series (1973–1980), Cabañas (1999) reveals Mendieta's "search for both identity and connection parallel her search for meaning" (pp. 14–16) by way of becoming one with nature using ritual as an apparatus in creating, which led her to ignite a personal quest to respond to notions of identity and forced displacement.

Lotty Rosenfeld (1943–2020)

Born in Santiago, Chile, Lotty Rosenfeld is recognized for her 1979 art action titled *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (*One Mile of Crosses on the Pavement*) and as a founding member of the art collective CADA Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (Brizuela & Bryan-Wilson, 2021; Tepper, 2022). It is impossible to discuss the work of Lotty Rosenfeld without first mentioning CADA's significant contribution to the artistic and social fabric of the time. To

[14] "Operation Peter Pan" was an allied effort between the U.S. State Department and the Catholic Church. Learn more here: https://www.pedropan.org/

situate Chile's artistic articulations after 1973, the term *Escena de Avanzada*[15] was coined by Nelly Richard, the cultural theorist and author of the 1981 *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile* (Tepper, 2022). In *Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile since 1973*, Richard (1986) unpacked her theories and characterized Chile's art scene after 1973 more profoundly. The country's socio-political condition at the time of CADA's emergence motivated the elemental activism that made up the collective's artistic mission. Based on "actual social events," (Richard, 1986, p. 54) the propelling work titled *Para no morir de hambre en el arte (To Not Die of Hunger in Art)* (1979), "diagnosed the wants of the national body by using the symbol of milk to denounce poverty, hunger or other economic deprivations" (Richard, 1986, p. 54). Through this art action, CADA aimed to confront the systemic problem of hunger "in the country and beyond," (Tepper, 2022, p. 420) and there was a coordinated effort to enrol the collaboration "of a broader and transnational network of artists," (Tepper, 2022, p. 420). This made possible "a series of art actions[16] that took place simultaneously in Chile, Toronto and Bogotá" (Tepper 2022, p. 420). For *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento*, (1979), Lotty Rosenfeld appropriated one mile along the suburban road Avenida Manquehue in Santiago, the capital city. There she used white fabric to intervene upon the existing pavement markings and the dashed lines on the road (Brizuela & Bryan-Wilson 2021; Tepper 2022).

The documentation video[17] of *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (1979), shows Rosenfeld in the middle of the road, unravelling the white coloured material, pasting it to the ground one end at a time, and securing it firmly, perpendicular across each dashed line. The artist

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[15] A version of Chilean avant-garde art movement that emerged after the 1973 coup d'état.
[16] "The events referenced the loss of social programs like Salvador Allende's 'Half a Liter of Milk' campaign, which provided daily rations of milk to children in Chile" (Tepper, 2022, p. 420).
[17] See Rosenfeld's video here https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2662485187324724&ref=sharing

moves with purpose, her eyes focused on reproducing the action at each interval; this embodied gesture is a ritual of reclaiming public space. As noted by Natalia Brizuela in Brizuela and Bryan-Wilson (2021), Rosenfeld "occupied space to turn it into public space, and she did this by rewriting its signs; this was a political gesture in relationship to the art world" (p.113).

At the time of this art action, Chile, the Pacific coast country recognized for its elongated shape on the South American map, was grappling with one of the most precarious moments in its history. In "Speaking of Lotty Rosenfeld: "Gestures Dangerous, Simple, and Popular"," scholars Natalia Brizuela and Julia Bryan-Wilson (2021) signalled how this work was motivated by exceptional circumstances. From 1973 to 1989, the country was living under a dictatorship; especially in the early years, it was an era of collective trauma, active oppression, intimidation, and censorship; and the military armed forces heavily controlled public spaces. Under such conditions, one can perceive Rosenfeld acted with intention in this performative action. When I consider intentionality in this work, it goes without saying this was a well-coordinated plan, as were all other successive art actions of the same name but in different site-specific places.[18] According to Bryan-Wilson, in Brizuela and Bryan-Wilson (2021), "Lotty's codedness is not only strategic from an aesthetic perspective; it's also demanded by the circumstances of the moment" (p. 122). Rosenfeld was reacting to her lived experience, the collective destabilization and the suffering of her homeland.

Returning to the video, one can observe a slight asymmetry in the markings: one side of the white strip is longer than the other; in this instance, the symbol of the cross is more apparent. While the cross symbol is heavily coded and open to many interpretations, Julia Bryan-Wilson,

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[18] *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* was performed in numerous other sites across Santiago and in Europe.

in Brizuela and Bryan-Wilson (2021), reflected that it can be read as “an oblique memorial to the disappeared, a memorial for the thousands of disappeared in a time when such memorials were impossible because of the censorious regime of the Pinochet dictatorship” (p. 122). However, it remains ambiguous and is “a confusing gesture” as it “scrambles” the meaning (Bryan-Wilson in Brizuela & Bryan-Wilson, 2021, p. 122).

My interest in this work revolves around the body’s engagement as a performative tool and how the use of sequence acts as a narrative device each time the art action is reinitiated. Even if Lotty Rosenfeld “engages the body differently than performance art does” (Brizuela in Brizuela & Bryan-Wilson, 2021, p.127), this performative action or gesture still demonstrates the agency of the embodied act, which to me is at the core of performance art.

Janet Toro (1963–)

In some performance art practices, the role of the body can be to act as an instrument of political transformation. In “The Liminal Space between Art Actions and the Chilean Civic-military Dictatorship,” authors Andrés Grumann Sölter and Francisco González Castro (2020) situate the following work within Foucault’s view "of micro-politics, taking the body to be an agent of political change” (p. 262). Contemporary Chilean artist Janet Toro (1963–) creates work that challenges social and political paradigms; her body performs and occupies public spaces differently from Rosenfeld. At the same time, the legacy of the escena de avanzada can be perceived (Grumann Sölter & González Castro, 2020). On her website, the artist summarized her practice as “an inquiry into social, existential and political issues ... seeking to generate a space of resistance, an oscillation of poetry and a questioning zone” (*BIOGRAPHY - JANET TORO*, 2022).

The archive of performance art generated by Toro mainly consists of some form of participatory instances, whether the audience is cutting or tying a rope around the artist's body in *La tarjeta* (2015) or making wishes and tying knots in the strings held by the artist in *El velorio del ángel* (2015). In other instances, the artist has recruited others to collaborate/participate in those art actions. For example, Toro's website describes in *El despojo* (*The Dispossession*) in 2019, a site-specific, performative action that called attention to Villa San Luis, the site of a social housing initiative put in place during the short-lived Salvador Allende government. During the dictatorship (1973–1989), its residents were forcefully removed from their homes and relocated. With *El despojo*, Toro enlisted formerly evicted residents in a collective art action.[19]

While the work I create is far different from the work of Janet Toro, I feel connected to the intensity of it. Of the many works by Janet Toro, I am especially drawn to two works. The first, *La sangre, el río, y el cuerpo* (*The Blood, the River, and the Body*)[20] from 1990. For this site-specific performance, Toro intervenes upon a section of the Rio Mapocho with a few main objects in hand: a long white canvas-like fabric, animal blood and her body. Alongside the river, the artist extended the long white fabric on the ground, wrapped her nude body in a blood-soaked sheath and lay down on the white fabric The bloodied imprint of her body remained.

The second is the 1999 work *El cuerpo de la memoria* (*The Body of Memory)*[21], which took place at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile, as part of the II Bienal de Arte Joven. Writer and visual artist Soledad Novoa Donoso (2012) described Janet Toro as

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[19] See Toro's *El despojo (The Dispossession)*, 2019 here: https://janet-toro.com/el-despojo/
[20] See Toro's *La sangre, el rio, y el cuerpo (The Blood, the River, and the Body)* here: https://janet-toro.com/1990-the-blood-the-river-and-the-body/
[21] See Toro's *El cuerpo de la memoria (The Body of Memory)* here: https://janet-toro.com/1999-the-body-of-memory/

having created a tremendous body of work that echoed/exposed the country's collective pain and healing from the remnants of the dictatorship. Over fifty-four days during the months of January and February, ninety performances took place in the museum and, more important, at selected sites throughout the city. Novoa Donoso (2012) defined Toro's "journey through the city [that is] a necessary part of Janet Toro's work [which] functions here as suture and scar of a collective wound, of a wound inflicted on the social body that inhabits the city" (in Toro, 2012, p. 8).

The body in Janet Toro's work *El cuerpo de la memoria* acted as the vessel for the (country's) collective body. Shifting the focus from the artist and placing the emphasis on the action, as was noted with Lotty Rosenfeld's work (with CADA), the acting body in the public space is one of the most poignant characteristics of the Chilean escena de avanzada movement, which continues to come up in Chilean contemporary performance art actions. It (the action) "entails the recovery of a space that has been snatched away" at the same time confronting those oppressive institutions while unifying and converting the public areas into spaces that can act as "the supporting medium" hosting a persistent and collective memory (Grumann Sölter & González Castro, 2020, p. 266).

As Grumann Sölter and González Castro (2020) assert, there is a rightful entanglement that emerges when creating work in spaces of the public sphere.

They explain,

> "the public space, the artist's body, and the collective work are intertwined, speaking, on the one hand, to the relevance of Toro's use of her own body, since it is ultimately in the body that political processes are situated, enabling her to forge a relationship with the other bodies that surround the action, both physically and metaphorically" (p. 266).

