ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

OCTOBER 14, 2022

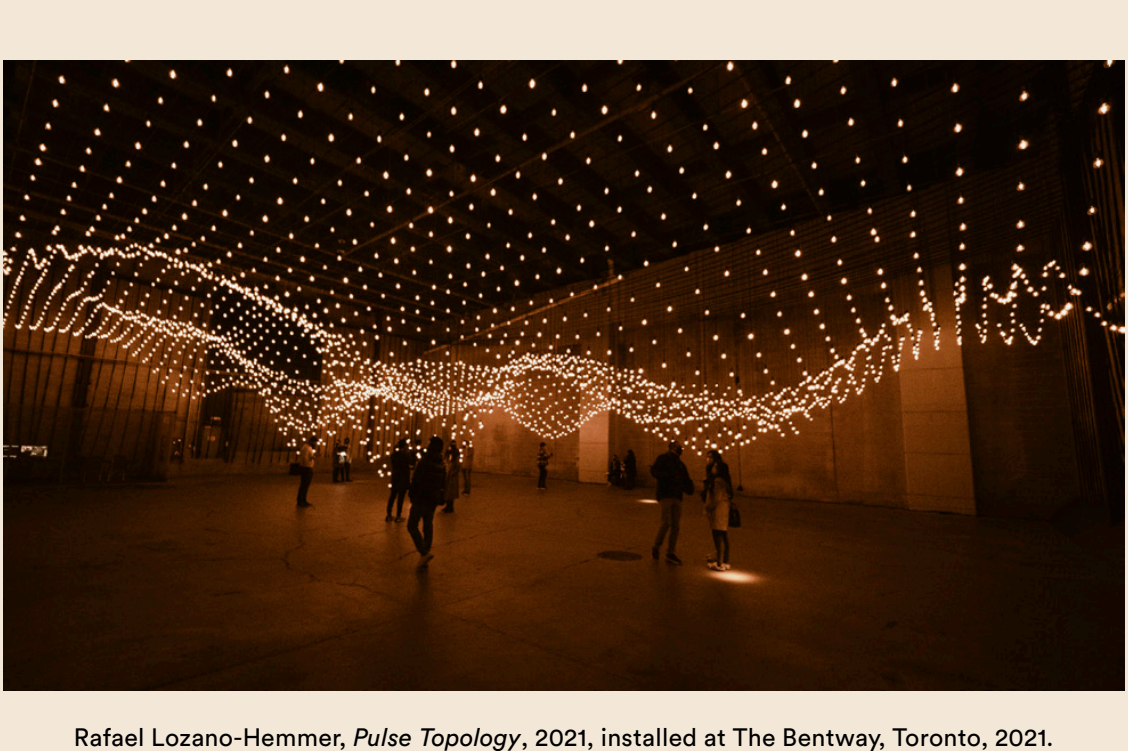
PICTURING PLACE
LATIN AMERICAN ARTISTS IN CANADA

In 2018, the Parliament of Canada proclaimed October as Latin American Heritage Month. To celebrate, we're highlighting works by artists from the region that explore questions of place and identity.

Our identities and experiences of place are shaped by our memories, histories, and culture. Through their work, artists in Canada of Latin American origin raise as many questions as answers about what it means to be in and belong to a place. October is Latin American Heritage Month, which recognizes the tremendous contributions of Latin American communities and people to Canada—including in the visual arts. The works in this week's newsletter centre notions of place and identity, exploring the rich terrain of migration, memory, history, and community. They pose questions such as: How do we experience place? How do places change over time? Can an experience or memory be recreated? As the Mexican Canadian artist Laura Barrón explains of her work, "The project became a reconstruction of my history in Canada, but also a reconstruction of my own territory and a return to myself."

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

PULSE TOPOLOGY
by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

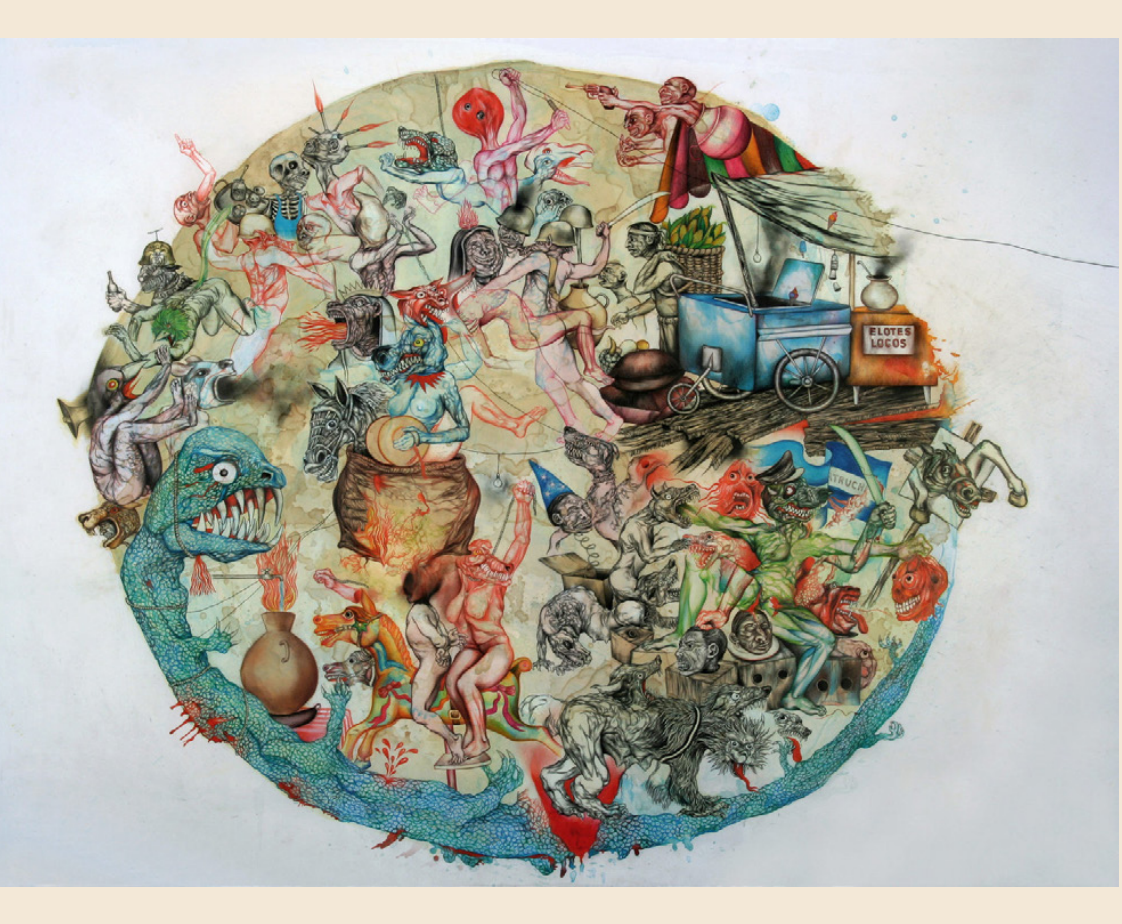


Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Pulse Topology*, 2021, installed at The Bentway, Toronto, 2021.

