

Indigeneity and Decolonial Seeing

in Contemporary Art of Guatemala



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Fernando Poyón,
Contra la Pared, 2006.
Digital video still.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Kency Cornejo

Introduction

In the early twentieth-century modernist art of Latin America, Indigeneity became a popular theme with which to strengthen nationalist discourse, one that relegated Indigenous being to a romantic past. With the emergence of a Latin American modernism, artists who had recently arrived from studies in Europe introduced avant-garde trends reminiscent of an Indigenous aesthetics and style from centuries ago: flat spaces, decentering of linear perspective, use of saturated bold colours, anatomically abstracted bodies and overlapping representations of space. While these stylistic choices echoed prequest modes of representation that were forcefully prohibited during colonization, they were now credited to European artists and labeled cubism, expressionism, fauvism, surrealism and other European modernist styles supposedly inspired by non-European cultures.

Simultaneously, while such artists celebrated and elevated an imagined Indigenous identity, the brutal repression of Indigenous peoples residing in Central America was taking place under various government-led military campaigns. In depictions of these brutal periods – such as La Matanza, the massacre of 1932 led by General Hernández Martínez which left 30,000 Salvadorans dead, or the more recent genocide in Guatemala led by ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, which resulted in over 1,771 Mayan-Ixil killed and 29,000 displaced over his seventeen-month rule – the Indigenous

body remains the object of violence, historical discourse and sociopolitical analysis, and is rarely acknowledged as a *voice* or enunciation of visual epistemologies. In some cases, well-respected and well-intended artists in Central America addressed the Indigenous plight in contemporary artworks, but the Indigenous body remained a representation from the gaze of another. It appears that unless an artwork figuratively depicts village life, customs or landscapes (subject matter that fits within an already accepted folkloric style), Indigenous artists are disqualified from art narratives as *creators* of contemporary or experimental art, much less as contributors to an intellectual or philosophical artistic debate. Why is Indigeneity relegated to a romantic past, one that is to be depicted, that serves to inspire artists and that is only *to be seen*, while Indigenous peoples in the region are continuously subjected to racist and colonialist treatment, dehumanization and murder?

Today in postwar Guatemala, the flourishing contemporary art scene consists of several artists who employ experimental art practices to address the current state and violence within a greater system of coloniality. I here refer to the term the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano introduced to describe a system of domination in which the European/Western colonization of political and economic spheres continues to be intricately linked to the colonization of knowledge systems at the world scale: Coloniality is not synonymous with colonialism, though their historical relationships are the same. Rather, coloniality extends beyond the removal



Fernando Poyón,
Contra la Pared, 2006.
Digital video still.
Image courtesy of the artist.



of previous colonial governments and administrations, and persists as an ideological and epistemic tool of domination embedded in systems of power brought about by the history of colonization. [1]

For years, artists Benvenuto Chavajay, Sandra Monterroso, Ángel Poyón, Fernando Poyón and Antonio Pichillá have challenged colonialist notions of Indigenous peoples as mere silent sources of inspiration. Similar to what Walter Mignolo has termed a “locus of enunciation,” these artists create and articulate knowledge from a specific place – a colonial wound – visually

and through the body. [2] From an Indigenous embodiment of knowledge and cosmologies, they critique coloniality as they observe and live it in contemporary Guatemala. What issues do these artists bring to the forefront of decolonial visual thinking and critiques of coloniality? And how do these artists negotiate contemporary art practices with a colonial legacy of Indigenous repression, as they engage in creative decolonial strategies? How do their works delink from Eurocentric notions of the Indigenous body as one to be seen, and not as one who sees?



Sandra Monterroso,
Rakoc Atin, 2008.
Performance.
Image courtesy of the artist.



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[1] Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Its Institutions”

(paper presented at the conference Coloniality and Its Disciplinary Sites, Binghamton University, NY, April 1999).

[2] See Walter Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the

Colonial Difference,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 56–96; and Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).



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Sandra Monterroso, *Rakoc Atin*,
2008. Performance.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Corporal Critiques of Coloniality

Just this year, unprecedented in the Americas, the Guatemalan ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt was put on trial in a national court and found guilty of genocide for his deliberate attack on the Mayan-Ixil population. [3] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that up to eighty percent of deaths during the conflict were of Mayan Indigenous peoples, who were also raped, tortured and disappeared. Through earth scorching, sacred lands and resources were destroyed, ensuring that those who escaped direct military death still had very little chance of survival. And while the military rationalized killing Mayan children during the conflict by labeling them “consequential victims,” it is now known that government forces perceived Indigenous children as “bad seeds,” directly ordering their execution. [4] But what happens when these “bad seeds” grow anyway?

