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The Getty Foundation

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Guatemala from 33,000 km presents over 100 works of art from more than 75 artists, created from just after the start of the civil war in 1960 to the present day. The vast range of artworks in the exhibition spanning diverse media, forms, and perspectives demonstrates that even during the worst years of repression and war in their countries, artists, both as individuals and collectives, continued to create visual expression that not only mirrored but directly engaged the sociopolitical situation of their time, albeit often through muted languages and conceptually oriented presentations. The exhibition considers the onset of the civil war in 1960 as a starting point, identifying this period as a catalyst for the emergence of contemporary artistic practices that became critically engaged with the country’s cultural, political, and historical context.

Guatemala from 33,000 km spans three venues—MCA, Santa Barbara Community Arts Workshop, and Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art—with each presenting a selection of work that reflects one or more of the themes. MICA explores the majority of works around art, politics, and the resulting violence; Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art focuses on issues of identity both racial and gender-related, and CMA presents works that deal with formal experimentation and art history. The highly diverse collection of works demonstrates the surprising extent to which artists in Guatemala participated in the broader moment and practices of Latin American art, such as geometric abstraction, performance and conceptual art, and new media, even in the midst of the “long civil war” that plagued the country and whose consequences, to a large extent, continue to this day.

Guatemala from 33,000 km is a part of the Getty’s Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, a fascinating andambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles.
CLUSTERS

From various points of view, formal approaches, and ideological positions, ART AND POLITICS deals with the way in which artists from different generations have experienced the thirty-six-year civil war and its consequences. Through these works emerges the nature of the conflict, as well as the presumption that it has generated in the Guatemalan population, which is reflected in artistic production. Given that the date of this exhibition coincides with the formal beginning of the war and parallel the development of the artist as a critical observer of political circumstances, it is argued that contemporary Guatemalan art cannot be dissociated from this aspect.

The group leading ART HISTORIES acknowledges the existence of multiple art historical narratives and includes works from the spirit of Institutional Critique, refer to local or international art, to the history of art, or to the work of other artists as prime matter for creation. This chapter also includes artworks by artists concerned with the lack of access to art education in the country, interested in publications, and inspired by artistic and cultural producers not necessarily recognized within the official art history.

The works included in FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION have contributed to the removal of technical and formal artistic practices in Guatemala over the last half-century, touching on fields such as geometric abstraction and the use of industrial materials to sculpture as well as the influence of Mexican and artistic languages. The group recognizes, however, the strong tendency towards figuration and social art; geometric abstraction has been, from different angles, a determining component of the history of Guatemalan art, insinuating as it has allowed for its renewal.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES analyze how gender and body rights have been expressed in artistic practices in recent years, largely through dialogue with foreign artists and the adaptation of the development of feminist theories to Guatemalan reality. It also discusses the disregard practices that have emerged from what has been more of an empirical conception of gender theory or activism and its social and cultural manifestations.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY explore the complex relationship between landscape, land, and territory, from some of the essential issues behind the armed conflict (such as former President José Efraín Ríos Montt’s agrarian reform proposal, and the expropriation of land to the United Fruit Company) to the central role played by the landscape in the construction of the collective imagination and the country-branding of Guatemala. The artworks in this chapter explore the multiple narratives that emerge from the landscape, such as the country’s natural environment, landscape as a source of conflict, and a particular cultural vision of the indigenous population: one that understands indigenous as an element of an exotic landscape and not as a citizen, member of society, and human being in his/her own right.

POPULAR CULTURES brings together works and artists who, from a Western art historical perspective, have paid special attention to popular culture, both indigenous and Latin. With one of the most deeply rooted traditions in Latin America, textile handicrafts have influenced several generations of artists, directly and as a result of their formal characteristics, use of materials, and wide dissemination as a distinctive cultural field.

RACISMS AND IDENTITIES, the artworks address the idea of a possible Guatemalan identity from the perspective of the cultural clash between indigenous groups and the Latin population (a minority that has historically not had social, political, and economic power). This set includes a series of works that deal with the racial division between Guatemalans (indigenous and mestizo) and social and racial conflicts in the course of history, as well as the multidimensional issues that flow from it. It also explores a third way of understanding the question of indigenous and Latin cultures—through the lens of hybridization and protestant theories.

Given the profound influence of Maya cosmology, as well as the great cultivation of “important” religions in Guatemala, such as Catholicism and more recently, Protestantism, the category RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS includes works that deepen the presentation of a spiritual aspect in the relationship with a wider cultural scene. This chapter includes a thoughtful and critical review of the effect that different modes of faith and metaphysics have had on the country in permeating the culture and its material and visual production.

The set of artworks in VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA present the responses of artists to the violence that persists in Guatemala as a consequence of the civil war and as the continuation of a broader historical narrative that goes back to the Spanish Conquest, spanning the military governments of the twentieth century, and deriving from the situation of inequality and social instability today. This group of works addresses the role of the State and the socially legitimized violence that has impacted life in Guatemala during the last half-century, but also represents work that is produced by a lack of State, institutional, and social policies that have allowed such tragic phenomena to happen in the country, such as the maras (gangs), migration, and the strengthening of drug trafficking.

KEY

The color of the small label for each artwork corresponds to one of the nine clusters outlined above. Each color is categorized below:

- ART AND POLITICS
- ART HISTORIES
- FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION
- GENDER PERSPECTIVES
- LAND, LANDSCAPE, AND TERRITORY
- POPULAR CULTURES
- RACISMS AND IDENTITIES
- RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND METAPHYSICS
- VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

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COMMUNITY ARTS WORKSHOP
431 Granada St, Sarrera, CA 93101
WESTMONT RILEY TREE MUSEUM OF ART
923 Le Fee, Montecito, CA 93108

VISITING HOURS FOR MCA & CAW:
Monday & Tuesday - Closed
Wednesday, Friday, & Saturday: 11 am - 5 pm
Thursday: 11 am - 8 pm
Sunday: Noon - 5 pm

VISITING HOURS FOR WESTMONT RILEY TREE:
Monday: 10 am - 4 pm
Tuesday: 10 am - 5 pm
Wednesday: 10 am - 5 pm
Thursday: 10 am - 5 pm
Friday: 10 am - 5 pm
Saturday: 10 am - 5 pm
Sunday: Closed

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