Parakupá Vená | Fall From the Highest Place

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Abstract

This document is a collection of the ideas and research that drive my artistic practice. My practice focuses on investigating the power structures, historical roots, and existential implications of the current Venezuelan economic crisis, one of the most drastic economic collapses of modern times. The ideological rifts created in the Cold War era created a deep anti-socialist sentiment that inhibits our ability to responsibly acknowledge global interdependence. I visualize collective belief systems that gain power from their proposed neutrality. I point to the existence of value beyond the parameters and measures of global capitalism that encourage dependence. I see the Venezuelan crisis as the failure of old forms of socialism to resist against the evolving forms of neoliberal capitalism.

My practice considers the present moment as the projected future of modernism and colonialism, with its accelerating time and its ideals of suppressing and surpassing materiality. I develop rituals that slow down this trajectory that seems to stop only in collapse and crisis. I contrast and recalibrate human time with geological time. My sculptural practice studies consumption and incorporation; the way everything is made up through incorporating or rejecting something else. I think of my gendered, sexualized, Latina body, as matter in an infinite process of integrating and disintegrating with the world. The moments where materialities meet image surfaces shed light on the complex ways images build empire, the contradictions and power of visibility and invisibility. Sometimes I turn off the lights, and with touch, I resist the impulse to favor distanced sight as a supposedly objective form of knowing.

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I do not know how many days I have been 'social distancing'. I am not keeping track. I like the way time is no longer striated, except by a few sparse virtual events. For now, I can sit and breathe. It is like being a child. Before Corona, I set alarms, so I could exist, forget time, in this way for at least short intervals. Then, the days bloated. Then, the sun rose and set in spite of all my activity. Now I follow it. Every once in a while, a wave of worry comes over me, that having lived this, I will not be able to ariate my time again and I will fall behind the count.

A few days ago, I remembered that I had a trip planned for Colombia. It was squeezed in between so many other things. I had envisioned myself driving to DC, flying to Bogota, and sleeping an eight hour overnight layover in the airport with my backpack as a pillow. I had envisioned myself a soft target in the middle of a large empty air-conditioned airport, with yellow lights that flicker imperceptibly. I had imagined myself changing my sim card with an earring and debating all night whether or not I would actually get mugged or kidnapped if I got in a taxi or the bus instead of an Uber or if that was neoliberal talk. Or maybe both were true. Or maybe the chances were the same? Why would they be different? I would weigh the fears.

The last time I left Bogota, the taxis were on strike against the 'the neoliberal apps': I got in the front seat and put on my seat belt. I could see the beads of sweat running down his face. He called me a crazy woman for going there alone, without a plan. He said the taxis were blocking traffic and were armed and the police would take his license away for twenty five years if we got pulled over. I later learned this was a gross exaggeration. He parked in the lot and walked me into the airport. We agreed he was my dad's friend, in case the police questioned us. They gave us looks, we nodded and he squeezed me.

I imagined I would make it to Santa Marta, where Josne would meet me under midday sun. The kind of sun there for quiet afternoons. Somehow the only sounds would be the echoes of another Venesian selling fruit over a parlante, and the sun whistling between the buildings. The same kind of afternoon of my last day in Valencia when we waited on the corner of our building to be picked up. I imagine we would step onto the tiny blue buses that go down la carretera to Palomino. That we would stare at rows of bagged banana bushels to which all the Sierra's rivers were diverted. These areas are safe now, they say. Those guerrillas now function out of Venezuela where the government turns a blind eye. I would sink my feet into the dry dirt for a minute before hopping on a motorcycle to Josne's new apartment, where we would make a video of ourselves throwing the Bolívars we had collected up into the air, and we would watch them fall, with ironic smiles, not too dissimilar to the sinister satisfaction this brings me. But at the same time it brings me deep cynicism and dread. I've seen the disbelief and how this downward spirals and collapses. No estoy Colombia or Venezuela, I'm in Richmond. I lay in a hammock in my bedroom and write this. I knew all along there was a reason we had to see these events at borders would say when they saw the contents of the bag. I can imagine they would laugh at me. There might be laws against this, but this money is technically worth very little. "It's just art," I would say, with a smile. She's just a girl playing pretend. They might let me go, thinking I pose no threat. "It's just art. It's just pretend. Like the movies."

Yesterday I told someone about the bounty put on Maduros head by Trump. Fifteen million dollars. I wonder if a Venezolano will get that. How many bags would that fill? What kind of zeros are on those bills? It's perfect timing, in a terrible way. With everyone focused on Corona. With everyone desperate for someone to give them some certainty, something to hold onto in this abyss. But they said, "I didn't know we put bounties on other country's presidents like that! Bounties are in the movies." It reminded me of a day I sat in the car listening to the radio and they were talking about Escobar. I turned it up, I wanted to learn about the history of the conflict in Colombia. But I realized after a few moments, that they were reporting on the Netflix series called Narcos.

They make the world into entertainment so that some people can laugh and say it's pretend. I am not interested in the project of making the real into the pretend. The world itself is full of magic. I am interested in finding what is pretend about what I have been told is real.

I would go through immigration at Orlando airport again. The officer would say, "welcome home," and I would shed a single tear, saturated with my salty minerals. Orlando airport is a cruel reminder of the disillusion and betrayal. The USA is an image, a pretty reflection, held up by our beliefs in it. I would come back to Richmond and put the bills in a safe embedded in the gallery wall covered in the symbol of exponential growth. People would ask how much is it worth, people would ask if they could see the wallets and bills, people would speculate about their existence behind the safe walls.