Connectivity is front and centre in *Pulse Topology*, the extraordinary light and sound installation by Mexican Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (b.1967). In this work, thousands of undulating lightbulbs ebb and flow through a dark room, activated by a series of sensors that are set off by the movement of visitors. As their individual pulses are recorded, heartbeats light up the room, forging a thrilling feeling of connection amongst friends and strangers alike. Lozano-Hemmer is celebrated for his use of technology in the creation of immersive environments. Here he transforms the intangible theme of collective harmony into a riveting sensory experience—with community quite literally at the heart of the piece.

Learn more about Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

FERIAS II
by Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo

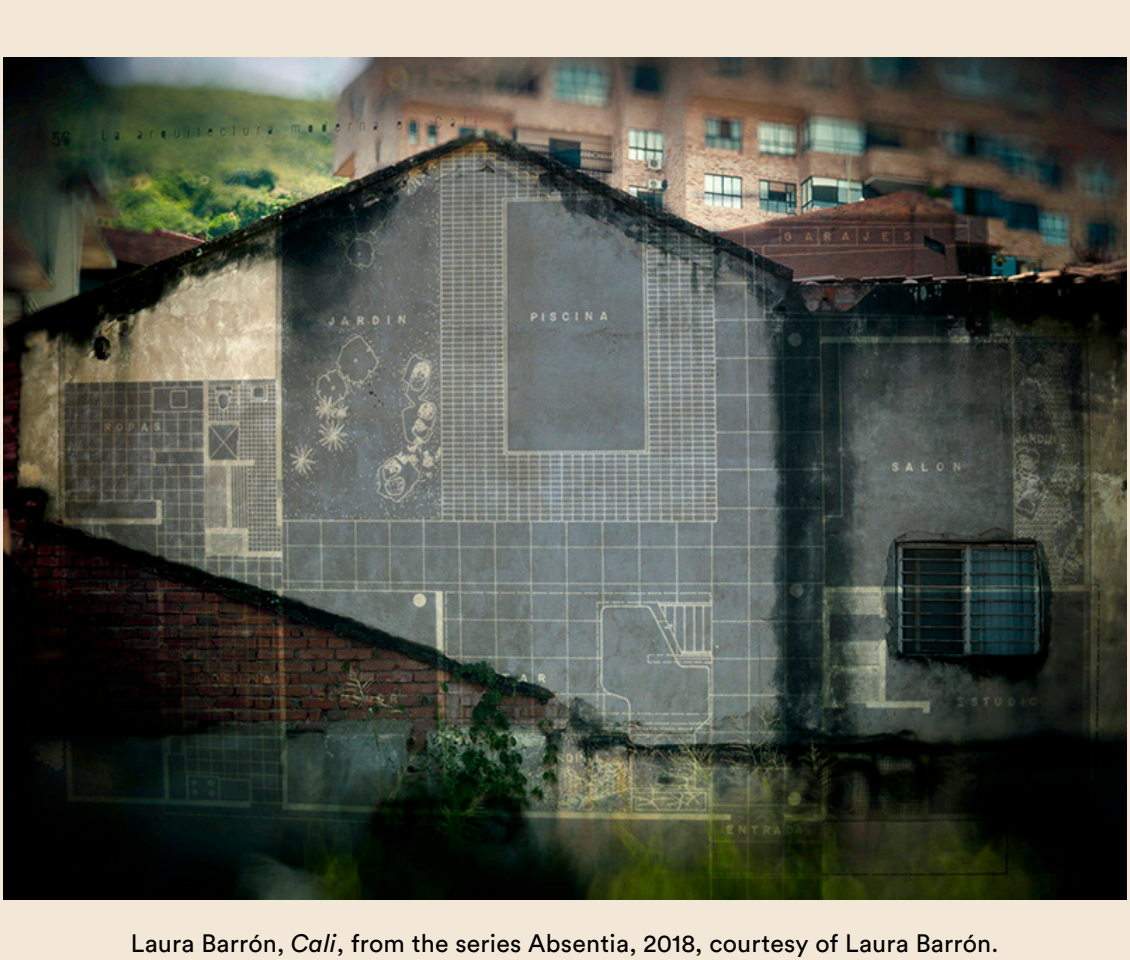


Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo, *Ferias II* (detail), 2007, courtesy of Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo.

In this striking drawing by El Salvador-born, Vancouver-based artist Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo (b.1978), the collective trauma of the Salvadoran Civil War—a conflict that spurred Castillo's immigration to Canada in the 1980s—is evoked. With hints of the visual dystopia represented in Early Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch's (1450–1516) seminal work *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490–1500, here Castillo blends a cacophony of influences, from pre-Hispanic mythology to Salvadoran folklore and Western art history. Entitled *Ferias*, or "fairs," the work is part of the Carnivalissimo series, in which the carnival is transformed into a distorted spectacle of affliction. As the artist states, "My body of work is an intuitive construction of memory as a form of personal myth-making that casts political expressions, voices modes of resistance, and most recently speaks to a process of reconciliation, repair and healing."

