Producto Centro Americano: Made In Honduras

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Producto Centro Americano: Made in Honduras

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Master of Fine Arts in Photography and Film
Virginia Commonwealth University on May 8, 2011

Director: Robert Paris,
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Abstract

PRODUCTO CENTRO AMERICANO: MADE IN HONDURAS

By Alma Leiva Master of Fine Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011.

Thesis Director: Robert Paris, Professor Kinetic Imaging / Photography and Film

I was born in 1973 in Honduras, a country under military regime. In 1982 after 20 years of military rule, Honduras finally had democratic elections. During that decade, and as a consequence of the cold war, the kidnapping, torturing, murder and disappearance of civilians became common practices among the Honduran military. Peasant activists, university leaders, union workers and intellectuals were among its favorite targets.

In Producto Centroamericano: Made in Honduras I present the viewer with a "product" entrenched in Honduran history;
the disappearance of almost two hundred civilians in the 1980's for political reasons. The work also presents the viewer with the imminent threat of the return of this practice after its military coup in 2009. By juxtaposing references of torturing tools such as knives, metal poles, chains and meat hooks, against more frail materials such as paper, wax and fabric, I make allusions to the vulnerability of the individual against such repressive forces. Through the elements presented in the installation, I try to take the viewer on a journey that will hopefully, confront one with one’s own humanity and ultimately with one’s own mortality.
In the 1980's, Honduras became the nerve center of U.S. policy in the region under president Ronald Reagan's administration. The U.S. appalled by the specter of a left-wing government in Nicaragua and the strength of the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation front) in El Salvador, saw Honduras as key to its geopolitical interests. One of the strategic points in Honduran territory for U.S. Army was the Palmerola base, which was used to sneak in Nicaraguan contras to Nicaragua. So massive was the US sponsored military buildup that even CIA operatives and US embassy officials began to cynically refer to Honduras as the "Pentagon Republic" or "USS Honduras." ¹

In 1981, pressured by the US policy, which aimed at making Honduras a showplace democracy in Central America, relatively open and honest elections were held. Liberal Party candidate Roberto Suazo Cordoba was elected president. However, the military, under the leadership of chief of the Honduran Armed Forces General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, maintained a firm grip on power. The electoral process, rather than curbing the power

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¹ Numbers in text are for attribution or reference purposes only and do not indicate any additional facts not already included in the text.
of the military allowed them to act with greater impunity, covered by the facade of a civilian government. "For the first time in its history, Honduras became the scene of disappearances, outright political assassinations, secret cemeteries, and clandestine detention centers. In 1983 Honduras joined the exclusive United Nations list of countries that arbitrarily execute people."²
A Family’s Experience with Repression

Juan, my step-grandfather, was the union leader of a construction company in Honduras. He was also an active member of the Honduran Communist Party. Members of the Honduran DNI (Directorate of national Investigation) had been looking for him for days. The DNI was notorious for its death squad Batallion 3-16. Its members where trained by the CIA and the Argentine Military on coercive questioning and torturing tactics. They were also responsible for the murder of dozens of civilians in Honduras in the 1980’s.

The DNI and FUSEP (Public Safety Force) were back then the two main military branches of The Honduran Armed Forces involved in most of the disappearances. The torture mechanisms practiced by Batallion 3-16 can be traced to the ones used by German Nazis during the Holocaust. These tactics were taught to the Argetinian military by Nazi refugees. Eventually this practice spread to other South American and Central American countries.

Juán had been in hiding for several weeks in 1981 until they found him at a bar a few blocks from the house, and arrested him. He was arrested on June 19 of the same year on
accusations of communist activity, and was savagely beaten up. Someone who saw everything alerted my mother. She immediately collected his Marxist books and hid them at a neighbor's house. Every time my mother recalls the event, I can see the horror, sadness, and anger in her face when she says: “They wanted to kill Juan, they brought him to the house to search it. He was covered in blood, bruised, and crying like a boy because he knew that if they found the slightest thing that could implicate him they would kill him.” In the end they didn't find anything, but took Juán anyway.