But Coronavirus spread in the US and all international flights were canceled. These places where people have the privilege of mobility are highly affected. This crisis is difficult to displace. I remember how some people thought shortages and state checks were only for third world countries. Now the grocery stores here remind me of Venezuela. I try to shake off the sinister satisfaction this brings me. But at the same time it brings me deep cynicism and dread. I've seen the disbelief and how this downward spirals and collapses. No estoy Colombia or Venezuela, I'm in Richmond. I lay in a hammock in my bedroom and write this. I knew all along there was a reason we had to see these Bolívares here.

Once I was in Palomino, I would feel every ounce of my body in the river and at the place where it met the ocean, tears would also stream out of my eyes. This place, with dangerous vitality. The ocean there made a round time of its own, the waves, too bravos to be counted. In a moment, I would pack my bag full of the bills. It would feel like a sterile violent departure, out of that round pace.

I don't know what the officials at borders would say when they saw the contents of the bag. I can imagine they would laugh at me. There might be laws against this, but this money is technically worth very little. "It's just art," I would say, with a smile. She's just a girl playing pretend. They might let me go, thinking I pose no threat. "It's just art. It's just pretend. Like the movies."

1. Delune, Gilles, Guattari, Felix. “The Smooth and The Striataled.” A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Delune and Guattari describe space as striated by vertical and horizontal elements that organize matter. I think about calendars and how this downward spirals and collapses. No estoy Colombia or Venezuela, I’m in Richmond. I lay in a hammock in my bedroom and write this. I knew all along there was a reason we had to see these Bolívares here.

2. “Ride-sharing” phone application corporations such as Didi, Cabify, Indriver, and Uber have become available in Colombia in the past decade. The fact that these applications often bypass federal regulations, disguise increased employee risk as "self-sufficiency"; and reduce competition, has led to significant critical attention including various lawsuits and taxi strikes in Colombia.
Look
Two mountains
¿Qué?
Two mountains
Aaaaah
Well that’s one right there
Yyyyy
And the other one
that’s not it
With that, the fisherman oriented themselves
As I remember...
how the boy sang the story in Margarita
María Guevara was an indigenous woman
who fought against the Spanish
She died in battle and in the place where she died
Those mountains grew

But Wikipedia in English says:

Lines and images are a certain blindness

How do we orient ourselves in a world so big? How do I know who I am? Where to start? This project started in Summer 2019. I was on the other side of the Sierra Nevada. I looked up at the sky right above the mountains. In Colombia, I met so many Venezuelans. I thought, where or what is this Venezuela, that I left and have been longing for ever since? If everyone left would it still be Venezuela? If everyone came to Santa Marta, would Santa Marta become Venezuela? Or is it the land? How can twenty-four different categories of ecosystems all be held in one name? What are the implications of this signifier? What is that word?

Veeeeeninveeeeeeезuuuuuuеaaааааа?
Confederación de Venezuela
Estados de Venezuela
Estados Unidos de Venezuela
República de Venezuela
República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Qué es esta Venezuela a quien le corresponde esta republica Bolivariana?

My research began at the inception of this signifier for those lands, to understand the conditions in which this signifier came to be. In their voyage of 1499, the indigenous houses of Lake Maracaibo reminded Vespucci and Alonso De Ojeda of Venice, Italy and so they began to refer to these lands as Venezuela, little Venice. This was a projected type of vision. A blindness in sight. One particular way of seeing, from the infinite possibilities for seeing. In the accounts that explorers relayed to the Royalty, the images of Venezuela began. Images of paradise and fertile land, that would bring wealth to their empires in competition with other empires. A way of conceptually placing the viewer on the viewed, that began the process of consumption. The colonial fascination with indigenous Caribbean cannibalism might itself be understood as another form of projection, since it was the colonizers who came with plans to incorporate, that which was considered other, into their way of being. In this ontological projection, things were defined by the processes by which they would be consumed into empire. Seen in this way, Venezuela is not the land itself, but the border that defined it as theirs. Maybe to the surprise of some, I can say, this was not the true beginning of what Venezuela really is, but where the crisis began.

“The planet is bordered because it was bordered by colonialism.” Through map-making, image-making, and land-scaping, colonizers defined land for the extraction of its resources. Through this process of imaging, land is transformed into property. This is the process of projecting lines onto the infinite, to be able to count and therefore own. Image-making, as a practice of, framing, decontextualizing, and ontological making, of places, people, and plants, is fundamental to the power of the colonial order. As a visual artist, this gives me both great responsibility and power.

Today, the images of Venezuelan landscapes on Bolívars reveal the persistence of imaging as a colonial tool. They are the incorporation of land onto the mechanism for counting and accumulating value. Looking up close, these images reveal themselves as mere collections of lines. Yet even these flat images, even these collections of lines are made of paper and ink and can be seen in infinite ways. Even as the apparatuses for sight reach technical limits, there is always more that could be seen.

In midwest USA, where the winter brings a passivity to the land, I learned that these lines come with mathematical straightness. But in Venezuela, where the tepuis drastically fall, and the Sierra splits waterdrops on its sharp ridges, the lands resists and the border has no choice but to follow. Despite great efforts to annihilate via deifying for consumption, lines can never truly deny or contain full existence. The process of incorporation is a messy one, and there is resistance and existence in spite of these reductive processes. As a visual artist - independent wielder of images - I study the dynamics of this mode of vision and the way it persists in our times. I interrogate the Google algorithm and the images it presents that reduce these places to vacation destinations.

