

# PUBLISHER'S ESSAY



## **MARIO CADER-FRECH**

From my earliest introduction to the world of art and collecting, I knew I wanted my own art collection to include artists from my home country El Salvador. However, with the help of friends Tom Healy and Amy Cappellazzo who were also my initial guides through the contemporary art world, I was able to begin a much deeper and more rewarding journey that would culminate with the completion of this book.

The journey began when Tom and Amy encouraged me to think not only about collecting Salvadoran art, but supporting art programs that focused on conceptual and avant-garde movements from El Salvador. In the mid 1990s I began to proactively focus my attention on supporting the arts in El Salvador. At the time art movements in Costa Rica and Guatemala were beginning to gain some momentum, but Central America as a whole was still alarmingly underrepresented in major international art exhibitions. I soon realized that the reason for this was that most countries in Central America lacked a cohesive and organized cultural structure.

This was especially true of El Salvador, and even though there were several great artists working both locally and internationally as part of the diaspora, there was no structured connective tissue in the form of institutions or written material that brought them together within an identifiable cultural framework. The country had after all endured a twelve yearlong civil war, the aftermath of postwar reconstruction, and

the outbreak of gang-related violence, which meant that the exportation of artistic and social movements to the rest of the world had been stunted. As a result, many people were not aware of what was happening in El Salvador, and for me this made what the artists had to say even more important. I endeavored to find ways in which to make these voices heard. When I began supporting the Salvadoran contemporary art scene, my goal was to gather a comprehensive art collection of Salvadoran art, and enough documentary materials to illustrate at least a decade of critical exhibitions and activities within the country's art scene. I focused not only on making the art produced by Salvadoran contemporary artists known, but also on providing a space for an international presence within the country itself in order to foster critical international exchange.

In 2000, with the support of friends in Washington D.C., we opened one of the first exhibiting art spaces dedicated to showing conceptual art by Salvadoran artists in the Salvadoran Consulate. The exhibition program included artists from El Salvador, and Salvadoran artists living in the United States, who were making work that importantly dealt with themes of identity, the consequences of the civil war and their emigration. This program remained open for ten years and eventually expanded to the consulates in Boston, New York and Miami, where my own art collection based on these artists, and artists working in El Salvador, is still on permanent view. Three years later I turned my attention to El Salvador and began working with the Museum of Art of El Salvador [MARTE], which was the first institution of its kind in the Mesoamerican region when it was inaugurated in 2003.

With the help of New York-based curator Janet Phelps, and many friends and supporters, the MARTE Contemporary program (MARTE-C) was launched a year later in 2004. Ten years later, the program continues to showcase prominent contemporary art from abroad and supports the development of the artistic community in El Salvador. Artist exchanges, workshops, talks, performances, portfolio reviews, and seminars by invited artists, curators and museum directors have influenced dozens of aspiring Salvadoran artists to produce increasingly daring works. Through the hard work and support of visiting artists, curators and MARTE staff, many of whom are featured in this book, we have invited the international art world to El Salvador, and provided Salvadoran artists access to the outside world.

After the successes of each of these projects, and with ten years of MARTE-C programming documentation accrued, I realized the time had come to bring together the story of contemporary art in El Salvador. So in 2013, and as we celebrated the representation of El Salvador in the Venice Biennale with work by Simon Vega in the Arsenale pavilion, it became clear to me we needed to make a book that spoke not only of El Salvador's contemporary art scene in the country, but the impact of its creative community internationally.

With the help of two dear friends and long time supporters of the development of Salvadoran art, Claire Breukel a New York-based curator and chief curator of MARTE Contemporary and the acclaimed artist Simon Vega, we embarked on the making of Y.ES.