

**Minerva Cuevas:**

# **DISIDENCIA**



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*Alaina Claire Feldman*

How can one define dissent today? A crack in the sidewalk, an intentional misspelling, a mass protest? It is 2019 and a presidential election looms in the United States. The current relations between the US and Mexico are more fraught and complex than at any time in recent memory. Asylum seekers are forced back to Mexico or detained under horrifying conditions at the border after risking their lives in the journey north, while an impotent trade deal between the countries slowly collapses, then rebuilds itself, only to collapse once more. But in an era when objection seems almost impossible against the backdrop of growing neoliberal power and an increase in the privatization of public services and spaces, there are cracks subtly emerging. From Long Island City to San Juan to Hong Kong, we see how democratic self-organizing can succeed when combating seemingly impenetrable structures. It is within these cracks that Minerva Cuevas situates her work. Her visual language embraces, highlights, and amplifies instances of dissent and progress, thereby transforming our perception of politics and our political consciousness.

The centerpiece of this exhibition is a 25-minute video that began in 2007, titled *Disidencia* (Dissent), which is appropriately the title of the exhibition itself as well. An ongoing archive (consisting of over 30 hours of original footage), the video traverses Mexico City while looking for signs of deviant behavior — be it in public squares or in the streets, whether a squat of tents along the sidewalk or graffiti hiding in the shadows. The video's constant horizontal movement of the camera and the flashes of powerful public scenes of militant resistance bring to mind one of cinema's earliest political films, Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* from 1929. Vertov devoted himself to the development of *kino-eye*, a cinema that was unstaged and

shot without the participation of professionals in order to represent working-class conditions with authenticity. Like Vertov, Cuevas's cinema simultaneously documents her observed reality while constructing a new one from these captured slices of rebellion. We join her camera marching alongside farmers, gazing past imperial architecture towards banners demanding better labor conditions, and walking by anti-police brutality graffiti. Over the course of this project's 12 years, we see time pass but empty spaces continue to fill with activity. The fact that this video continues to be made reflects both the artist's and her subjects' ongoing support of such forms of political resistance.

Margins are important to Cuevas. Often overlooked by dominating structures, they are places of opportunity. Cuevas privileges research and participation over making art objects, staking out these moments of objection regardless of their scale. The exhibition is spiked with approaches she has developed over years of social practice and aesthetic production: her observation of public sites of resistance, creating spaces and projects that circumvent governing structures to question such systems' status quo (as with *Mejor Vida Corp*), and her strategic ways of connecting these structures to global environments.

It is fitting that *Disidencia's* New York premiere is presented at the Mishkin Gallery, part of Baruch College and the City University of New York. The College was established in 1847 as The Free Academy of New York, the first tuition-free institution of higher education in the United States, which embraced the radical idea to admit students based on what they could do, not who they were. It is a profoundly diverse campus, with 18,000 New York City undergraduate and graduate students who represent 160 countries and speak over 110 languages. Access to international artists like Cuevas, her ideas and social perspective, offers new ways of thinking and seeing for coming generations to experience.

The Mishkin Gallery is proud to bring this exhibition to New York from São Paulo, where it was initially curated by Gabriel Bogossian and Solange Farkas for Videobrasil in fall 2018. We are grateful for their time, research, and care in creating this important exhibition. We are also deeply appreciative of kurimanzutto, who helped to organize the seamless transfer of the exhibition to New York, particularly Amelia Hinojosa and Bree Zucker. Their support and camaraderie are invaluable. Clayton Press' contribution to this publication adds a rigorous and thoughtful perspective to Cuevas' work and we are proud to publish his writing here to allow audiences to think alongside him. I want to also sincerely thank Hedwig Feit for her ongoing support of Latin American arts and discourse at the Gallery and throughout the College. Her generosity and graciousness cannot be surpassed. Thank you to Dean Romero, Dino Dincer Sirin, and the staff at the Weissman School of Arts and Science for their day-to-day support of the Gallery and for trusting us to bring a visual, humanitarian lens to the College. And finally, my utmost gratitude to Minerva Cuevas, for making this work and showing us that our gestures of dissent are not going unnoticed.

## Curatorial Statement

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*Gabriel Bogossian and Solange Farkas,*  
*Associação Cultural Videobrasil*

A look around the Latin American art scene leaves no doubt: the colonial aspects of our history and the weight of this heritage in social relations are still a central theme in the work of different artists from the region. In this context, the emergence of a forceful poetics combining irony and stark criticism of the capitalist system and the *barbaric civilization* of which Walter Benjamin spoke, situates the work of Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas in a unique position, where the approach to social disputes of the present articulates repertoires of mass culture and texts, authors, and slogans of different times against the status quo.

Cuevas' *Disidencia* takes, over a set of eight works, a distinct approach to the artist's audiovisual practice. The exhibition brings together some of the central elements of Cuevas' poetics, in which the relationship between humanity and nature is highlighted—with regard not only to questions of commodification or preservation of the environment, but also to the rights of native peoples and their lands—along with the different forms assumed by the colonization of imageries, which always operates by suppressing or neutralizing dissonant cultural repertoires. *Disidencia*, a work that gives its title to the show and which wraps up the exhibition, creates an inventory of the different marks left by popular demonstrations in the public space of Mexico City, rescuing it (at least symbolically) as a place of political negotiation. It is, therefore, a poetic based not on the cynical refusal of the present but on a way of thinking that seems to remind us, as Susie Linfield says while commenting on Benjamin, that "documents of suffering are documents of protest, since they show us what happens when we destroy the world."

*Disidencia* reasserts Galpão Videobrasil's vocation as a site for reflection and artistic research, as well as a site for artists working from the broad Global South against the deterioration of creative and political horizons, in favor of dissent and freedom.

This text was initially written to coincide with the fall 2018 presentation of *Disidencia* at Videobrasil.  
[videobrasil.org.br](http://videobrasil.org.br)



*If there is no struggle there is no progress.*<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Douglass

Assent and dissent are complementary forces—Yin-Yang counterparts—in the unity of consciousness. Irrespective of language and culture, the forces are always:

Yes and no.

*Ita vero et minime.*

Sí y no.

*Sem e não.*

Ja and nein.

*Oui et non.*

Titled *Disidencia* (Dissent), this exhibition illuminates modern problems: difficulties, issues or complications. By even raising consciousness, dissent is positive, testing awareness, providing insight, suggesting potential outcomes and, by inference—however subtle—solutions. The art of Minerva Cuevas exposes both Yin and Yang. Each project demonstrates elements of distress and empathy at the same time. There is no shadow without light.