In the capital city of Guatemala, an Indigenous man dressed as the elders of his Mayan-Tz’utujil community intervened in the chaotic urban space, making all nearby stop and take notice of his performance, *El Grito (The Scream, 2002)*. The artist, Benvenuto Chavajay, paced back and forth on the busy sidewalk while swinging a matraca around and above his head. With the matraca, a religious instrument and symbol of Guatemalan identity for the artist, Chavajay echoed the sound of gunshots—a very familiar sound to his community during the armed conflict. By projecting this sound onto the city and its pedestrians he evoked a memory, reminding citizens of the 36-year war and of all its unresolved injustices. Chavajay evaded the limits of a sound associated with repression, and with his bodily presence transformed this sound into a visual and corporal scream of resistance, of condemnation — one that cannot be expressed

or experienced in the same way with a word or through text, as it requires the full embodiment and presence of both the artist and the viewers. His gesture evoked the sound, and his traditional dress and Indigenous body prescribed its meaning.

Chavajay’s action in *El Grito* draws from an ancient tradition of performance as an essential mode of cultural, spiritual and social representation and transmission of knowledge. From a Euro-American geopolitical perspective, however, grand histories of art locate performance art within a European and US tradition of experimental art in the 1960s. These histories of linear and unilateral development value concepts like originality, and identify Western art as authentic and all others as derivative. As a decolonial strategy, delinking from this Eurocentric perspective requires shifting the geographies of reason, and rewriting from colonized, erased histories and ways of knowing to bring forth other possible points of departure.

While Chavajay engages in performance art as a sociopolitical critique, he also draws from an Indigenous tradition that precedes twentieth-century Euro-American art movements, in which the body, uses of space and the ephemeral entail a system of knowledge production and transmission. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor coined a pair of terms, the *archive* and the *repertoire*, to elucidate how performance in the Americas, inclusive of its aesthetic and political aspects, can be understood as a system of knowledge. Unlike the archive (that is, memory and knowledge as it exists in documents, maps, bones, videos, film and anything else resistant to change), the repertoire enacts embodied memory (gestures, performances, orality, movement, dance) and includes ephemeral acts thought of as non-reproducible knowledge. [5] The irreproducible testimonial embodiment of Chavajay’s protesting scream (the repertoire), along with its visual documentation (the archive), challenges Western ways of knowing as solely textual, and roots the performance in an epistemic system deriving from ancient Mesoamerican civilizations. From that geography of reason, Chavajay evokes the thousands of visual and corporal screams that since colonization have resisted and condemned the prior genocides. *El Grito* therefore reveals that genocide within a neoliberal context is merely a contemporary manifestation of coloniality.

Along these lines, in a performance titled *Rakoc Atin* (2008), the artist Sandra Monterroso occupied the public space in front of the Supreme Court of Guatemala both as condemnation and healing process. During her performance, she wrote out in large scale the words *rakoc atin* with sea salt on the ground. In Maya Q’eqchi’, *rakoc atin* means “hacer justicia,” or “to make justice.” Under Ríos Montt’s rule, military forces would blatantly dispose of Indigenous peoples by throwing them from helicopters into the Pacific Ocean. [6] Some bodies returned with the tide, but most were never to be seen again, preventing both a proper burial ceremony and rituals of mourning. By using sea salt, Monterroso condemned the inhumane military practice, while simultaneously calling on the significance of salt in many Indigenous rituals and practices of healing and cleansing.

As the performance progressed, various intravenous machines, normally used to transfer blood, medicine or drugs into a main artery as a form of medical treatment, slowly leaked

[3] For information on the developments of the trial and links to other sites, see www.riosmontt-trial.org

[4] As Martínez Salazar observes, the death and killings of Mayan

children “was not a secondary casualty of state terror, but a clear object of destruction within the context of genocide.” Mayan babies, toddlers and children were defined by the state as “bad seeds” for being children of the

“internal enemies,” a term defined in the 1983 Manual of Counter-Subversive War by the Center for Military Studies of the Guatemala Army. See Eglá Martínez Salazar, *Global Coloniality of Power in Guatemala:*

Racism, Genocide, Citizenship (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 103.

