

Pinto mi Raya: Archiving Press Clippings as Conceptual Art
UAAC, 2011, Ottawa

Today I am here to speak about the conceptual space called Pinto Mi Raya, which means I draw my line or I draw a line, and consists of two individuals Mónica Mayer and Víctor Lerma **slide**

Mónica Mayer was born in Mexico City in 1954 and she studied visual art at the National School for the Arts, which pertains to the UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico City. She then obtained an MA in Sociology of Art from Goddard College in the United States. Since 1989 she has been writing columns for El Universal newspaper. So that's been going on for over twenty years. From 1983 to 1993 she was part of an artist group with another artist named Maris Bustamante and they formed a collective that was called Polvo de Gallina Negra, or Dust of the Black Hen, which references witchcraft. Later, she also started the conceptual space with Víctor Lerma in 1988.

Monica has always been involved in feminism and also performance art. She started to get very interested in performance art when she took a workshop in the mid-seventies at San Carlos where she was studying. A German artist came and she went through these workshops, and then he disguised them as a cloud and sent them to the Zócalo, the main plaza in Mexico City. That was her first encounter with it. After that, when she was in the United States, she joined the Women's Building in Los Angeles 1978. That's when she really got her first taste of performance art. When she was in the United States doing her MA, she was studying, she was looking at art and going to exhibitions by people like Allan Kaprow, Chris Burden, Rachel Rosenthal, Linda Montano, that group of people, and they were coming to lecture her classes. Then she joined a performance group called Ariadne, a group formed by Susan Lacey and Leslie Nabowitz (?). Susan Lacey studied under Allan Kaprow and Judy Chicago, and Leslie Labowitz studied under Joseph Beuys. This gives you a little into the influences that have gone into making up who she is and obviously influencing her artwork as well.

When she comes back to Mexico in the early eighties, in 1983, she joins Maris Bustamante. **Slide** They are here, before and after—a little bit older in the second image. And they do a lot of really crazy things. They start up Polvo de Gallina Negra and they start doing performances that challenge the parameters of patriarchal society, art, what that is, the aesthetic canons, and they do a lot of interactions. One of their performances is they decide to get pregnant at the same time, their husbands are artists and involved in all of this, they are aware of all of this and they have children within three months of each other. And then they each have another child afterwards. So this is all part of what they are doing at the time. This is the mid eighties.

Víctor Lerma was born in Tijuana in 1949. He studied visual arts also at the National School for the Arts, which is part of the UNAM. They met in 1973 and were married in 1980. They remain married and continue to work together as a collective. Victor also doing lots of performance art and electronic or digital art. Remember, this is the seventies and eighties, the era of photocopiers—they are not that old—so they were using this new technology—photocopiers—and different kinds of printing methods in their artwork.

If we are to speak of Pinto Mi Raya, I have to mention the Era of the Discrepancies because this will give you an idea of what was going on at the time in Mexico. And you can see the two dates here: 1968 on the one hand and 1997 on the other. 1968 marks the student uprising that happens in the Plaza Tlatelolco. The uprising is a student movement that goes against the 19th Olympic Games that were presented in Mexico City in 1968. Three hundred students were killed and another thousand jailed, so that's on the one end. On the other end of the spectrum in 1994 if you remember we have the uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas. I left Mexico in November 1994 after having lived a total of over thirteen years there (split into two sections), and in December the peso dropped and created economic challenges for the country that lasted three years. So this is what we are looking at.

I should also go back to 1968 for a minute to mention the Salon Independiente. With the Olympic Games, the state decided they wanted to organize a large exhibition at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. It was to include forty artists authorized by the state who were doing the 'right' kind of artwork. This meant that all the other artists who were not doing the 'right' kind of work became agitated and they decided they were going to band together to do

something in response to the Salón Solar, as the official exhibition was called. They were going to do their own Salón Independiente, or Independent Salon. And they started this in 1968 and they do it for three years in a row. In 1968 it took place at a library called Isidro Favela and the following two years it happens at the UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico. I can't mention all of this without mentioning Helen Escobedo—she was the director of the museum at the UNAM. She was the one who saw what was going on with the Salón Independiente and she is the one who insists the artists exhibit at the UNAM, and they do this for the next two years. Helen Escobedo is an artist herself. We'll come back to her in a moment.

After the Salón Independientes, the No Grupos or Non Groups develop, which are a series of artist collectives that emerge. I can't speak about each one individually nor even mention all the names of those involved in the collective, but I will show some images. We have Tepito Arte Acá, who were eager to return to muralism. We have the Mira Grupo, which was interested in politics and information. And we've got the Proceso Pentágono, one of the founders of whom was Felipe Ehrenberg. These were the instigators of conceptual art in Mexico. **Slide of Felipe** The Grupo Suma was interested in intervening in the street using stencils. And then of course there is the El Peyote y Compañía. This collective was interested in pop culture and traditions, and merging them with contemporary art. The Marzo Group was interested in image and word and the intersection between them.

And then we've got the No Grupo. **Slide of Maris** There's Maris Bustamante in the middle. The No Grupo runs from 1977 to 1983 and in this latter year Maris gets together with Mónica Mayer and starts the Polvo de Gallina Negra. **Slide** So there is Maris there as well as a couple of other individuals I have had the pleasure of knowing as well. They had a large exhibition in 2010 at the Museo de Arte Moderno. They were going against official culture, looking to use pop culture to de-stabilize the art status quo.