I have been fortunate in being able to access a large amount of documentation of Janet Toro's performance work. From what I observe, there is a persistence to act through resistance and the body is at once the subject, the material and the medium, that moves between the then and the now; always signalling the collective body through her own.

María Teresa Hincapié (1954–2008)

Born in the Colombian town of Armenia, María Teresa Hincapié (1954–2008) began her performing career in theatre with the experimental theatre group Acto Latino, where Grotowskian[22] principles of acting also played a vital role in her creative process. Through theatre, Hincapié discovered the world, trained her performative body, and became familiar with European and Oriental theatre practices; those immersive experiences inspired what would become the performance art for which she would be known.

In a rare account of Hincapié's life and work as a performance artist, Constanza Ramírez Molano's (2006) "La performance de María Teresa Hincapié" ("The Performance of María Teresa Hincapié") reveals that in 1985, the artist had interpreted *Ondina*[23]*,* which ultimately was a life-defining role for the actor. She eventually left the theatre group, where she had spent six years, to embark on a quest for her own truth, "la búsqueda de mi verdad" (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p.177). No longer interested in playing the parts of others, she realized these "others" were already part of her person (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p. 177). This quest involved an intense existential investigation during which Hincapié made important philosophical discoveries and

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[22] Based on Jerzy Grotowski's (1933–1999) approach to theatre. He was a theatre director, teacher and theorist known for introducing innovative approaches that focus on the importance of the body in performing and ritual in theatre. Author of *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968).

[23] *Ondina* (1939), written by Jean Giraudoux (1892-1944) is a play that recounts the entangled love story between a man and a spirit of the water. Read script in Spanish here https://icaa.mfah.org/s/es/item/1087824#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-368%2C218%2C857%2C480

experienced valuable encounters with other artists. These encounters would eventually be very influential to her understanding and rendering of performance art as practice. According to Hincapié, a turning point came when artist friend Doris Salcedo[24] (1958–) introduced her to the performance work of Joseph Beuys[25] (1921–1986) (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p. 178). Because of that encounter, she developed a new understanding of performance art's temporal and spatial facets.

Hincapié also formed a well-defined interest in the every day; all things quotidian became points of interest (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p. 178). For her, her life and body were the art; thus, with this concept in mind, she conceived of *Si este fuera un principio de infinito* (*If This Were a Beginning of Infinity*) (1987) in a vacant storefront (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p. 178). According to Hincapié, in Ramírez Molano (2006), she transferred her home, filling the space with furniture and her personal belongings. While occupying this domesticated and transformed space, she performed all the homely rituals with a slow pace designed to embody everyday actions (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p.178).

In 1990, María Teresa Hincapié gained award-winning recognition for her performance titled *Una cosa es una cosa (A Thing is a Thing)*[26] at the XXXIII Salón Nacional de artistas[27] at Corferias in the city of Bogotá, Colombia (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p.179). Once again, the artist incorporated her personal belongings and everyday objects brought from home. The performance revealed the actions of unpacking and organizing, with reiterative actions, at times sorting objects by colour, size, or function. These objects were placed to form a spiral around the centre

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[24] To learn about Doris Salcedo: https://art21.org/artist/doris-salcedo/
[25] To learn about Joseph Beuys: https://fluxusmuseum.org/joseph-beuys/
[26] See a video excerpt of *Una cose es una cosa* (1990) here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCCTTsfKOII
[27] Learn more about XXXIII Salón Nacional de artistas: https://repositorio.unal.edu.co/handle/unal/47456

of the room. At this moment, objects (things) had become of great importance. In Ramírez Molano (2006), Hincapié described the moment when she began to love these things and to respect them, to feel that each thing had a soul.

In Ramírez Molano's (2006) text, we are privileged with the words of the artist describing her process and numerous epiphanies throughout her artistic journey. Hincapié revealed that, after fifteen years, the meaning of spiral form became clear, signalling to her the notion of eternity. According to the artist, she had finally understood, through Grotowski, that the work made itself; it had spoken, and she performed through intuition (Ramírez Molano, 2006, p.179).

There is very little documentation available to view these early performances; however, in the few that I have observed María Teresa Hincapié's attention to movement with the body was measured, and her intuitive approach to the performative body is apparent. When I contemplate this, with her notions about life being the art, the souls of objects and the importance of the quotidian, merging my own ideas about the performativity of the day-to-day, I am reminded of where this thesis journey began. I started by observing each time my everyday actions and engaged in repeated gestures, practicing the movement, and observing the sameness and the differences. While I studied my movements, moment after moment, I thought about how I arrived there. How did I learn to button my shirts and brush my hair? How did I develop those gestures that are unique only to me? What do certain gestures mean? Do they have a different meaning in other parts of the world?

Regarding the works of Ana Mendieta, Lotty Rosenfeld, Janet Toro, and María Teresa Hincapié, however long ago it was created, they continue to transcend time in every dimension, and it is through their work that I have found a resonating connection for understanding my own

approaches to art making. The following section alerts us to the issues surrounding the discourse and the representation of Latin American women artists within art history and contemporary art practices.

Theoretical Framework

The following section examines art topics through the lens of the feminist/ethnic (Other). I broach feminism, situating the theory within the expanded context of Latin America. I also present Latin American and Latinx perspectives related to the representation and dissemination of information and resources that impact on the global visibility of women artists in the context of their underrepresentedness.

Feminism, Art and the (Ethnic) Other

> The very need to organize a historical exhibition based on gender is evidence of a vacuum in the art system.
>
> —Fajardo-Hill, 2017, p. 21

The women artists presented in this thesis reveal their work through the complexities connected to feminism, including socio-political specificities. While Ana Mendieta, Lotty Rosenfeld, and María Teresa Hincapié are no longer living, the lasting impression and impact of each of their artistic practices is the source from which considerable discourse continues to be transmitted, and Janet Toro continues to create new and relevant art that is emblematic of current systemic issues. Examining the works of these artists was instrumental in my personal and artistic growth. Valuable insights came from this process, which inspired new and focused searches into histories of feminism (in art) that I had not been exposed to in academia.

Because of the long and complex history of feminism(s), it is easy to get lost in the labyrinth of information and resources. Associate professor of philosophy at Marquette University, Stephanie Rivera Berruz (2023) refers in *Latin American Feminism*, to Latin American feminism while including Caribbean feminism and explains that "most historical genealogies" map the start of Latin American feminism to the 1960s and 1970s but clarifies that its origins predate any documented activism (p.1). While these feminist histories are "rooted in

the social and political context defined by colonialism, the enslavement of African peoples, and the marginalization of Native peoples," this feminism "focuses on the critical work" of women's resistance movements within these contexts (Rivera Berruz, 2023, p.1). In *Multiple Feminisms: Feminist Ideas and Practices in Latin America*, writer and philosopher Francesca Gargallo (2017) summarizes the efforts of numerous women's organizations throughout Latin America, including Mexico. For example, the right to vote was fought for by women in Mexico during the 1930s; in 1912, Colombian women marched "in favour of civil rights"; in 1928, women in Ecuador lobbied for the "implementation of their political rights"; and in 1880, in Brazil, several "abolitionist" women's groups rallied to "publish an openly feminist newspaper" (Gargallo, 2017, p. 77).

The era of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s influenced the art being made by Mendieta, Rosenfeld, Toro, and Hincapié. During this period of their emerging practices, they had all been struggling against the prejudice from within their own countries and their own experiences of marginalization. Together, they represent but a small cluster within a much larger constellation of artists, provoking a shift in the domain of (Latin American) feminist performance art practices.

Art historian and curator Cecilia Fajardo-Hill (2012) asserts that this sphere of influence "since the 1960s reflects the history of great experimentation and political action" (p. 2). For this thesis, I wanted to develop a more concrete understanding of the origins of feminist art in Latin America. I could not do that without first uncovering the roots of feminism in Latin America. The importance of examining Latin American women artists is especially poignant for me and the greater process of "becoming" I examine through movement in my artmaking.

From the position of a Latina artist, a Chilean-born woman and daughter of exile, I acknowledge that my lived experience is sharply contrasted with many of those histories because I was raised in Canada. However, my initiation into activism and feminism as a young child emerged through the many occasions when I witnessed my own mother engage in activist initiatives with women's movements, organizing protests and hunger strikes that denounced the dictatorship and called for justice in Chile. My mother and her closest friends, also feminist activists, were the strong women role models that collectively framed my upbringing. As I examine the trajectory of my artwork and the themes I address, which include womanhood, identity, the body, and notions pertaining to the human condition, I realize that feminist knowing had been forming in the subconscious of my identity all along.

