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Guatemala

from

33,000

km

CONTEMPORARY ART, 1960–PRESENT

Curated by Miki Garcia and Emiliano Valdés

Exhibition on view:

SEPTEMBER 17 - DECEMBER 17, 2017

MCA
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
SANTA BARBARA

Guatemala from 33,000 km

CONTEMPORARY ART, 1960-PRESENT

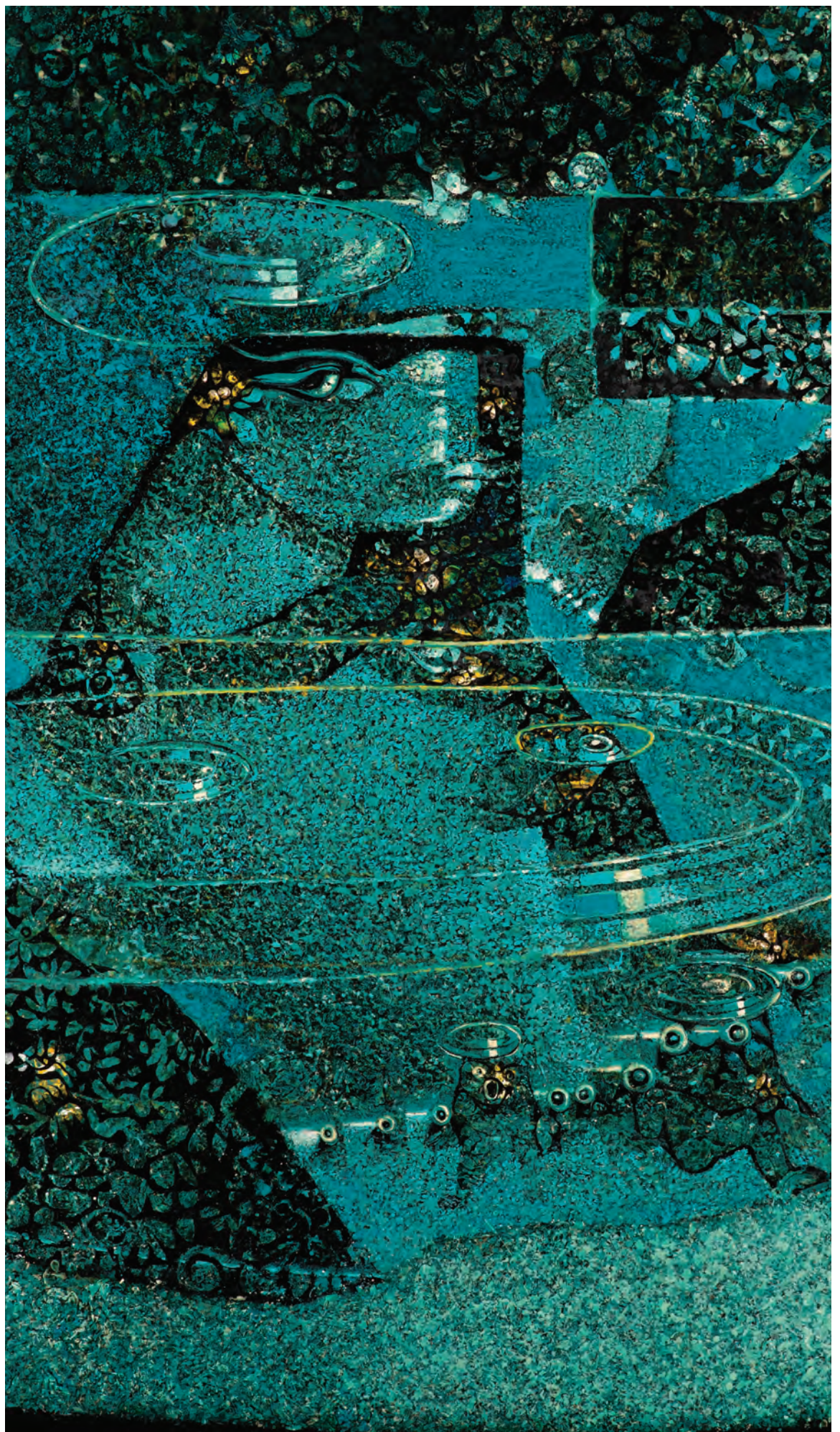
Organized by Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, *Guatemala from 33,000 km: Contemporary Art, 1960–Present* traces multiple routes of artistic development in Guatemala during the last half-century through the current moment. Groundbreaking in nature, this project introduces practices and oeuvres that have, by and large, remained invisible, and brings light to an understudied territory vis-à-vis the artistic lens. Responding to a relative lack of information on the country's cultural contributions and rich artistic production, the exhibition proposes nine overarching themes, clustered to provide a general framework from which to understand key moments in Guatemalan art history. The exhibition's title is inspired by a tour-de-force painting by artist Efraín Recinos (1928–2011), alluding to distance (both geographical and psychological) and portraying his signature *Guatemalita*, an anthropomorphized map of the country, painted in 1960.