As an artist, Cuevas is less a traditional object maker and more an idea generator, claiming that her work is the intuitive and contextual research she does. She is an archivist in a traditional sense, collecting, organizing, preserving, controlling and, ultimately, manipulating extensive and diverse collections of traditional and electronic media that have relevance to her values and topical investigations.

Cuevas is also a guardian of memories about contemporary issues: cultural, ecological, economic, political and social ones. Her synthesis of information and delivery of ideas is always compelling. She advocates and informs, but does not proselytize. For Cuevas, consciousness and dissent become mediums of expression.. She actively questions and problemizes consensus and the things that are taken for granted.<sup>2</sup>

Irrespective of media, everything produced by Cuevas can be termed “conceptual art.” As she says, “It’s secondary if it’s made by me, or if it’s painted by me.”<sup>3, 4</sup> She is an artistic producer-director, originating, planning and coordinating various aspects of production, including writing, directing and editing. Cuevas’ art is conceptual art at its purest. The formation and distribution of crystalline ideas are more important than artist processes and physical products. Her approach somewhat parallels that of Christopher Williams, who explores socio-cultural ideas and their political implications with still photography. Using an approach that Tim Griffins described as sociophotographic, Williams, like Cuevas, “directs” the production of his photographs, rather than taking them himself.<sup>5</sup>

“Objectness” aside, Cuevas’ art-making hardly disguises her progressive, pro-active orientations to environmental and social topics and, most importantly, the interconnectedness of everything. This is Yin-Yang. Yet, she is not an activist artist. Cuevas clarifies this saying, “The term political activist is problematic. I think the challenge is to stop using the reference to activism because everybody has agency (that is, the ability) to react in daily life and therefore generate political actions.”<sup>6</sup> So, her work engages in “the active insistence on another possibility, of the conviction that dissenting can lead to social and political transformation.”<sup>7</sup>

For Cuevas, “Dissent implies both the possibility and the opportunity to engage with and criticize the status quo—literally, to ‘speak truth to power.’”<sup>8</sup> She rebuts the notion that “art’s social function has withered . . . and can contribute nothing to the solution of pressing social problems,” a concern expressed by Charlotte Posenenske, the German artist, in 1968, a period of social and political turmoil, tipping points in the modern era.<sup>9</sup> Cuevas counters that “Art is totally connected to social change. We don’t have a way to measure how art can impact society, and that’s good, because that’s part of the freedom to do.”<sup>10</sup>

At first it might seem an art historical overreach to associate or even align Cuevas' thinking and art-making activities with those of Joseph Beuys, another German artist who, like Posenenske. Cuevas has different tools—film and video, for example—and techniques—irony and humor, especially. Some of her work invites nervous discomfort. Yet, like Beuys, Cuevas clearly demonstrates how art originates in personal experience, and addresses universal artistic, political and/or social ideas, that is, topical issues of the day.

Although ideas and arts can be disquieting, the work of Cuevas and Beuys share a positive outlook. Beuys positioned art in an optimistic role during times when hope for many was closing down. In some respects, Beuys also rediscovered—or at least, rearticulated—the criticality of the man–nature relationship. He developed the concept (or construct) of “social sculpture,” a term he created to embody his understanding of art’s potential to transform society even through nudges. Beuys’ intention was that his work—art work—should stimulate audiences to action and sculpt thought-forms, speech and other forms of creative activity.

Founded upon a holistic vision of society and nature, Beuys is still provoking us to transform our everyday actions, “joining,” as Fabio Maria Montagnino wrote, “the collective effort toward a new evolutionary stage of humanity.”<sup>11</sup>

Cuevas’ work also awakens this potential using historic sources, scripted scenarios and film archives and documentation of dissent. Her methods are “intentional, not accidental. They are critical, not laudatory. They are public, not private.”<sup>12</sup> Like Beuys, Cuevas’ intention is to “generate an intellectual process that uses the spectator’s own sociopolitical references to generate an aesthetic reflection that invokes rebel spirits and to bring the audience into this process.”<sup>13</sup> Dissent follows. She believes,

Through the use of unlimited creative resources and interdisciplinary connections art can not only generate unique sensorial, scientific and technological exercises but also build a stronger sense of community. Art being part of culture can influence the way societies are shaped. It's to be hoped that it influences society not only to associate the natural sphere with beauty but also social justice with something essentially aesthetic.<sup>14</sup>

Cuevas' work also affirms her belief that art has the potential for developing consciousness and activating dissent, thus transforming life, work, and society as a whole. From the micro to the macro, she reveals intersecting fields of power relations in daily life. For her, "Dissent is the active insistence on another possibility, of the conviction that dissenting can lead to social and political transformation. It is the active call for and belief in another alternative."<sup>15</sup>

## **The Work**

In combination, the eight works at Baruch College's Mishkin Gallery (The City University of New York) are a variation of Cuevas' solo presentation at Associação Cultural Videobrasil (Galpão VB) in 2018. Both exhibitions demonstrated the range of Cuevas' interests and, equally important, sampled her alternative electronic visual media, from slide presentations to films. One size, one approach does not fit all. In several works, narration, sound effects, music or a combination of all three complement the visual, adding dimensionality.

*Donald McRonald  
(France), 2003  
Two-channel  
projection and  
costume  
16'27"*



*Not Impressed by  
Civilization, 2005  
Acrylic paint on wall  
and video  
13'20"*



*A Draught of the Blue,  
2013  
Video  
9'48"*



The earliest work in the exhibition, *Donald McRonald (France)*, 2003, is an auditory onslaught by a French-speaking clown character—a food chain mascot—shouting satiric diatribes in the winter daylight of Les Halles, Paris, and in the managed chaos of a McDonald’s restaurant. Auditory cacophony is layered on its visual counterpart. *Not Impressed by Civilization* (2005), shot at night with a solo lantern as her light source, goes nearly black at times. You can barely make out the eyeshine of a doe, chewing its cud in the grass, before Cuevas redirects the camera on herself, making a night camp in the Rocky Mountain wilderness of western Canada. Except for the distant horn of a night train, the only sounds are those of Cuevas maneuvering in the outdoors and preparing to sleep. *A Draught of the Blue* (2013), a black and white and color video, is accompanied by the sounds of bubbling scuba tanks and synthesizer music by Pablo Salazar, a Mexican composer. These sonic elements heighten the visual ones.