[5] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham:

Duke University Press, 2003).

[6] See Guatemala, Memory of Silence: Tz’iinil Na’tab’al, Report of the Commission for Historical Clarifications, Conclusions and Recommendations (2000).

liquid onto the words, consequently diluting them. This subtle watering down of the phrase *rakoc atin* spoke to the fact that when victims or their families reported crimes of violence in their Native languages to police authorities, these reports often went undocumented due to a lack of translators— not to mention all those who never reported at all. The same occurred during a peace process that sought testimonies to initiate healing and reconciliation processes. In simulating a disintegration of words by a machine intended to keep people alive and to heal, Monterroso implicated language not only within the power of coloniality, but also with the failures of a symbolic healing process designed to only superficially maintain a people and culture alive.



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Benvenuto Chavajay, *Suave Chapina* series, 2007–2008.
Object, intervened rocks.
Image courtesy of the artist.



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Benvenuto Chavajay,
El Grito, 2002.
Performance.
Image courtesy of the artist.

This becomes all the more relevant considering that ten days after the historic guilty verdict for the US-backed military dictator Ríos Montt, by which he was sentenced to eighty years for genocide and crimes against humanity, the Guatemala Constitutional Court annulled the jury's verdict. [7] Chavajay and Monterroso, who embrace Indigenous identities and consider their actions decolonial strategies, bring the issue of race to the forefront of Indigenous genocide in Guatemala. Through their performances, they recognize how sound and language remain implicated in coloniality, and intervene in public spaces with their bodies to enact visual and corporal screams of denunciation. Their interventions can be understood as corporal critiques of contemporary systems that continue to uphold notions of race, superiority and inferiority to deem a group of people nonhuman. There are no *representations* of Indigenous bodies here; rather, the active presence of the artists' own bodies are decolonial gestures of embodiment and knowledge, not represented via the gaze of another, but enunciated and spoken in public space.



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Antonio Pichillá,
Ku'kul'kan, 2011.
Installation.
Image courtesy of Maria Victoria Véliz and the artist.

Away from the city, in more remote areas of Guatemala, artists are using object-based art to address the violence of modernity on Indigenous communities, linked to coloniality as the underside of modernity. San Pedro La Laguna is one of several Indigenous towns located at the edge of Lake Atitlán in the department of Sololá, Guatemala. [8] It is home to the Tz'utujil community, one of twenty-one ethnic groups in the country that make up the ancient Mayan civilization. Today, an influx of foreign travelers has turned the town into a tourist site with an overflow of backpackers, hostels and restaurants run by foreign retirees.[9] While the town is known for its strong artistic community (in particular, paintings of quotidian life in a traditional folklore style made for tourist consumption), a new generation departs from this artistic tradition to engage in practices still rooted in Indigenous ways of seeing. [10]

Chavajay, who resides in both the city and San Pedro La Laguna, links the environmental deterioration of the lake to the arrival of a foreign modernity. In his *Suave Chapina* (2007) series, the artist transforms rocks, stones and other objects from Lake Atitlán by attaching to them the plastic straps of the popular Suave Chapina brand of sandal. The brand's name merges *suave*, "soft," and *chapina*, the informal name used to refer to a Guatemalan woman. As Chavajay has noted about plastic: "This material marked Guatemalan society, above all the Indigenous world. With its arrival everything changed. Modernity *inplasticated* our culture." [11] This brand of sandal became both an inexpensive commodity of desire and an alternative to going barefoot. While the lightweight material of the sandal should project comfort and convenience, Chavajay has replaced the "sole" of the sandal with the natural rocks from San Pedro La Laguna, bringing forth the weight, heaviness and plight of the Tz'utujil community. This juxtaposition and relation between materials, in which plastic represents a foreign modernity and the rocks represent the lake and the Tz'utujil, goes beyond a critique of environmental destruction of land brought about by the tourist invasion of San Pedro. Modernity as inplastication of Indigenous culture summons in the artist's own terms what scholars have noted to be the underside of modernity. [12] That is, the conquest of the Americas was the constitutive element of modernity, and coloniality its counterpart—both mutually dependent phenomena. The series, however, is not a rejection of modernity but rather a reassertion of resistance and survival. Chavajay recognizes in much of his work the process of transculturation so pertinent to the Americas, but maintains a Tz'utujil epistemic connection through the base and sole of the artworks—pieces of earth that have existed for centuries as witness to Tz'utujil journeys.