The next day my family petitioned the Supreme Court of Justice for a writ of habeas corpus, however Juán remained detained.

Juán spent more than two months in prison although it is against the law to have someone detained for more than 24 hours, without any formal charges. My grandmother hid little notes in the food she sent him to keep him up to date on the efforts being made to accelerate his release. When nothing else worked, she publicly denounced the case. Soon after, they decided to set him free. By the time he came out, Juan had lost more than 20 pounds and looked 70 years old, even though he was only 48.
Although many of the victims back then were Honduran citizens, among them were also foreigners, mostly political refugees. They were persecuted by the Honduran military and handed over to members of the Nicaraguan contra or the Salvadorian military who would then “disappear” them.

On April 22 1981, twelve Salvadoran refugees were detained by DNI agents in their home in Tegucigalpa, among them was twenty nine year old Nora Trinidad Gómez de Barillas. She had been the secretary of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero before his assassination in El Salvador. Siblings Enoé de Jesus Arce Romero and Eva Sara Arce Romero were abducted as well.

Enóe de Jesus Arce Romero
They fled El Salvador in 1981 because of the constant persecution and repression they endured. The twelve civilians were handed over to Salvadorian Intelligence agents. In an interview, former U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Jack Bings, said that Salvadorian officials and members of the Honduran military and police had tortured the victims. Latter they were taken away in a Honduran military helicopter never to be seen again.¹

On the last week of his detention, Júan witnessed the murder of a twenty something year old student at the hands of DNI members. He recalls that he heard them torturing him everyday, until one morning they beat him so savagely that they broke almost every bone in his body. He saw as the torturers were dragging him out like a ragdoll.

The abduction of José Eduardo Becerra Lanza in 1982 was a clear case of military repression against university students. Becerra Lanza was a 24 year-old medical student at the UNAH (National University of Honduras) and the secretary general of FEUH (Federation of University Students of Honduras). José Eduardo, a strong advocate for social change among the student community, was kidnapped by battalion 3-16 when he was at a bar in Tegucigalpa with two other medical students. His friends said they saw DNI agents take Becerra Lanza and introduce him in a
Jeep with no license plate. The day after his abduction the students took over the school of medicine at the UNAH demanding Lanza's release⁴. Over the years José Eduardo's family presented several writs for Habeas Corpus with no results⁵. Latter on, his family learned that José Eduardo had endured horrible tortures for twenty-eight days before the orders of his execution came directly from General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez⁶. Alvarez was the chief of The Honduran Armed Forces and greatly favored the methods of physical torture that the Argentinian military applied to civilians during its dirty war. Like most barbarian members of the military, he was trained at the School of the Americas in U.S.A and was a graduate of the Argentine Military Academy.
A witness confessed to having seen Becerra Lanza at a DNI cell and that he was suffering convulsions caused by the tortures he had endured. "An Armed Forces communiqué denied José Eduardo's detention and suggested he may have left the country under an assumed name".

In 1986 a member of the Nicaraguan Contra admitted to having murdered José Eduardo. Lanza was killed and his body was buried somewhere between Tegucigalpa and Choluteca. A former member of the Armed Forces' Batallion 3-16 later corroborated the testimony. To the day Becerra Lanza's body hasn't been found.
On one occasion Júan described how one of the soldiers, or "chafarotes" (a derogatory term for soldier) had made him stand up on a chair, tied up a string to his testicles and tied the other end to a metal container. A group of four soldiers stepped back and started casting small stones inside the container. Then they would swing the container back and forth. He almost passed out from the pain, because some of the more sadistic men would throw in larger rocks.

