

**NICO AMORTEGUI**

(PERUVIAN & MEXICAN)



**ROSALIA TORRES-WEINER**

(AMERICAN & MEXICAN)



**CORNELIO CAMPOS**

(AMERICAN & MEXICAN)



**LUGAR DE ENCUENTROS | PLACE OF ENCOUNTERS**

**MAY 11, 2023 - JANUARY 14, 2024**



**RENZO ORTEGA**

(PERUVIAN-AMERICAN)

**CAM**



**RODRIGO DORFMAN**

(AMERICAN & CHILE)



**MARIO MARZAN**

(PUERTO RICAN-AMERICAN)



# PLACE OF ENCOUNTERS — LUGAR DE ENCUENTROS



**Nico Amortegui • Cornelio Campos • Rodrigo Dorfman  
Mario Marzán • Renzo Ortega • Rosalía Torres-Weiner**

North Carolina is home to a rich diversity of voices, which is reflected in its community of Latin American artists. Work from ***Place of Encounters/ Lugar de Encuentros*** often straddles two worlds, reflecting both birthplace and chosen home, exploring tension and harmony in the relationship between the two. From film to installation art to paintings to photography, this exhibition delves into the variety of migrant experiences, offering a space for connection, and a chance to encounter another's experience through art. Artists include **Nico Amortegui, Cornelio Campos, Rodrigo Dorfman, Mario Marzán, Renzo Ortega, and Rosalía Torres-Weiner.**

# INTRODUCTION

In order to gather a multiplicity of art practices and create a place of encounter (*un lugar de encuentro*), it is necessary to explore the multiple roots, routes, and experiences that this group of visual cultural producers have taken to get where they are. Individually, they represent lines of flight, alternative cultural networks, embodied territories on the move, displaced and unrooted experiences, as well as forces of coalescence and cultural synthesis (creolization).<sup>i</sup>

As deterritorialized subjects, they exist as nomads, able to reappropriate the means of artistic production and locate themselves, temporally, at the center of the production of sense. Their work promotes them as cultural subjects, but also as political ones, able to change conceptions of production, circulation, and consumption of art in the South of the United States. It is paradoxical that, in many cases, we are facing an absence of the art object or at least, a re-elaboration of its means and ends. Issues of origin, displacement, materiality, mobility, and activism are present in their work, as their practice is living labor.<sup>ii</sup> This flow of alternative art-making permits individuals to move across borderlines, overcoming not only geographical limits and the parameters of the art world, but also conceptual limits.

A minority, Hispanic/Latino-a, and LatinX communities are consolidating in the so-called Nuevo South.<sup>iii</sup> In North Carolina, this community passed from 1.2% in 1990 to 10.7% of the total population by 2020, reshaping the demography,

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<sup>i</sup> Lines of flight represents deterritorialization and the potential for new linkages across existing boundaries. Its conceptualization and use come from Deleuze & Guatary's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1971-1980), and Manuel De Landa's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002).

<sup>ii</sup> Living Labor and/or Immaterial Labor Power are notions suggested by Italian thinker Antonio Negri. I suggest that such notions are inherent to the production of this group of cultural producers  
<sup>[2]</sup> Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and Las Carolinas.

<sup>iii</sup> Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and Las Carolinas.

economy, and culture of the state. Their presence is now multigenerational and diverse. Such progression is seen also in the arts, which is performed by a minority of art makers that have no model because they permeate not only artistic sites but also non-artistic sites. This minority becomes a process (a flow), they are lines of flight.<sup>iv</sup> As a generation of deterritorialized subjects from the south, suddenly come to age, alternative cultural networks have consolidated allowing them to be visible in the local cityscapes, as well as in virtualscapes of the global world.<sup>v</sup> They are a horde that flows across borders, carrying geo-memories, narratives of an experience that now makes it through the crevices of the art world. This reality starts to be normalized and even celebrated (not without resistance), is opening a space to understand the journeys and the motivations behind their uprootness, and re-rootness in this new territory.