Learn more about Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo

ABSENTIA
by Laura Barrón

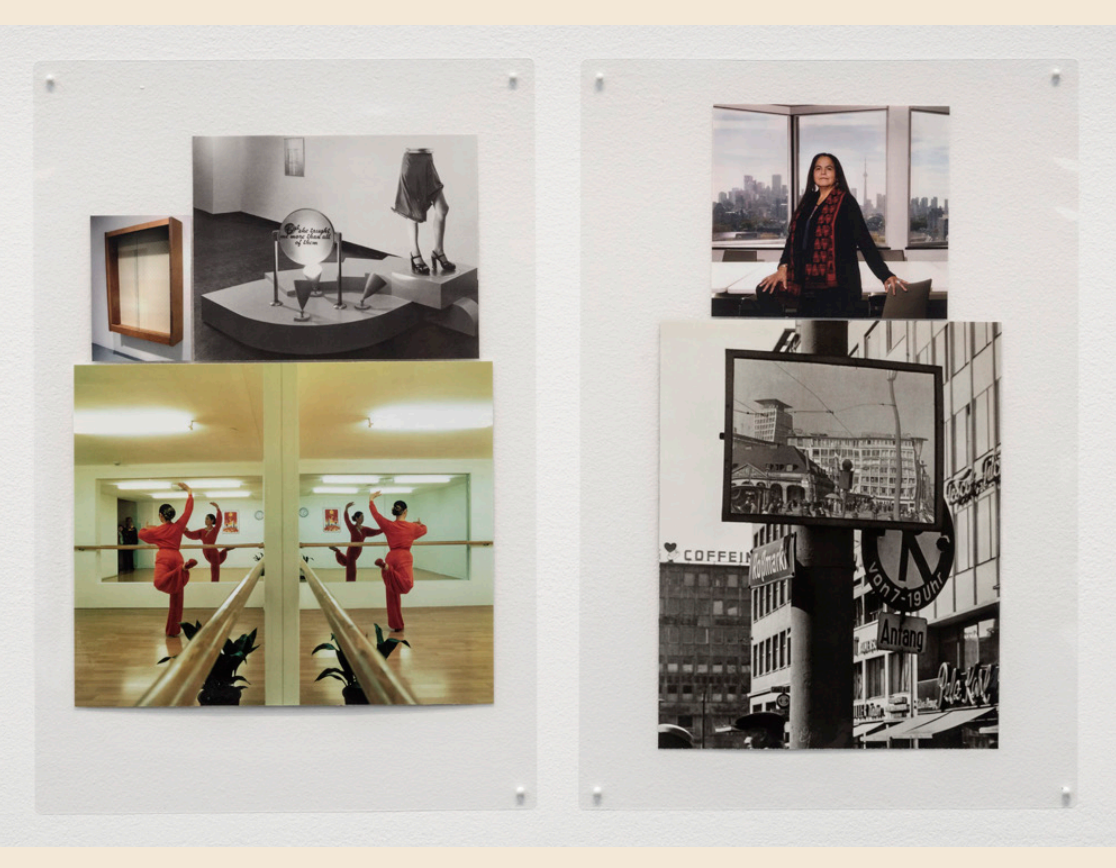


Laura Barrón, *Cali*, from the series Absentia, 2018, courtesy of Laura Barrón.

Absentia, by contemporary Mexican Canadian artist Laura Barrón, traces her journey across Latin America, which she embarked on during a return to her home country and those of her friends after a decade of living in Canada. The work consists of seven photo-books, each dedicated to an individual city. Though the project is grounded in a commitment to being present, its title evokes the phrase "in absentia"—an acknowledgement of absence that, as the artist states, engages with themes of nostalgia, longing, and loss. As she describes, "After many years of my relocation I came to the realization that I was learning about Latin America in a way I never did while living in Mexico.... The project became a reconstruction of my history in Canada, but also a reconstruction of my own territory and a return to myself."

Learn more about Laura Barrón

ALBUM XIV
by Luis Jacob

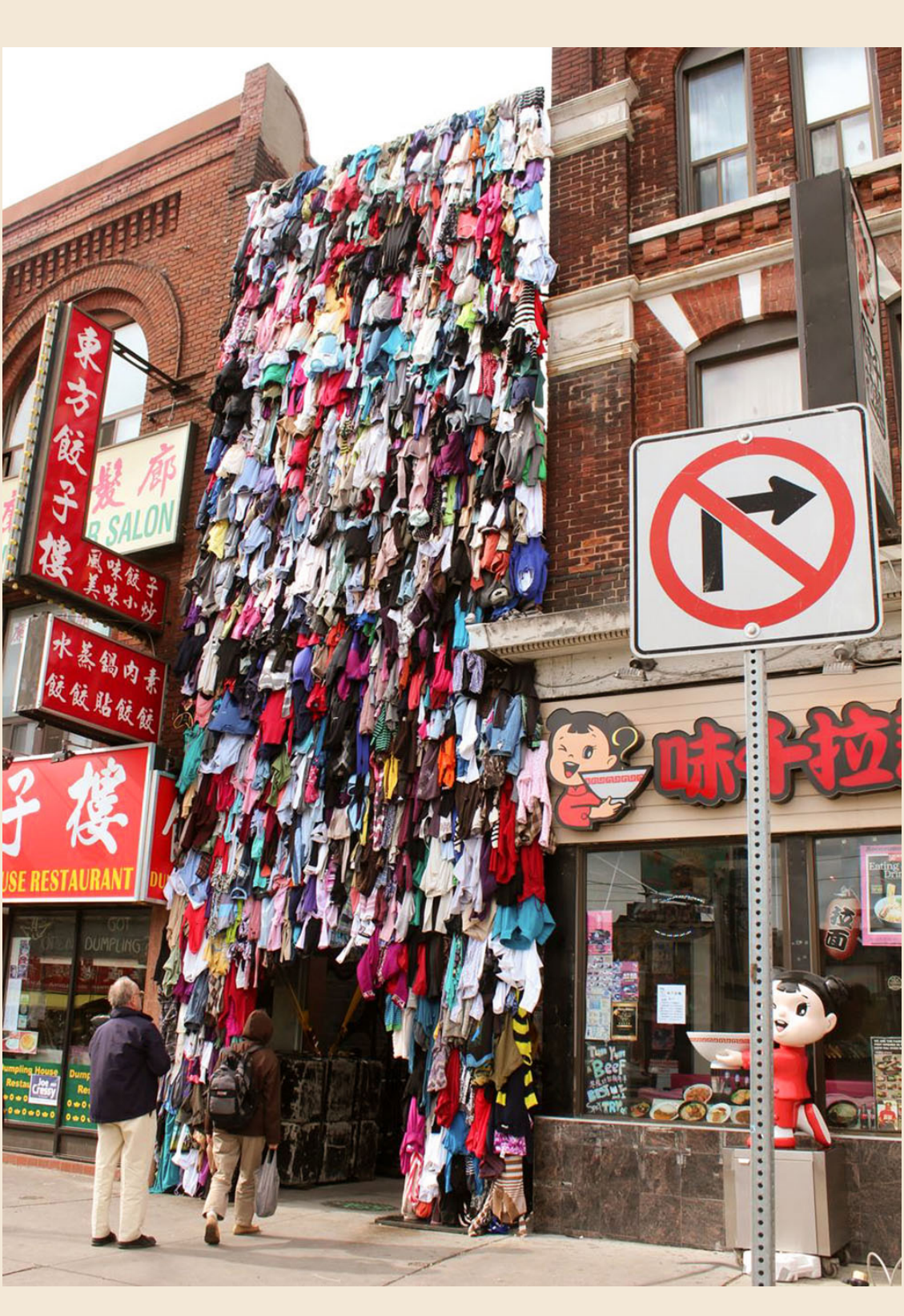


Luis Jacob, *Album XIV* (detail), 2016–17, courtesy of Luis Jacob.