The story of Maria Guevara, is literally a story of her physical resistance against the Spanish. As an oral tradition, the story is told and retold, each time with the texture of a new voice, a new intonation, a new interpretation, cherished in its multiplicity, in the impossibility of complete objectivity. That does not mean she was not real in any way or in many ways. With each retelling, her edges flicker, they evade ownership. In death she becomes the mountains, orienting fishermen, not through projection of borders but through relation between bodies and land.

The story of the islands of Margarita, Cumana, and Cubagua, where the Spanish arrived and began the process of extracting and claiming the beauty of pearls and of women like Maria Guevara, reveal the complexity of the violence in the colonial project. It is a project in which the lands were described as paradise. It is a project of incorporation, of lustful desire to obtain, not exclusively a project of destruction. In *Venus in Two Acts*, Saidiya Hartman makes the point that, “what has been said and what can be said about Venus, take for granted the traffic between fact, fantasy, desire, and violence.” In Hartman’s creation of a narrative counter-history of Venus, the focus on two particular women’s stories about their crossing of the middle-passage brings to light the ways that colonialism and slavery seeped beyond structural violence, into a libidinal violence. Through my work, I hope to expose and study the paradoxical closeness of desire, pleasure, and intimacy, with violence and domination.

In the *The Uses of the Erotic*, Audrey Lorde talks about the “power of the erotic” as a source of knowledge and how it is suppressed by being transformed into the pornographic. My practice is a search for this erotic way of knowing. With Lorde’s theory, I understand the colonial and contemporary touristic imaging of Venezuela’s lands and people, as the reduction and exploitation of this erotic power. The land in the northern area of South America and Central America, holds enourmous feminine erotic energy and power. I think about the pearls, the gold, the salt, the coffee, the women, and the gasoline exports and the colonial desire to dominate this beauty and wealth. Because the erotic is reduced to the pornographic through imaging, I resist the tendency to further turn the Venezuelan land into image. Instead, through microscopic proximity to the bills, I present viewers with the erotic power of the materiality of the images themselves."

7. In *Art/Porn*, Kelly Dennis makes the argument that representations are important to the conversation about representation because, even when depicted in a painting, the female body can cause a physiological reaction in the viewer. She says that the Venus’ Urbino breaks down the distinction between subject and object, and that this challenges Plato’s notion of truth as coming only from distant observation, and that representation represents some truth outside of that representation. This is interesting in relationship to images on money and money as images, because there is supposed to be some truth of value outside of the representations of money. Feminine sexuality has some assertion to make in this dialogue: Dennis, Kelly. *Art/Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching*. 2009. Print.
who fought against the Spanish
Here we go
We go there

Yeah that’s when we built that lift
That went up that mountain
And.. bueno pues!

that’s the Humboldt
Eso es lo que compramos con el dinero del petro

National Imaging: the view of Caracas, the view of the USA
The modernist project is a continuation of colonial imaging. In order to fully understand modernity, we must understand the continuities between the projects of colonization and modernization. We must not treat modernization as an ahistorical phenomenon. Modernization is not just complicit with, but is possible because of colonization.

By 1819, descendants of Spaniards who were born in the Americas, revolted against Spanish rule and gained independence from Spain under the leadership of Simón Bolívar as La Gran Colombia. After hundreds of years of Spanish incorporation, this projected term, Venezuela, became a lived reality. People like Simón Bolívar, seen as lesser than by Spaniards for being born in the Americas, now saw themselves as Venezuelans. The rhetoric of liberation across the Americas is often used to mark the end of the colonial project. Yet, in many ways, racial and economic structures of domination remained, with those considered most pure in Spanish descent at the top of the power hierarchy. In this way, the rhetoric around liberation movements across the Americas has been used as a dehistoricization that allowed for the continuation of domination. The colonial project simply slowly transformed into nationalist domination.

In the 1950’s, Pérez Jiménez constructed a national identity that persists today in the Venezuelan landscape and psyche, through the modernist utopian image. In Here We Go, We Go There, Here We Go, I look at the image of the Humboldt Hotel, built during Pérez Jiménez’s dictatorship. Like the colonialist project, Jiménez’s project turned the Venezuelan land into an image in order to justify material accumulation and extraction and disguise it as progress. In Spectacular Modernity, Blackmore describes the ways Jiménez used architecture to turn space into a modernist spectacle.

“Turning this previously undeveloped mountain into a leisure destination was the dictator’s pet project, and the amenities inaugurated there in 1956 translated the ideals of synoptic vision, spatial transformation, and superacion onto a monumental scale. After entering the cable car at the ultra modern station that Alejandro Pietri designed at Maripérez, visitors ascended to a height of over two thousand meters and, once at the summit, visited restaurants, or even gilded around the skating rink. Another option was to board a smaller, horizontal cable car and continue along the ridge to the five-star Hotel Humboldt, whose fourteen-story cylindrical form was topped by a penthouse complete with 360-degree view and with landscaped gardens designed by the Brazilian modernist Roberto Burle-Marx. The architect of the hotel, Tomás Sanabria, was a keen pilot who during his lifetime amassed almost eight thousand aerial photographs of Caracas and confessed to canceling appointments just so he could take to the skies and view the city “like a model”. The cable car and the hotel underscore the culture of display linked to Venezuelan modernity.”