One day the torturing was so extreme that Juán made up a story and mentioned the name of one of the members of the union. The next day he sent a message alerting the man to leave the country. Elvia Alvarado a peasant Union activist detained and tortured in Honduras in 1986 recalls saying to the men, who were asking to admit to her involvement with the Nicaraguan Sandinista groups: "That's how you get people to make up stories. They admit to things that aren't true so you'll stop torturing them".8

After going through such horrors and at the request of my family, Júan left the party and refrained from any political and social activism. My Grandmother, Mother, and uncle left Honduras in 1982 to the U.S. but my brothers and I stayed back with an aunt. In 1988 knowing that in a couple of years we would begin
university studies, and at the possibility of my brothers and I becoming targets of the system as well, my mother sent for us. We arrived in Miami on July 1988.
Yet Another Coup

In 2009, Honduras went thirty years back in history when democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a military coup. The military and De facto president Roberto Micheletti excused the coup as a strategy to protect the country's "democracy". Manuel Zelaya encouraged the people to vote for a referendum that would change the constitution and allow him to run for a second term. This presented a threat for the military and the upper classes interests, because Zelaya was very popular among the Honduran poor classes for his proposal for land reform. The 2009 Coup brought to mind the one against democratically elected president Ramón Villeda Morales in 1963. Morales had greatly favored the poor with his land reform, but he was seized from power because the military and upper classes saw their interests compromised.

The days to come were chaotic. On television, massive demonstrations of citizens protesting against the coup could be seen. Military abuses were registered. This time the military was confronted by a very solid front formed after the coup. It denominated itself as FNRP (National Front of Popular
Resistance). The front comprised mainly of artists, peasant activists, journalists, lawyers, union leaders, intellectuals and university students.

In the months following the coup, military and police authorities were accused of murdering more than thirty civilians, most whom were members of the resistance. Among them were doctors like Janeth Lourdes Marroquin murdered on October 1, 2009, teachers like Sergio Eliseo Juarez Hernandez killed on October 19, 2009, and artists like Edwin Renán Fajardo Argueta killed on December 22, 2009. Unlike the 1980's when the modus operandi aimed at keeping the evidence from public scrutiny, most victims were now killed in broad daylight. On the other hand, the kidnapping, torturing, and disappearance of Carlos Roberto Turcios Maldonado abducted by hooded men on December 15, 2009, brings to mind the threat of the resurgence of such practices. In 2010 four peasants were abducted by the military.

In August of 2009, I visited the country. The sight of military trucks driving thru the streets and soldiers heavily armed, was reminiscent of the military dictatorships of the past. The weeks I spent in Honduras made me realize that the actual events were greatly distorted by both Honduran and biased international media. Back in Miami, television shows where
exalting the military interventions. The Honduran military was portrayed as a courageous hero in comparison to the "less" competent Venezuelan military army, which had let Hugo Chavez take over Venezuela.

The first time I experienced a sense of repression during my stay in the country, was when after driving around the city, I reached for my camera to take a picture of a military truck parked ahead of us. I saw the opportunity for a great image, but before I knew it my aunt held my hand down and told me: "Don't even think about it! Do you want to be pulled out of the car by the hair?" I was in shock and asked her why would they do that? She then explained the incident when a journalist the previous week had tried to take a similar photograph. The woman was dragged out of her car and attacked.
Two Bodies of Work that Address the Consequences of Violence

In 2010, I returned to Honduras to work on a series of photos called *Fuera de La Celda* (Outside the Cell).

Image © Alma Leiva, from *Fuera De La Celda* (Outside The Cell), *Fuera De La Celda #9*, Digital Print, 20in x 14in and 12in x 8.5in
The series portrayed the way in which people reinforced home security, through gates, high walls, etc. because of the violent situation in the country. Everywhere in the city, I found graffiti accusing the government and military of human rights violations. The houses in poor neighborhoods were stained with crosses and names of the murdered. During the time I stayed there, journalist Georgino Orellana, a friend of the family, was murdered. He was shot dead outside the radio station where he
worked. Like all the other cases, nobody was charged for the crime. By the end of 2010, ten journalists had been murdered in Honduras, among them Israel Zelaya Díaz, Nahún Palacios, Joseph A. Hernández Ochoa and David Meza.