Luis Jacob (b.1971) is a Peruvian-born, Toronto-based artist and curator whose practice draws attention to how society, politics, and place affect images and the ways that we see them. In works such as *Album XIV*, Jacob presents a series of hundreds of illustrations cut from books and magazines, displayed together without their original captions or context. Alongside reproductions of city planning images, abstract art, portraiture, and mannequins, Jacob includes pictures of artworks by Toronto artists and scenes of Toronto's urban development to ground *Album XIV* in a specific place and invite viewers to make their own connections between the personally familiar and unfamiliar images they encounter.

Learn more about Luis Jacob

MADE IN CHINA
by Maria Ezcurra

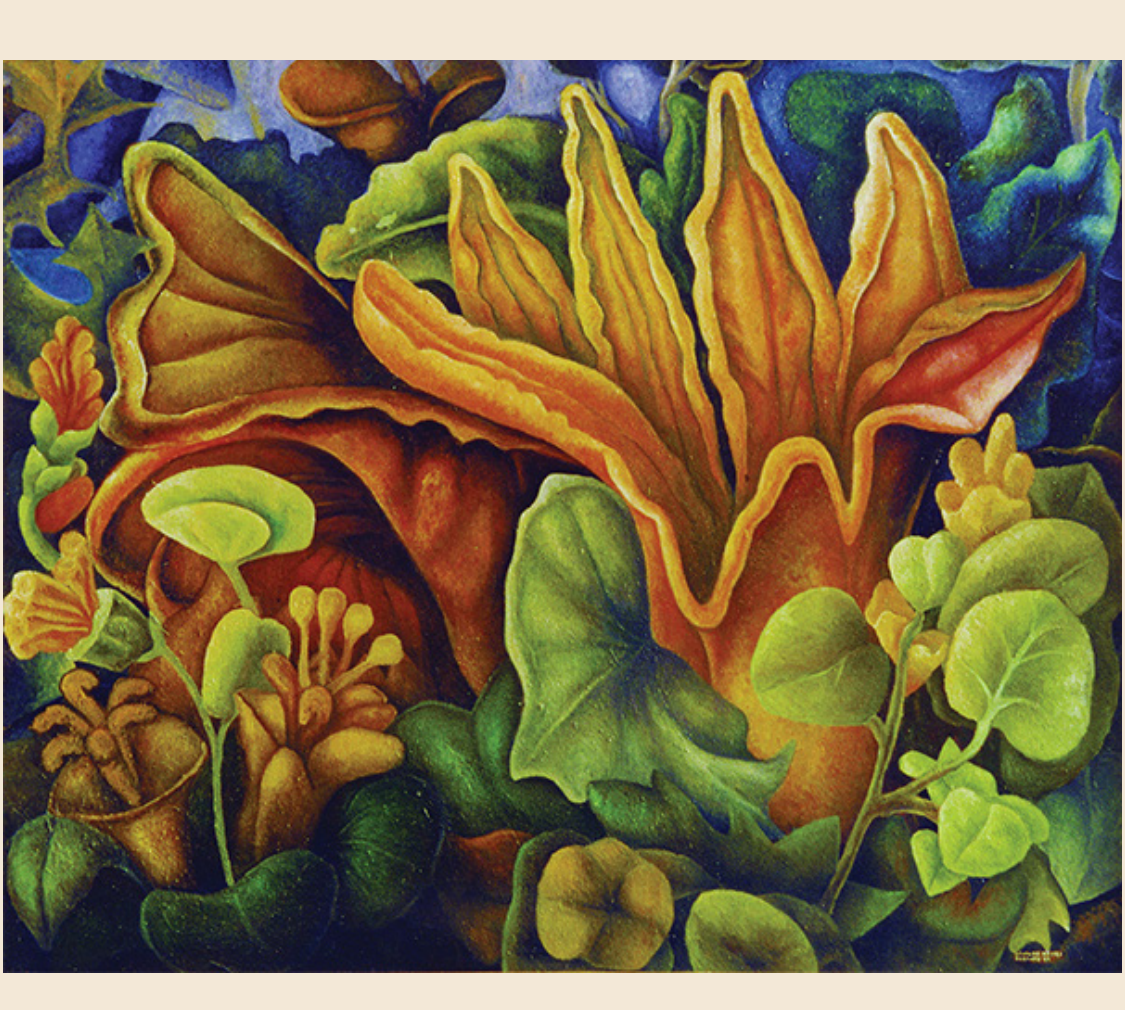


Maria Ezcurra, *Made in China*, 2014, installed at 330 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, 2014, courtesy of Maria Ezcurra.

Personal objects, textiles, and clothes are at the centre of many of the sculptural works and installations created by Maria Ezcurra (b.1973). Born in Argentina, raised in Mexico, and currently living in Montreal, Ezcurra's work frequently considers questions of globalization, migration, and gender. For her installation *Made in China*, 2014, Ezcurra asked Torontonians to donate clothing labelled as "made in China," which she then hung between two buildings on Spadina Avenue in the city's Chinatown. Ezcurra explained, "Most of the things we buy now are made in China. They're made everywhere but the place where we are living." The resulting wall of clothing was a striking reminder of how, as Ezcurra put it, "the decisions we make in our personal life end up affecting others on many levels."

Learn more about Maria Ezcurra

SUMMER IN CANADA
by Osvaldo Reyes Herrera



Osvaldo Reyes Herrera, *Summer in Canada*, 1991, private collection.

The expressive lines and luminous colours of *Summer in Canada* by Chilean Canadian artist Osvaldo Reyes Herrera (1919–2007) are typical of his style, which he cultivated while studying painting in Mexico with great muralists like Diego Rivera (1886–1957). Born in Chile, Reyes Herrera lived, worked, studied, and taught art both there and in Mexico during the politically tumultuous years of the mid-twentieth century and the Pinochet dictatorship. After moving to Canada in 1988, he continued to develop his unique style of social realism and increasingly turned to nature as a source of inspiration.