Helen Escobedo leaves the MUCA (Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte) to become director of the Museo de Arte Moderno from 1981 to 1983. Prior to her arrival, in 1977, sculptor Sebastián organizes an exhibition at the Museo called the Salón 77 in which Mónica and Víctor participate. **Slide** This is one of Mónica's pieces called Tendedero (Clothes Line). Keep in mind that Mónica is 23 years old when she participates and Víctor is 29 or 30. Víctor's work focuses on urban contexts and deals with where he's living in Mexico City, called the Cero Chihuihuite (Chihuihuite Hill) so his themes are around urban development. This is the seventies.

And then we get to the eighties, which is a time of applying what artists learned in the seventies. This gentleman, Juan Acha, is a Peruvian sociologist who taught at the art school where both Mónica and Víctor studied. I did my MFA at that same school and was lucky enough to study under Juan Acha as well. He coined the term No Objetualismos, which means non object art. He was the main instigator of that idea in Latin America.

Back to the eighties. Helen Escobedo is now at the Museo de arte modern between 1981 and 83, and Hervé Fischer—a French sociologist and curator—who now lives in Canada, writes her and suggests they work on an interesting project for the Museum called the Calle ____?, which means where does the street begin or end. They decide to open up the museum and let everyone from the street go in and have their own artistic proposal going on. Hervé calls up a friend name Mario Rangel Faz, who happens to be an ex-member of the Grupo Suma mentioned above, and asks him to get involved. Mario agrees and in turn calls a few artists and forms a new group, the last one of the era, called Sincerely, The Management. Mario was a colleague of mine at the art school where I taught, and in fact I have had the great pleasure of working with many of them over the years. They do all of these actions in front of the Museo de arte modern, there is general chaos and everyone from the street takes over the museum and Helen Escobedo is fired. This was 1983.

Helen Escobedo was the one who opened up institutions in Mexico to conceptual art, beginning at the MUCA and moving to the MAM. **slide** The museum hires a new director and he organizes, in particular, a group exhibition in 1988 that includes the work of Rolando de las Rosas. Rolando exhibited a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe with the face of Marilyn Monroe, which provoked outrage. The museum was taken over by believers and shut down, and the event organizer Jorge Alberto Manrique was fired as well. Not only that, this launched a manifestation where everyone got thousands of people, organized a manifestation and they walked to the Basilica of the Virgin

Guadalupe in response to Rolando de la Rosa's painting. And it wasn't just him: someone else had painted a pair of cowboy boots on the flag, which also ignited protest.

This is 1988, an important year to keep in mind when we speak about Pinto mi raya: it was in this year that almost all the exhibition spaces closed to conceptual art. There is no place to exhibit. So the artists band together and determine that they must organize their own spaces—artist-run spaces. Víctor and Mónica call up Maris Bustamante, Alberto Gutierrez Chong—a former colleague of mine as well—and they call up the artists from the former No Grupo. They begin discussions about what they want to do and some decide to open a new space called Escandalario while the others open La Galería. Mónica and Víctor open up Pinto mi raya. Fast forward to 2006 when Mónica publishes a book called *Art and Its Distribution*, a small and engaging book that plays on the ideas of Juan Acha. Acha had been the proponent of producing, distributing and consuming art. Many believe that production refers to the artist, distribution to the gallery or curator and consuming to the buyer. But her book is about how artist do all of that and she maintains that even today we still do. Pinto mi raya is founded in 1988 as an artist gallery in the neighbourhood called La Condesa in Mexico City. It runs for about three years and hosts many exhibitions of all kinds, both solo and group. Their mandate is wide open and they do a lot of crazy things.

In 1989, Mónica begins to write for the newspaper called *El Universal*. As she begins to write, she wonders who might reading her articles because there are thirty-four newspapers in Mexico City alone, and twelve of them have regular art critics writing for them. She begins to purchase the papers each day and clip the press clippings to find out who's writing about what. She does this for about a year and a half until she and Víctor decide to do something with all this information: seriously compile it into a publication. They call it *Raya: Criticism and debate in the visual arts*. **Slide** They start to produce booklets that look like this: they cut the clippings, paste them on the sheet, and they've got the name of the newspaper at the top, they write the name of the newspaper from where the clippings was taken, and they note the section and page number as well. This booklet is simply bound with a spiral. These booklets are made in two-week blocks. And they have been doing this for twenty years. Every two weeks they produce the compilation and distribute them, and you can see them stacked up and it's all photocopies. Every two weeks there are between fifty and eighty articles written about art in the newspapers. They are then sent out to people who have subscriptions, such as museum archives, research centres and libraries are subscribing. This is Pinto mi raya.

Ten years later, in 2002, they receive a call from the Sala Siqueiros, named after a Mexican muralist. They are invited to do something for the Sala. They ask if, among their archive of 34,000 articles amassed over the ten years, they might go through them all in search of all the articles that mention Siqueiros. Mónica and Víctor agree and they pull the articles and create a limited edition of twenty-five signed books. While they are at it, they decide to do one on public art due to the connection between muralism and public art.

At this time, they are also invited to do an art installation for the interior of the Sala Siqueiros, located in Polanco. They make photocopies on acetate and hang in the facility. At the same time, after these ten years, they begin something called *Hurgando en el archive*, *Hunting in the archive*. 07:59