Celdas (Prison Cells) was developed out of my preoccupation with the surging levels of violence in Central America.

Image © Alma Leiva, from Fuera De La Celda (Outside The Cell), Fuera De La Celda #2, Digital Print, 20in x 14in and 12in x 8.5in
The series portrayed the way in which people reinforced home security, through gates, high walls, etc. because of the violent situation in the country. Everywhere in the city, I found graffiti accusing the government and military of human rights violations. The houses in poor neighborhoods were stained with crosses and names of the murdered. During the time I stayed there, journalist Georgino Orellana, a friend of the family, was murdered. He was shot dead outside the radio station where he worked. Like all the other cases, nobody was charged for the
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Celdas (Prison Cells) was developed out of my preoccupation with the surging levels of violence in Central America.
Image © Alma Leiva, from Celdas (Prison Cells) Celda #5, digital Print, 25in x 25in and 50in x 50in, 2010
Image © Alma Leiva, from Celdas (Prison Cells) Celda #6, digital Print, 25in x 25in and 50in x 50in, 2010
Image © Alma Leiva, from Celdas (Prison Cells) Celda #7, digital Print, 25in x 25in and 50in x 50in, 2010
In this particular body of work I created installations in my studio, which I then photographed with a medium format camera. The final product of each installation is one single image. The work presents the viewer with the absurdity inherent in a society stigmatized by violence. My extensive research into the
violent patterns in Central America triggered by gangs, and drug trafficking, led me to dwell on the factors that helped the formation of the problematic. During my investigations I discovered that "gangs" were a result of poverty and of the brutal violence, Central American citizens endured during the civil wars. Gang members often call themselves "children of the war". The violent way in which these gangs operated brought me back, not only to the way in which the military acted against the citizens in El Salvador and Guatemala, but also to the way in which the military in Honduras fought their "dirty war" against the civilians it was supposed to protect.
In *Producto Centro Americano: Made In Honduras*, I present the viewer with an installation, which includes sound and elements that are allusions to torturing tools. Fragile materials such as candle wax, paper, and fabrics reference the frailty of the human existence.

Image © Alma Leiva, detail of *Producto Centro Americano: Made In Honduras*, installation, size variable
The rows of metal chains and hooks, six chains in total, installed across the ceiling, are allusions to slaughterhouses. The pieces of clothing hanging from each hook resemble the descriptions that family members gave to authorities during an excavation in the 1990’s. Six of the bodies found were identified as victims disappeared in the 1980’s.

"Gustavo Adolfo Morales Fúnez was "disappeared" on March 1984 after being arrested in Tegucigalpa by several armed men in civilian clothes alleged to be members of the National
Directorate of Intelligence (DNI). Several years later during an excavation his remains were found. The victim was 37 years old, married and had three children. He worked for the National Children's Foundation and was a popular political activist and government critic. His remains were recovered in October 1995 from a grave containing two bodies in Las Trincheras, El Maguey. The forensic experts made a full identification through pieces of clothing, a shoe and a dental prosthesis. "His driving license protected by a plastic cover, was found in an inside pocket of his trousers".

The use of candle wax on the clothing is a metaphor for burning as torture and for the innumerable candles, family members of the disappeared lit praying for their loved ones to return.

In an interview, Júan Ramón Chinchilla, representative of Youth in Resistance and MUCA (Unified Peasant Movement of the Aguán) described his kidnapping on January of 2010. "They got me
up and showed me a table with torture instruments on it. They began talking among themselves. They said, “What are we going to do first? Are we going to pull out a fingernail or burn him? Then they began to strike me in the face. They burnt my hair. They told me they were going to pour gasoline on my head and burn me”\textsuperscript{11}.

The number three repeated in the chains and clothing is a metaphor for the trinity in Cristianity; the father, the son and the Holy Ghost. Honduras is mainly a catholic country and
Catholics, become closer to their religious beliefs in the face of tragedy.