Each work, even the seemingly simple ones, reveals stories within stories. *El pobre, el rico y el mosquito* (The Poor Man, the Rich Man and the Mosquito), 2007, is not merely a simple parable about the poor and the rich. It is a commentary about the power of an insect and its place in and interconnectedness to the human sphere. *Disidencia* is a mosaic of footage that Cuevas shot of an enormous range of social actors/projects and active protests in Mexico City, documenting waves of recent historical activity. Simple visual symbols, like the female mascot of Lulú, a Mexican soda, points to a historic labor-management confrontation in the early 1980s. Mojiganga puppets, traditional figures of cardboard, paper and cloth typically used to evoke joy during important religious pilgrimages and satirically fashioned to ridicule public personalities, are recast as protest figures. Tradition confronts modernity. Repetitive viewing reveals many, but not all, of the archival details, some of which need explanation.

La venganza del  
elefante, (The  
Revenge of the  
Elephant), 2007  
Installation with a  
series of 12 slides  
Looped



No Room to Play,  
Video retro-projection  
on hanging screen  
6'29"



El pobre, el rico y el  
mosquito (The Poor  
Man, the Rich Man  
and the Mosquito)  
Video  
4'14"



Cuevas' work invites, even necessitates, repeated watching. To use a commonplace idiom, "the devil is in the detail." Cuevas's cinematic techniques amplify her story lines. The scrambled sequencing of images in *La venganza del elefante* (The Revenge of the Elephant) intentionally encourage different interpretations of the slide's original (19th century) story line. *A Draught of the Blue* (2013) is an HDV video projection that uses both black and white and color footage. The black and white portions objectify the underwater environment, revealing more movement and textures. In contrast, color footage makes the sea real. *No Room to Play* is divided into 4 colors, marking the passage of time and nearly suggesting seasons.

Then, there is language, spoken and subtitled. Cuevas uses the languages or vernacular of her locations, underscoring Cuevas' respect for locus. At the Mishkin Gallery, Cuevas' work uses five human languages.

*No Room to Play* is narrated in German and subtitled in English.

*A Praia* is in Portuguese.

*Disidencia* is in Spanish, as is *El Pobre, El Rico y El Mosquito*.

*Donald McRonald (France)* is in French.

She also captures underwater burbles and bubbles—the language of the sea—in *A Draught of the Blue*. In *Not Impressed by Civilization* the soundtrack is language of the Canadian wildness' night. The loudest, most universal language of all is the absolute quiet of *La venganza del elefante* (The Revenge of the Elephant.)

Each project is unique, but Cuevas' themes are universal, not confined in any way by place or culture. Cuevas' balances empathy and antipathy, assent and dissent to elevate awareness and encourage action. Her homeland —to paraphrase Tomás Meabe, a Spanish socialist and dissident— begins in her and ends nowhere. Art in balance —Yin-Ying.







## 2003, Donald McDonald (France)

*Two-channel projection and costume*

16'27"

*Donald McDonald (France)* was prepared for and first screened in *Hardcore: Towards a New Activism*, an exhibition organized by Jérôme Sans at Palais de Tokyo (Paris) in 2003. Sans suggested that "While artists have always been 'hackers of the real', the creative men and women brought together in this show offer a language and form of artistic intervention that tend toward a new activism, because they attempt to transmit, like a pirate radio station, an alternative, critical view of a social, economic and political context."<sup>16</sup>

Taken as a whole, *Donald McDonald (France)* is a broad critique of capitalism and consumerism channeled through "a character, dressed as a clown, [who] stands in front of the premises of the best-known hamburger chain and invites passers-by to enter and consume its products."<sup>17</sup> The clown teases, inveigles, badgers and pleads with customers to come into "his restaurant" to make him richer, to "eat a hamburger with additives and a lot of fat." McDonald says, "[If] you eat regularly the delicacies I offer, you can get diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, heart disease." He offers a happy meal of corporate greed and personal disease. And, if you need a job, McDonald offers a non-unionized, minimum wage work.

Midway through his "buy and die" entreaties to customers in this Parisian franchise, McDonald orders a sandwich of his own. With his back turned to the audience, he pops in a pair of fangs into his mouth. When he turns around, McDonald is in full vampire mode, stuffing a sandwich into his mouth, even though vampires, unlike humans, do not eat food for sustenance.<sup>18</sup> But then, McDonald's point is hardly nutritional. As you snicker at the character's









comic behavior, the hair raises on the back of your neck. Perhaps your blood pressure rises. Anyone who has eaten at any fast food franchise is complicit with corporate connivances. It is fast food against the planet: animals suffer, the environment suffers and consumers suffer, with children—present and future customers—as the ultimate target.

## 2005, Not Impressed by Civilization

Acrylic paint on wall and video

13'20"

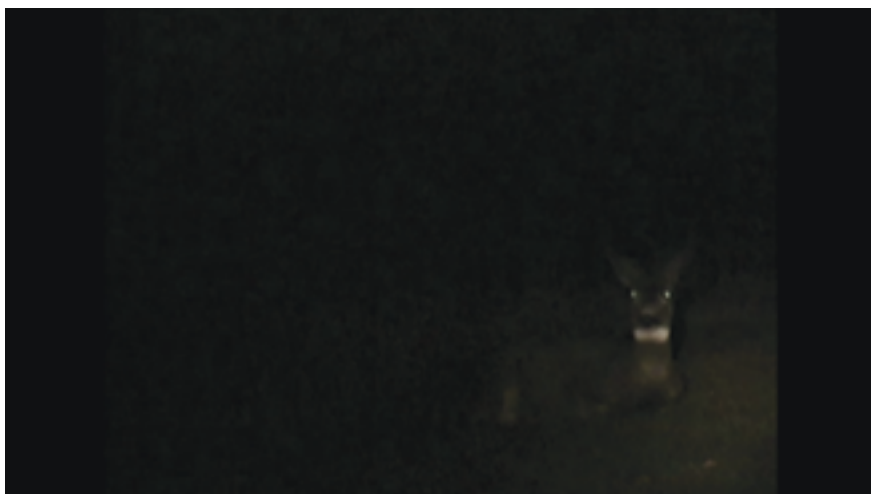
*Not Impressed by Civilization* is a video performance about renouncing to the urban environment and sleeping for one night outdoors in western Canada. The event was based around an interpretation of a quote from a speech by Tatanka Iyotanka (more commonly known as Sitting Bull), the Sioux Indian chief. In a prison interview given in 1882, Iyotanka rejected the urban lifestyle of the whites, saying, "The life of white men is slavery. They are prisoners in towns or farms. The life my people want is a life of freedom. I have seen nothing that a white man has, houses or railways or clothing or food, that is as good as the right to move in the open country, and live in our own fashion."<sup>19</sup>

Cuevas later recalled that the experience was both peaceful and liberating, adding, "I think that when you face a vast natural area alone, you are led to take a more humble position in evaluating our relation with nature."<sup>20</sup> The very act of spending a night outdoors among wild animals and in extremely low temperatures "implied the inherent risks of being unprotected in the wild," according to Cuevas. But the wild is the normal habitat of animals. So, Cuevas poses two unsettling questions, "What is normal for wild animals; what is normal for domesticated humans?"