What is common and unites their experiences (as Latin American and Caribbean subjects living in the U.S. South) is coloniality. The original place of encounter (or clash) between western and non-western ontologies, when forms of life and being in the world were disrupted, and continue to be so.<sup>vi</sup> This unifying experience, with differentials, has created deep marks on how culture and art play into identity politics. On the one hand, there is cultural dependency on Euro-American models, branding them as artists. On the other, cultural resistance has sheltered forms

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<sup>iv</sup> Lines of flight constitute the available means of escape from the forces of repression and stratification. "Territorialities, then, are shot through with lines of flight testifying to the presence within them of movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization." Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. pg. 55

<sup>v</sup> Local academia has played an important role in the emergence of these cultural practitioners, in particular as the migration debate went beyond the study of poverty, labor, and security. Scholars working on and with migrant communities in the State had become important allies of many of these art makers, as they represent aspects of the experience and debate as members of those communities. We can argue that a move from streets, plazas, markets, and churches moved then to universities and finally to galleries and museums. This path is different from the usual taken by visual artists within the realm of the art world.

<sup>vi</sup> As the forces of modernity/coloniality and capitalism continue to shape the planet.

and practices tied to ancestral and local forms of relation, making them producers of sense and holders of memory. The result is living practices that carry both markers, they flow between times and spaces in a sort of archipelago.<sup>vii</sup>

*Place of Encounters/Lugar de Encuentros* features a number of these experiences (I am calling them singularities) that represent a multitude. The artists in this exhibition, constitute lines of flight that signal points of entering and exiting contemporary society. At times, they are treated as exotic and/or naive, sometimes as minor voices; some other times, as a novelty. They seem fragile and unimportant until their force is revealed. At the same time, they are part of agendas that are pushing for the inclusion of a wide range of views and experiences of the world. Coming from below, they are selected as cultural agents beyond traditional conceptions of art in traditional art sites. Yes, to invite them is a form of spectacle (*una fiesta/a party*); but it is also a carnival, where a commonality of work is manifested and where theory becomes praxis, where resistance becomes re-existence.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>vii</sup> Archipelago is a metaphor used by Caribbean philosopher Edouard Glissant that refers to creolization. Creolization defies mestizaje, it is a state in which continental thinking is related to the major trends of historical, hierarchical knowledge, versus knowledge produced in insulation and autonomy, in an in-betweenness. The insular thought, the insular language, and the insular knowledge encompass issues such as autonomy, transculturation, and hybridization. Creolization is a state of being, that originated in the Caribbean experience of coloniality.

<sup>viii</sup> Re-existence is a term coined by Afro-Colombian intellectual Adolfo Albán, which indicates how there are alternatives to the system of oppression, based on intercultural dialogs and relational forms that liberate peoples and territories from extractive/colonial practices.



## SINGULARITIES

### From bordering spaces to colonial encounters

There are multiple ways to read the work exhibited at **Place of Encounters/Lugar de Encuentros**. Let's share some paths that can start conversations, physical and symbolic, and could help to situate some of the journeys and what is behind these cultural producers.

Mexico is a country on the edge, always on the brink of collapse, between miracle and ruin, rich and miserable, and above all diverse. **Cornelio Campos** is a Mexican-American artist, a Purepecha born in Cherán, Michoacán. Cherán is one of the autonomous indigenous towns in Mexico today, its people got tired of state abandonment, and thanks to the economic help of thousands of Purepechas abroad, workers, and migrants in the U.S. it was able to break the ties of corruption and violence to which it was subjected. It is also an answer to the cultural erasure since colonization, exacerbated after the 1910 revolution (the Cosmic Race) which flattened all possibility of indigenous autonomies. Cornelio is not only Purepecha, he is also a self-taught migrant artist living in Durham, North Carolina (where he makes a living from his job as an electrician). Campos immigrated as a teenager, a journey and process that now influences his work as an artist. Vibrant colors and geometric patterns of pre-Columbian origin are combined

#### Left

Cornelio Campos  
(American, b. Mexico 1971)  
*Rebelde*  
Courtesy of the Artist

#### Right

Cornelio Campos  
(American, b. Mexico 1971)  
*Libre*  
Courtesy of the Artist

Scan to learn more about  
Cornelio Campos



with American pop art symbols, in a duality that at times becomes monumental—a direct reference to Mexican muralism. Through his paintings, Campos illustrates some of the harsh realities of immigration, in his words “struggles, frontiers, and hope.” In ***Place of Encounters/Lugar de Encuentros***, Campos presents pieces from his oeuvre, on one side migrant narratives, on the other, Purepecha iconography. The use of the mirror image, a visual trick to recreate worlds (used by surrealists), is common in Campos’ work. This technique produces a threshold image, which is symmetrical, creating compositions that are somewhat dual, but also conceptually dense. The American way of life, buildings, highways, crops, and symbols such as the American eagle, the flag, or the Statue of Liberty have their counterparts. Pre-Columbian motifs, national icons of Mexico (the Coatlicue, the ChacMool, the two-headed serpent of pre-Columbian mythology, eagles, deer, monarch butterflies, and corn, among others), are balanced in the composition achieving a particular gravity. Bright colors also encounter terracotta palettes, those of Tarascan art (as the Purepechas are also known).