In "Gender, Race, and Feminism: Specificity in a Global Context: The Case of Chicanas, Latinas and Latin American Women Artists, 1960s–1980s," Fajardo-Hill (2020) writes about the tangled and "complex task" (p. 35) of tracing the history of feminist art in Latin America. She describes this task as follows:

> [it] can be bound neither by canonical notions of White Euro American feminism, nor by strict academic historiographies of art. This history cannot be shaped solely as a narrative based on existing academic references and exhibitions. Information is scattered in myriad directions, sources are often obscure and include alternative art projects, artists' archives and personal collections, or sometime memory—in cases where the work was lost due to migration, lack of resources, and the indifference of the art milieu—and there is limited but growing published research in the field. (Fajardo-Hill, 2020, p. 35)

The matter described by Fajardo-Hill is an ongoing issue, a knot that needs untangling, and numerous efforts are being made to that end. With *Grounds for Comparison: Neo-Vanguards*

and Latin American/U.S. Latino Art, 1960–90[28] (2013–2015), Andrea Giunta and George Flaherty (2017), both scholars specializing in Latin American art history and authors of "Latin American Art History: An Historiographic Turn", hosted a seminar series that "challenged the field of Latin American art history to become more comparative in its frames of reference and research, using the neo-avant-gardists of the 1960s through the 1980s, who returned to the historical avant-garde as an archive, as shared material" (p. 122). The project aimed at a "critical re-evaluation of Latin American and U.S. Latino [of] neo-vanguards" while confronting Eurocentric perspectives (p. 123). Furthermore, it encouraged "intense discussions of particular artworks, the constitution of a common arena of information, theoretical perspectives and methods," and fostered encounters where art historical analysis could be flexible and be discussed within a pluralistic comparative framework (p. 123). Giunta and Flaherty (2017) concluded that there has been a significant increase during the two decades since the 1990s in bridging initiatives among scholars worldwide that made a transformative impact on postwar Latin American art scholarship through a diverse range of "research programs and methodologies," including a focus on historical "emancipatory processes running from the 1960s to the present" (p. 138). Nevertheless, they explained that the entanglements surrounding topics of "gender, sexuality, patriarchy, and affect" remained underexplored here. They added that over the last twenty years (or more now), "queer and feminist" contributions had led to a revitalized interest in Chicano art, whereas in Latin America, these scholarship trends had still to catch up

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[28] Grounds for Comparison: Neo-Vanguards and Latin American/U.S. Latino Art, 1960–90 was a research and publication project aimed at supporting emerging art historians from throughout the Americas. https://sites.utexas.edu/clavis/projects/archive-2/getty-foundation-connecting-art-history-seminars/ The project was supported by the Getty Foundation's Connecting Art Histories initiative. https://www.getty.edu/projects/connecting-art-histories/

(Giunta & Flaherty, 2017, p. 138). Ultimately, to ensure the field of Latin American art, especially where Chicana, Latina and Latin American women artists are concerned, the way forward is through shared knowledge and interdisciplinary dialogue whose objectives confront the boundaries of "traditional" historiographies (Giunta & Flaherty, 2017, p.136).

In 2017, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta co-curated the *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* exhibition at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.[29] This event featured "the first genealogy of radical and feminist art practices in Latin America and by Latina artists, thereby addressing a lacuna within the history of twentieth-century art" (Fajardo-Hill & Giunta, 2017, p. 17).

Through extensive research for this exhibition, Fajardo-Hill and Giunta (2017) developed a focused and reconceptualized vision/approach known as the political body (p.17). They set out to establish a platform to enhance visibility among these women artists, and successfully afforded them the long-deserved "complex theoretical and critical framework" (Fajardo-Hill & Giunta, 2017, p. 17). Broaching feminism through an expanded lens, Fajardo-Hill (2020) declares that it is important to move away from the "universal idea of feminism or art history" (p. 36). Patriarchal and colonial biases, she added, are perpetuated by this idea while "the contextual, cultural, and historical" implications are disregarded, and as a result, the unique "aesthetic and conceptual" distinctions get overlooked (p. 36). Nevertheless, in the context of my education in art history, I recognize the notable absences of Latin American, Chicana, and Latina women artists, along with Others on the fringe. I attribute this to the dominating Eurocentric mind-set—

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[29]See *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* at the Hammer Museum here: https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women

what Fajardo-Hill terms “canonical notions embedded in the production and reception of global art” (Fajardo Hill, 2020, p. 36).

Chapter II: Methodology

This chapter highlights research-creation as the methodology employed to examine the questions posed at the beginning of the inquiry and refers to research-creation and studio-inquiry interchangeably. Through this arts-based approach and its prescribed "articulations", the deep enmeshing of artistic and research processes led to a holistic comprehension of my own creative approaches and how they connect to collective ways of knowing. Thanks to the research-creation model, I was immersed in a dynamic process of interdisciplinary creating and researching. Through experimentation, reflexive encounters with new material, and deliberate wayfinding, I examined key questions regarding the role of agency, the body and identity; transformation through art processes; and how to consider new knowledge in ways that support a deeper connection between the personal experience and the collective narrative.

Research-Creation

I adopted research-creation (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012) as the principal method of inquiry to examine the relationships between the artist and their body as experienced through the multifaceted role of identity. The creative artistic component worked to generate research from diverse angles and at different moments while working with other aspects of the process. Chapman and Sawchuk explain, "In research-creation approaches, the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are pursued in tandem" (p. 6). With this methodology, there are multiple ways to adapt art-making experiences and acquire new knowledge through a range of processes.

In "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances"," Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2012), artist-scholars and professors at Concordia University, establish the research-creation methodology, which routinely combines "a creative process,

experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an integral part of the study" (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 6). Research-creation as a methodology is also associated with various labels and interpretations (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 10).

For example, scholar and author Patricia Leavy (2017) in *The Handbook of Arts-Based Research,* states that arts-based research (ABR) creative practices, such as visual arts, literature, or performance, as methods of inquiry (p. 4) provide many advantages (p. 9). According to Leavy, the ABR approach can go beyond conventional academic margins, and when properly undertaken, can cultivate a deeper and more holistic understanding of diverse phenomena.

Employing a materialist lens, Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) have viewed this as practice-as-research. These co-editors of *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* establish that the approach of practice-as-research elicits a "crucial interrelationship" between "theory and practice" (p.1). They argue that the transformative potential of embodied and experiential facets of artistic work leads to new knowledge (p.1).

In *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, while defining and comparing practice-as-research (PaR) approaches to traditional research practices, scholar Robin Nelson (2013) characterizes PaR as an approach requiring a higher level of "labour" and a wider scope of "skills" to harness the complexity of "multi-mode research inquiry" (Introduction). Drawing on the notion of "holistic understanding," my encounters with experiential processes created a space for intense learning that was also flexible and interdisciplinary.

What I found most effective as I came back to Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) was their four sub-categories of research and creation: 1) research-for-creation, 2) research-from-creation, 3) creative presentation of research, and 4) creation-as-research (p. 15). As I threaded through

three of these distinct "articulations", each phase of my research-creation process provided me with the space to experiment facilitating numerous learning curves and making the process feel seamless.

Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) stress that these "articulations," or modes, can be "connected" or have the capacity for interchangeability and "can be ongoing and happen simultaneously" (p. 21). I quickly appreciated how this flexibility could enhance my learning and benefit my artistic development, together with the research practice.

Research-for-creation

In this thesis, I utilize three of the four articulations at distinct stages and occasionally concurrently through the entire research journey. When pointing to research-for-creation, Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) assert that inherently the creative process brings together an accumulation of various elements, such as the "gathering together of material, ideas, concepts, collaborators, technologies, et cetera, in order to begin" (p. 15). During the initial phase of this study, the amassed material is represented through a series of note/visual journals, audio/visual files, and an array of literature. As I delved into theories on performance art and photography, I observed the work, and in some cases, listened to the voices of (performance) artists (and photographers), where I learned about diverse art processes and concepts surrounding "other" identity, the body (political body) and feminism in art. Every action I carried out during this phase was a move in laying the foundation for all subsequent progress.

Research-from-creation

The research-from-creation "articulation" appropriately syncs with the phase of exploration and experimentation I encountered with photography and with responding to new

research questions that emerged as a result of the previous phase (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 17).

In particular, numerous questions surrounding the body in art and movement in photography began to surface as I sought to interpret my own work in progress. It was "an iterative process of going back and forth between creation and reflection or knowledge development" (Chapman & Sawchuk, p. 20). Because of this flexibility of the research and creation model, I could "shift gears" at any time. Furthermore, at this stage, my interest in Latin American performance artists grew. Since I had started with the work of Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta, and as I was already familiar with Chile's tangled history with "art actions" during the dictatorship era, I decided to examine the works of Chilean artists more closely; in doing this, I was searching for some resonance. I turned to Lotty Rosenfeld and Janet Toro as two key artist figures and in the process, I discovered the work of Colombian artist María Teresa Hincapié.

Creation-as-research

As Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) stipulate, creation-as-research is potentially the most complex of all the "articulations" (p. 19). It requires creation to be the catalyst for the research. Here, knowledge emerges from the acts of interdisciplinary engagement, "gathering and revealing through creation," at the same time aiming to "extract knowledge from the process" (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 19).

How can this be achieved? How can this be proven? My primary objective was to employ performative photography as the means of inquiry. During the creation process, I often had to reorient my role as the artist to accommodate the different procedural stages. During the picture-taking stage, I acted as both performer and photographer to capture the series of images. Eventually, I adopted the role of curator, mindfully selecting from the captured images. I then

resumed my role of artist to edit the chosen photographs. After that I became the printing operator while I printed the photographs; next, I acted as the installation technician when hanging the printed images with the reappearance of the curator. In the exhibition, I returned to my role as an artist, feeling proud of the accomplishment. As I put that feeling aside, I made room to inhabit the role of the observer. In all of these instances, I was learning through the experience of doing and "extracting" from the various dimensions and stages of the artistic process.