Placed at the top of a densely forested mountain, the Humboldt Hotel intends to claim it, projecting a future of development for the entire mountain side. The path of ascension to the hotel is a phenomenological manifestation of the rhetoric of progressivist escalation, complete with a path of landscape visualizations. Using architecture, Jiménez manipulated space in order to create grandiose spectacles that idealized the control of land as progress for the nation. Yet, the hotel only functioned for a short period of time, before the cable car broke down and the hotel was left abandoned. In, Here We Go, We Go There, Here We Go, I present the lived reality of this modernist utopia, nothing more than an image. Reproduced on devalued Bolívares, the video ironically asks - what does this upward trajectory of modernism lead us to? Through my reimagining of it, I de-monumentalize the symbolism of the Humboldt, present it in its truest form, and subject it to my trembling perspective, my round breath.

Modernization in Venezuela, however, cannot be fully understood without a critical account of US hegemony. By 1823, only four years after the declared end of Spanish colonial rule, the Monroe Doctrine
was drafted in the USA. The Doctrine warned European powers not to meddle in the Americas. While it was positioned as a response to national security threats and as an anti-colonial argument, it set the ground for the continuation of imperialist power in the Americas by the USA. The argument, that the USA opposes imperial power and therefore cannot be an empire, remains prevalent today. "The neo-conservative view of humanitarian or benign imperialism proposes a newer version of American Exceptionalism, contends the U.S. empire is different from empires of the past. Generally, Americans are unwilling to see their nation as imperialist. It is becoming increasingly clear, though, that the identification of the U.S. as an imperialist power is generally accepted as a given throughout most of the world. Ironically, the residents of the main imperial power seem to be the last to fully grasp that sentiment."9

Similarly to the way past colonialisit and nationalist powers functioned, the USA used imaging as a tool for domination of land's resources and people. Starting in the 1920's, and particularly after the nationalization of the oil industry in Mexico in 1938, the USA focused on securing its access to the extraction of oil in Venezuela.10 US corporations did so through the creation and dissemination of hegemonic images - hypervisible images of idealized modernity and American culture that function as models for development. Oil was strategically positioned as the means to achieving this goal.

In Labor Versus Empire, Miguel Tinker Salas describes in detail the influence oil camps had in Venezuela. "Corporate and even the state discourses presented oil as an agent of modernization, of progress, and as an essential element of civilization. Of course, progress under this scheme depended on an acceptance of the social hierarchy that developed in oil camps throughout Venezuela. Likewise, any critique of this new social order quickly became categorized as "ignorant" or worse, "retrograde;' and therefore harmful to the nation. Thus, the national discourse on development and modernization was framed by the control foreign oil companies played in the economy."11

The influence of these oil corporations spread, not only to people in the oil camps where many Venezuelans relocated to for employment, but also to the general public through large public relations campaigns that produced cultural content in magazines and radio stations.12 US involvement in the oil industry in Venezuela, reached far into the psyche of Venezuelan culture, shaping not only the culture of labor, but also the general ideas of what the country should strive for, the way families were organized, and even the idea of what it meant to be Venezuelan. Through the creation of hegemonic images, the USA guaranteed its access to oil. We wanted to turn the earth for its energy, thinking that with it we could become the image of American modernity. Collectively we held up this system of belief which functioned as a model that guided our becoming.

By 1998, the idealization of development and modernity had become so prevalent that in much of Venezuelan discourse, everything American was idealized or seen as better than. I remember seeing images of the geodesic sphere at EPCOT.13 I wanted to be everything it was. Hegemonic images are designed to build aspiration, and present themselves as possible realities. Yet abstract ideals, imposed in different places, contexts, and bodies inevitably relate to many unimaginable factors and produce significantly different realities. This is part of the violence of imperialism. What does it mean, to try to mold the complex vitality of life into a distant image? 

When I immigrated to the United States, I thought we were literally moving to EPCOT. I realized later that this expectation was not simply childhood naiveté, it was a product of hegemonic images. They create a sort of blindness; you cannot see reality while you are looking into an image. So in My Compulsory Promise (After Spaceship Earth), I say here I am; this is fifty years later; this is the projected future that the modernist project idealized. I build the image of EPCOT, the geodesic sphere, to my size, and touch it. I read it a love letter to renegotiate my desires that it dictated for so long.

I understand hegemonic image as the projected image that doesn't see itself, and that negates its situated perspective; the image that is only seen, or the person that sees as if seeing from nowhere. Through touch I resist the impulse to favor distanced sight as a supposedly objective form of knowing. Touching is inevitably, simultaneously, to be touched. I am interested building an entangled, reciprocal, "responsive " way of knowing the world that resists the hegemonic power of unidirectional sight.

The USA is a place without a name. This is no coincidence. Sometimes I call it 'The United States, yet there are many united states. Sometimes I call it America, but there are many countries in the Americas. So the United States of America is a country without a name and this is no coincidence.

10. Smith, Labor Versus Empire. 135.
13. Experimental Planned Community of Tomorrow was originally planned as a place where people could live, it instead became a theme park in Disney World.
14. A design by Buckminster Fuller. One of the first iterations of this form represented the US in 1967 World's Fair where it aimed to create its own isolated environment. The acrylic surface of the sphere burns down. At Epcot, the sphere became a ride called Spaceship Earth that takes viewers through a simulated and idealized history of human communication technology.
detail of My Compulsory Promise (After Spaceship Earth): ground Tumi, felt, wood, rubbing alcohol, metal plates, hardware, hose, 2019

Letter to My Compulsory Promise (After Spaceship Earth): paper and graphite, 2019
My Compulsory Promise
After Spaceship Earth
ground Time. Wood, rubbing alcohol, metal plates, hardware, hide. 2019
yea that’s when we built that lift that went up that mountain and bueno pues!
The Developmental Myths

The modernist project was ignited by and an expansion of colonial extractive exploitation. The automotive industry depended on the rubber extracted by enslaved indigenous populations in the Amazon during colonial times. There are numerous examples. Yet there are many contradictions embedded in Modernity about materiality - a negation of materiality, despite it being at the center of its project. This contradiction comes from the prevalence of the Cartesian dualism: the idea that we are bodies that hold our souls, that the soul could be separated from the body, and that ideas and matter and form can exist separately. In many ways, the project of Modernity is a project that sees material and materiality as a problem that we have to overcome. It idealizes ideas without material.

