

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Developing a Collective Language of Resistance Across the Centuries

It's not often that you find a space in which communication is not only possible, but encouraged across time, discourses, and borders.



Lorissa Rinehart May 6, 2019



Unraveling Collective Forms at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) (photo by Christopher Wormald)

LOS ANGELES — The Inca Empire stretched nearly the entire length of South America's western shore and as far east as the Peruvian highlands. Within this polyglottal region, the lingua franca didn't look like language in the way we typically think of it. Commercial transactions, taxes, and

astronomical events were recorded with an elaborate knotting system collectively known as quipu. Integrating complex patterns of knots, intricate weaving techniques, and up to 1,500 threads of varying colors, quipus encompassed a myriad of information within one "text" or textile. But after the fall of the Inca Empire in the late 16th century — beneath the

weight of Spanish guns and disease — the grammar of quipus disappeared and today they are no longer legible to the contemporary reader.

Still, it is from this enigmatic alternative form of writing that *Unravelling Collective Forms*, on view at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), draws its inspiration. Fittingly, the exhibition itself is difficult to read at first glance.

Upon entering, pre-Hispanic drums from Tania Candiani's video/performance work, "Pulso," ricochet across the gallery, signaling this is probably not the kind of space most Los Angelenos are used to. To the right, "Coyote Dance with Me – Litar," a series of photographs by Mercedes Dorame, reimagines the Tongva ceremonial heritage that once existed along the Southern California coast, as if to envision the landscape as reclaimed by its original inhabitants, or perhaps one never marred by European incursion.



Tania Candiani, "Pulso" (image courtesy LACE)



Mercedes Dorame, "Coyote Dance With Me" (image courtesy LACE)

A few steps forward and you're flanked by two distinct visions of the future that may well exist at the same time any day now. "My female lineage of environmental resistance," a series of 100 portraits by Carolina Caycedo, presents a future influenced, if not shaped, by the activists she depicts with raised fists, mics in hand, or deep in thought. Their numbers and strength make their success seem inevitable until you turn your attention to the other side of the gallery, where Kim Zumpfe's "a safe place for people i love or; How I

Learned To Stop Worrying and Love Weathering the Storm" stands as a monument to an environmental apocalypse. Visitors are encouraged to enter this rectangular structure created out of soundproofing materials with straggly plants growing from its dirt roof. Enveloping you in a pitch-

black interior, it seems like the ideal shelter to shut out any number of natural disasters.



Carolina Caycedo, "My female lineage of resistance" (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)



Kim Zumpfe's "a safe place for people i love or; How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love Weathering the Storm" (photo by Christopher Wormald)

The past is just beyond these visions of the future in "Cloudless Blue Egress of Summer," a two-channel video work by Sky Hopinka that retells Seminole Chieftain Coacoochee's escape from the Spanish Fort Marion in Florida, where he was imprisoned during the 1830s Seminole Wars. On the left is a video montage of what would have been his escape route, starting with his cell and ending with the Atlantic Ocean. On the right is a rotating series of drawings he made of his imprisonment as well as his flight to freedom. Together, these components weave a hypnotizing story of near mythological resistance.

At this point you might pause and wonder what all these multivariate

works have in common. Very little, as it turns out, considering that they are so divergent in material, topic, time, and scope. But, as the exhibition's curator, Daniela Lieja Quintanar, explained in an interview with Hyperallergic, "all of the works are proposing a way to approach the world, as histories, but also as paths forward." She continued, "all these artists are either doing actions against the capitalistic machine, working as jesters, or highlighting activists."

Specifically, *Unravelling Collective Forms* highlights actual resistance movements catalyzed and sustained by those whose livelihoods depend on rebellion, and in particular, those of Indigenous peoples. As Lieja phrased it, "those who have been in charge of longterm resistance are the

Indigenous groups all around the world.”



Workshop on traditional weaving techniques at LACE (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

From this vantage point, *Unravelling Collective Forms* becomes much like a quipu in its ability to weave together multivariate forms of communication into a single document: the works within become nodes or knots, connecting centuries of knowledge and experience of resistance and resurgence. You can sense this if

you attend some of the events organized in tandem with the exhibition. In April, one workshop combined traditional Tongva weaving techniques, taught by longtime activist Julia Bogany, with anarcha-feminist texts read by artists Mónica Rodríguez and Jorge González. It was odd to see two disparate forms of expression being joined together, and you may have gotten the sense that failure was imminent. But in watching the audience dutifully follow Bogany’s instructions on how to create children’s toys from palm fronds, while Rodríguez and González’s words echoed in all of our ears, there seemed to be a kind of synthesis between these two forms of expression.

When it’s difficult enough to find common ground even across television channels, it’s not often that you find a space in which communication is not only possible, but encouraged across time, discourses, and borders. Yet to a large degree, *Unravelling Collective Forms* achieves this, at least on small scale. With the exhibition’s last events coming up, including one on “Transfeminist Discourses,” it’s probably worth experiencing for yourself.

Unravelling Collective Forms continues at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (6522 Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, Los Angeles) through May 25. The exhibition was curated by Daniela Lieja Quintanar.