The methodological approach employed for this studio inquiry facilitated knowledge development through reflexive experiential and inter-disciplined modes. It allowed me to be guided by the process rather than following a strict pre-determined route.

Procedures

Performance became a method for me to narrate through the photograph. Over the course of this thesis endeavour, I created a photographic body of work composed of six series**.** This eventually culminated in a three-day exhibition where the work was presented to the public.

Upon starting this research-creation journey, I focused on body movements. Through my day-to-day activities, brushing my hair or getting dressed, I sought to establish a routine of observing my actions. I consistently wrote in my journal and sketched my ideas on paper and through voice recordings, which I named "Images." I captured images and video with my iPhone camera, although I knew this would eventually not suffice. I was actively experimenting and seeking ways to create the images I was after.

Following this, I would reserve and borrow a digital camera from the university's Centre for Digital Arts (CDA) and reserve a studio room for a series of photo shoots. After capturing

hundreds of images at each session, I would assess my progress, often deleting many images I deemed unnecessary. The total number of images captured exceeds 1800.

Throughout the process, I spent much time listening to different podcasts about art more specifically about women artists. One such podcast was titled "The Great Women Artists Podcast," hosted by Katy Hessel, the art historian and writer of the book *The Story of Art Without Men;* another was The Messy Truth, dedicated to interviewing contemporary photographers, hosted by Gem Fletcher, a well-known London-based photographic art director and writer. With these two podcasts combined, I have spent hours listening to artist interviews and connecting with their stories on creativity, process and the artist's identity.

When I decided I had sufficient material, I printed my photographs, using the facilities at the Milieux Institute, Post-Image Lab, of Concordia University. Once I learned how to use the Epson 11880 Ink printer through a training session with one of the technical professionals, I was on my way. I set out to test the qualities of the printed images by printing them on different papers. I found the "Enhanced Matte" paper to be my best option. It offered the images a rich velvety texture once printed. During this process, I had acquired access to a space, free of charge, located on the 10th floor of the Concordia University EV. Building that would serve to present the work. While printing, I was simultaneously planning the layout of the exhibition. I sketched out numerous plans, which ultimately influenced my printing procedures.

While printing the photographs I also observed specific characteristics that I had not observed via my computer screen. For example, as I handled the paper to trim the borders, the traces of movement would suddenly appear abstract. I was becoming aware of the work's transformation. Each time I noticed a shift, I sought to gauge the process of my own knowing.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, I outline my strategies for collecting data. The experienced scholar in arts-based-research, arts therapy and creativity, Shaun McNiff (2017), considers that in arts-based research "the word data does not universally describe art that we generate and examine" (p.29). As a person who makes art and thinks like an artist, I, too, believe that expressions of art and the processes of making go beyond the idea of data, where "living expressions" are far more complex (McNiff, 2017, p. 29).

Furthermore, as I concur with McNiff's (2017) ideas, our engagements with artistic expressions have the potential to evolve; they are not static experiences. One of the principal aspects of observing a work of art is that each encounter can lead to new discoveries, generating an ever-flowing stream of intrigue, enchantment, and inspiration. This is also probably associated with our personal growth and the changes we experience, constantly learning or consuming information daily. When I contemplate my artistic approaches and expressions of art as outcomes, I engage in an ongoing process of interpretation, which permits me to read my experiences in numerous ways. With the visual and textual journalling method, both physically and digitally, I could generate a significant amount of data. Eventually, this led me to create the body of work that is the culminating source of data from which I interpret the major themes of identity and the body in art.

The experience of opening a brand-new sketchbook or notebook is unique and is one of my favourite things to do. Coming in different sizes, colours, and shapes, these act as time capsules for our thoughts and ideas. In the visual journal, I used for this studio inquiry, I scribbled my thoughts, sketched the images that came to my mind, copied writings or

expressions that inspired me and drew numerous mind maps as I sought to develop my ideas in a coherent manner.

The visual journal/sketchbook was instrumental during my process and was not only a place where I could express and store my ideas but also a site where my concepts had space to mature, like a kind of incubator. This space is where my practice evolved. Sometimes, I would let go of ideas I no longer supported; this made room for new ideas to emerge. Scholar Douglas Gittens (2014) calls it a "storage vessel" (p. 92) and "an in-between liminal threshold, as a portal through which creative intentions can find their fix in the world" (p. 91). The visual journal/sketchbook was the space that kept my ideas safe and made them tangible until the moment I brought them together to be part of a larger reality.

Accompanying this primary source of data collection, I used my iPhone camera to capture photographs and video that recorded experimental processes. At times, these were direct translations of the sketches I would make in my notebooks; at other times, these images were improvised. It was a way to assert my artistic self as I sought to position this identity within the research. I also spent some time voice recording "images"; an image would come to my mind, and I would describe it. Since I was interested in movement with the body, I would create videos of various body movement actions from those audio files that documented my oral process. Those photographic and video exercises served as stepping stones to the final works. Other data sources came from looking at my past work, which offered a general sense of direction. Through this observation, I could ascertain that I was interested in pursuing a photographic project, one that was also performative.

From observing the work of other artists, specifically through the lens of Latina and Latin American women artists, I could identify and clarify connecting themes throughout their work

and my own. In doing so, I was immersed in an "interactive, in situ encounter" with my own pursuit of knowing (knowledge) (Sutherland & Krzys, 2007, p. 126). Even though I could not witness the art actions/performances firsthand, my interaction with the work came from encountering the documentation. I argue that many years after the actual work was made, each encounter was an enriching experience; together they have helped me to develop an understanding of the socio-historical relevance that is political, yet personal, to each of the artists discussed.

The documentation of the performances was not the only component fuelling my knowledge. I also experienced a virtual interaction with the people who had discussed the work, written about it, or made videos about it. In some instances, I had the privilege of listening to the voices of the artists via archival recordings or video footage. Those opportunities affected how and where I situate myself, with my identity and work; and the way I think about making art. All of these were encounters with the work and with the artists that proved valuable to my inquiry and to my personal artistic journey. Inspired by these encounters, I created a body of work that was also (primarily) personal and, to some degree, political.

Finally, while the photographs created for this thesis are the culmination of all the collected data, they are in and of themselves the most significant source of data. Upon completion, an unconstrained map emerged between my artwork and that of the artists I had contemplated earlier.

A last note on the gathering of material: I observed that since the data collection occurred incrementally, within each of these epiphanic junctures, I consistently encountered unexpected responses to what I was seeking. Through these responses, new questions emerged, and by the

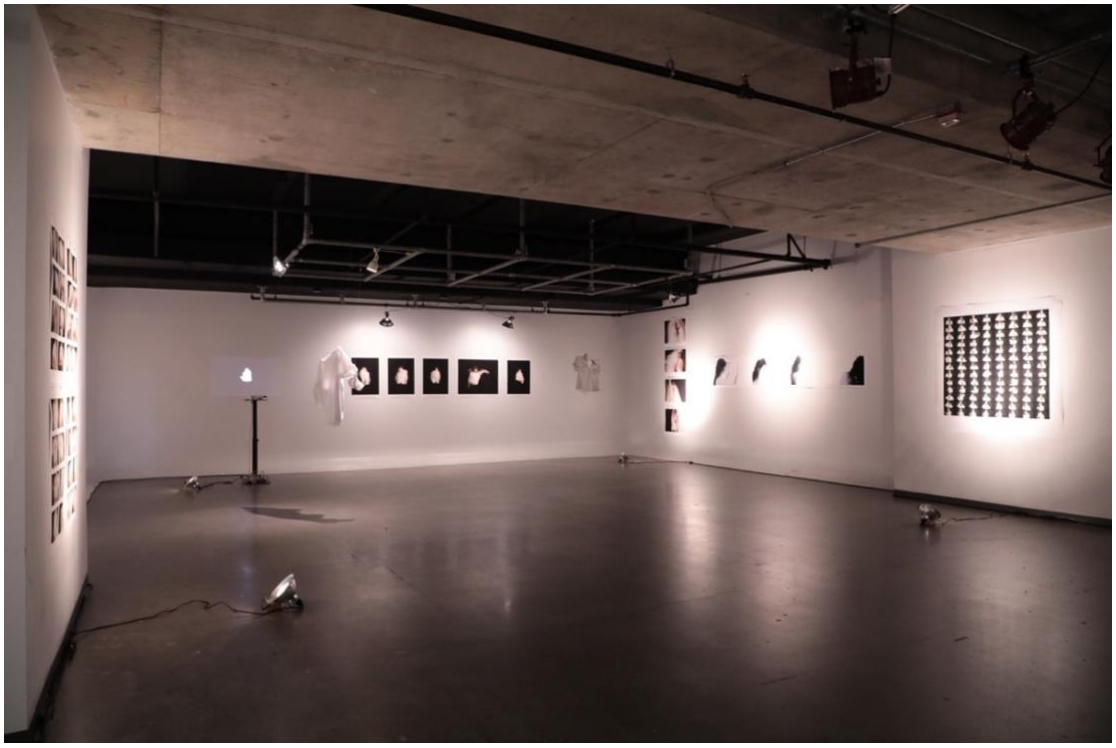
end, I recognized I had gained a better understanding of my creative practice, including the artistic transformations and outcomes.