This work, like *A Draught of Blue*, 2013, also links well to the theses and theories of animal rights' activist, Peter Singer, whose 2001 book, *Animal Liberation*, began,

This book is about the tyranny of human over nonhuman animals. This tyranny has caused and today is still causing an amount of pain and suffering that can only be compared with that which resulted from the centuries









of tyranny by white humans over black humans. The struggle against this tyranny is a struggle as important as any of the moral and social issues that have been fought in recent years . . . This book is an attempt to think through, carefully and consistently, the question of how we ought to treat nonhuman animals. In the process it exposes the prejudices that lie behind our present attitudes and behavior . . . It is intended rather for people who are concerned about ending oppression and exploitation wherever they occur, and in seeing that the basic moral principle of equal consideration of interests is not arbitrarily restricted to members of our own species.<sup>21</sup>

In Cuevas' view, "We value human life more than life. The anthropocentric perspective seems naive and retrograde these days; the idea of 'our' planet is an arrogant fantasy that is leading us to extinction."<sup>22</sup> Lyotanka "knew the supreme lesson of history . . . that nothing can compensate men for the loss of liberty, and that everything else can be endured but that."<sup>23</sup>

*A Praia* was planned in conjunction with *Vazios Urbanos* (Urban Voids), the first Lisbon Triennial of Architecture in 2007. The Triennial focused on the “phenomena of rarefaction or urban rupture generated by processes of physical and social decay and degradation in city areas . . . spots of “non-city”, absent spaces, ignored or laid to disuse, oblivious or surviving to any territorial structuring systems.”<sup>24</sup>

In several respects, *Vazios Urbanos* offered a near-ideal context for Cuevas. At the intersection of environmental subjects —urbanization and degradation— the Triennial offered the potential for intervention and collaboration, as well as an opportunity for economic and political commentary and dissent. The work was originally conceived to be a mural, but in the absence of institutional support for the work, Cuevas and a *tribe*, as she put it, of architectural students undertook a collaborative, public and illegal intervention on a hillside, where they spelt *A Praia* in cobblestones.<sup>25</sup>

In Portuguese, the title means “the beach.” This is a partial appropriation of *Sous les pavés, la plage*, that is “Under the paving stones, [there is] the beach,” a slogan that was originally penned by Bernard Cousin, a Parisian worker, with an accomplice in 1968, a watershed year in world history accompanied by turmoil, chaos and revolt.<sup>26</sup> In revolutionary terms, it implied that beneath the cobble stones of the streets in Paris, which student dug up to throw at the police, there was literally sand, which brings to mind a beach, perhaps even a utopia. The intention, Cousin later wrote, was to evoke a paradisiacal future.<sup>27</sup>

Cuevas, ever the archivist, insists on historical and sociological accuracy of the slogan. Cousin, who subsequently became a country doctor, authored *Pourquoi j’ai écrit “Sous les pavés la plage”*, a 42-page book in 2008.<sup>28</sup>















He asserted in an interview in *L'Express*, the French weekly, that he and his friend, a publicist named Bernard Fritsch, wanted to develop a slogan that captured the spirit of the times. His 2018 obituary, underscored Cousin's humor and strong provocative spirit.<sup>29</sup>

For many leftists, sympathetic centrists and bona fide anarchists, 1968 was a short-lived period of exuberant "utopian fantasy." The availability of higher education and the expansion of Postwar affluence enabled young people—the Baby Boom generation, in particular—to differentiate themselves as separate from, if not against, the beliefs and values of their parents who had suffered real hardship during the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>30</sup> Irrespective of how the slogan had originated, it reflected the *Zeitgeist* of 1968, a spirit of the times and a sense of liberation. The slogan's furtive re-creation in Lisbon was a clear expression of dissent.

## 2007, El pobre, el rico y el mosquito

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*(The Poor Man, the Rich Man and the Mosquito)*

Video

4'14"

*El pobre, el rico y el mosquito* (The Poor Man, the Rich Man and the Mosquito), 2007, is a poetic fable contained in a rare 1939 copy of *¡Levántate!* (Get Up), an anthology for Mexican elementary students. The story goes:

*A poor man once lived opposite a rich man. Every day, through his window, he saw how poor he really was. He said to himself: 'What have I in common with this man?' And the rich man across the way who saw him every day said to himself: 'What have I in common with this man?' And the poor man was dying. Dying [...] He was dying, alone as can be.*

*And the rich man across the way saw him every day from his window and, stingy, he once again said to himself, 'What have I in common with this man?' But then that same night one of the millions of mosquitoes that lived in a swamp bit the dying man.*

*Later, flying at the mercy of the shadows, it gained entrance to the home of the rich man, who was sleeping, and bit him too.*

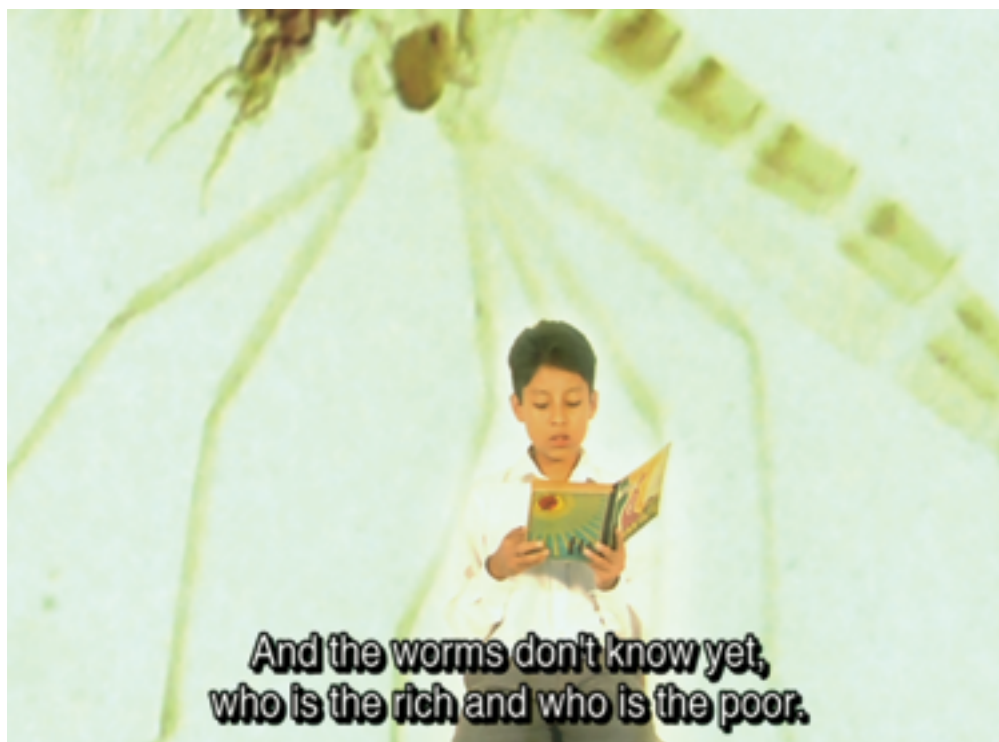
*As the mosquito bit him, it passed on the disease of which the poor man was dying.*