The colonialist and imperialist relationship to material developed an economic order that in many ways persists today. In the Paradox Of Plenty, Karl analyzes the similarities in the effects of the oil booms in Venezuela and 16th century Spain during the extraction of gold and silver from Central and South America. He quotes both Adam Smith, and John Maynard Keynes, making the argument that the Spanish extraction of gold and silver was perhaps one of the most significant events in the formation of modern capitalism. Optimism from the influx of wealth from the extraction in the Americas, encouraged drastic increases in spending by the Spanish Crown. Many of the current structures of credit and debt were developed as the crown tried to maintain its levels of spending while waiting for the transportation of these heavy metals across the Atlantic and across Europe. Credit formed from the high of capital accumulation and the desire to outrun material limitations.

This negation of matter occurs throughout Western culture. In Intimacies of Four Continents, Lisa Lowe reveals how humanist ideals of freedom developed due to the fact that these philosophers started to have leisure time due to their exploitation of labor and resources. In the rhetoric of liberal humanism, in addition to the exclusion of people of color from the rights humanism guarantees, there is a glaring omission of acknowledgment for the labor that the ideological formation of humanism depended on. As if leisure time was magically possible. In Bolívar, I allude to this irony in representations of liberation by looking at a compilation of the different images of Simón Bolívar on Bolívars and asking them to liberate us. The work implicitly asks: liberation from what? Given the context, it suggests that the Western notion of liberation is a 'liberation', for some, from the responsibility to acknowledge the material reality of life, rather than a truly inclusive freedom from domination. This negation under the guise of freedom, continues today as global capitalism 'forgets', de-visualizes, and pushes the formative conditions of its making out of the frame of its image, out of its visuality. Today, this manifests through the outsourcing of manual labor out of its idealized spaces, and through the racialized and gendered delegitimization of certain people and their labor.

In my work, Si La Virgen Fuera Andina, I attempt to resist this ontological relationship to matter. I present first an image, a Virgin Mary figure on a felt pedestal that also holds a painting with the word 'insurance' embossed. As viewers walk around the felt structure, they realize this idealized image obscures the mold in which the virgin was made, a pit of charcoal, and a hand held meat grinder. I present to viewers part of the process in which the sculptural element was produced. The meat grinder from the


50’s symbolizes the ease and leisure that modernity promised through consumer culture brought by modernization, yet as a product it again obscures the labor and material with which it was produced. Through the use of the Virgin Mary, I touch on the Christian colonial roots of this idea of mind over matter. I think about immaculate conception: this idea that she became pregnant through a purely spiritual power, without any kind of material existence. I allude to the suggestion that the truth of that physical reality would somehow make her unholy, the idea that materiality could be surpassed or that it should be suppressed. I make her out of charcoal — carbon, the most basic element of life — to reinfuse this idea of life with materiality.

The suppression of materiality is at the root of many of the world’s problems today. In the idealized spaces of contemporary capitalism, there is extreme visuality around commodity culture, yet as soon as that object loses its sense of image, once it becomes matter again, it becomes invisible. It is immediately put out of sight, in an opaque plastic bag, taken away to a conceptual ‘no place’. But landfills are very real places, many of them existing in the Global South.

I question Cold-War rhetoric that set up a developmental hierarchy in the world that allowed for the continuation of exploitation of the resources of the Global South. These ‘worlds’ are not separate worlds, one simply striving to be like the other. If one holds a superior position under its own standards, it is because it is using the others to hold itself up. Modernist utopian image seeks to create the illusion that one day all the countries in the world could be ‘developed’, yet the maintenance of the ‘first world’ depends on the labor and land of the ‘third world’. There has to be third worlds for there to be first worlds, and so for many in the world, this order inherently inhibits that dream which it promises.

Material limits the exponential linear growth of modernist utopian progressivism, and developmentalism. In The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power, Sachs declared the end of the developmental era, in 1992, saying that, “If all countries ‘successfully’ followed the industrial example, five or six planets would be needed to serve as mines and waste dumps.” So not only is development a hierarchical fiction of access, it is also physically impossible and ensures planetary destruction. Today, we are increasingly seeing the limits of this material exploitation, as ecosystems collapse and climate change causes catastrophic weather patterns. The effects are proving humans inability to truly control the material world.

This is part of the reason why in the USA recently, the word neoliberalism has emerged in critical discussions. Wendy Brown is suddenly concerned. The crisis, created by the advancement of the Western imperialist project, is so large that it is affecting spaces that used to be guaranteed comfort and leisure by this very project. After years of its imposition on the Global South, she is now seeing the effects of this imperialism as its destruction becomes increasingly difficult to contain and direct. Brown is interested in distinguishing between liberalism and neoliberalism because in the time of liberalism, most middle class white people in the Global North were still benefiting from this system. The developmental project has taken things to such extremes that even the people Brown speaks of/to are now being negatively affected.