Chapter III: Walk with me: A Descriptive Encounter

The following chapter documents the exhibition titled *Impulse: A Photography Exhibition on The Articulation of Becoming*, which took place October 26–28, 2023, at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. This exhibition is the culmination of the creative research that examines identity and the body in motion. Concepts of feminism and the (Ethnic) Other emerged during creation. The photographic installation is described in detail while providing as accurately as possible a depiction of each photo series appearing in the exhibition; an image detail of the described series is integrated in the text. The artistic concept and interpretive description follow this in the next section.

Figure 2

Entrance view of exhibition

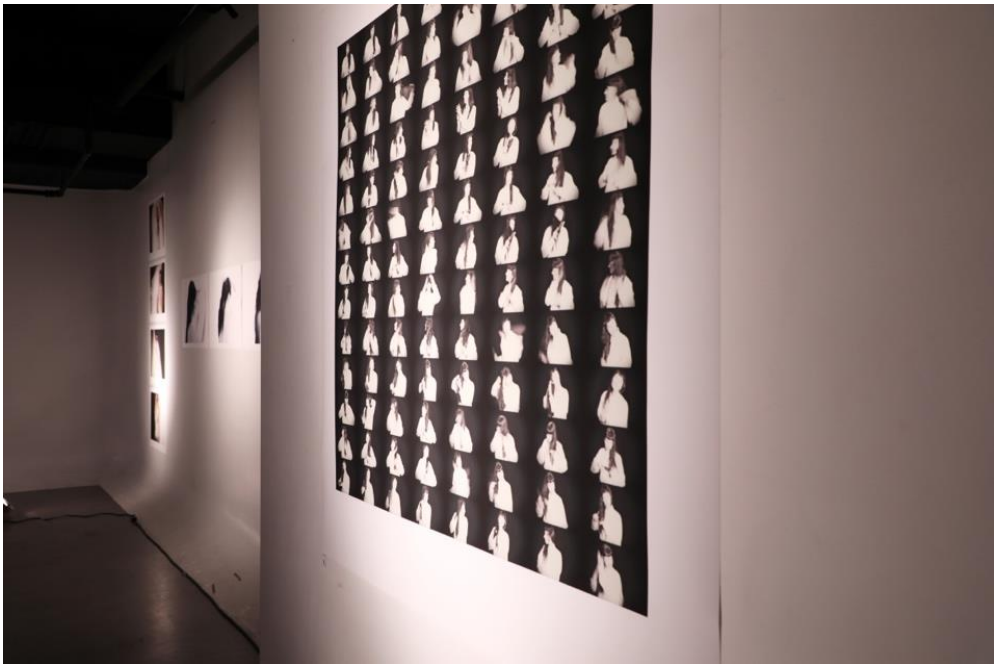


Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

Upon entry, one is welcomed by the ample space and soft lighting that illuminates each series of photographs. Some are lit from above, and others from below. At the far right of the room, the first image we see is a large photo composite, a grid of over 100 images. The series is titled *Cabello No. 1*. This print occupies a wall space that protrudes from the main wall space. It hangs alone, taking up most of this area. The subject of these images is a woman brushing her hair. She is shown from the waist up. The background is black, and she is wearing a white shirt. Her hair is long; she holds a brush in her right hand. Her body is slightly tilted, and with each image, we see she is moving her head while she brushes her hair. Within each of these images, one can see a motion blur.

Figure 3

Detail of Cabello No. 1



Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

In the centre of the room, two white shirts are suspended from a metal structure above. These garments are surrounded by photographs in which they appear in some form or another. One quickly observes that one shirt, the male shirt, is illuminated by a light from above, whereas the other shirt, the female shirt, hangs sombrely unilluminated, in the shadows. These two are arranged and shown opposite each other, approximately ten feet between them.

Figure 4

Detail of White Shirts: Suspended

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

On the left wall directly across from the *Cabello No.1* series, is a series titled *White Shirt No.1*. There are four large prints, each containing a grid composite of 8 images, totalling 32 images in all.

Figure 5

View of left wall of exhibition

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

Moving through the exhibition, on the right is another series, titled *White Shirt No. 2*. These images are larger, approximately 24 x 32 inches in size. Each print contains a two-image composite, and there are three prints. They are arranged, paralleled and in a row, revealing six images. These are printed in black and white. Once again, the figure is shown wearing a white shirt (this time, it is the male shirt) and is cropped at the neck and waist. The identity of the subject is unclear. This series is illuminated from the top centre.

Figure 6

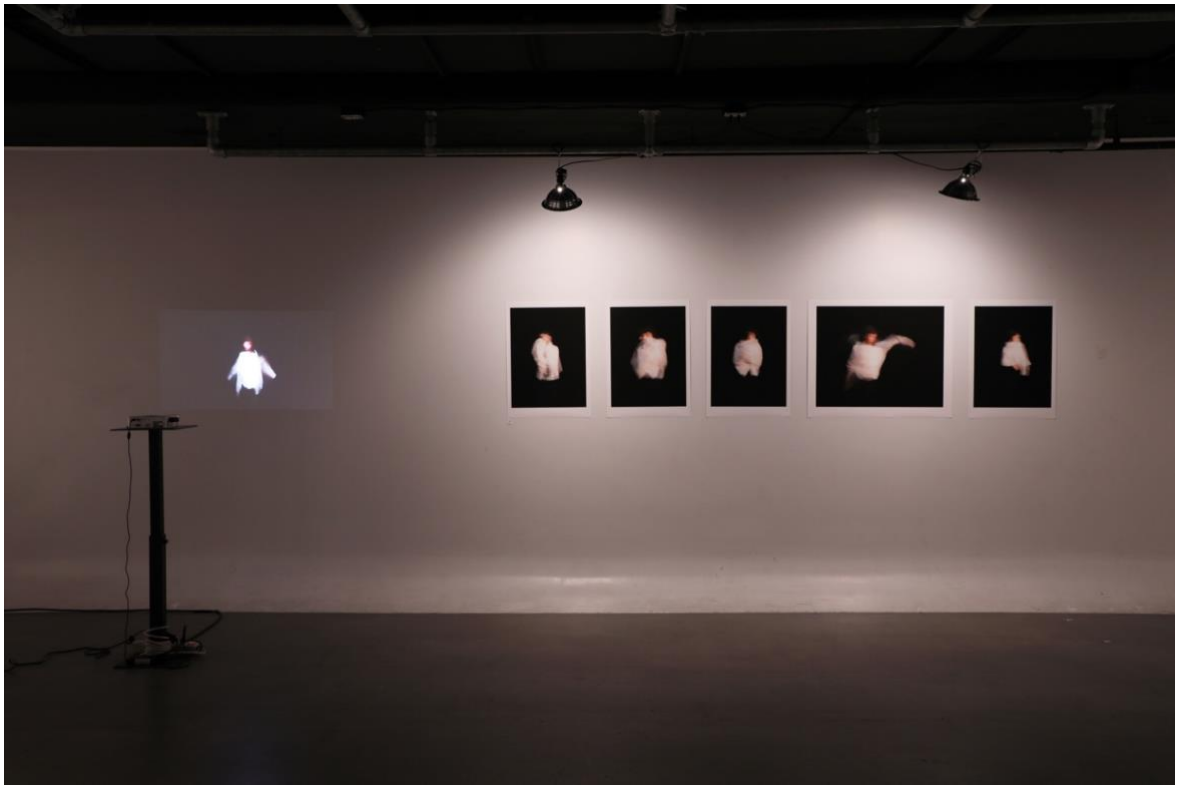
View of left wall and detail of White Shirt No.2

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

On the back wall of the exhibition space is the series titled *White Shirt No. 3*. Toward the right-centre, there are five large prints, each holding one image. The first three are composed vertically, the fourth is horizontal, and the fifth and final print is vertical again. These images show the subject standing before a black background. Here, the subject is centred in the images and is shown wearing the white male shirt. On the left, a looped video is projected onto the wall. This slow-moving video is a compilation of the images captured for the White Shirt No. 3 series. Each frame transitions slowly, revealing the action of the figure. The video reveals the subject's turning movement inside the white shirt.

Figure 7

View of back wall and detail of White Shirt No.3



Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

Gestured Rhapsody No. 1 and Gestured Rhapsody No. 2 is a series that shows the subject moving and draping a large cloth object around her body. In No. 1, the print contains a large image composite of 63 images. The images are highly contrasted, light against dark. One can perceive the figure engaged in movement within each frame. At times, the figure is in the centre, at other times it is completely obscured by the light and the sheath. The lighting for this image is from below.

Figure 8

Detail of Gestured Rhapsody No.1

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

In the exhibition, *Gestured Rhapsody No. 1 and Gestured Rhapsody No. 2* are on opposite-facing walls. This second series, located on the far side of the right wall, showcases four prints. One may recognize these enlarged images from the first series. They are vertically placed on the wall in a tall column on the left side of *Susurro de pelo No. 2*. The spotlight has been placed on the floor, providing light from the bottom to the top.