Learn more about Osvaldo Reyes Herrera

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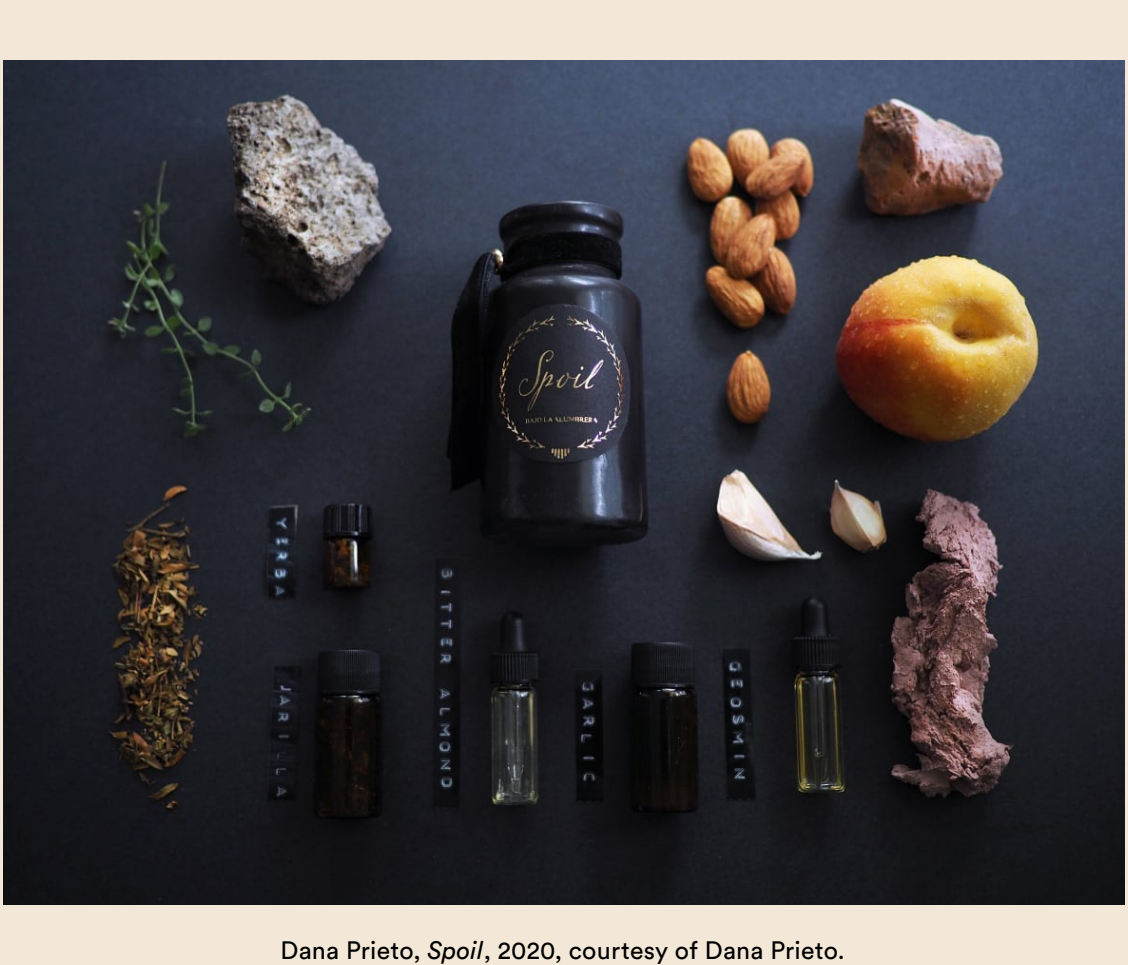
SPOIL
by Dana Prieto

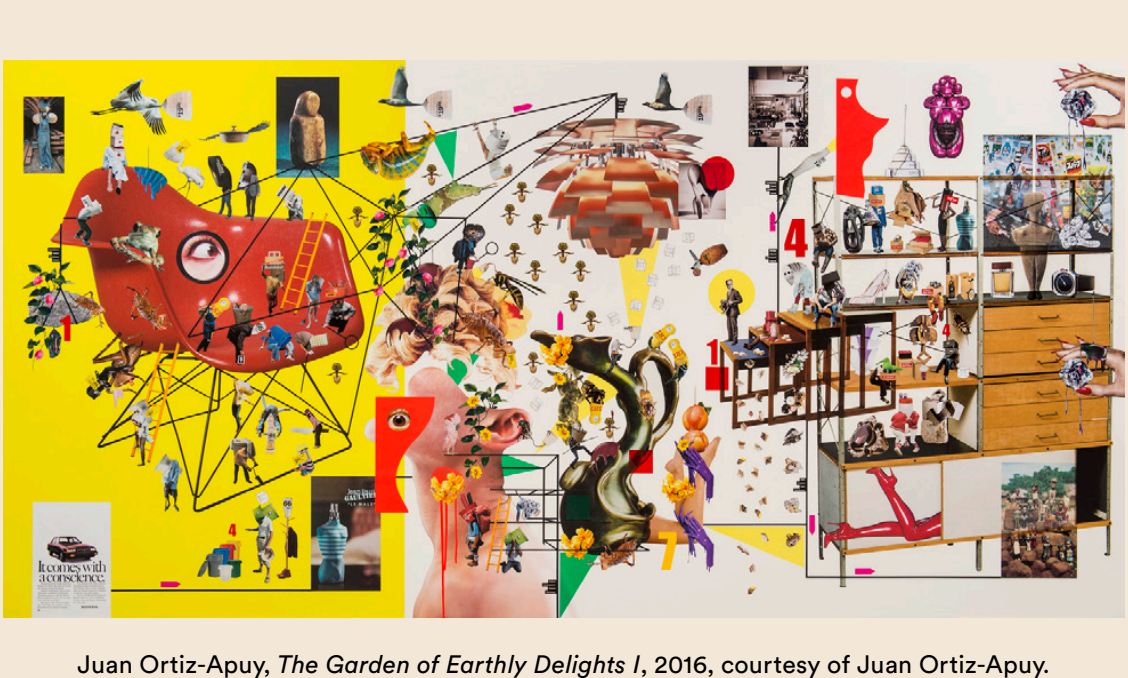


Dana Prieto, *Spoil*, 2020, courtesy of Dana Prieto.

Resembling a luxury fragrance, *Spoil*, 2020, by Toronto-based Argentine artist Dana Prieto (b.1984) conjures up the smell of soil near the Bajo de la Alumbrera gold and copper mine in Catamarca, Argentina, which is operated by two Canadian companies. Familiar earthy notes, such as unripe peaches and apricot pits, mingle with the sharp scents of garlic blossoms and bitter almonds—which mimic the smells of arsenic and cyanide, two of the most toxic by-products of gold mining. Spanning nearly one thousand kilometres, Bajo de la Alumbrera, Argentina's oldest and largest open-pit mining site, has faced fierce resistance from the local community. Collaborating with Montreal-based perfumer and scent artist Dana El Masri, Prieto developed a fragrance that offers a tangible, "sensorial encounter with the complex and indulgent textures of extraction."