*Petate* (2023), connects Campos’ worlds. Petates, *Petlatl* in Náhuatl, are woven mats (for bedding and other uses) made from a palm (*Thrinax morrissi*) and are still widely found today throughout the countryside in Mexico. A petate serves multiple functions: where life is conceived, for newborn deliveries, to be used at markets to lay out produce, and to wrap dead bodies that will be laid to rest. Now it supports an image of regeneration, as LatinX youth face a life beyond the despair of the border crossing. Visual interweaving is used by Campos. It underlines traditional practices with conscious and direct imagery. Weaving is expressed in *huanengos*, *rebozos*, *hiupiles*, cloaks, belts, and overcoats that, with techniques such as brocade and embroidery, produces symmetrical, repeated, and abstract images. These are Purepecha mediations, writing forms (as coding) with the territory. This geometry of the image is clearly expressed by Campos in his work. Inhabiting two worlds (indigenous and white), that of immigrants



in the United States and that of traditional life in his home state of Michoacán, he builds a truly intercultural dialogue. Campos has deeply studied the visual production of Mesoamerican cultures, although he is not a purist. He always mixes iconographies that are relevant to the content of the pieces, such is the case of his *Tzintzuni* (hummingbird) of 2022, which resembles his *Phoenix* (2018). It celebrates the emergence of its people from coloniality, as the Purepecha capital of *Tzintzuntzan* (place of hummingbirds) has been recently re-discovered, recognizing the presence of its people in the history of Mexico and in North Carolina (as Purepechas are now building Rancho San Francisco Cherán 2.0 in a disclosed location north of Durham).<sup>ix</sup>

Cornelio Campos  
(American, b. Mexico 1971)  
*Renacer*  
Courtesy of the Artist

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<sup>ix</sup> There are three aesthetic strategies that cross and connect the political and popular themes in Campos' work. And while they are aesthetic choices that intersect and blend in a kind of kaleidoscopic effect that shocks and complicates the situation, they are also connected to their content. These are repetition, uprooting, and politics (Garrigan 2018).



Scan to learn more about  
Rosalia Torres-Weiner



Charlotte-based artist [Rosalia Torres-Weiner](#) is well known for her series of portraits of Dreamers, colorful murals, vibrant paintings, and social work. Coming from a place of privilege in art and culture, growing up in the Latin American capital of murals, Mexico City, and then moving to Los Angeles - also the alternative capital of street art in the U.S. - Torres-Weiner found her calling. In the Americas, art has always been political; exemplified by the work of those socially committed Mexican artists post-1910 revolution (muralists and graphic artists in particular). Their work profoundly impacted the art of the United States during the mid-twentieth century and beyond.<sup>x</sup> That is the origin that guides Torres-Weiner and her own journey through the United States (from the West coast to Charlotte, NC). Her cosmopolitan condition and exposure to multiple aesthetics has helped her to sink her Mexican heritage and tune her talent to use art as a tool to highlight the struggles of migrants and the necessity of art education for all.

Rosalía Torres-Weiner  
(American, b. Mexico)  
*Armor NC*, 2021  
Digital media

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<sup>x</sup> See Jason Arn, How the Mexican Revolution Changed Modern Art in America. *Frieze*. April 2020.



That is how for a decade, Torres-Weiner has increasingly focused on the stories of undocumented youth, the so-called Dreamers, creating portraits of many of them. “She has developed arts programs specifically to help young people process the trauma that develops from extended periods of anxiety—and for many, the loss of one or both parents because of deportation. Torres-Weiner now calls herself an ‘ARTivist”’ (Mint 2022). A contemporary synthesis of the long tradition of Latin American and Caribbean artists that now encompasses her role as an artist, muralist, and social activist.