*And the rich man was no longer able to see the poor man from across the way from his window [...] Both men died of the same affliction, both died practically at the same time, unaware of what the one had in common with the other.*

In the film, a neatly dressed young boy sits tall in a wooden chair in front of a slide projection of a skeletal mosquito. He methodically reads aloud a short story by Tomás Meabe, the Spanish socialist writer, about the entitled and disenfranchised, the haves and have nots.



**The poor, the rich and the mosquito.**



**And the worms don't know yet,  
who is the rich and who is the poor.**



**and that to rescue them in time  
is to help ourselves.**



Francis McKee, Director for Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, described the work as a "view into the traditional folk world where there are rich men, poor men and unwitting insects that unite them."<sup>31</sup> McKee precisely described how this piece demonstrates "the balance between man and animal no longer holds" in the modern, industrialized world.

It embodies "the rupture between humans and the natural world," as characterized by John Berger, topics consistent with Cuevas' consciousness raising.<sup>32</sup>

Even with lives in contrast; death in common. Nature always prevails.

## 2007, *La venganza del elefante*

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*(The Revenge of the Elephant)*

*Installation with a series of 12 slides*

*Looped*

*La venganza del elefante* is a slide presentation that uses vintage (ca. 1897) illustrations with text by Wilhelm Busch, a 19th century German artist, who is regarded as one of the founders of modern-day comics. He was such an influential caricaturist, poet and satirist that only Goethe and Schiller are quoted more frequently in Germany than Busch. His cartoons even hung on the walls of Sigmund Freud's Vienna study. (Busch's most famous works are the adventures of two unruly boys, Max and Moritz.)

"He was a kind of social critic," according to Hans Joachim Neyer, director of the Wilhelm Busch Museum. "Busch was aware that people get a thrill out of killing, and that they sated it by killing animals."<sup>33</sup> Busch was considered also an anti-Semite. Rudolph Hess, Adolph Hitler's Deputy Führer, referred to Busch as a philosopher in cheerful clothes ("*Philosoph in heiteren Gewande.*")<sup>34</sup>

A common theme for Busch was "bad behaving" animals. Invariably, his text comics explained what happened in the pictures in vernacular terms. In *The Revenge of the Elephant* Busch's text is clearly racist. When attacked by a black boy, the irritated and injured elephant chases and captures him, then dangles him above the open jaws of a crocodile, before finally throwing him into a cactus. It is unclear which animal is more untamed, the elephant or the black boy.

The slides in this projection were produced by W. Butcher & Sons, London (1870-1906) under the trade name 'Primus'. While the slides were sold as a set of eight in a cardboard box, they were sometimes released as sets of 'Primus Projecting Post Cards'. *The Revenge of the Elephant* is one such









set. Its propaganda circulated broadly, equating black people with animals.

Cuevas directly appropriated the images—without text—reproducing the images of the glass slides images on photographic film. This technique let her to project the images using an automatic process that scrambled the original storyline. The resulting haphazard sequencing “messed,” as Cuevas puts it, with the original slide order and makes any reading of the images more complex.

## 2007-ongoing, *Disidencia*

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*Video*

25'43"

*Disidencia* is a long-term project to generate a video archive that documents the many free-willed, anarchic, unpredictable, illegal, irreverent, makeshift and often spontaneous demonstrations that have historically occurred in Mexico City. One of the highlights of this portrait of Mexico City's rebellious character are the rural elements that remind us of the city's origins and that constitute a form of resistance by themselves, managing to defeat the very urban definition of a city.

Many of the "symbols" of dissent are specific to Mexico, but their explanations are universal. Nonetheless, Cuevas often provides only clues or suggestions. For example, there is a recurring image of the logo and trademark of Lulú, a local beverage company.<sup>35</sup> It begs a short explanation. In 1938 Rafael Víctor Jiménez Zamudio created the company Refrescos Pascual, S.A., which sold popsicles, bottled water and soda. Continuing labor disputes with management led to a strike in 1982, and 150 workers were fired for their participation. A subsequent confrontation between plant security and the employees resulted in the death of 2 persons and the injury to 17 others. A work stoppage went on for three years, which only ended in 1985 when Jiménez Zamudio yielded to a newly formed workers' cooperative.

During the strike, art became an impetus for change and union labor a source of rescue. Over 320 artists sided with the workers, including Rufino Tamayo, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Francisco Toledo, as well as the Salón de la Plástica Mexicana and Taller de Gráfica Popular. They donated artworks to auction off. While the auctions took place, the money was insufficient to restore the business. The main union of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Cuevas' alma mater, provided the funds needed to obtain permits and service the machinery.





*Disidencia* is accompanied by musical compositions by Mexican composer Pablo Salazar and The Kronos Quartet. These enliven festive dissent. In a sense, democracy has never looked so good. And yet, the music belies reality. One piece is an augmented chamber music ensemble playing a modernized and Latinized version of *The Elephant Never Forgets*, a version of Ludwig von Beethoven's *The Turkish March* (1809). The work was transformed into theme song for the Mexican sitcom, *El Chavo del Ocho*, a show centered around the adventures and tribulations of a poor orphan (Chavo, or lad) and the inhabitants of a fictional vecindad, a low-income housing complex.

Video  
9'48"

The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, also known as the Great Mayan Reef, is the second largest reef in the world and the largest in the Western Hemisphere. It stretches nearly 700 miles from the northern tip of the Yucatan Peninsula down through the Honduran Bay Islands. It is also one of the most vulnerable places on the planet subject to multiple threats, from climate change to large-scale agriculture run-offs. It is a hotspot for biodiversity including endangered marine turtles, corals and 500 species of fish.