18. More research could be done here on the transition from indigenous iconography and the catholic image.
20. *Truman for the first time declared, in his inauguration speech, the Southern hemisphere as ‘under-developed areas’. The label stuck and subsequently provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North*.
As we approach the material limits of the developmentalist project, Jean and John Comaroff argue that “prevention replaces progress as the objective of development, the redistribution of risk rather than the redistribution of wealth now dominates the international agenda.” While I would argue that in neoliberalism, the redistribution of wealth still continues, the shift to redistributing risk is the new approach necessary for the continuation of the same project of domination. I am much more interested in how neoliberalism is a continuation of liberalism, of Western humanism, and of colonization; in how it is simply a morphing to maintain the established colonial order as people create forms of dissent and opposition.

In *Theory from the South*, Camaroff and Camaroff show significant proof that in these days, if there is a linear progression of time as modernism claims, it is reversed because the Global South in many ways, can be said to be ahead of the Global North, in that it has been dealing with the catastrophe that the unsustainable project of modernity causes. Put into this context, this reverses the modernist ideas that the Global South is a place for matter and not theory. The perspective of the Global South, “affords privileged insight” because people have been dissenting from domination, and living in crisis, for years. Venezuela clearly shows that old modes of battling against the inequality of capitalism like national socialism do not work, that it simply feeds Cold-War dualisms and digs deeper into the trenches of abstract ideology. Yet, the failure of a socialist state does not simply mean we shrug and let the capitalist current drag us away. It does not mean there cannot be new forms of dissent. This is part of the reason that I find it important to bring conversations about the Venezuelan economic crisis to the United States, because it is not a disconnected issue in which the US has no involvement, and because it is not impossible that this sort of crisis may one day affect the US directly.


Where is that?
Where... where is that?
¡Ooooh! that's Cayo de Sal
Do you remember Muñe when we lived in Valencia
Te acuerdas Muñe?
Sii
Siii
El agua de mar se evaporaba y dejaba cristales de sal en la arena
Nos llevamos una
Nos llevamos una a Ohio
Sí y yo la miraba ahí
La miraba ahí porque
Porqué en Ohio no podía ser sal
Entonces cuando tu no mirabas
Yo la lamía con mi lengua
Era
Era sal de mar

To know by licking

In the video Cayo de Sal, I recall licking a salt crystal that my family and I had brought with us when we immigrated to Ohio. I remember thinking that in the idealism of the USA, somehow materials ceased to exist. So I licked the salt crystal to verify its existence, and indeed it was salt. Through my practice, I investigate the larger significance of this small moment.

We do not simply control and shape the material world with our ideals, matter impacts us. As a sculptor, my work seeks to find new relationships to matter that counteract extractivism by understanding that we not only shape matter, but that we are made up of it and are influenced and driven by it. It is interesting to look at a cross cultural/national study of the social/political histories of countries that heavily rely on petroleum as a source of wealth creation. In Paradox of Plenty, Terry Lynn reveals stunning similarities in the trajectories of these countries’ exponential wealth followed by drastic decline, and extreme difficulties in the maintenance of democratic institutions, and the abuse of power made possible by the concentration of access to this resource. This counteracts the idea that humans have control over matter. Maybe it is more that we are blindly interacting with the world and it influences us as much as we influence it.

“In half an hour a car burns a gallon of fuel approximately 17 billion 525 million times faster than it took for it to be formed inside the earth.” No wonder we felt an exponential growth followed by exponential decline in a society built around the consumption of petroleum energy. Petroleum is the release of concentrated energy. Petroleum is made of carbon, it is cells that died billions of years ago. We will one day become petroleum and until then it drastically changes the way we live in time.

I slowly walk down the alleys picking up little bits of plastic, paying close attention to their concentration of petroleum energy. Through Suelo, I bring the infinite complexity of our materiality to meet image surfaces. I think about the billions of years it took to create the petroleum in each plastic piece, in contrast to the brief life it lives as a utilitarian object in my life, and in contrast to the inconceivable amount of time it will exist in this form on the surface of the earth. The way it will resist becoming something else. This long death. In my practice I look at matter, sort through it and figure out how to build new futures that don’t rely on this standard of growth that’s dependent on exploitation.

In my work, grinding, rebinding, and mastication become ways to think about incorporation. The way everything is made up through incorporating or rejecting something else. I try to treat the consumption disorder that is capitalism. I resist the narrow gendered racialized image of myself as a Latina woman and instead think of everything that is me, differentiating and undifferentiating from everything around me. The series of Bolívar videos is made up of a lot of things people have said, the way they resonate in my mind, performed back again through my voice to viewers. I resonate with the realization that, in the same way that I am materially made up of the world around, all my ideas are also constructed in dialogue with the outside world. There is no pure me. I have no pure thoughts. There is no such thing.

I think of the way that my bones and my teeth are made up of calcium carbonate, which is the same substance that makes the exoskeleton of a coccolith, which falls to the ocean floor and becomes cliffs, which humans grind and pack into chalk, or little flavored pills called antacid. I am in search of new senses of relation to material and value and knowing and becoming. To understand myself as porous and in constant flux is to resist the colonial project of bordering, categorizing, and imaging.