Rosalía Torres-Weiner represents a generation of Mexican American women opening up spaces for a generation that needs models to follow. Torres-Weiner recovers “lo” art practices such as *papalotes* (kite-making). *Papalotl* (in Nahuatl) means butterfly, spiritual beings that travel across the realms of the spirits, and physically traverse the borders -such as in the case of the Monarch butterfly. Collaboratively, with migrant children, Torres-Weiner has produced kites made of remnants of clothing that deportees (their parents) left behind, as to help bring solace, and healing via the arts. For ***Place of Encounters/Lugar de Encuentros***, Torres-Weiner presents *The Magic Kite* (El papalote mágico) a short film (2023), an audiovisual storytelling, in the form of street box puppet theater, full of art, memories, and magic. By celebrating magic realism in her solo and collaborative work, with audacious design and composition, vibrant colors, and great references to the masters of Latin American art (from David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and Frida Kahlo to folk artists from multiple regions of the Americas), Rosalía Torres-Weiner brings the best of committed art to homes, galleries, museums, and the streets of North Carolina. She has stated: “My idea is to bring the arts to underserved neighborhoods and provide art workshops, especially for children. Art is powerful and not just to hang on the wall. It’s a weapon to express our stories” (Mint 2022).

Scan to download the  
Red CalacAR App



Unlock additional stories  
and narratives when  
viewing the Dreamers series



Rodrigo Dorfman  
(American, b. Chile 1967)  
*Aztecas and Cowboys*  
Photography  
Courtesy of Rodrigo Dorfman

As a documentary filmmaker, the work of **Rodrigo Dorfman** has been shaped by the experience of exile. Exile is a violent form of uprooting, with traumatic and long-lasting consequences. In addition to such, Dorfman grew up amid an intense aesthetic-political experiment, that of the popular government of Allende's Chile in the 1970s. For years Dorfman has been building a visual archive related to experiences of exile and cultural production in a multimedia mode. More recently, and as a result of the cultural emergence of migrant communities of rural and indigenous origin in North Carolina, his work has moved to participatory/ethnographic documentary. For this exhibit, Dorfman offers an immersive documentary experimental installation, *Aztecas and Cowboys* (2023) where photography and moving images merge. Aztec Dance and bull riding (*jaripeo*), are the subjects of his gaze. On one hand, the ancestral ritual dance, based on repetition, rhythm, a powerful bodily display, and visual appeal relates to indigenous

Scan to learn more about  
**Rodrigo Dorfman**



Otomí and Chichimeca migrants in Durham. The dance celebrates an Otomí-Chichimeca victory against the Aztec empire (prior conquest and colonization by Europeans). Then, it became a syncretic form of religious practice, an offering to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and a form of cultural resistance to coloniality. Conversely, rural North Carolina is a space in which migrant laborers (from Ranchos across México) encounter cowboys. The long tradition of bullfighting and bull riding (of European origin) has established ties between brown and white communities, with poetic and visual appeal. What is relevant here, is that *Danza Azteca* became the first public expression of the migrant (indigenous) community during the mid-2000s. A collective body of dancers (undocumented and unafraid) defied the shadows of their economic exile and emerged as the most relevant cultural practice of the migrant community in Durham. Today, it is a multi-generational practice, with multiple groups across the State. Dorfman has been documenting such phenomena for years. The preservation of *Danza Azteca* throughout the centuries is a testament to the primary role of indigenous traditions (via oral and body archives) in the creation of postcolonial identities (Valdez 2012). Bull riding, on the other hand, demonstrates how flows of migrants from rural Mexico related to their white peers in the internal flows of American rural fairs, with it, commercial and cultural relations emerged, where poetics (love stories), politics, and economics find commonality. Dorfman recognizes and stresses the poetic, aesthetic and political dimension of such reality, as dancers take urban public spaces, and *jariperos* become icons (such as in *lucha libre*) while both live double lives, as migrant workers and symbols of cultural liberation. Contemporary forms of *Danza Azteca* and bull riding offer migrants of indigenous descent opportunities to express cultural pride, formulate indigenous identities and acquire indigenous knowledge, forms of cultural resistance, re-existence, and reterritorialization.



Renzo Ortega  
(Peruvian-American, b. 1974)  
*Mestizaje*, 2019  
Acrylic on unstretched canvas  
9" h x 12" w  
Courtesy of Renzo Ortega  
Studio

Scan to learn more about  
Renzo Ortega



**Renzo Ortega** talks about culture as a container. As everything is packed, we are only able to see the outside, with all its visual appeal (like in a marketplace). But what is contained / constrained within? That is what matters to Ortega. As a contemporary painter, Ortega studies the history of art and the grammar of the visual to account for the fragmentation of space and time in contemporary societies. Ortega is also a performer, musician (of techno cumbia and punk rock), and installation artist. Nonetheless, he considers himself a conventional painter, one that had the privilege of studying at important art schools.<sup>xi</sup> At the same time, Ortega feels dislocated and anachronistic as a creator. Indeed, he is not a conventional artist, he is a cerebral painter, with a monastic discipline and attention to detail, in both form and content. Ortega invites the viewer to immerse in visual narratives. His work is reflexive, at times bringing his multicultural