Miguel Francisco Carías recalled in an interview hearing Nelson Mackay praying and crying from his cell: "Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women..." Mackay's voice grew louder as he recited the prayer over and over. I told him, 'Mackay please shut up. I am going crazy with all your prayers,' "Carias said. Mackay kept on. "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death..." "I never heard or saw Nelson again," he concluded. His remains were among the ones found in the excavations.

In between each row of clothing there is a dim light bulb, to create in the room a clandestine mood. The light bulbs provide enough lighting to make the pieces of clothing visible.

Twenty-four year old, Ines Murillo and José Flores, were kidnapped in Choloma, a town near the Honduran north coast, in 1983 by DNI agents and accused of subversive activities. Ines was held captive in a clandestine jail for 79 days. Forced into exile after her release she described the horrors she had to endure. Years later she recalled she was subjected to terrible forms of torture from genital electrical shock, to near
suffocation, to forcing her to maintain stress positions, to threatening her with attack dogs.

Image © Alma Leiva, view 1 of Producto Centro Americano: Made In Honduras, installation, size variable

Each of the 134 paper identity cards or cedulas (4.5in x 3in each) around the room, bear the name and date of a disappeared in Honduras. In place of the person's photo each identity card displays the remnants of a picture that has been ripped off the card.
This is an allusion to a person being forcefully stripped off his/her identity through "disappearance", and to the memory of that action as a perpetual memory of the individual.

In an interview with the Baltimore Sun, Bertha Oliva recalls the night on June 11 1981, when hooded armed men stormed into her house looking for her husband, professor Tomás Nativí. He begged them not to hurt his wife because she was six months pregnant. With tears in her eyes Oliva remembers how she tried to give him a shirt. "One of those animals would not let me get to him...Tomás looked at me, smiled, and said: 'Be strong my love'".

Each cedula is sewn through the top and bottom, with metal thread and attached to a metal frame. Sewing references needle pinching as torturing as well as the idea of being tied up. The metal thread is also a reference to electrical shock used by the military as coercion tactic.

"They started with 110 volts,"said Miguel Carias,"Then they went up to 220. Each time they shocked me, I could feel my body jump and my mouth filled with a metal taste".

Ines Murillo recalled: "I smelled smoke and realized I was burning from the singes of the shocks."
The six inch high frame is secured to the wall and wraps around the space at eye level. LED yellow lighting is installed inside the top part of the frame to light up the ID cards. The LED lighting like the light bulbs enhance the clandestine mood of the installation. The edges of the frame are sharpened, to reference mutilation.

In an interview with Raymond Bonner from the New York Times, an ex-member of battalion 3-16 describes the surrealistic accounts of a man's death and torture as follows: "They took out their knives and stuck them under his fingernails. After they took his fingernails off, then they broke his elbows. Afterwards they gouged out his eyes. Then they took their bayonets and made all sorts of slices in his skin all around his chest, arms and legs. After that they took his hair off and the skin of his scalp. When they saw there was nothing left to do with him, they threw gasoline on him and burned him". The witness also stated that "Americans" witnessed the act.

The sharp blades are also a metaphor for the system that brutally cut off individuals from his/her familiar surroundings. The sharpness is intended to keep the viewer from getting too close to the individual’s identity. The blade's sharpness bluntly confronts the viewer with a threat, which prevents them
from getting "too close". This is a reference to the repressive and bureaucratic systems that prevented access to the victims.

According to the CIA Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual-1983 used as a model for coercion tactics in Honduras in the 1980's, "A person's sense of identity depends upon a continuity in his surroundings, habits, appearance, actions relation's with others, etc. Detention permits the "questioner" to cut through these links and throw the subject back upon his own unaided internal resources. Detention should be planned to
enhance the subject feelings of being cut off from anything known and reassuring".\textsuperscript{15}

The family members of the disappeared found themselves confronted with misleading information when delving on the whereabouts of their relatives.

The military came up with different stories regarding the disappearance of American Jesuit priest Francis “Guadalupe” Carney in Honduras in 1983, after being captured with a small Honduran guerrilla group.