Learn more about Dana Prieto

THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS I
by Juan Ortiz-Apuy

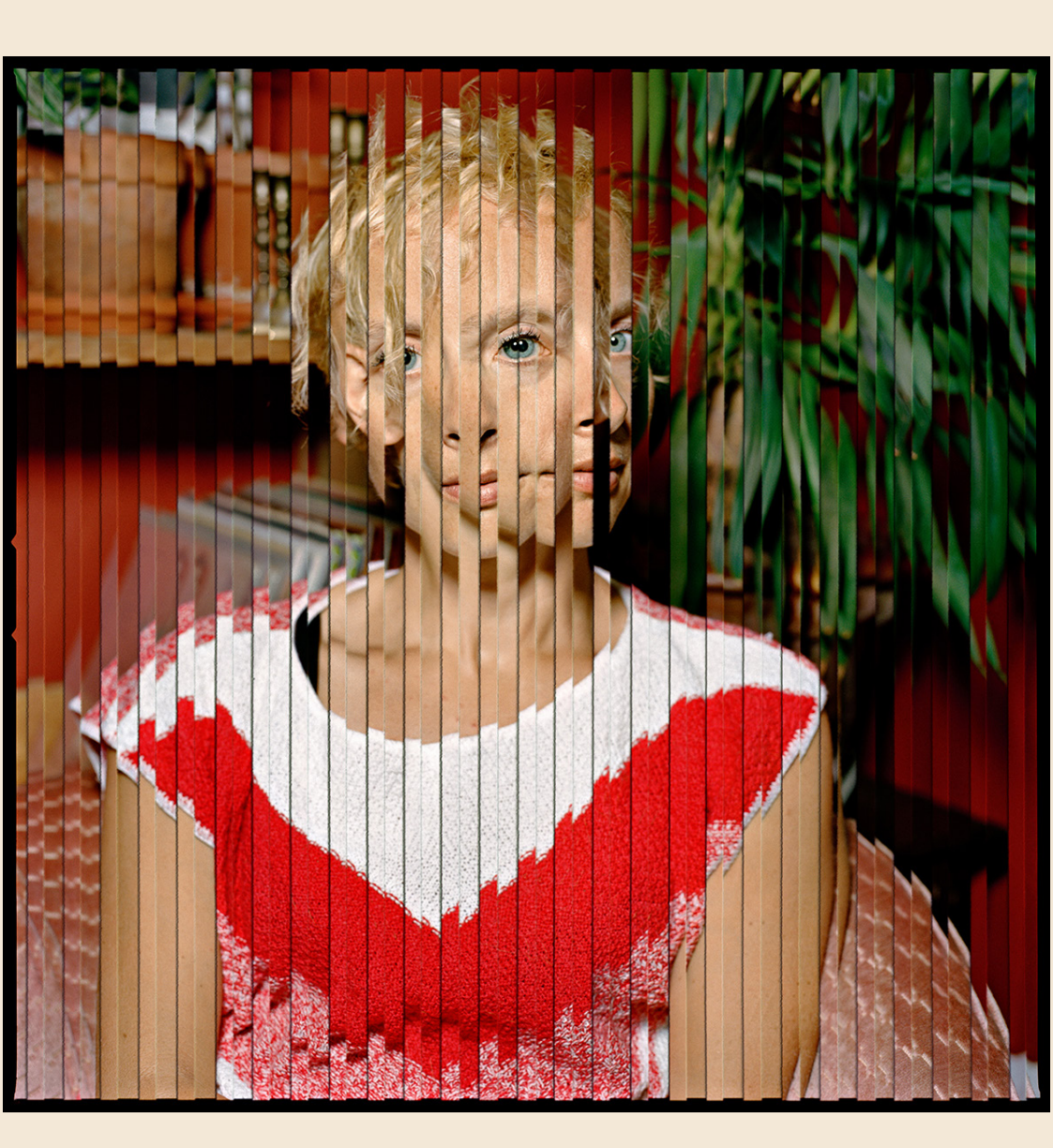


Juan Ortiz-Apuy, *The Garden of Earthly Delights I*, 2016, courtesy of Juan Ortiz-Apuy.

Titled after the Early Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch's (1450–1516) famous triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490–1500, this large-scale collage by Montreal-based Canadian Costa Rican artist Juan Ortiz-Apuy (b.1980) offers commentary on our commodity-obsessed culture. Ortiz-Apuy brings together glossy, colourful images of consumer products, people, and the natural world taken from IKEA catalogues, design history books, and issues of *National Geographic*, juxtaposing new and pristine material objects with fleshly bodies that allude to inevitable physical decline and mortality. With this complex piece, Ortiz-Apuy, who often works with collage and assemblage, evokes a world "that is at once disturbing and hellish, yet strangely enticing, and (dare I say it) pleasurable," observes writer Daniella Sanader.

Learn more about Juan Ortiz-Apuy

CHEVRON #1
by Isabel M. Martínez

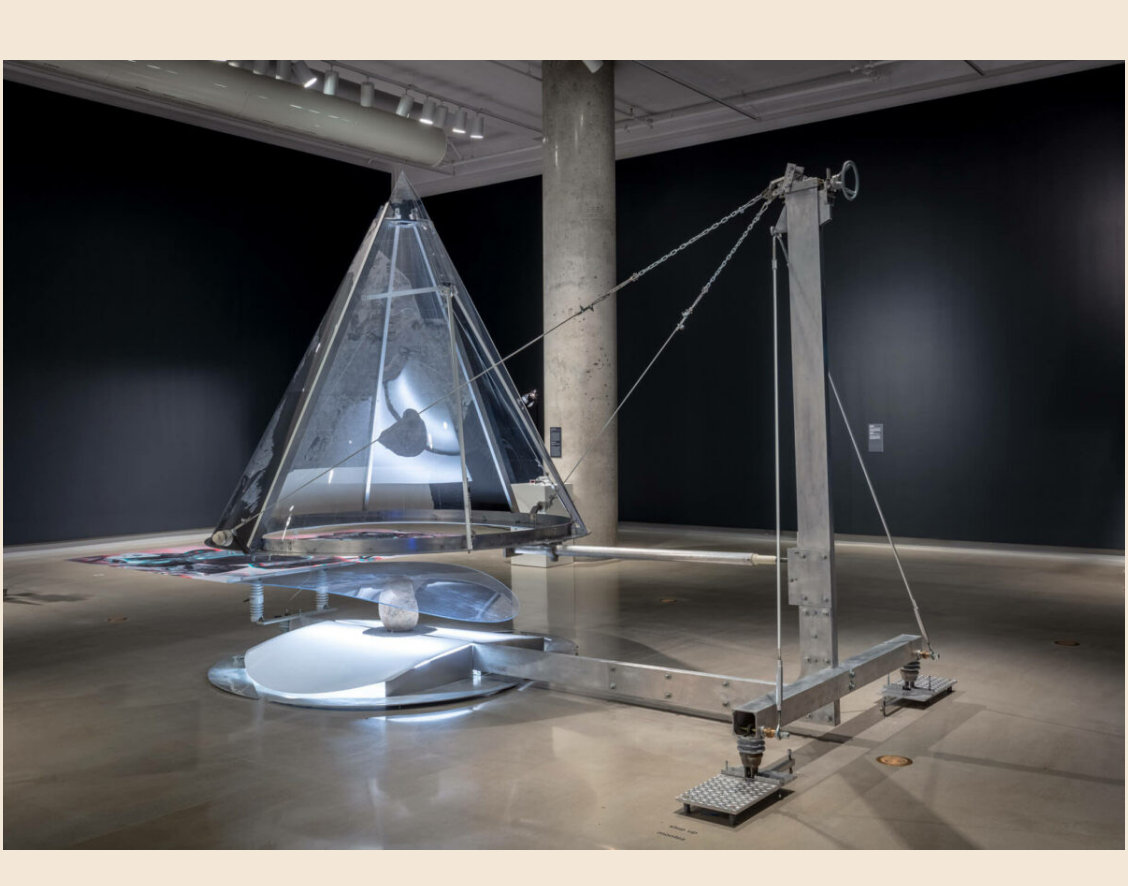


Isabel M. Martínez, *Chevron #1* (from the Quantum Blink series), 2011, © Isabel M. Martínez, courtesy of the artist.