Figure 9

Detail of Gestured Rhapsody No.2

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

In *Susurro de pelo No.1*, the series located on the left wall was visible from the door entrance and installed next to the exhibition poster and the art statement. Lit from above, it is a horizontal image composite, totalling 12 images. These images are printed in black and white, with a grainy effect. There is a heavy contrast between the white background and the blackness of the hair. It is difficult to discern the subject's identity, as their face is either blurred or concealed by the hair, and the subject's body is cropped at the upper chest. Each frame within the composite reveals a different image.

Figure 10

Detail of Susurro de pelo No.1

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

In *Susurro de pelo No. 2*, I took four images from the last row of series No.1 and enlarged them to create a single print for each. They have been installed on the right wall, at eye level and are aligned horizontally between *Gestured Rhapsody No.2* and *Cabello No. 1*. The lighting is from above.

Figure 11

View of right wall and detail of Susurro de pelo No.2

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

The following section highlights the artistic concept and interpretive description of this exhibition. For this studio inquiry, I engaged in a reflexive and embodied process of learning and knowing —a process of "becoming," a term I have applied in part to the exhibition's title.

Artistic Concept and Interpretation

When I began this studio inquiry, I had a general idea of what I hoped to achieve. To start, I had determined that I wanted to employ photography, and I knew I was interested in performative practices with my own body. What I did not know was that I would become so involved in daily activities and that I would be as committed to the practice of movement as I had been. I was also purposeful with key aesthetic choices. For example, the sequential and serial compositions that I have chosen to display not only signal movement upon movement but also a kind of lingering narrative of the event. I view this lingering as an opportunity for the work to be observed frame by frame and, at the same time, in no particular order. There are recurring elements to be observed, too, such as the minimalist colour palette, the white props, the white shirts, the white sheet, which convey their own meanings. The following scripts provide insight into my analyzed motivations relevant to each series. Describing and analyzing the work provided yet another opportunity for questions to emerge.

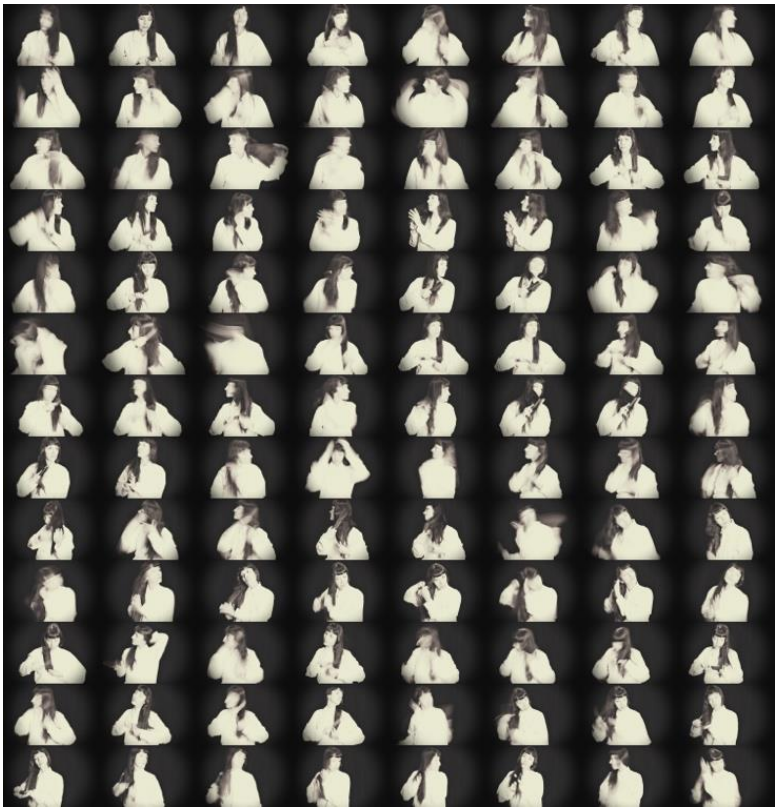
Cabello No. 1

The grid composite of this image, combined with the filtered sepia tones of the print, alludes to a vintage quality reminiscent of the nineteenth-century work of Eadweard Muybridge, and the intended vignette around each image suggests another retro-like characteristic. Aside from enjoying the aesthetic rendering of those devices, I sought to eliminate the variations of colour in the original images. Doing so would allow the viewer to focus on a minimal number of elements, the body, and the movement. The contrast between the lights and the darks is sufficient to perceive, even from a distance, a changing pattern.

This series began with an intense examination of everyday practices. In other words, habitual or ritualistic doings such as dressing-undressing, washing and other self-grooming activities. Aiming to capture the body's movements during hair brushing, in this instance, the very act emerged to be more complex. Recalling the painful and uncomfortable feelings of having my hair brushed as a child, I realized that I have a complicated relationship with this part of my body. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the lockdown, such banal actions as hair brushing transformed my daily routines into novel experiences, and I began to look upon these actions as series of movement-based narratives my lived experience would inform.

Figure 12

Cabello No.1



Note. Composite [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

As an object, the hair on our heads is exposed to numerous elements, including compliments, judgements, and changes, and is often viewed as ornamental or employed as a seductive device. In certain contexts, within various religions and cultures, the presentation and/or care of one's hair goes beyond aesthetics. As a powerful signifier of identity (Pergament, 1999), our hair is at the same time versatile yet vulnerable as a material. Through the repetitive motion of this seemingly simple act, a transformative engagement with the body emerged, which included an awareness of the self within a spectrum of historical narratives surrounding the symbolism of hair across time.

Susurro de pelo No.1

This series employs seriality as a narrative and aesthetic device. This rectangular composite features twelve images. The white background in these images is contrasted by the blackness of the subject's hair. They have been printed in black and white, with a grainy effect. This whole series reveals the subject interacting with their hair, handling it, shaping, and pulling it; each row in the composite narrates a different interaction with the head of hair. The subject's body is cropped at the upper chest, and any skin that shows (face, arms, and neck) comes through as a soft, light grey. The face of the figure is consistently obscured, hair and the motion blur. Parts of the figure are at times indiscernible, but the black hair projects strength and life.

Susurro de pelo No. 2

I selected four images from the original grid for this series and enlarged them significantly. I sought to transform the viewer's experience and provoke a sensation of curiosity. From a distance, the images look like their smaller versions; one can perceive the figure and the hair easily. However, upon approaching the large prints, the viewer can detect the grain effect, resembling speckles of matter.

When I was a child, I would twirl my hair. There are still moments when I take my hair and "play"; I twirl, twist, and make knots, only to undo them and make them again. Hair is once again a primary subject in this series. With hair as a metaphor for being, this contemplative narrative is set in a blank/white space. It is a dialogue between the body and the action/movement. I asked what it feels like to cover my face with my hair, close my eyes and feel my hair, pull on it, hold it, use it to caress my skin, move it, throw it up and feel it fall again. The body responds with feelings of softness and resilience.

Figure 13

Susurro de pelo No. 1

Note. Composite [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

White Shirt series & White Shirts: Suspended

The white shirt is a central feature of this body of work. The white shirt as clothing is a device that is fashionable yet sensible and utilitarian and suggests a multitude of meanings: depending on the occasion, it can signal gender, class, and purpose. I see the white shirt as an object of resistance as in the images of the women from the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD)[30] demonstrating in Chile's national stadium[31] as well as grieving mothers or widows of victims of the Chilean dictatorship dancing alone what became known as la cueca sola[32], the Chilean cueca traditionally being meant for couples (Bannister, 2004, p. 1).

The white shirt also recalls a past project of mine. When I re-enacted a portrait of my father, in that photographic series, I dressed to mirror his image. Because I did not grow up with my father, those self-portraits were a way to actively connect with him through the performativity of "becoming" him.

Here, the white shirt is represented in two forms: through photography and the installation of two suspended white shirts. In the photographs, the notion of being is in conversation with the actions of the body. Throughout the *White Shirt* series (2023), I am performing in and with the white shirt as an act of being and questioning the place of identity, the ambiguity of aliveness and death, and transformation. Although I wear the shirt as it was intended, being and becoming "other" in it, I also use it as something akin to a shell where I am

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[30] The *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD)* is a Chilean human rights organization founded in 1974. To learn more, see here: https://afdd.cl/

[31] During the early months of the dictatorship, Chile's national stadium was used as a detention centre (Hite, 2004; Hite & Sturken, 2019)

[32] La cueca sola is courtship-style folkloric dance. To learn more, see Marilu Mallet's film *La Cueca Sola* here: https://www.nfb.ca/film/la-cueca-sola/

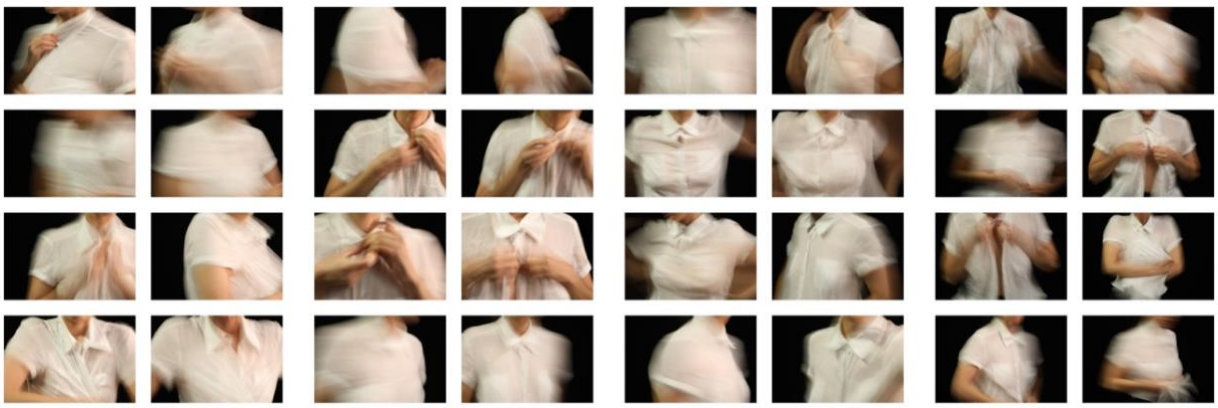
not either me or “other,” but something else entirely. In the installation of the suspended shirts, the white shirt is the carcass, acting as the remainder of the being and the memory of the action.