The stones, moreover, are infused with a definition of art and the sacred that delinks from Western definitions of art. In the Tz'utujil community the word *art* or *arte* in the colonizing Spanish language emerged only fifty years ago. [13] For artists like Chavajay, the closest equivalent to art in Tz'utujil is *the sacred*, which implies a notion of valorization and significance applicable especially to nature, from the tallest trees to the smallest rocks. [14] This notion extends beyond mere belief and into a daily praxis and relation with the Mother Earth based on respect, sustenance and reciprocity. The Indigenous relation to nature continues to contrast and challenge the dominant ill-treatment and violent disregard of nature prominent in the coloniality of power, capitalism and Western ways of living—especially as they entail the destruction of Indigenous lands, sacred plants and, of course, bodies. The sacredness of life in nature's objects, as the most accurate definition of art, challenges the notion of art-commodity while maintaining a fundamental spiritual connection to visual culture and life that has survived for over 500 years.

By contrast, the Kaqchikel artist Ángel Poyón, who also makes object-based artworks, is more interested in conveying the failures of modernity for Guatemala. Poyón is from San Juan Comalapa, a town inhabited by the Indigenous Maya Kaqchikel located in the department of Chimaltenango, and widely known for a tradition of folklore painting that extends back to the 1940s with the master Andrés Curruchich. [15] In *Estudios del fracaso medidos en tiempo y espacio* (*Studies in Failure Measured in Time and Space*, 2008), Poyón recovers old-fashioned twin-bell alarm clocks by eliminating the numbers (references to Western concepts of time) and replacing them with paths of movement, migration and displacement. The lines—evoking one of the most notable modernist artists in the West, Piet Mondrian—offer a contradictory journey, with overlaps, repetitions and an unclear directionality that proposes an oppositional framework of time and space brought on by the failures of modernity. As the Guatemalan curator Rosina Cazali has argued, "these studies suggest a useless pathway, as was the project of modernity." [16] The vintage clocks proposition an element of nostalgia to the passing of time and movements in space, but in the context of Guatemala, nostalgia is offset by recent memories of forced migration—either rural to urban, or across national borders, as a result of the Guatemalan conflict. Like the *Suave Chapina* series, Ángel Poyón's *Estudios del fracaso medidos en tiempo y espacio* exposes the relation between an imposed modernity and its underside, coloniality. These nonfigurative, object-based works bring forth current issues of environment, space and migration; but unlike in the traditional style of painting practiced by local artists in their hometowns, Chavajay and Poyón eliminate representations of Indigenous bodies, allowing the ideas

[7] As these events are developing, we have yet to see the outcome of the annulment.

[8] For more on the Indigenous communities surrounding Lake Atitlán, see Morna Macleod, *Santiago Atitlán, Ombligo Del Universo Tz'utujil: Cosmovisión Y Ciudadanía* (Guatemala: Oxfam Novib, 2000).

[9] Away from the shore, or what art historian Maria Victoria Véliz has called the "downtown" of San Pedro, and up the steep slope of the volcano, tourists become less visible and the Tz'utujil

community becomes more present. See Maria Victoria Véliz, "Seguir Hacia Delante, Volver la Mirada hacia Atrás" in *Suave Chapina: Bienvenuto Chavajay* (Ciudad de Guatemala: Centro Cultural Metropolitano, 2007. Exhibition pamphlet).

[10] See Roberto Cabrera Padilla, "Artistas Guatemaltecos Kaqchikeles y Tz'utujiles: Una Nueva Visión" in *Otra Mirada: Atitlán + Comalapa* (Guatemala: Embajada de Mexico, 2007. Exhibition pamphlet).

[11] Benvenuto Chavajay, "A los

chunches no los transformo. Los transfiguro. No hay nada que hacerles," interview by Beatriz Colmenares, *El Periódico* (12 May 2013; online at www.elperiodico.com).

[12] See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" in *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580.

[13] Benvenuto Chavajay, interview by the author, San Salvador, El Salvador, 29 May 2011.

[14] Ibid.