Chilean-born, Toronto-based artist Isabel M. Martínez's series Quantum Blink, 2011, was inspired by research illustrating that the human brain operates at 40 waves per second—meaning that it synthesizes that number of conscious impressions into a single, unified moment. "I began to think about those fissures, tried to imagine them, and pondered over what could possibly reside in the gaps between instants of consciousness," explains Martínez. This portrait records a woman turning her face, producing an unsettling, fragmented image of her with three eyes. Although *Chevron #1* and other works in the Quantum Blink series may appear to be the result of Photoshop, the artist in fact used an analogue camera with in-camera masks, which allowed her to capture two exposures in quick succession without the images fully blending together.

Learn more about Isabel M. Martínez

ET AMOR FATI (FOR THE LOVE OF CANADA)
by Juan Geuer

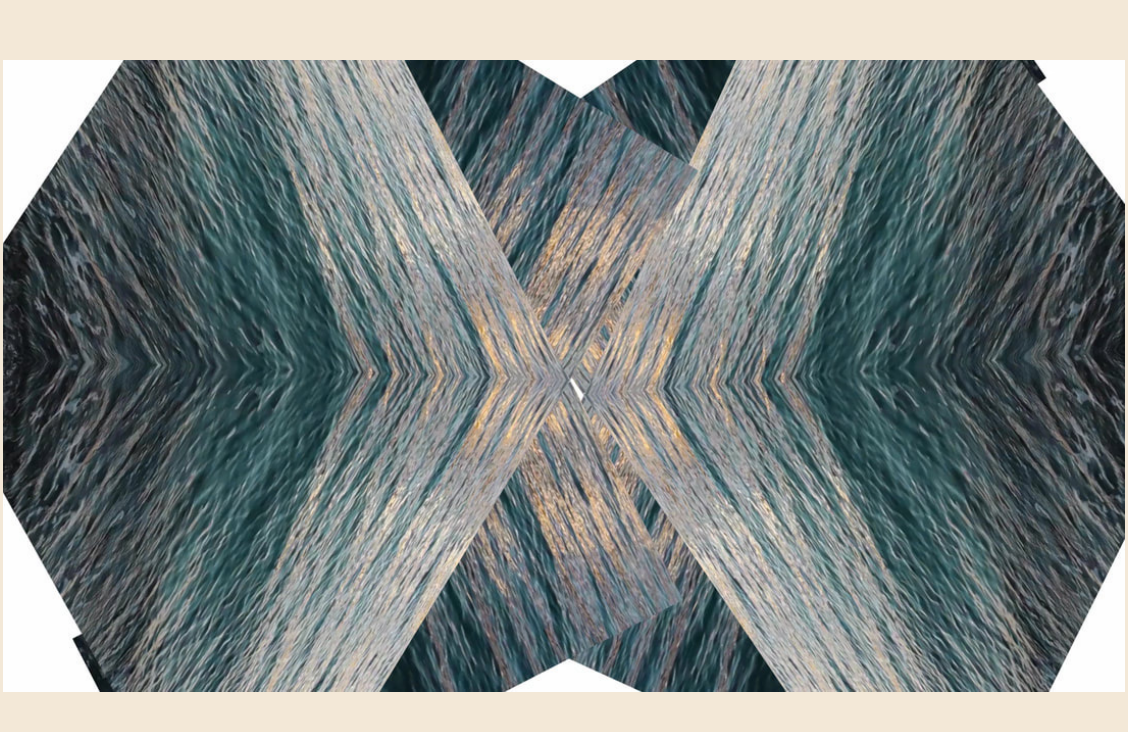


Juan Geuer, *Et Amor Fati (For the Love of Canada)*, 2007, Ottawa Art Gallery.

Born in the Netherlands and based in Bolivia with his family in the 1940s, Ottawa artist Juan Geuer (1917–2009) is renowned for his pioneering exploration of the links between art, science, and technology. His inventive mixed media installation *Et Amor Fati (For the Love of Canada)*, 2007, created when he was ninety years old, consists of a hollow metal cone that functions as a horizontal pendulum and displays a translucent government-produced map of Canada on its exterior. The structure of the piece was inspired by the seismometer, which measures the movement of the earth caused by earthquakes and other natural phenomena. Reflecting on the darker aspects of globalization, Geuer's work questions Canada's position within global peacekeeping.