White Shirt No. 1

This series was captured while I wore the female white shirt. I had been experimenting with different garments, and when I pulled this out of my closet, I immediately took note of its softness and the transparency of the fabric; it was short-sleeved, had buttons on the sleeves, and was tapered around the waist. The photographs have been printed in colour, with the subject contrasted against the black background. The blurring, composition, and cropping of the body make it difficult to discern who it is or what is happening. What remains prominent is the white female shirt, the arms and hands.

Figure 14

White Shirt No. 1



Note. Composite [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

In each frame, the figure is actively handling the white shirt, whether buttoning or unbuttoning. One grid shows the figure buttoning or unbuttoning the shirt from the collar. Others show the figure seemingly adjusting the shirt, standing up in it. In some instances, the figure appears to be moving closer to the foreground or moving back, remaining cropped at the neck and waist.

The aesthetic qualities in this series are soft and almost "fleshy." The motion-blur in these images creates a delicate, feathery effect. This series is lit from the floor upwards, offering a soft glow to the presentation.

Figure 15

White Shirt No. 2

Note. Composite [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

White Shirt No. 2

This series was captured while I wore the male white shirt. My attachment to this shirt began long before I began the series. I was familiar with it because of a prior project and knew what to expect while wearing it. It had a stiff collar, the sleeves were too long, and oversized on my body. These photographs have been desaturated and have been printed in black and white. In

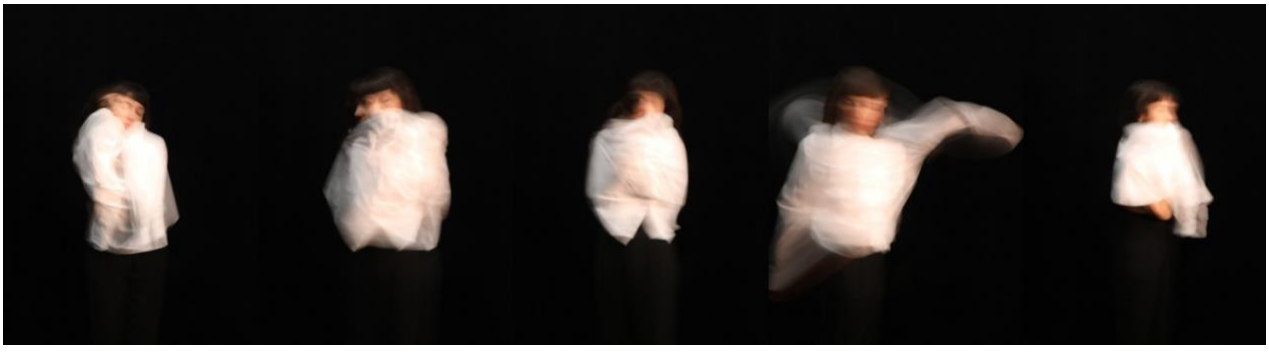
some instances, the figure is clear, and the motion blur occurring in these images is contained to smaller areas, while at other times, it causes the figure to be unrecognizable. This effect makes some of the images look almost like an x-ray. One can perceive the moving figure's softness and "ghostly" quality while against the black background. Observing from left to right, the images here start as something we recognize and progress to something nearly unidentifiable, almost abstract.

White Shirt No. 3

Once more, in this series, I am wearing the male white shirt. From a distance, the figure appears to be "floating" in a blackened space. The strong contrast of this white-on-black is mellowed by the soft-coloured tones of the figure's face. The white shirt covers her torso, including her arms; the figure is inside the shirt. The figure is seen in an obvious act of movement. The camera has captured a layered motion blur with a ghostly effect. The subject does not look outward (at the viewer). Instead, her eyes are either closed or looking away from the camera.

Figure 16

White Shirt No. 3



Note. Composite [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

White Shirts, Suspended

The two white shirts worn in the photographs have been displaced and placed, suspended in a symbolic gesture to say they exist, that they are real, and that they did not just disappear after the images were captured. Upon close inspection, one can witness the tension between the tautness of the wire and the fabric of the shirts. Their vulnerability reveals itself through their delicate essence floating in the air.

Figure 17

White Shirts, Suspended

Note. From *Impulse* exhibition [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

Gestured Rhapsody No. 1

The grid sequence here is once again a strong device that engages an optical dance. The presence of a solid white light behind the figure draws the eye towards the centre, enticing the viewer to follow the whiteness of the cloth and figure as they move around the borders of each frame. The constant is the black background; however, there are breaks caused by the motion blur effect, and in this case, tracings of blue and orange add a “halo” radiance to the moving figure. During the exhibition, someone whispered that it reminded them of flame. And I thought, like the dancing flame of a candle.

Figure 18

Gestured Rhapsody No.1

Note. Composite [Digital image], by D.A. Olivares, 2023.

Gestured Rhapsody No. 2

Here, I selected four images to be printed in large format, not quite life-size, but close enough to let the viewer to see the traces of the movement while seeing the entire photograph. Here, the blue and orange halos are more visible. This column of prints invites the viewer to enter the image from a different access point. The composition of the four prints, the dark background, draws the eye throughout each image in a curved or wavy vertical line. One may say the white does the same. On the other hand, since there is an elevated colour contrast, the whites almost blend into the back wall, while the shadows and dark tones draw the eye inward.

I have a distant memory of helping my mother to fold the bedsheets. Domestic tasks such as making the bed, doing laundry, folding, organizing my clothes were instilled in me from a young age. The habit of this kind of order has remained part of my daily rituals. For this series of images, I was provoked by the notion of disorder and the desire to be impulsive, so I decided to use the bedsheet in a playful, uncontrolled manner. Here, the principal object, the bedsheet, underwent a transformation; with each impulse, it became something entirely different.

Once I had installed the photographs in the space, the work took on yet another new meaning. It was as though they were in conversation with one another. The *White Shirt* series spoke to *Cabello No.1*, which spoke to the *Susurro de pelo* series and so on; at the centre, the two white shirts, appearing together/apart, shared a mutual silence. It was a revelation for me to witness the transformation of the meaning of the work in such a way. After all, I was with it from the inception. In light of this new meaning, the exhibition provided a space where the photographs can be commented on, pondered upon, and ultimately participate in a performative act, exchanging with those observing them while generating new meanings with new perspectives aside from my own.

The process of creating this body of work and the work itself evolved as the thesis journey led me through diverse portals of knowledge and experience. As the research evolved, additional questions emerged that became part of my broader interrogation into concepts of identity. This evolving direction became apparent as I sought to situate myself and my work somewhere within contemporary art practices. An in-depth examination of my findings is provided in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV: Multiple Understandings

In this chapter, I share an assessment of the process as I experienced it and the outcomes as they revealed themselves. I engaged in performative photography as an artistic approach to exploring concepts of the body, and movement. During the process, I contemplated the role of identity (through a feminist/ethnic lens) and agency in creative practices and uncovered the transformative potential of art processes. From there, I uncovered the deep-rooted gap surrounding critical and scholarly discourse of Chicana, Latina, and Latin American art history despite recent contributions to the field in the last decade. I review the exhibition, where the series of works I produced culminated.

Discussion of Findings

This journey started in 2020 as an experiment with the body in motion. As I continued the trajectory of exploring methods, materials and themes, I repeatedly came back to photography. Photography provided me with immediacy and numerous other possibilities to be experimental. Making the images and presenting them was three-quarters of the work; the other twenty-five percent required a critical engagement with my art and the theory.

How did performative photography generate agency for me? Being the "subject" of my photography, using my body as the "material", and being the photographer simultaneously allowed me to have control over my creative process, which I greatly appreciated. I could decide what I wanted to reveal and how much; and I controlled all aesthetic and thematic choices. Having this level of control over my creative process was a necessary condition. Beyond that, I acknowledge that this artistic path led to a deeper understanding (and appreciation) of my socio-cultural roots and a "coming to know" how I want to express myself in the world.

The performing self, the body in motion, in this studio inquiry was fundamental for creating this narrative. Although, at times, my performing self would be interrupted by the self that was acting as a photographer or lighting technician. It was often fastidious, but I viewed it as part of the process. The act of performing was more about moving the body, being patient and following my body through the memory of its movements. Performance as a method allowed me to engage in dialogue with my body through motion, in space, and through the interactions with the white shirts, the white sheet, the white light and, ultimately, the camera. Viewing it as a mutual exchange, performing for the eye of the camera was a quiet interaction.