Through darkness in my performances I encourage the audience to become more attuned to their sensations, their openings to the world around us. In my videos, through the intimate closeness of the Bolivars, I try to find where sight meets touch. Vision becomes an embodied seeing rather than a distant imaging. We hear the voices, we touch the felt structure, we sit with the pieces of the land that have been turned into plastic, we taste a little bit of papaya. The nationalistic images on the bills start to fall apart, they become the paper and the ink, become skin, become water in our minds. I want to resist the push to think about aesthetics and sensation as apolitical, because this way of thinking is an extension of that negation of matter. My work tries to heal the ideological division between subject and object, between mind and body, and form and ideas.
yo la lamía con mi lengua
Cuando La Política Cuaje, 13 minute performance with vinyl, credit offers, wood, insulation foam, ice, kiddie pool, gelatin, detritus from ground, 2019
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the devastation that occurs at the collapse of the systems of power that many have become dependent
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Th
e end of that spectacular modernist escalation.
This is the fall from the highest point.
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current crisis can be understood as the drastic implosion of the modernist capitalist developmental
framework, this is an investigation into one of the greatest economic
collapses of modern times. It is a space for mourning the losses that this collapse has brought and a space
for finding its meaning. Throughout my life, I have heard accusations between the left and the right in
Venezuela and the United States about the demise of Venezuela. Every misfortune is instrumentalized
to make an argument for one ideology or the other. This duality in the way of thinking comes precisely
from the Cold-War ideology that positioned the US as an imperial power by polarizing the ideologies of
communism and capitalism. What if actions taken by all sides including Maduro, and the opposition, and
the US to impose their ideology further hurt the social and economic conditions of the country? What
if it is not Maduro or the opposition but their relations shaped by history that cause these misfortunes?
While Maduro relied on nationalist extractivism and fostered corruption and authoritarianism, the right
now provided access to resources took advantage.
state that could bring justice through economic redistribution, but corruption grew as those who were
never provided access to resources took advantage. The regime brought a shift in ownership rather than
a shift in the way we think about value. We desperately need alternative forms of dissent to neoliberal
policy, that provide an ontological shift in the way we think about value and ownership, that provide a
way to gently deescalate the exponential growth of modernity. We need modes of creating independence
from the structures of domination, so that we do not fall when these structures collapse. For this reason,
I make work that critiques the power of neoliberal logic that equates economic growth as social good
and breaks down our abilities for democratic civic engagement by characterizing the individual as a
rational economically driven isolated entity in an environment of competition and scarcity.
There is an ebb and flow to being. If we try to ignore that and create continuous exponential growth
we will see exponential collapse and we will be unprepared. How can we instead create space for growth
and degrowth; create systems that support vulnerability and accept that as a part of life rather than as an
anomaly or exception to the rule?

Parakúpα Vená is the tallest waterfall in the world
En los años cincuenta Jimmie Angel, de Missouri,
aterrizó su avión en los Aáuyan-Tepui; mientras buscaba oro.
Desde entonces la cascada fue conocida en el mundo como Angel Falls
Aáuyan-Tepui quiere decir casa del diablo en Pemón, la lengua local
Parakúpα Vená quiere decir caída desde el punto más alto
El agua cae por tanto tiempo que se convierte en niebla antes de tocar fondo
Parakúpα Vená is considered the highest waterfall in the world
In the 50’s, Jimmie Angel, from Missouri,
crash-landed his plane on the Aáuyan-Tepui; while he was looking for gold.
Since then, the waterfall was known to the world as Angel Falls
Aáuyan-Tepui means the house of the devil in Pemón, the local language
Parakúpα Vená means the fall from the highest place
The water fell for so long that it turned into mist before touching the bottom.

Parakúpα Vená - The Fall from the Highest Point
This exhibition is not an ideological battlefield, this is an investigation into one of the greatest economic
collapses of modern times. It is a space for mourning the losses that this collapse has brought and a space
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if it is not Maduro or the opposition but their relations shaped by history that cause these misfortunes?

Most importantly, if we understand the colonial, imperialist, and national history of the country, the
current crisis can be understood as the drastic implosion of the modernist capitalist developmental
dream that was “La Gran Venezuela”. As Maduro tried to impose a socialist system by disassembling
the capitalist structure, the opposition sabotaged, and the US placed sanctions to coerce, the modernist
capitalist system that so many Venezuelans had become dependent on, collapsed. This is what is at the
end of that spectacular modernist escalation. This is the fall from the highest point.

Capitalism is a bubble, suspended by collective belief, creating dependence for unsustainable growth
that bursts into crisis.

The extreme left in the US often celebrates the end of capitalism by any means possible, not understanding
the devastation that occurs at the collapse of the systems of power that many have become dependent
on. Simultaneously, neoliberalism uses the dependence it fosters to make it seem like there are no
alternatives. Chavez’s dream was to fight inequality and the grievances of capitalism through a socialist
state that could bring justice through economic redistribution, but corruption grew as those who were
now provided access to resources took advantage. The regime brought a shift in ownership rather than
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0 Nothingness
In the video I say “nada”, which means nothing and also means to swim.
This exhibition is a space where we can recognize that, despite the catastrophic loss, value still exists
beyond the collapse of this system for recording it. Like the dissipated water at the end of Parakúpα
Vená, value seems to not exist when it doesn't exist in the forms provided by this economy, and in many
ways there is a very real destruction of value. But the practice of folding the Bolívares into wallets, by
Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia, is a beautiful gesture that demonstrates the ability to see this bill
as something more than a bill. It’s paper. It's material. We can do so many things with it. We make
something new out of it, like wallets, or videos and then it has value in a new way. In this way, we
demonstrate and practice how value is not something that’s only held by this system; that it existed
before and it will continue to exist beyond the collapse or end of this global economic system; and that
we have the power to shape how that happens. Imperialism has always tried to own existence, but it can
never completely negate the possibilities for the complexity of existence.
desde entonces la cascada fue conocida en el mundo como Angel Falls
Parakupá Vená quiere decir caída desde el punto más alto
these unknowns. These narratives have a lot of power, so they’re often abused and co-opted. Politics
and are so interconnected. It becomes more and more difficult to practice an embodied seeing and