Read more in ACI's
Ottawa Art & Artists: An Illustrated History by Jim Burant

NAUFRAGIOS
by Manuel Piña-Baldoquín

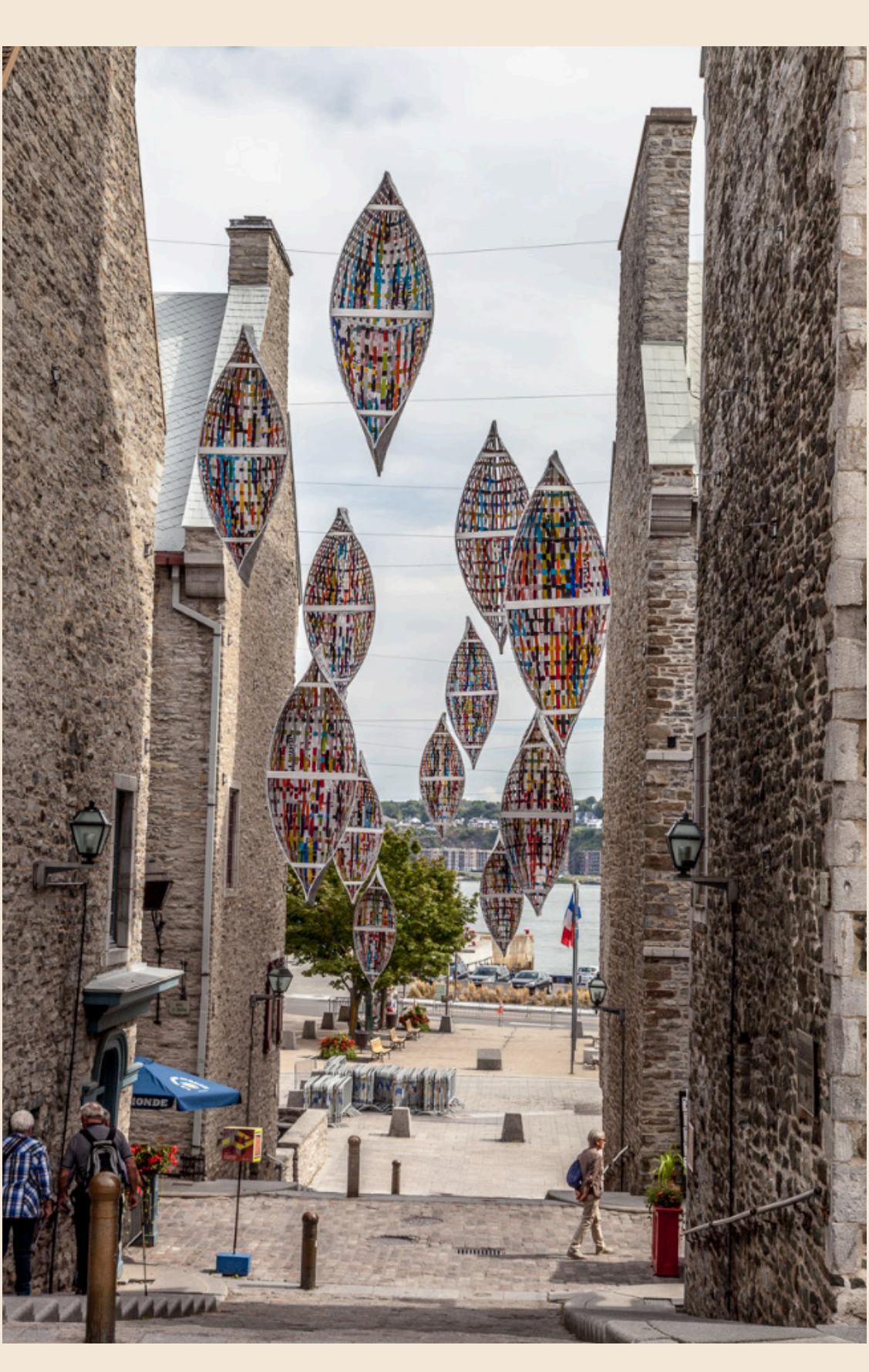


Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufragios*, 2015, courtesy of Manuel Piña-Baldoquín and Mónica Reyes Gallery, Vancouver.

In his video installation *Naufragios*, 2015, Havana-born, Vancouver-based artist Manuel Piña-Baldoquín (b.1958) takes the familiar, soothing imagery of a seascape and manipulates it into a series of disorienting fragments and geometric patterns. The work's Spanish title translates to "shipwreck," alluding to precarious migratory journeys past and present. In addition to contemporary images of refugees on overcrowded boats fleeing violence and political unrest in the Middle East and Africa, Piña-Baldoquín's piece brings to mind the mass migration of refugees from Cuba to the United States that took place in the second half of the twentieth century. The artist also draws on his own experiences of moving from Cuba to Vladimir, Russia, for his education before settling in Canada, where he has taught at the University of British Columbia since 2004.

Learn more about Manuel Piña-Baldoquín

PASSAGE MIGRATOIRE (MIGRATION PATHWAY)
by Giorgia Volpe



Giorgia Volpe, *Passage migratoire* (*Migration Pathway*), 2016, installed in Old Quebec City, 2016.

São Paulo-born artist Giorgia Volpe (b.1969) reflects on the role of migration in shaping her hometown of Quebec City—and society more broadly—in her installation *Passage migratoire* (*Migration Pathway*), 2016. Shown here as part of the 2016 edition of Passages Insolites, an annual public art exhibition held in the historic Petit Champlain and Saint-Roch districts of Old Quebec City, the work consists of a group of colourful, braided canoes vertically suspended on wires between buildings. The handwoven vessels symbolize both the vulnerability and resilience of those who journey from one place to another. Volpe's installation pays tribute to the First Nations communities, settlers, and sailors who converged in Quebec City and made it a place of rich cultural exchange.

Learn more about Giorgia Volpe

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Image Credits: [1] Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Pulse Topology*, 2021, 3000 LED light bulbs arrayed in a fermat spiral, contactless heartbeat sensors, audio playback. Installation view, The Bentway, Toronto, 2021. Courtesy of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. Photo credit: Antimodular Research. [2] Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo, *Ferias II* (detail), 2007, mixed media drawing, colour pencils, acrylic ink, coffee, oil paint on mylar, 106.7 x 309.9 cm. Courtesy of Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo. [3] Laura Barrón, *Cali*, from the series Absentia, 2018. Courtesy of Laura Barrón. [4] Luis Jacob, *Album XIV* (detail), 2016–17, image montage in plastic laminate, 104 panels. Courtesy of Luis Jacob. Photo credit: Toni Hafkenscheid. [5] Maria Ezcurra, *Made in China*, 2014, installation at 330 Spadina Avenue, Toronto. Courtesy of Maria Ezcurra. [6] Osvaldo Reyes Herrera, *Summer in Canada*, 1991, oil on canvas. Private collection. Courtesy of Artistas Visuales Chilenos. [7] Dana Prieto, *Spoil*, 2020, stoneware ceramic bottles, oil scent. Courtesy of Dana Prieto. [8] Juan Ortiz-Apuy, *The Garden of Earthly Delights I*, 2016, hand-cut found images on foamboard, 246 x 126 cm. Courtesy of Juan Ortiz-Apuy. [9] Isabel M. Martínez, *Chevron #1* (from the Quantum Blink series), 2011, chromogenic print. © Isabel M. Martínez, courtesy of the artist. [10] Juan Geuer, *Et Amor Fati (For the Love of Canada)*, 2007, aluminium frame, adjustment mechanisms and mylar map, 328 x 344 x 470 cm. Collection of the Ottawa Art Gallery, Gift of Else Geuer-Vermeij, 2013 (2013.04.21a-bh). Courtesy of the Ottawa Art Gallery. © Estate of Juan Geuer. Photo credit: Justin Wonnacott. [11] Manuel Piña-Baldoquín, *Naufragios*, 2015, two-channel video installation. Courtesy of Manuel Piña-Baldoquín and Mónica Reyes Gallery, Vancouver. [12] Giorgia Volpe, *Passage migratoire* (*Migration Pathway*), 2016, installed in Old Quebec City, 2016. Courtesy of Slow Nomads. Photo credit: Chris and Jeannie Fooshee.