Observing performance as a method other artists employ enriched my experience with the method. It was a push, a thrust more like it, that forced me to stretch, extend outside my comfort zone, listen, and connect with my body's movements in a manner that was beyond corporeal. At this stage, the works of Latin American (performance) art, particularly those of Ana Mendieta, Lotty Rosenfeld, Janet Toro, and María Teresa Hincapié, informed a critical awareness of the political body along with fostering a deeper understanding of how connected the personal experience is with the collective narrative.

During those illuminations, I discovered the (significant) disparity in scholarly discourse and access surrounding the topics of Chicana, Latina, and Latina American women artists. Nevertheless, for institutions within the United States, the gradual increase in effort to bridge the gap "within college curricula" through numerous "conferences … and scholarly associations … the Latino Art Now! biennial conferences, and the US Latinx Art Forum (USLAF) help to establish networking opportunities and enhance the visibility of our fields to broader audiences" (Cohen-Aponte & Fitzpatrick Sifford, 2019, p. 61). Despite this, the gap persists. Without the continued efforts to engage in critical discourse that invites inclusivity across disciplines, from

the classroom to the museum and beyond, we cannot completely forge broader understandings that extend past the Eurocentric baseline (Cohen-Aponte & Fitzpatrick Sifford, 2019).

The method of photography allowed me to generate more than enough material, especially owing to the capacity of the digital camera I utilized. As previously mentioned, it provided numerous opportunities to experiment, further manipulate a given series and to develop composites or short videos that could generate new meanings. Given that I had captured digital photographs, the possibilities regarding presentation are endless and offer many new trajectories to reinvent their significance. As a potent narrative device, photography employs the image to evoke emotional responses that can extend beyond words. The visual narrative I sought to construct was aided by considerations I made regarding composition, lighting, and subject matter, and my narrative is personal yet imbued with cultural and social implications. French literary theorist, philosopher, and critic Roland Barthes' (1981) notion of the punctum, in his book *Camera Lucida*, is the triggering detail in a photograph that "is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (p. 27). The punctum, as he explains, is the one feature in an image that draws the viewer in, that differs, that causes a "break" and elicits a wonderment, or disturbance whatever the case may be. It is the moment the viewer makes an intimate connection to the image. Whereas the studium, according to Barthes, permits the viewer to access "the photographer's intentions" through an inevitable cultural meaning; it "is a kind of education" that, as viewers, we "participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions," (pp. 26–28). In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag (1977), an American writer and critic, posits that the photographic image is both witness and interpreter of realities, with the capacity to shape the collective memory and (re)write cultural narratives (pp. 5–7). Photography has the ability to blur truth and fiction, in a way that can invite a more profound understanding or critical

analysis of one's perceptions and societal norms. Thus, an image actively participates in the performativity of its expression and interpretation (Barthes, 5–10; Sontag, 3–20). With this work, I sought to transmit a different reality, one that is invisible to the naked eye, much like Anton Giulio Bragaglia, but in my own way. In these photographs, there is no doubt that what is real is the person, the space, the clothes, and the movement appearing in the image. However, these images are staged, edited, and selected from among hundreds of images to finally create the story I set out to create.

Nevertheless, I did encounter challenges with photography. These began with the accessibility of the device itself. Since I do not own a proper digital camera, one that could capture quality images, I had to reserve and borrow one from the Centre for Digital Arts (CDA) equipment depot at the university. Next, I had to become familiar with the device to learn how to operate it. Other challenges I experienced were mainly technical; for example, the capacity of the digital camera to register more than one thousand images is astounding to me; it quickly became important for me to monitor the number of photographs being captured so I would not spend hours trying to select and delete unwanted images.

On the other hand, printing the photographs myself became more a happy learning experience than a challenge. Here, I fully encountered the transformation of my work, my performance, and my images into something altogether new. These unexpected moments that provided me with the "most meaningful insights" (McNiff, 2007, p. 40).

The presentation of work revealed itself through the installation of photographs of varied dimensions. This photographic installation was curated to invite the viewer to encounter the articulation of an artist with her body, to observe the solitude, to perceive movement, and to behold the aura of motion. The exhibition event was the final source of data that I would analyze.

Conclusion

> Education is the process of learning to create ourselves, and it is what the arts promote, both as a process and as the fruits of that process. Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture.
>
> —Eisner 2002 p.3

This studio inquiry contributes to the broader discourse on art and identity, offering insights into the transformative power of creative expression and its significance in shaping individual and collective narratives. It employs an art-based approach fusing the creative practice of performative photography and research methods to examine the role of the body in art amidst the frames of subject, material and medium. I examine the history of movement in photography while interpreting aesthetic outcomes and contemplating the notions of the camera in relation to the audience. The research-creation methodology facilitated the process of making and inquiry that aimed to respond to key questions regarding the role of agency, the body and identity, transformation in art processes, and how to integrate new knowledge in ways that can influence and effect change.

It brings together concepts of feminism and identity beyond gender and ethnicity, while exploring key works by performance artists of Cuban, Chilean, and Colombian descent. In examining the works of other artists of Latin American origins, I establish specific parallels, including the differences within their work and between my own artistic practice and theirs. Not only was this instrumental in my personal and artistic growth, but it brought forth essential insights demonstrating the transformative ability of art to convey ideas and effect change both from within oneself and through to the broader socio-cultural context. More important, I locate a desire to pursue an exploration of feminism in art history as it evolved in Latin America; I uncover the notion of the political body as it pertains to the Latina and Latin American identity;

and I identify the enduring lacunae where access to the topics of Chicana, Latina, and Latina American women artists (including other marginalized groups) and scholarly discourse is lacking. As we continue to explore the intersections of art, identity, and education, this research sets a foundation for further inquiry and innovation in the field.

As the creative process evolved, the research transformed, and I, too, was changed. Part of the process was learning to embrace the unknown and move forward. Here, I demonstrated that a symbiotic relationship can emerge while one pursues a studio practice and connects with the art and creative processes of fellow artists. This connection can contribute positively while enriching one's own creative endeavours; it can lead to new knowledge that has the potential to challenge existing ideas, inspire others, and promote critical thinking about the world around us. Moreover, the ripple effect of this process can inspire creativity to address ongoing social, cultural, and environmental issues we face today. As Paolo Freire (1968) observes, to imagine any transformation, we must begin by recognizing the source of the issue, and in doing so we can raise our consciousness and liberate ourselves (p. 47).

Educational Significance

> [A]ny honest discussion of history, or of the effect that historical stories have on us as humans—as members of specific tribes, nations, or affiliations—has to acknowledge that we can never fully separate our understandings of, or our relationships to the past, from our emotions or our bodies.
>
> —Desai et al., 2009, p. 9

The themes of identity, selfhood, and notions of the body in art are poignant and can be valuable creative access points in art education. Lotty Rosenfeld's point of departure was her resistance to the socio-political oppression she and her country were experiencing in the face of a dictatorship. For María Teresa Hincapié it started with an introspective inquiry that led to spiritual, philosophical, and relational art responses to the impact of industrialism and consumerism on the social fabric of her surroundings. These points of departure can expand the personal lived experience towards an enhanced social awareness and through to the larger universal contexts. For example, if I were to introduce performative photography as a studio practice for a course, I would encourage my students to incorporate their lived experiences and socio-cultural perspectives into their art-making. Simultaneously, I would do the same for my curriculum. I am inspired by Art Education scholar and artist-activist Dipti Desai (2009) when I say there is potential for students to make discoveries about themselves and the world around them by observing artworks within the global art history landscape (p. 8). I would ensure that my students had the opportunities and the tools to interpret and critique the art of the past and the art of today by shifting and widening the lens to generate greater inclusivity and enable visibility for underrepresented (arts) communities (Desai, 2009, p. 8). My view is based on the idea that those kinds of experiences can lead to a broader scope of knowledge and potential opportunities for students to reframe historical narratives (Desai, 2009, p. 8).

Through nurturing an "embodied nature of historical inquiry" (Desai et al., 2009, p. 8), much in the same way as I engage with the works of Ana Mendieta, Lotty Rosenfeld, Janet Toro, and María Teresa Hincapié and with my own work, students can learn from embracing the "physical and emotional process" of observing an artwork (Desai et al., 2009, p. 9). This approach undeniably presents an opportunity to examine the inspiration and motivations behind the work, particularly when it addresses social, political, cultural or environmental topics. An embodied inquiry can also inspire students to question how they situate themselves within these frameworks, which furthers the ability of the approaches to generate agency from within, allowing it to manifest and be experienced by the outside world.

Moreover, as Art Education scholar Elliot Eisner (2002) explains, artistic practices and artistic knowing, can foster meaningful learning experiences; result in enhanced critical thinking skills and increased creativity (imagination); it can encourage connection and develop empathy for others (pp. 3-4). Eisner's work emphasizes that "experience is central to growth because experience is the medium of education" (p. 3). By acknowledging the connections between our lived experiences, what we learn from history and current observations, and lessons from others' experiences, we can proceed towards a transformative process of self-discovery that can contribute to a deeper understanding of our socio-cultural context.

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