Initially they said that Father Carney had been killed in a combat operation. Eventually it was said that the priest had died of starvation while attempting to flee Honduran troops.

Image © COFADEH, Francis “Guadalupe” Carney
But neither the military nor the authorities would provide his family with reliable information.

The frame can also be interpreted as a metaphor for captivity. "The prisoners of Battalion 3-16 were confined in bedrooms, closets and basements of country homes of military officers. Some were held in military clubhouses at locations such as INDUMIL, the Military Industries complex near Tegucigalpa. They were stripped and tied hand and foot. Tape was wrapped around their eyes"16.

The sound piece begins with underwater sounds, that allude to water boarding and is intertwined with Honduran newscasts gradually fading in and out.
Towards the middle, I introduce the following line from a Ronald Reagan speech: "...There is absolutely no substance to charges that the United States is guilty of imperialism or attempts to impose its will on other countries by use of force..." The word "force" is emphasized with the clank of a metal door in reference to imprisonment, and the forced disappearance of civilians for political reasons. The sound then fades away, and only the echoing of a metal door remains. Eventually, the underwater sound is reintroduced for the rest of the piece. The sound of the metal door is a metaphor for the
individual being confined in a prison cell. It is also an allusion to blindfolding, and to the subsequent heighten of other senses.

Ines Murillo recalls: "After being blindfolded for so long, her other senses had become more acute. She heard the footsteps of three or four people enter her cell. Then she heard the sounds of a pencil scribbling on a pad and the passing of the pad from one person to another." 17
Artists like Guatemalan Regina José Galindo, Luis Gonzales Palma, Ana Tiscornia, and Júan Manuel Echavarría, have been strong influences in the way I perceive my role as an artist and activist in society. Others like Christian Boltanski are strong aesthetic influences in my work.

In general, when it comes to issues relating to human rights violations, these artists’ work speaks with a language that can be brutal but nonetheless true and compelling.

In her performance piece "Quien Puede borrar las Huellas?" (Who can erase the traces?) Regina Galindo dips her feet in human blood, as she walks from the Constitutional Court building to The National Palace, leaving a trail of bloody footprints. The performance is a memorial to thousands of Guatemalan citizens murdered during General Rios Montt dictatorship, and a protest against him running for president. Having discovered and researched her work helped me understand how important the role of the artist as an interpreter of social issues is, especially in oppressed regions like Central America. "Some of her other
backdrops are more generic, such as the dim, dank room where a heavy set man repeatedly dunks her head into a barrel—but they remind us of histories of political repression and torture that scar all Central American countries, and most of Latin America.

History is thus allowed to speak and Galindo’s silent movements are in dialogue with it. Some of her works refer directly to the history of political violence in her native country of Guatemala, but many are expressive of the widespread economic

Image © Regina José Galindo, Quién Puede Borrar Las Huellas? (Who Can Erase The Traces?), performance, Guatemala City, 2003
Image © Regina José Galindo, *Confesión* (Confession), performance, 2007

Image © Regina José Galindo, *Libertad Condicional*, performance, 2009
polarities and fractured political orders that pervade the Global South. Her work takes us into the dark side of many cities where the scenes of subjection that she draws on are routine and rarely acknowledged."

Some of the elements present in Producto Centro Americano: Made in Honduras, like the use of lighting to convey an emotional state as well as to reference the clandestine, are common components in Christian Boltanski's work, which strongly influenced my piece.

Image © Christian Boltanski, Reserve Detective III, installation, dimensions vary, 1987
The use of clothing as references to the dead, are elements present in my piece as well. However, unlike Boltanski's use of clothing, in my work the wax covered garments morph into something beyond recognition. The Human absence is not experienced through subtle feelings of melancholy but through the shocking realization of the events that preceded it. The pieces of clothing in my installation reference what is left of the person that was "disappeared"; as in the case of the excavations; a piece of clothing that is barely recognizable.