[15] As a young boy, when Curruchich worked as a farmer, he acquired an interest in painting objects and local scenes onto feathers, wood, jicaras (gourds), and later cloth panels. Once "discovered" by a local priest, he gained international recognition and went on to exhibit in the United States, initiating the tradition in Comalapa, where he taught others his style of painting. Today there are hundreds of artists in Comalapa, including his daughter María Curruchich along with several women artists, who continue to paint in the tradition of daily scenes through oil painting.

[16] Rosina Cazali, *Migraciones: Mirando Al Sur* (Ciudad de Mexico: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, AECID, 2009. Exhibition catalogue).

and discourses in their works to convey Tz'utujil and Kaqchikel understandings of modernity/coloniality. This way of seeing materializes through a resignification of objects, which in the case of Chavajay, reinscribes Tz'utujil ways of seeing the sacred in the earth.

Spirituality and the Hidden

Studies have shown that Indigenous artists trained in Western styles of art during the colonial period inconspicuously incorporated symbols and imagery of Indigenous significance unknown to the Spanish colonizers and priests who supervised the works. While Christian religious practices were taken on, they were also subverted to incorporate and preserve Indigenous cosmologies and spirituality. [17] Today,



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Antonio Pichillá, *Lo Oculto*, 2005.
Installation.
Image courtesy of the artist.

artists like Fernando Poyón and Antonio Pichillá depend less on figurative associations to address the spiritual, instead using installation and video to critically reflect on the consequences of Christianity for Indigenous peoples in Guatemala and to reinforce notions of an Indigenous spirituality in the present day.

In the fifteen-second video *Contra la Pared (Against the Wall, 2006)*, Kaqchikel artist Fernando Poyón presents a close-up shot of three Mayan women in their traditional dress. Poyón frames the lower half of the women's faces while they speak words inaudible to viewers. The only sound heard is the classical Catholic hymn that plays throughout the duration of the video. Once the camera zooms out, never showing the women's faces but expanding the frame to their torsos, one sees the women repeating a gesture customary of the Catholic prayer I Confess to You. In the Spanish version of this prayer, to accompany the phrase "por mi culpa, por mi culpa, por mi gran culpa" one repeatedly

takes the right fist to the heart as a gesture of guilt and remorse. Poyón associates this act with being "backed against the wall," as the title indicates. In removing all contexts and isolating the act of self-blame as the focus of the video, the artist highlights that there is no justification for the confession, portraying the robotic gesture of guilt as an internalized colonialist act. Rooted in the imposition of Christianity as a method for colonization, and specifically the slaughter of those who refused conversion, Poyón points to this self-blame as a forced yet internalized mode of survival to coloniality. The lack of facial expression, the deliberately hidden eyes, and the mechanical manner in which the women repeat the gesture, conveys a dissociation from the prayer's meaning that highlights a difference between performing a compromise in order to evade death and that of complete submission. In this manner, the artist reveals the role of Christianity, extending from initial colonization into contemporary coloniality manifested through self-blame. For Indigenous communities, the concepts of blame and self-blame remain prevalent concerns considering the continued lack of outside accountability for the oppression and injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples, and in particular by women as the main victims of physical and psychological violence.

Conversely, Tz'utujil artist Antonio Pichillá departs from a Mayan-Tz'utujil spirituality in his installations and videos. In the large-scale installation titled *Ku'kul'kan* (2011), Pichillá utilizes massive amounts of red cloth in a sculptural representation of the ancient fire serpent god Quetzalcoatl. The serpentine form is made up of a series of large knots, and the sculpture is placed across the wall to simulate its movement. Visually, Pichillá works with the concept of the knots or *bultos* (bundles) in relation to a strict Tz'utujil spirituality and energy. In the Tz'utujil community of San Pedro La Laguna, the artist is also known as a spiritual guide (or what some term a shaman) called upon by the community to heal individuals on matters of the spirit. Thus, his artistic practice explicitly departs from the notion of "experience from life" and into "life is spiritual" [18] By incorporating knots into his installation, Pichillá embodies notions of the body, spirit, mind and energy into the sacred.