Filmed off the coast of Akumal Beach on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, two divers—sometimes singular, other times paired—swim through and swim over the reef's coral, sea grass and sea life. They swim with stretched banners that read:

*IN TROUBLE*

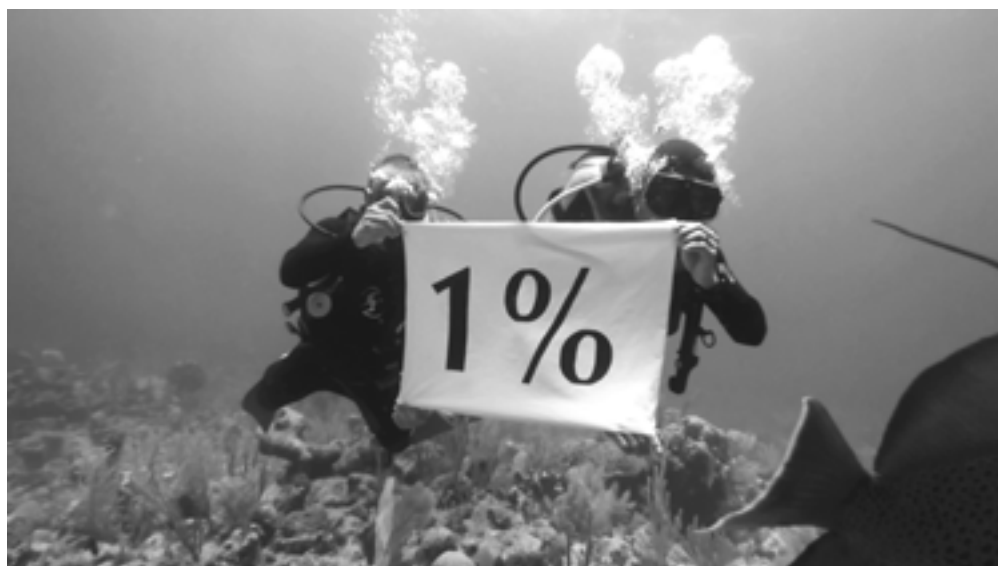
*Omnia sunt communia*

1 %

25 %

Their almost telegraphic messages are simple. *IN TROUBLE* reaffirms the imperiled status of the entire ecosystem of the reef, if not the planet. One banner, *Omnia sunt communia*, translates as "All things are held in common." In other words, the underwater ecosystem, the global environment is the rightful, common property of all living things, vegetal, animal and human. The banners originally refer to the statistics of how much coral is left in the world (less than 1%) and the 25% of all marine species which depend of it. Coincidentally, a secondary reading of the 1% banners reasserts the staggering economic gap between the world's wealthy elite (the 1%) banner and ordinary citizenry. Most disturbingly, the banner 25 % is a reminder that the







United Nations estimates that manmade pollution and environmental damage are responsible for a quarter of all diseases and deaths worldwide.

Cuevas' tact in *A Draught of the Blue* calmly, but resolutely, heightens awareness of the complex relationships between nature and humans, saying:

The environmentalist discourse tends to be superficial and only pays attention to 'problems' that are merely the symptoms of a violent system. By contrast, in the framework of social ecology the causes of the ecological crisis are located in relations of domination between people. To quote Murray Bookchin: 'the very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human'.<sup>36</sup>

As the film concludes, a rainbow parrotfish approaches the camera, almost as an act of protest. More poignantly, an endangered sea turtle swims over the reef and away from the camera.

## 2019, No Room to Play

49

*Video retro-projection on hanging screen*  
6'29"

*No Room to Play* had its premiere at daadgalerie in Berlin in May 2019. It expanded on Cuevas' environmental and sociological research, contemplating the real world of issues of climate change in what she views as façades of democratic states.<sup>37</sup> *No Room to Play* is not a post-apocalyptic fiction. It is a pre-apocalyptic admonition about economic, environmental and urban decline.

Initially a camera pans over an abandoned naturalistic playground, like some kind of imagination grove envisioned by Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian social reformer. It is a desert island in an urban landscape. There is a mix of equipment and structures spread across a sand foundation that looks "organic" to the point of crunchy: non-toxic, safe and eco-friendly. There are over-sized carved and painted wooden animals, vegetables and playhouses among the equipment and water feature.

No human is present in this play space. Their only traces are footprints in the sand and graffiti on walls. The park is surrounded by apartment buildings in an urban landscape. The film is accompanied by a score of chimes, which are initially soothing and inviting, before becoming dissonant, accompanied by neurotic percussive clicks and drumbeats. The visuals are at first meditated through color filters, changing like seasons with the story line.

The narrator—a young girl—narrator speaks in German. The voice, subtitled on the screen, begins:

There was a time when we wore flowers on our heads  
...wishing it would never get dark  
so we could continue to play.  
We chased freedom and joy every day.



We learnt about fear, delight and laughter...  
 ...but ended up running the race.<sup>38</sup>

As the narration continues, the camera pans over a dilapidated wooden truck trailer, battered metal buckets, and derelict concrete climbing walls. The visuals are filtered in an icy lake blue and, finally, a rust red. The story becomes darker and ominous.

But there was a day when we weren't told the truth.  
 We didn't know enough to understand the bad news.  
 Others took our decisions, others took our strength.  
 Welcome to earth.  
 There was a time when we wore flowers on our heads...  
 ...but then it became cold in the summer and hot in the winter.  
 We were promised Neverland.  
 That imaginary faraway place...  
 ...but true happiness never came.  
 We wander now in darkness and despair.<sup>39</sup>

The narrator reveals that Neverland, that imaginary, faraway place where mythical creatures and other beings live, does not exist. There is no here, there. Neverland is only a metaphor for a place that exists in the minds of children.<sup>40</sup>

The works in this exhibition specifically and Cuevas' career more generally address the balance of consciousness and ignorance, assent and dissent. Yin-Yang. Like Beuys, Cuevas explores "how artistic creation can directly convey the existential attitudes of a more profound understanding of natural ecological relationships, and how an expanded conception of art can tackle even the social, economic, and political reorganization of Western society."<sup>41</sup>







<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, "West India Emancipation," in *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 2, ed. P. S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 437.

<sup>2</sup> Jørgensen, Martin Bak, and Óscar García Agustín. "Nine Theses on Dissent." *Politics of Dissent*. (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 221.

<sup>3</sup> Minerva Cuevas: Bridging Borders. Art in the Twenty-First Century, Extended Play, March 24, 2017. <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/minerva-cuevas-bridging-borders-short/>.

<sup>4</sup> Mexico City. Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 8, September 16, 2016. <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s8/mexico-city/>.