The following artists strongly influenced my work and were part of a group exhibition called "Los Desaparecidos" (The Disappeared) that opened at the North Dakota Museum of Art in
2005. Every single one of these artists was touched in one way or the other by the violent wave of repression that took the life of thousands of civilians in Latin American during the 1970's and 1980's.

Luis Gonzales Palma's piece *Hermetic Tensions* is evocative and moving.

In his piece the artist presents the viewer with a diptych. In one photograph a Mayan woman looks straight at the viewer behind a safety wire fence. The other image, also behind safety wire, is that of a white shirt which is symbolic for her disappeared husband. The wire in the photographs, serve as a fence, which protects the viewer.

Juan manuel Echavarría's piece has a distinct aesthetic appeal which makes it extremely powerful.
Echavarría's series of photos, of an abandoned mannequin, is a metaphor for mutilation. The disintegrating parts of the mannequin bring to mind the practice used in Latin America. It is also a reference to mutilating bodies and burying the parts in different places to prevent identification.
Ana Tiscornia's series of vanished photos of the disappeared influenced the way in which I used the identity cards as a metaphor for the individual's existence. Tiscornia presents portraits of the disappeared in a way that invites close inspection, however even by doing so the images are so dim that the viewer ends up imagining them with the little information provided.

Image © Ana Tiscornia, Retratos, 1998
Conclusion

For the completion of my thesis work, I've researched Human rights documents, newspaper articles, and biographies extensively. The researching process has been intense, and emotional, but nonetheless rewarding.

The project’s success should be defined by the way it engages the viewer to investigate and to get immersed in the experience. Its success is subjected to its power to humanize an event that is relatively unknown to American society.

During the opening night of the show there were several individuals that approached me inquiring about the event I addressed in my project. Some people expressed their shock to find out that such practices took place years ago and have returned after the 2009 military coup. An older man had a very emotional and passionate response to my work. He became very angry as he recalled when a friend of his, a university professor was murdered in Central America during the 1980’s fascist regimes.

In my previous work I was interested in presenting the viewer with a glimpse of Central American reality. In Producto
**Centro Americano: Made in Honduras** I invite the viewer to experience the actual physicality of the altered space. As I take the viewer through the journey, I confront him/her with the prospect of a truth that could be painful in the realization of one’s own complicity, or validating in the discovery of one’s own humanity.

**Producto Centro Americano: Made In Honduras,** has been a personal journey back in Honduran history I willingly took in the face of the imminent threat of a return to the repressive years. With this work I bring to surface a dark chapter in Honduran history that should be acknowledged to prevent the same practices from sneaking their way back into the present.
Endnotes


2 Medea, Benjamin. *Don't be afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart, The Story Of Elvia Alvarado*. xviii


8 Medea, Benjamin. *Don't be afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart, The Story Of Elvia Alvarado*. 131


Bibliography


Curriculum Vitae

Alma Leiva was born in Honduras and moved to Miami, FL when she was fourteen years old. She currently lives and works in Richmond, VA.

Education

2007- BFA from The University of Florida (New World School Of The Arts) in Photography/ Electronic Media, Minor in Art History, Miami, FL
2011 - MFA in Photo/Film, Virginia Commonwealth university, Richmond, VA