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<sup>xi</sup> Ortega received his BFA in painting from the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes del Perú (1999), studied at the Art Students League of New York (2000-04), and received an MFA in painting from Hunter College (2014).

origin and his story of migration to the U.S. In his *Mestizaje* (2019) Ortega not only goes to the cradle (literally), depicting a conqueror father and an indigenous mother, they are married (look at the rings defying preconceived ideas), with two babies, one holds a sacred coca leaf and points outside of the frame, the other sleeps under the tutelage of a sacred mountain (*Apu*). The front piece of the cradle shows a map of the United States, while a bull (the symbol of Durham) is at the fore of the image. On the left, an afro-angel carries a stone home, while a parade of youth march playing music. It is like reading a baroque painting, where the iconography defies gender roles, and criticizes the hypermasculine idea of European culture in the Americas. In Ortega's large and small paintings, different elements of 1950s abstraction, past and contemporary images coalesced. He highlights the cultural differences and similarities, a constant negotiation on the constitution of the self, which materialized in the multilayer depictions that defy perspective and grounding (as all floats before the eyes). His work oscillates on cultural identity, art history, material culture, hi and lo art, what is contained in the frame, and what escapes it. In *Vida* (2019), a primal environment in green, yellow, and blue, holds several layers where fragmented indigenous images and constructive spaces (that recall Giorgio de Chirico's surrealist work) float. A ghost tree at the center of the frame ties all elements together. On the lower right, a womb shows a fetus in which the umbilical cord is also a tree, and a drum-like figure balances the composition on the lower left. In front of the tree, corn (*maíz*) takes center stage giving sense to the title. King corn is at the base of indigenous cosmivision in the Americas, and it is at the center of the food supply across the continent (the U.S. is the largest producer of corn in the world); past and present it rules. Where does this image take place? The northern cardinal perched in the tree announces the place of encounter, North Carolina.



Nico Amortegui (Colombian)  
*Hope, 2021*  
Acrylic, oil sticks, spray paint  
on canvas  
Courtesy of Nico Amortegui

Materiality is at the center of **Nico Amortegui's** approach to art making. The materiality interest may come from his relationship to folk art (coming from a small town in Colombia), his aesthetic interest in African arts, and his experience in construction in the United States. Precarity is a condition of the South, Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980) stated in one of his “parangolés” (flags and wearables to perform interventions into cultural circuits): “In scarcity, we thrive.” That slogan connects bodily (labor) practices of marginal subjects that recognized the value in all materials, even those discarded into cultural spaces.<sup>xii</sup> As an immigrant, Amortegui experienced a culture of excess and comfort, a common cultural shock connected to economic success. His initiation in art-making

Scan to learn more about  
Nico Amortegui



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<sup>xii</sup> The early work of Oiticica shows how the Concrete project succumbs before the reality of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. Art as a living space and organic architecture (or art space of living) is present in his penetrable installations of the 1960s. The “parangolés” of the mid-1960s were capes or cloak-like layers of different materials that were intended to be worn by moving and dancing participants. They were made of colored and painted fabrics, as well as nylon, burlap, and gauze. Some contained political or poetic texts, photographs, or painted images, along with bags of pebbles, sand, straw, or shells. They also sometimes took the form of flags, banners, or tents.



comes from a place of scarcity - as his world ended during the financial crisis of 2008, and a new one started. His work can be labeled under the banner of *art brute* (or neo-expressionist) and recalls the work of Jean Michelle Basquiat (1960-1988), who derived his powerful visuality from his Haitian roots, African aesthetics, in addition to his participation in the street art scene of New York in the 1980s. Amortegui has stated that art comes from a place of destruction, as such his early work was sharp, fragmented, raw, and direct. Dark lines underlined figures, text would function as a complement to them, and color was scarce. As a migrant, there were no safety nets, only cultural legacy. As a self-trained artist, Amortegui turned to street art markets, where fine art encounters folk art. Folk art, then became an obsession. "Art across indigenous and African cultures is fascinating to me and I love interesting architecture" (Merrel 2021). As in the case of Campos, Amortegui's education was initially based on observation, the study of symmetry, structure, materiality, color patterns, and repetition in folk art tradition. Indeed, other influences are present, for example the legendary rivalry between Pablo Picasso and Henry Matisse takes another round in the sculptural piece *Oye Buey* (2023), part of ***Place of Encounters/ Lugar de Encuentros*** exhibition. A three-dimensional assemblage, in the manner of post-