Pichillá's *bultos*, furthermore, allude to private, domestic space as a reference to the safeguarding of the valuable and the sacred. This idea is present in the installation *Lo Oculto (The Hidden, 2005)* consisting of two *bultos* in a triangular shelf. Common in Tz'utujil homes, items of value are hidden in tied bundles, kept veiled for protection in various locations throughout the home, or at times on the body. For Pichillá, in addition to the sacred and domestic, knots are symbols of Tz'utujil aesthetics and concepts of beauty, and recall the braided hair of an Indigenous woman secured with cloth and knots as a visual sign of attractiveness. [19] Gesture becomes equally important for the artist as he compares the process of creating and unraveling a knot (like covering and unraveling a bundle) to the continuous cycle in life. In the process, one knot leads to another, like a cycle of time that intersects states of knowing, being, and the sacred, where an end is actually a beginning. [20] With this idea, Pichillá references the Mayan calendar and the Baktun 13-while many inaccurately interpreted this as the Mayan prediction of

[17] For example, the pre-Columbian goddess Coatlicue was secretly worshipped via the sanctioned figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This imagery has been especially central to Chicana/o artists in the United States who root their spirituality

through the incorporation of pre-Columbian imagery in their artwork. For a study on this relation between spirituality and Indigeneity in Chicana/o art, see Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham and London:

Duke University Press, 2007); and Guisela Latorre, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

[18] Antonio Pichillá, interview by the author, 29 November 2012.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

apocalypse, it in fact indicates an end to a Mayan era and the beginning of another rooted in Mayan cyclical concepts of time, and in opposition to the linear notions of time in Western thought.

Poyón's *Contra la Pared* video raises the question of an internalized colonial mentality made possible through religious conquests and the persistence of coloniality; from extreme impoverished conditions to the lack of education resources, to rape, torture and genocide, the Guatemalan government constantly evades responsibility for the plight of Indigenous peoples and attributes responsibilities to notions of ignorance, uncleanness and promiscuity, resorting to colonialist racial discourse for impunity. Pichillá, from a direct Tz'utujil spirituality, points to the hidden and the sacred as an entry point to resistance and survival for an Indigenous episteme, with a critical awareness that like Christianity and modernity, disciplines of Western knowledge have sought entry into Indigenous cosmologies under the guise of objective research. [21] Key to the concept of the hidden is that which is being protected: Indigenous cosmologies and ways of knowing, which have historically become the desires of Western studies. In conversation, Poyón's video and Pichillá's installations make a clear distinction between the role of religion in coloniality and the protection of spirituality as a decolonial strategy.

Conclusion

In Mesoamerica, visibility has been a carrier and transmitter of histories, identities, thoughts, scientific discoveries and concepts of time and space even before coloniality/modernity became the global model of power. It is no surprise, then, that in an attempt to eliminate a population's ways of being, the colonization of ways of seeing would be yet another strategy for the repression of other bodies and cosmologies. This suggests that a decolonial approach to visibility, art and visual thinking requires an unveiling and decentering of Western perspectives and their monopoly over meaning, beauty and art, and a visual rewriting from a position of colonial difference. Recognizing Indigenous visual theorization as part of ongoing political and artistic debates is key, and is distinct from addressing it as subject matter, as has been common in Western art where the Indigenous body is treated as a mere source of artistic inspiration.

Belonging to the generation that the military government termed "bad seeds," and now to a so-called postwar generation, these artists enact decolonial gestures, and create objects to convey decolonial ways of seeing, in the contemporary art of Guatemala. From visual/corporal screams and object-based critiques of modernity and its underside, to the power of preserving the sacred, these selected works are based on rigorous investigation, on notions of the spiritual and in consideration of current political issues. They reinforce the epistemic aspect of art that goes beyond expression and into reflection and the production of knowledge. As such, they reiterate that intellectually inspired creative works are not limited to an Indigenous romanticized past, but are continuously present today, just as colonialist structures remain intact within current systems of power, demonstrating the need for decolonization as an ongoing project.

[21] See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1999).



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Angel Poyón. *Estudios del fracaso medidos en tiempo y espacio*, 2008.
Object, intervened clock.
Image courtesy of Andrés Asturias/RARA and the artist.

Kency Cornejo is currently a PhD candidate in Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University and holds an MA from UT Austin and a BA from UCLA. Her dissertation, "Visual Disobedience: The Geopolitics of Experimental Art in Central America, 1990–present," explores the intersection between race, gender and coloniality in the art of postwar Central America, and considers issues of violence, femicide, immigration and Central American diasporas. Her work has received support from the Fulbright-Hays DDRA and the Ford Foundation. She has designed and taught a course at Duke titled Art, Visual Culture & Politics in Central America.