Exhibitions

2011- MFA Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
2011- "Where The Heart Is", Brooklyn Artist Gym Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
2010- Dave Bown Projects, "1st Semiannual" (Curated by Eva Frosch, co-owner of Frosch and Portmann, NY).
2010- "Art Basel Juried show" Daniel Azoulay Gallery, Art Basel, Miami, FL
2010- "Miami Independent Thinkers" Casa Wynwood, Art Basel, Miami, FL
2010- "Memory Upgrade" 20010 Annual Juried Exhibition, CoCA Seattle, Center On Contemporary Art, Seattle Washington.
2010- "Bow Wow and The Big Meow" Virginia Commonwealth University, Pollock Building, Richmond VA
2010- "Wide Awake Dreaming" The Vermont Photography Workplace, Online-Gallery Annex
2010- "Juried Photography Exhibit " The Delaplaine Visual Arts Education Center, Frederick, MD
2010- "First Contexts: Where Art Comes From" Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center, Cincinnati, OH
2010- "Tallahassee International 25th Juried Competition", Florida State University, Museum of Fine Arts, Tallahassee, FL
2010- "Art/Everywhere", Video Screening, Norfolk, VA
2010- "Process Impact", Eagle Art Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY
2010- "Photography And Film Exhibit" Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
2010- "Security", Root Division, San Francisco, CA
2010- "Altered" (Curated by Tomiko Jones), University of West Florida, Pensacola, FL
2009- "December 2009 Juried Exhibition" Emerson Gallery, Palo Alto, CA
2009- "Photo/Image Project" (Curated by Taryn Simon) Arlington Art Center, Arlington, VA
2009- "Five Past One" Candidacy show, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
2008- "First Year Show" Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
2007- "Fortune and Freedom", Group exhibition, curated by Alisa Pitchenik, SOHO building, Miami, FL
2007- "Altered Surfaces" New World School Of The Arts Gallery (Curated by Maria Martinez-Cañas) Miami, FL
2007- "Fear. Fate. Fame.", New World School Of The Arts BFA Show, curated by Fred Snitzer and Maggie Cuesta, The Freedom Tower, Miami, FL
2006- "Student Exhibition" Photo Miami, Art Basel, Curated by Alisa Pitchenik, Miami, FL
2006- "New World School of The Arts Student Exhibit", Art Basel Miami, FL
2006- "Rising Stars", New World School of The Arts, (Group Show) Miami, FL
2005- "To Trip The Life Fantastic" (Collaboration Project) Art Basel, Miami, FL
2005- "New World School Of The Arts Student Exhibition", Art Basel, Miami, FL
2005- "Rising Stars", New World School Of The Arts (Group Exhibition) Miami, FL
2004- "Rising Stars", New World School Of The Arts (Group Exhibition) Miami, FL
**Residencies**

2011- Vermont Studio Center, Johnson VT, September 23rd- October 23rd
2011- Arteles, Artist in residency, Haukjärvi, Finland, November 1st-31st

**Awards / Publications**

2011- Virginia Commonwealth University Graduate Travel Grant recipient, Richmond, VA
2011- Work will be featured in Visual overture magazine website in March 2011
2011- Work selected to be featured in art platform, Artisla, Berlin, Germany
2011- Work posted on "Imagined Prisons", website/Yale University
2011- College Art Association 2010-2011 Professional Development Fellowship in the Visual Arts recipient, New York, NY
2010- CoCA Annual 2010 " Memory Upgrade", Juror Juan Alonso, Catalog publication, Seattle, WA
2010- CoCA Annual 2010 " Memory Upgrade" Honorable Mention, Seattle WA
2011- Vermont Studio Center Full Fellowship recipient, Johnson, VT
2010- Virginia Commonwealth University Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation Award, Richmond, VA
2010- Virginia Commonwealth University Fine Arts Award, Richmond, VA
2010- McNamara Family Creative Arts Project Grant recipient
2010- Purchase Award, University of West Florida, Pensacola, FL
2010- The Voyager: " Digital skills blend with artistic eye ", Newspaper publication, Pensacola, FL
2009- Work featured on The Washington Post website, "Arlington Arts Center's 'Image/project' focuses on contemporary photos and video"
2009- Foundation For Contemporary Arts, emergency Grant award, New York, N.Y
2009- International Photography Award Honorable mention.
2009- Oculus Photographic Group Graduate Survey Book publication, "It's Following You".
2008-2009- Virginia Commonwealth University Graduate Teaching Assistantship Award, Richmond, VA
2007- Internship (Teaching assistantship) at New World School Of The Arts, with Alisa Pitchenik, Miami, FL
2007- Graduated with honors from The University Of Florida, (New World School Of The Arts) Miami, FL
2006- Selected By New World School Of The Arts Faculty for independent studio internship, Miami, FL
2006-2007- New World School Of The Arts Scholarship, Miami, FL