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 artwork in the exhibition—spanning diverse media, formal languages, and perspectives—demonstrates that even during the worst years of repression and war in their country, artists, both as individuals and collectives, continued to create visual expressions that not only mirrored but directly engaged the sociopolitical situations 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.

Rather than a straightforward, chronological account of Guatemalan art history, the exhibition is choreographed as a constellation of overlapping references and dialogues between artworks, artists, and time periods taking place in Latin America, linking them to broader global art phenomena of this era. The clusters that serve as a guiding structure are: Art and Politics; Art Histories; Formal Experimentation; Gender Perspectives; Land, Landscape, and Territory; Popular Cultures; Racisms and Identities; Religion, Spirituality, and Metaphysics; and Violence and Trauma.

Guatemala from 33,000 km spans across three venues—MCASB, Santa Barbara Community Arts Workshop, and Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art—with each presenting a selection of work that references one or more of the clusters: MCASB hosts 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 CAW presents works that deal with formal experimentation and art history. The highly diverse collection of work demonstrates the surprising extent to which artists in Guatemala participated in the broader movements 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 part of the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, a far-reaching and ambitious 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 examined the thirty-six-year civil war and its consequences. Through these works emerges the nature of the conflict, as well as the polarization that it has generated in the Guatemalan population, which is reflected in artistic production. Given that the dates of this exhibition coincide 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 under the heading **ART HISTORIES** acknowledges the existence of multiple art historical narratives and includes works that, in 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 renewal of technical and formal artistic practice in Guatemala over the last half-century, touching on fields such as geometric abstraction and the use of industrial materials in sculpture as well as the influence of handicrafts on artistic languages. The group recognizes how, despite a strong tendency towards figuration and social art, geometric abstraction has been, from different angles, a determining component of the history of Guatemalan art, insofar as it has allowed for its renewal.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES analyzes 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 dissident 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 explores the complex relationship between landscape, land, and territory, from some of the essential issues behind the armed conflict (such as former President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán’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 cluster 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 Ladino. 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 seal.

In **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 Ladino population (a minority that has historically had social, political, and economic power). This set includes a series of works that deal with the racial division between Guatemalans (ideological and de facto) and racial conflicts in the course of history, as well as the multidirectional racism that follows suit. It also explores a third way of understanding the question of indigenous and Ladino cultures—through the lens of hybridization and postcolonial theories.

Given the profound influence of Maya cosmology, as well as the great diffusion of “imported” 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 and its relationship with a wider cultural scene. This cluster 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 instigated violence that has impacted life in Guatemala during the last half century, but also represents work that is produced by a lack of State, institutionality, 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 wall 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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#mcasb #artchangedmylife #freeplay



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MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SANTA BARBARA
653 Paseo Nuevo, Upper Arts Terrace,
Santa Barbara, CA 93101



COMMUNITY ARTS WORKSHOP
631 Garden St,
Santa Barbara, CA 93101



WESTMONT RIDLEY-TREE MUSEUM OF ART
955 La Paz, Montecito, CA 93108

VISITING HOURS FOR MCASB & CAW:

Monday & Tuesday: Closed
Wednesday, Friday, & Saturday: 11 am - 5 pm
Thursday: 11 am - 8 pm
Sunday: noon - 5 pm

VISITING HOURS FOR WESTMONT RIDLEY-TREE:

Monday - Friday: 10 am - 4 pm
Saturday: 11 am - 5 pm
Sunday: Closed