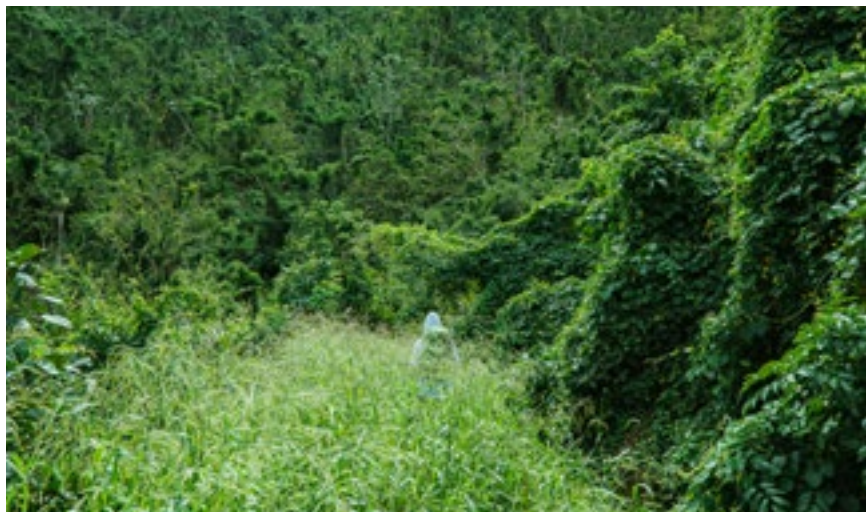
Nico Amortegui (Colombian)  
*Oye Buey*, 2023  
Re-purposed wood, acrylic,  
oil sticks  
96" x 60" x 72"  
Courtesy of Nico Amortegui



cubist art, uses a Mexican colloquialism to greet friends (Oye Buey / Hey dude), as a reflective source. Representations of bison, oxen, and bulls are recurrent in Indo-American, European, and Asian cultures, representing strength and prosperity. Cattle and horses were brought by Europeans during the Conquest, replacing native species, today their use in the country side has been replaced by agricultural machinery. However, they also represent the complex work histories of migrants in the United States, other colloquial usages such as “strong as a bull” or “work like horses” make reference to the cheap and reliable migrant work force. On the other hand, the American Bison, (Woodland Bison) disappeared from North Carolina 100 years before its annihilation in the western United States, is returning. The Cherokee (of North Carolina) called them yanasi (ᵱᵱᵱ), a sacred being who provided numerous spiritual, physical, and environmental services. As the American bison returns to the state (in repopulation programs, as new migrant implants), a restoration of natural habitats for future generations is possible. The same can be said of the Indo-American and Latino repopulation taking place in this territory. In this way, Amortegui affirms:

“Don’t get me wrong, I will always paint about what affects the people; The Black and Brown community, LGBTQ, Immigrants, and even the Native American community. The circumstances that I’ve experienced for the simple fact that I’m an immigrant or Latino will always be infused into my work” (Sánchez 2022).

Finally, in his collaborative work with Roxana Pérez-Méndez, **Mario Marzán** has developed a project called *Campo* (Field). It “engages in experimental long-distance walks and pilgrimages that address the cultural and aesthetic gestures of immersive, inquiry-based methods of experiential learning and aesthetic production.” You can argue that the aesthetics of walk are an extension of human history. From the expansion of the human species from mother Africa to the age of exploration; from the sacred pilgrimages to Mecca to the expulsion of indigenous of their lands during the trail of



tears; from the long march of the Red Army in China to the epic journeys of migrants passing the Darien Gap and the Sonora Desert on their way to the north. To walk is to be, a migratory aesthetic, a way of knowledge as old as human consciousness. Contemporary artist, Andy Goldsworthy (England 1956) used walking as a form of art, opening an entire practice known as land art in the 1980s. Latin American artist María Teresa Hincapié (Colombia 1956-2008) performed long walks and pilgrimages, creating ritual-based works looking for the sacred in nature. Both brought geographies into galleries and museums (at times planting gardens or allowing weeds to grow in exhibition spaces, painting with pollen or leaves, and hosting physical and symbolic occupations of museums with hundreds of grown trees). At other times, rather than interfering in natural processes, their work magnified existing ones through minimal intervention in the landscape. Marzán's long walks in pilgrim trails (as in El Camino de Santiago in Spain, and in other European landscapes) might signify a counter-exploration, as humans detach from nature and become a sedentary species, he goes back to the beginning. As a Caribbean subject (born in Puerto Rico), a neo-colonial one, Marzán's work could constitute a decolonial call to de-link from the confines of a conquered space, to reconnect the forgotten landscapes of