In 1971, Richard Nixon declared the end of the gold standard for the US dollar. In a way, this is
the ultimate goal of the colonial and modernist projects: to completely dematerialize value. Because,
removed from a material standard, the dollar’s worth becomes determined by collective belief. As
a standard of international exchange, it allows for unchecked domination. Collective belief in the
hegemonic image of the US supports the value of the dollar which in turn supports belief in the US,
creating a cycle of wealth and power accumulation. This is speculative capitalism, our current global
financial economy in which wealth creates the power to create more wealth for without actually
producing any social value. The results of this are clearly seen in the exponentially growing income
disparity. “The annual incomes of the top 400 wealthiest taxpayers quadrupled between 1992 and
2000, from $46.8 million to $17 4 million, while their taxes declined from 26.4 to 22.3%. Federal
Reserve Board data show that 75% of new wealth created between 1989 and 1998 went to the top
10% of the nation’s households. The income of the top 5% of households climbed nearly three times
faster than the incomes of the remaining 95% (Browning, 2003; Friedman, 2003).”

The International Monetary Fund predicted that in 2019, Venezuela would reach one million percent
inflation. They have since stopped keeping records since they consider Venezuela an anomaly that
skews the dataset. The exponential effect works in both directions. The prediction from the IMF
is a self-fulfilling prophecy because the currency is worth what the world collectively believes it is
worth. So if the IMF, which is an international, believed-in institution, predicts the Bolívar will be
devalued, this encourages people to divest making the currency worth less. I am buying hyper-inflated
Bolívars from Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia, to question the narrow idea of investment as an
economically rational self-interested endeavor, and to highlight the role that speculation and belief
play in creating value. Some would say it doesn’t make any sense to pay more than you need to for art
materials yet I am not working solely for my own profit. Through this symbolic and very real act, I
open up the possibilities for speculative belief in value.

For a long time, the fight against imperialist oppression required that we reveal the subjectivity of
imperialist authority. To imagine other ways of being in the face of hegemony and to question the
‘truths’ that it has taught us. Neoliberalism has learned to absorb this strategy. When people try to
reveal the myth making of the established system of power, those who benefit from this system of
thought often make the ultra relativist argument that, there is no truth, everything is subjective. Artist
J. S.G. Boggs makes this sort of argument by making detailed drawings of USD. His drawings reveal
the myth making of the US dollar system, it allows for unchecked domination. Collective belief in the

This is how you believe what is real

After centuries of the violent currents of colonialism, we have so much influence and responsibility
and are so interconnected. It becomes more and more difficult to practice an embodied seeing and
understanding of the realm of influence. Where there are unknowns, we create narratives to explain
these unknowns. These narratives have a lot of power, so they’re often abused and co-opted. Politics
becomes a management of belief. Belief becomes image making rather than truth finding. Image
making makes blindness. Truth making requires multiplicity. Pure truth is an oxymoron. As global
capitalism makes our relations ever more complex, it increases our dependence on its images for
navigating the world, which perhaps explains the political polarization in the world.

argument holds some importance, but through its absorption into neoliberal rhetoric, it allows for the evasion of responsibility of the very real effects that this system enforces. The system for assigning value is indeed subjective, yet the power relations and the way that these are enforced and lived are very real. So it is important to recognize not only the moments of belief and the subjectivity of certain truths that we hold, but also the way these are enacted to create reality and the way existing power structures, control the way this happens. In the current order of the world, just because somebody decides that this is the way things work, does not mean anyone could decide the way they work. Free-trade and free-market ideologies, in a world with long histories of inequality, only function to reinforce the power relations already at play.

Go to the bank get a one-hundred-dollar-bill
Get a $100 bill
Scan it
It says ERROR
How does the scanner know this is a 100 dollar bill?

Go to Lowes™ and buy a security camera and blinds
Grind them all up
Scan each side of the box
Digitally rearrange the sides of the box
Fold box back together and stuff it with ground up security commodities
this is how you believe what is real
"No dar papaya" | “Don’t give papaya”

People said to me on the streets in Bogota, papaya is easy. It is those objects left unclaimed by a vigilant ojo. We walk around the street with a conscious aura of property. For a moment I look at the Virgen de Guadalupe, up at the top of the cerro overlooking Bogota. She has crumbled twice to the shifting of the earth. But they keep building her back whole. She is said to look over the city. If that’s so, why do we have to keep an eye on belongings? I wonder if her pieces turned to papaya. I wonder what our eyes would see if they were unoccupied by belongings. I wonder the thoughts we could have without our brains tethered to our pockets. In Bogota I bought a papaya and ate it alone in an empty apartment. I cut it open and the seeds looked like fish eyeballs.

So I invited people to sit with me, we ate the papaya together with our hands. There was plenty to go around, plenty for everyone to taste, here and there we must practice sitting together and sharing papaya.

One of the people sitting and eating Papaya lived in Mexico. He said, in his country, “dar papaya” means to be sexually “easy”. He understood my act as a sexual euphemism. I realized this is also what I mean. When I went to Mexico City, I bought a papaya. “Señor me puedes vender esa papaya completa?” I walked back carrying the papaya on my hip.

In Venezuela, we call the papaya, lechosa, meaning “milky one”. They say the skin of the lechosa helps break down proteins and is used as a digestive.
Bibliography