<sup>5</sup> Griffin, Tim. "Christopher Williams: Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, Bologna." *Artforum International*, Vol. 45, no. 5 (2007), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Minerva Cuevas: Bridging Borders. Art in the Twenty-First Century, Extended Play, March 24, 2017. <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/minerva-cuevas-bridging-borders-short/>

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., 221.

<sup>8</sup> Falk, Barbara J. "The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent: From State to Global Action," in *Dissent! Refracted: Histories, Aesthetics and Cultures of Dissent*, ed. Ben Dorfman (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Posenenske, Charlotte. "Manifesto." *Art International*, Volume XII, no. 5 (May 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Mexico City. *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, Season 8, September 16, 2016. <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s8/mexico-city/>

<sup>11</sup> Montagnino, Fabio Maria. "Joseph Beuys' Rediscovery of Man–Nature Relationship: A Pioneering Experience of Open Social Innovation." *Journal of Open Innovation: Business, Open Innovation and Art*, vol. 4, No. 4 (2018), 50.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara J. Falk, PhD, who specializes in dissent and theories of violence and non-violence at the Canadian Forces College, writes “Dissent is disruptive to be sure: not without reason do authoritarian regimes constrain or prohibit dissent. At the same time, however, dissent contributes to the texture of democracy: dissent enables self-governance, civic participation, and promotes diversity and tolerance. Finally, dissent is normatively positive—branding something as “dissent” is at least partly an exercise in legitimation. Falk, Barbara J., “The History, Paradoxes, and Utility of Dissent: From State to Global Action.” *Dissent! Refracted: Histories, Aesthetics and Cultures of Dissent* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Minerva Cuevas email correspondence to Clayton Press, July 30, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Abaroa, Eduardo and Minerva Cuevas. “Corporatocracy, Democracy and Social Change (in Mexico and Beyond).” *Third Text*, 27:1 (2013), 171.

<sup>15</sup> Jørgensen, Martin Bak, and Óscar García Agustín. “Nine Theses on Dissent.” *Politics of Dissent* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 221.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ortega, Damien. “Alias.” *Antitesis* No. 2 (2012).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.gods-and-monsters.com/vampire-feeding.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Creelman, James. *On the Great Highway. The Wanderings and Adventures of a Special Correspondent*. (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Co., 1901), 299-302.

<sup>20</sup> Abaroa, Eduardo and Minerva Cuevas. “Corporatocracy, Democracy and Social Change (in Mexico and Beyond).” *Third Text*, 27:1 (2013), 168.

<sup>21</sup> Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. (New York: Avon Books, 1975), vii.

<sup>22</sup> Abaroa, Eduardo and Minerva Cuevas. “Corporatocracy, Democracy and Social Change (in Mexico and Beyond).” *Third Text*, 27:1 (2013), 162.



<sup>23</sup> Creelman, James. *On the Great Highway. The Wanderings and Adventures of a Special Correspondent*. (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1901), 297.

<sup>24</sup> Trienal de Arquitectura de Lisboa. <https://www.trienaldelisboa.com/programme/triennali/2007>.

<sup>25</sup> Minerva Cuevas email message to Clayton Press, July 23, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> The slogan *Sous les pavés . . .* has been frequently misattributed to French students and, later, to artists from the Internationale Situationiste (IS), a revolutionary alliance of European avant-garde artists who developed a critique of capitalism based on a mixture of surrealism and Marxism. In simple terms, their objective was to eliminate the distinction between artists and consumers and make cultural production a part of everyday life.

<sup>27</sup> Minerva Cuevas email message to Clayton Press, July 23, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Cousin, Bernard. *Pourquoi j'ai écrit "Sous les pavés la plage"*. (Paris: Éditions Rive Droit, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> "Mai 68 : le créateur de "Sous les pavés, la plage" est mort." *La Nouvelle République*. fr, April 15, 2018. <https://www.lanouvellerepublique.fr/indre-et-loire/commune/montresor/mai-68-le-createur-de-sous-les-paves-la-plage-est-mort>.

<sup>30</sup> Press, Clayton. "'Posters From 68. Paris – Mexico' Now On View At Kurimanzutto, New York." *Forbes.com*, September 19, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/claytonpress/2018/09/19/posters-from-68-paris-mexico-carteles-del-68-paris-mexico-kurimanzutto-new-york/#52cc0dcf5f31>

<sup>31</sup> McKee, Francis, "Minerva Cuevas: Anarchy in the Hive." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, Issue 27 (Summer 2011), 52.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/german-caricaturist-carped-on-society-with-crude-cartoons/a-3046288>.

<sup>34</sup> Steiner, John Michael. *Power Politics and Social Change in National Socialist Germany: A Process of Escalation into Mass Destruction*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 73.

<sup>35</sup> Bautista, Memo. "Lulú, la bebida sexy de los refrescos mexicanos." VICE, April 1, 2017. <https://www.vice.com/es/article/gvez7q/lulu-la-bebida-sexy-de-los-refrescos-mexicanos>.

<sup>36</sup> Abaroa, Eduardo and Minerva Cuevas. "Corporatocracy, Democracy and Social Change (in Mexico and Beyond)." *Third Text*, 27:1 (2013), 163.

<sup>37</sup> Abaroa, Eduardo and Minerva Cuevas.

<sup>38</sup> Cuevas, Minerva and Melanie Roumigièrre. *No Room To Play*. DAAD Artists in Berlin Program: Berlin, 2011, no page.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Cuevas's script triggers thoughts of Peter Handke's tender poem, *Lied Vom Kindsein* (Song of Childhood), which it almost parallels Cuevas' Neverland-ish script, beginning:

*Als das Kind Kind war,  
wußte es nicht, daß es Kind war,  
alles war ihm beseelt,  
und alle Seelen waren eins.*

*When the child was a child,  
it didn't know that it was a child,  
everything was soulful,  
and all souls were one.*

See Wenders, Wim and Peter Handke. *Der Himmel über Berlin*. Film script. 1987.

<sup>41</sup> Adams, David. "Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of a Radical Ecology." *Art Journal* 51, no. 2 (1992): 26-34. "Corporatocracy, Democracy and Social Change (in Mexico and Beyond)." *Third Text*, 27:1 (2013), 171.

**Minerva Cuevas** (b.1975, Mexico City) is an artist creating research based projects that allow the audience an insight into the economic and political organization of the social sphere through site-specific actions and artworks.

She is the founder of *Mejor Vida Corp.* (1998) and the International Understanding Foundation (2016). Member of *irational.org* since 1999.

