

The Recipe: *Making Latin-American Art in Canada*

Paolo Almario • Frances Cordero de Bolaños

Alexandra Gelis • Romeo Góngora

Tonel • Giorgia Volpe

Curators Analays Alvarez Hernandez
Daymi Coll Padilla

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ONE RECIPE, MANY RECIPES

What do we understand by "Latin-American" art or artists? Whether we find ourselves within what is commonly referred to as Latin America or outside of it, the question remains. What are the distinctive characteristics of so-called Latin-American art or artists in (Canadian) cities that are constantly being shaped by thriving diasporic communities—which are simultaneously transnational, virtual, and digital—and by accelerating flows of populations? Without claiming to answer these questions—any tentative answer should begin by examining the very notion of Latin America, the multiplicity this expression masks, and even the colonial dynamics it perpetuates—we have used them as a starting point for thinking about an exhibition that brings together six artists originally from Colombia, Guatemala, Brazil, Venezuela, Salvador, and Cuba.

This project, which is resolutely ambitious in character, conceived with a long timeframe and vast geography in mind, began three years ago. As curators, we felt the need to take stock of the art produced by Canadian artists of so-called Latin-American backgrounds. This laid the foundations for curating an exhibition that examines the mix of "ingredients" required for an artwork conceived, developed, or imagined on Canadian soil to be (or not be) perceived in Montreal as a "Latin-American" work. *The Recipe* creates the possible conditions needed to articulate multiple statements, which go beyond traditional boundaries, on what could be considered "Latin-American art" today.

The exhibition was previously shown in Toronto (Sur Gallery, 2018) and is now being presented in Montreal (OBORO, 2020): two cities affected by a historical rivalry and whose political affiliations, models of integration, local values, official languages, and the provenance of immigrants are, if not diametrically opposed, at least clearly and exponentially diverging. Furthermore, the two institutions that have welcomed this exhibition have different missions and target audiences. At Sur Gallery, an exhibition space dedicated to promoting contemporary Latin-American art, the viewers' expectations are geared towards finding ONE identity, in this case, what it means to be Latin American, while at OBORO, the expectations are informed by diversity, in the broad sense of the word, and end up integrating the idea of "Latin American" in the local contemporary art milieu, which does not avoid the risk of making the notion of Latin American "hip."

Constructing, Deconstructing, Reconstructing...Constructing [...]

The works of Paolo Almario, Giorgia Volpe and Tonel relate to architecture, both literally and figuratively. Equipped with digital sensors, a GPS device, and a microcomputer, **Almario** walked in the neighbourhoods of Strasbourg, Toronto, Chicoutimi, and Montreal to capture the natural and artificial light of these cities. Using a computer process, he then constructed (light) portraits. This project explores the figure of a contemporary *flâneur* who lays claim

to multiple affiliations and is nourished by the architectural features of our "conceived space."¹ **Volpe** has constructed shapes that shimmer when exposed to light, using tactics of converting objects, transforming something industrial into something organic. She seeks to instil new life/memory into the inert bodies of audio cassettes—protagonists of a bygone technology—in order to enable us to see and expose us to other ways of seeing and being a thousand and one things at the same time. Using an economy of shapes and lines, with a dash of humour and irony, Tonel has resorted to written language, strategies of repetition, and an aesthetic of precariousness to build edifices of thought that can be heard. From the top of these pyramidal structures, speech sharpens and strikes against all forms of authoritarianism. In addition, **Tonel** has stacked up piles of books (all related to knowledge) and enveloped them in light that, depending on the viewer's state of mind, seems to glow or burn.

Tie, Untie, Retie...Tie [...]

The act of tying together stories, relationships, or cultures, as though tying strings, is the common thread in the works of Alexandra Gelis, Frances Corderos de Bolaños and Romeo Góngora. Caught in a spiral of infinite gestures, **Gelis** invites viewers to assemble and disassemble her stories, to overlap them so as to better experience them. Mental projections and videos intertwine in this interactive work that underlines the universal dimension of personal experience: the fight against cancer of the artist's mother. A similar narrative register comes into play in **Corderos de Bolaños's** work, which makes visible the invasion carried out by the scourge of cancer. The artist captures the viewer's gaze in the threads of oversized tumors, which have a destabilizing effect due to the incompatibility between the attractive colours and textures and the horror of representation. She tells us: stay alert! Literally putting himself in someone else's shoes is a constant aspect of **Góngora's** art practice. Here, he presents an installation of the material and emotional traces of a performative experiment carried out in Jordan, in order to create a relational story-within-a-story by connecting different time periods, geographies, individuals, customs, and disparate ways of being and doing things.

1. Lefebvre, H., 1974. *The Production of Space*. Translated from French by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 2000. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Despite their contrasting practices, the artists of *The Recipe* appear to be connected by a common sensibility while also existing outside the cultural or identity container, in which (Canadian) society consciously or unconsciously places them, or in which they place themselves.

The Recipe offers, in the short- or long-term, revised/expanded or site-specific versions of the works first presented at Sur Gallery, revealing the wide spectrum of influences and references that shape these artists' imaginaries, beyond their countries of origin or cultural roots. The works whet the appetite by putting in sounds and images a varied menu of recipes concocted at the intersection between institutions, mediums, languages, states of minds, and affiliations.

Are you ready to order?

– Analays Alvarez Hernandez and Daymi Coll Padilla

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