

EDITOR'S ESSAY



Y.ES! Generation Y in El Salvador By Claire Breukel

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America, with an economy that relies on remittances from Salvadorans living and working abroad. Although it has been just over twenty years since the end of its civil war, the country continues to struggle with poverty and gang violence. But in the midst of these complexities that are not atypical of many other Latin American countries, a dynamic culture and tight-knit contemporary art community persists.

Y.ES is a window on this contemporary art community, which is one of the most under recognized “scenes” in Latin America. As such, to speak about the last ten years of contemporary art in El Salvador, much less to document it, is to attempt to put a stake in a conversation about artistic practice that is both disparate and in flux. This is exactly the aim of Y.ES.

To do this, we interviewed twenty-eight diverse art professionals from all over the world. Although individually unique, their views and ideas collectively give context to Salvadoran art within Central America, Latin America and the world, and together paint a charismatic portrait of Salvadoran contemporary practice.

HERE ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT TO EXPECT:

Curator Jose Ruiz reminds us that the country’s civil war has had a direct and lasting impact on the art community in El Salvador, and that many of the artists living and working in El Salvador today—Ronald Moran, Walterio Iraheta, Simon Vega and Mayra Barraza have indelibly felt its impact. However, in their interviews, these four artists speak about opportunities they have had to exhibit their work abroad, a sign that the art community is increasingly expanding its reach.

Conversely, United States-based diaspora artists, RETNA and Irvin Morazan, discuss the intricacies of their experiences coming back to their native country. Similarly, collector Christy Turlington Burns shares her childhood stories traveling between Miami and San Salvador, her mother’s place of birth.

Curators Alanna Heiss, Elvis Fuentes and Alanna Lockward as well as art historian Kency Cornejo, museum director Bonnie Clearwater and public art program specialist Brandi Reddick have all visited El Salvador, and here recount their experiences participating in art programs initiated by the Cultural Center of Spain in El Salvador and the Museum of Art of El Salvador [MARTE]. Over the past decade the role of the museum has been significant, and director Roberto Galicia uses its evolution as a departure point to contextualize the role of the art institution in El Salvador.

A selection of interviews discuss El Salvador's art presence in relation to that of the rest of Latin America, and by extension the presence of Latin America within the wider art realm. Collector Ella Fontanals-Cisneros discusses her foundation's widespread commitment to supporting Latin American art, while PINTA Art Show founder Mauro Herlitzka describes a shift in the focus of institutional collecting, and the role of the art fair in making the region's art better known. This is complemented by Zelika Garcia's explanation of the role of the Zona MACO art fair, as well as Marc Spiegler's explanation of the programming the Art Basel art fairs have in place to facilitate the participation of lesser known galleries. Sam Keller, Fondation Beyeler director and Art Basel chairman, shares his personal experiences developing relationships within Latin America, as well as the authentic integration of Latin American artists within the foundation's program. Sotheby's expert Maria Bonta de la Pezuela offers an invaluable bird's eye view of the region's art market, and contributes ideas as to the role of biennials in Latin America. Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Professor of Latin American Art, Dr. Harper Montgomery, describes her role curating the 2004 San Juan Triennial that was initiated in the 1970s to bring artists together within Latin America's dispersed market.

This discussion of the art market is expanded upon by Austrian gallery owner Ernst Hilger and Salvadoran Gallery 123 director Patricia Gardiner Amare who offer crucial insights on the global market for Salvadoran art.

Contemporary art expert Amy Cappellazzo is positive the market is growing and offers a message that art from niche areas within Central America will only gain increasing exposure. ArtNexus founder Celia Birbragher and arts writer Roger Atwood agree that an important contributor to providing "good" exposure for contemporary art is critical writing that situates artistic production conceptually rather than geographically. To this end, collector and writer Tom Healy describes the unfortunate defensive posture that many "local" cultures take on when being compared to larger cities—confirming that contemporary art communities are bonded not by borders, but by ideas.

Y.ES is a journey—one that is conceptual rather than geographic, though it reaches from the experimental collectives in San Salvador to the Venice Biennale to the booths of Art Basel Miami Beach, and beyond. The artists, curators, directors, gallerists, historians, collectors and critics whose participation, creation, cultivation and collecting continues to shape the journey are vital. We sincerely thank each and every one of them, and we hope you, our readers, will be inspired to more deeply connect with El Salvador, it's contemporary art, and take this book as a call to action:

Y.ES! I support Salvadoran contemporary art!

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

When Mario Cader-Frech first came to Simon Vega and I with the idea of creating a book about contemporary art of El Salvador, he made it clear that he wanted us to approach this as an independent research project. Despite this humility, Mario's patronage and efforts to promote Salvadoran contemporary art over the past decade have been significant and inevitably his name is mentioned throughout many parts of this publication. My sincerest thanks go to Mario for his vision and generosity. Thank you also to my co-editor Simon Vega for his invaluable insight and helping Y.ES seek out the best interviews; Melissa Diaz for her patience as assistant editor and proofreader; Ronald Moran and Walterio Iraheta for their cherished advice; Jacober and Associates for lending us their incredible design talents; and all Y.ES interviewees whose contributions have created a more comprehensive portrait of art in, and about, El Salvador.