Mario Marzán  
(Puerto Rican-American,  
b. 1978)  
*Root, Not Roots: A Walk  
Post-Maria no. 3*  
Fuji Crystal DP II Photo Paper  
Mounted on Wood  
24" x 36"  
Courtesy of the Artist

**Scan to learn more about  
Mario Marzán**



the old-colonial world and look at the landscape (mountains, beaches, the oceans) as part of the body-landscape, a sacred one.<sup>xiii</sup>

For ***Place of Encounters/Lugar de Encuentros***, Marzán presents his most recent walking project in Puerto Rico, his root. The island's natural wonder is only equated to its vulnerability to climate-related events, such as hurricanes and earthquakes (and tsunamis). The island and its inhabitants are now suffering from post-traumatic stress due to natural disasters exacerbated by its neo-colonial state. There are more Puerto Ricans living in the continental U.S. (5.4 million according to Pew Research) than in the island itself (3.28 million according to census data in 2020). Migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has increased to record numbers. Post-hurricane María has accelerated climate exile, and while climate disasters affect mostly poor Puerto Rican communities, the gentrification of the island's natural wonders (beaches and forests) is taking place. Marzán invites us to walk with him, to recover the sacredness of the Taino's land.<sup>xiv</sup>

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<sup>xiii</sup> Other contemporary artists that also use walking as practice are Libia Posada (Colombia 1958) and Qin Ga (Mongolia/China 1971). Posada's iconic photo series, *Signos cardinales* ("Cardinal Signs"), 2008-2018, and Ga's famous performance piece, the 微型长征 (Miniature Long March), 2002-2005, bring issues of mapping and body-territoriality. *Signos Cardinales* is a series of counter portraits (only legs are shown) of forced migration that proposes an exercise of collective and individual mapping. Women described routes of displacement and long marches which are inscribed on their legs. Qin Ga's *The Long March* builds on the idea of the revolutionary body. Qin Ga tattooed a map of China onto his back creating a "miniature long march" on his body. Completing the walk (that some other friends started in 2002) recording the process with video and photography, as well as collecting tools, instruments, and small paraphernalia as a way to archive the process itself. For a full description of these projects see: Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, *Common Ground: Shared Textuality and Visuality in China and Latin America*.

<sup>xiv</sup> The third cycle of the formation of the Taino Society presents Guahayona and Anacacuya. Some of the first Taino to emerge from the Cacibajagua cave (the original place). Their troubled relationship lets us understand the division of power and gender within Taino society. Guahayona, separates women from men and submerges Anacacuya into the sea. That is how Anacacuya, the mythical cacique, is associated with both the underwater world and with Polaris, the star at the center. As astronomical knowledge was a pursuit of Antillean Tainos. Guahayona, the behique or shaman, is connected to navigation, travels, and spiritual rituals. During the fourth cycle, the ancestors of Taino women (who are androgynous celestial beings) commit a sin. The women were transformed by woodpeckers by carving Jobo trees. Which represents the reunification of men and women. Sky, land, and ocean. See: *Sebastián Robiou Lamarche, Tainos and Caribs The Aborigin of the Antilles*.

# MULTITUDE OF JOURNEYS

After a brief introduction to the roots, routes, and destinations of these singularities, it is possible to argue that there are multiple vantage points from where to experience some of the realities shared by these artists. This archipelago of singularities and meanings is now presented to you (the viewer) under an invitation: ***Place of Encounters/ Lugar de Encuentros***. This celebration is an affirmation of the cultural emergence of cultural producers from Latin America and the Caribbean now rooted in North Carolina. It is an invitation to immerse in the diversity of embodied experiences. Recently I had the privilege of reading *Solito*, the 2022 novel by U.S. poet laureate Javier Zamora (El Salvador 1990). This travel book is a rare, eye-opening rendition of the brutal reality of border crossing -by walking all the way from there to here. At the same time, it is an affirmation of solidarity, as any traveler that goes from place A to B, needs and encounters companions. As you immerse in any of the journeys offered to you, allow them to bring your own journey to the fore. We all share roots, routes, and destinations. This is a place where we come together. Our hope is that this “Lugar de Encuentros” will help to create dialogue and lay bridges so that together we may walk and experience each of our journeys.