Cuevas' solo exhibitions include: *No Room To Play*, daadgalerie, Berlin, DE (2019); *Dissidência*, Galpão VB, São Paulo, BR (2018); *Fine Lands*, Dallas Museum of Art, USA (2018); *Feast and Famine*, kurimanzutto, Mexico City, MX (2015); *Minerva Cuevas*, Museo de la Ciudad de México, MX (2012); *Landings*, Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK (2012); *S-COOP*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK (2010); *Minerva Cuevas*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, NL (2008); *Phenomena*, Kunsthalle Basel, CH (2007); *MVC Biotechnologies*, Vienna Secession, AT (2001); *On Society*, MC Kunst, Los Angeles, USA (2007); *Egalité* (2007), Le Grand Café–Centre d'art contemporain, Saint Nazaire, FR (2007); *Schwarzfahrer Are My Heroes*, DAAD, Berlin, DE (2004); *Mejor Vida Corp.*, Tamayo Museum, Mexico City, MX (2000).

Cuevas's work has been part of group exhibitions in institutions including: SFMOMA, San Francisco, USA (2019); Museo Jumex, Mexico City, MX (2018); South London Gallery, London, UK (2016); MAXXI Museo Nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome, IT (2015); Museum Ludwig, Cologne, DE (2016); Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA; Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, USA (2013); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, AT (2013); Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM/ARC), Paris, FR (2012); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, DE (2010); Pompidou, Paris, FR (2010); Redcat, Los Angeles, USA (2006); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL (2005); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2003); PS1, New York, USA (2002) .

Her work has been present in the following Biennials: 4th Prospect New Orleans, United States (2017); Liverpool Biennial, United Kingdom (2010); 6th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany (2010); 9th Biennale de Lyon, France (2007); Mercosur Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2007); 27th Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2006); Tirana Biennale, Kompleksi-Goldi, Albania (2005); Biennale Of Sydney, Australia and the 8th International Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2003).

She studied Visual Arts at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, UNAM, Mexico (1993-1997).

[www.minervacuevas.org](http://www.minervacuevas.org)

**Gabriel Bogossian** is adjunct curator of Associação Cultural Videobrasil and an independent publisher and translator. Since 2007 he has researched the representation of indigenous peoples in Brazil, integrating the production of images of contemporary art, journalism, and social movements. He worked as curator in the exhibitions *Nada levarei quando morrer, aqueles que me devem cobrarei no inferno* (Galpão VB, São Paulo, 2017), *O museu inexistente* (Funarte, São Paulo, 2017), together with the artist Victor Leguy, *Amanhã vai ficar tudo bem* (Galpão VB, São Paulo, 2016), a solo art exhibition by Akram Zaatari, *Cruzeiro do Sul* (Paço das Artes, São Paulo, 2015), and *Transperformance 3: Corpo estranho* (Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014). He contributes to *Artelogie* and *BRAVO!* magazines, and translated into Portuguese the books *Americanism and Fordism*, by Antonio Gramsci (Editora Hedra, 2008), and *Quiet Chaos*, by Sandro Veronese (Editora Rocco, 2007), among others.

With four decades of professional activity in the cultural field, **Solange Farkas** was Chief Curator of the Museum of Modern Art of Bahia. She participated as a guest curator of FUSO (Portugal), Dak'Art – African Contemporary Art Biennale (Senegal), the 6th Jakarta International Video Festival (Indonesia), the 10th Sharja Biennial (United Arab Emirates), the 16th Cerveira International Art Biennial (Portugal) and the 5th Video Zone - International Video Art Biennial (Israel). The founder and director of Associação Cultural Videobrasil, Farkas has taken up the role of artistic director of the festival and biennial Sesc\_Videobrasil since its first edition in 1983. In recent years, she has been a member of the Prize Jury of the 14th Sharjah Biennial (2019), the Prince Claus Fund Award Prize Committee (2017–2018), the jury of the 10th Rencontres de Bamako - African Photography Biennial (Mali, 2015), the curators' selection committee for the 11th Berlin Biennale (2020) and helped organize the "Anthropocene Project" exhibition at the Ilmin Museum of Art (Korea, 2019). She is a member of the jury committee of Amsterdam's

EYE Art & Film Prize, and of Pivô's consulting board, in São Paulo. In 2017, she was the recipient of the Montblanc Arts Patronage Award, a prize from the German foundation granted to professionals with an outstanding career dedicated to supporting and developing the many artistic and cultural expressions.

**Alaina Claire Feldman** is the newly appointed director and curator of the Mishkin Gallery, an academic art gallery situated within Baruch College, The City University of New York, where she recently curated *The Aesthetics of Learning and Lise Soskolne: The Work*. From 2011-2018 she was Director of Exhibitions at Independent Curators International (ICI) and curated the traveling exhibition *The Ocean After Nature* as well as edited the subsequent catalogue. She was the Managing Editor of ICI's Sourcebook Series, and produced artist-centric publications with Allen Ruppersberg, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Martha Wilson. Her projects have included long-term support of artists, collectives, archives, and educational opportunities, particularly those beyond the traditional Western cannon. As a writer, her work has been published in *Afterall*, *Flash Art*, *The Graduate Center Latinx Studies Guide*, and in catalogues and anthologies for museums around the world. In 2012, along with Stephanie Jeanjean, she translated a selection of video works from the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir which she curated at *The Kitchen*, *Space Studios* and *The Center for Feminist Pedagogy*. Feldman has lectured and taught at Baruch College, the University of Porto, The School of Visual Arts and ICI's Curatorial Intensive. She was the 2017 Annual Beckwith Lecturer at The School of the Museum of Fine Arts Tufts, Boston. She is a member of the International Advisory Board of Casa S. Roque – Centro de Arte (CSR), Portugal.

**Clayton Press** is an educator and scholar with specific research interests in female, Black, and Latin art, as well as in the history of and dynamics of the art market and collecting. Since 2012, he has been an adjunct professor at New York University, teaching art history and market economics. As an independent scholar, he also conducts research at Princeton University. As an author, Press was the lead author of REDS (Mnuchin Gallery, 2017), Robert Mangold, A Survey 1965-2003 (Mnuchin Gallery, 2017), Next to Nothing. Close to Nowhere (Burckhardt Boles, 2016) and LOVE STORY, Anne and Wolfgang Titze Collection (Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2014). More recently, he contributed essays to Germán Venegas. Todo Lo Otro (Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, 2019). Press was the consulting scholar on BOOM, a recent title about the development of the contemporary art market and its social history. He is a contributing journalist at Forbes.com, where he has contributed more than 100 essays. Press completed his PhD studies at the Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) in the cultural anthropology of peasant cultures, after receiving his MA in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh and his AB in anthropology, art history, and black studies from the University of Rochester. He was a Doctoral Research Fellow at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies, and the Organization of American States, Barbados.









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