Miguel Rojas Sotelo, Ph.D.  
Center for Latin American  
and Caribbean Studies  
Duke University  
Durham, North Carolina. March 20, 2023

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## ARTIST BIOS



### **NICO AMORTEGUI**

Nico Amortegui is a Charlotte-based artist who was born and raised in a creative family in Colombia. Well known for his large-scale paintings, murals and sculptures, he is self-trained. Materiality is often at the center of his approach to artmaking, possibly influenced by his love of folk art and his experience in construction in the US. His work illustrates 'snapshots' of a peripatetic lifestyle- his own which was focused on survival while living undocumented, and those he has encountered along the way. "My art is rooted in the experience of becoming an immigrant - something I didn't want to imagine at age 17 when Bogotá was all I knew. Being forever between two cultures has shaped my views and molded the themes of my pieces."



### **CORNELIO CAMPOS**

Durham, NC - based Cornelio Campos is a Mexican American artist who immigrated as a teenager, a journey and process that continues to influence his work as an artist. A self-trained artist, his work combines vibrant colors and geometric patterns of pre-Columbian origin with American pop art symbols in a duality that at times becomes monumental. National icons of Mexico including the Coatlicue, the ChacMool, eagles, deer, corn, coexist with flags, the American eagle, buildings, crops, highways. Inhabiting two worlds, Indigenous and white, he builds a visual intercultural dialogue while referencing Mexican muralism. Through his paintings, Campos illustrates some of the harsh realities of immigration, in his words "struggles, frontiers, and hope."

## ARTIST BIOS



### **RODRIGO DORFMAN**

Rodrigo Dorfman is a Chilean-born, North Carolina-based award-winning writer, filmmaker and multimedia producer. For years he has been building a visual archive related to the experiences of exile. Aztec dance and bull riding are two subjects of his gaze. In the words of Dr. Miguel Rojas Sotelo, Dorfman's immersive documentary experimental installation merges photography and moving images. It shows how contemporary forms of Danza Azteca and bull riding offer migrants of indigenous descent opportunities to express cultural pride, formulate indigenous identities, and acquire indigenous knowledge, forms of cultural resistance, re-existence and reterritorialization. "I'm always looking to break down borders and help transform the worn patterns of an Old South with a new emerging Nuevo South."



### **MARIO MARZÁN**

Mario Marzán is an interdisciplinary artist born in Puerto Rico whose work includes drawing, video, sculpture and installation. He currently teaches at UNC Chapel Hill. His work incorporates walking as an artistic practice. His research explores topics such as migratory aesthetics, landscapes as forms of representational art and the relationships of place to cultural identity. It reflects on the outdoor experience as a way to promote alternative engagements with the environment. In the words of Dr. Miguel Rojas Sotelo, "To walk is to be, a migratory aesthetic, a way of knowledge as old as human consciousness."

## ARTIST BIOS



### RENZO ORTEGA

Born in Peru, Renzo Ortega is an artist based in Carrboro, NC. A contemporary painter who is also a performer, musician (of techno cumbia and punk rock) and installation artist, he earned his MFA from Hunter College. His visual language seeks to use the figurative tradition in order to build bridges for people to cross, while at the same time opening spaces for viewers to make their own interpretations. “Our identity is the fusion, our art expressions are not a characteristic of the immigrant nostalgia. We are a living culture, and my art commitment is about that.”



### ROSALÍA TORRES-WEINER

Rosalía Torres-Weiner is an artist, activist and community leader in Charlotte, NC. She grew up in Mexico City and has lived in Charlotte, NC for 25 years. In 2010, she shifted her focus from commercial art to art activism. She is known for colorful murals, vibrant paintings and her series of portraits of undocumented youth, the Dreamers. She uses her art to document social conditions and raise awareness about issues affecting migrant communities such as family separation, access to public education and racism. Her work often features digital augmentation and augmented reality, featuring the stories of her subjects told in their voices. “I believe that through the use of technology, art becomes more personal, more interactive, and ultimately more impactful.”



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Image: Phil Freelon (American, 1953-2019), *Structure in Bloom* [detail], 2012. Color inkjet print.  
Courtesy of the estate of Phil Freelon. Purchased with the 2019 Compass Acquisition Fund.



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