

Editorial

From the Memory Books of Josely Carvalho

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Abstract: In this interview, Brazilian-born multi-media artist Josely Carvalho (b. 1942) reflects back on her art making practice in the 1980s. Among the subjects that she addresses are her bi-nationalism, her use of the silkscreen process, and her association with the 1984 activist campaign Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America. She also speaks about working as a Latin American artist in New York City during this period, as well as her involvement with galleries and arts organizations such as St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, Central Hall Cooperative Gallery, and Franklin Furnace.

Keywords: Josely Carvalho; art; Brazil; activism; silkscreen; mail art; Artists Call; St. Mark's Church; Central Hall; Franklin Furnace

1. Introduction

Since Donald Trump took office in January 2017, immigrant communities in the United States have been subjected to new and increased enforcement policies and threatened with the building of a wall along the U.S.–Mexico border. They have also been demonized as dangerous criminals, placed on expedited removal, and children have been separated from their families (Suro 2018). In response to this ongoing situation, cities, college campuses and churches, among others, have declared themselves sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants and others threatened with deportation. These acts of solidarity, however, are not new. They date back to the 1980s, when a broad-based, grass roots, transnational, and anti-imperialist movement, known as the Central American solidarity movement, developed in the United States. Made up of a diverse group of organizations and tactics, ranging from faith-based to the radical Left, the movement stood in opposition to the longstanding history of U.S. intervention in the region and in support of Central American self-determination, agency, and culture (Fox 2012). While scholars have written about this movement, and especially its transnational dimensions (Hatzky and Mor 2014; Perla 2008), considerations of the visual arts remain largely absent within this growing body of scholarship. In this interview, conducted in February 2019, visual artist, poet, and activist, Josely Carvalho reflects back on her art making practice in the 1980s, when she was involved with a number of transnational solidarity coalitions in New York City.

For Carvalho, who was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1942, but has lived in the United States part-time since the late 1970s, inter-American collaboration has been an essential part of her art making practice (Carvalho 2018). But, as the interview suggests, Carvalho prescribes to neither a utopic or simplistic vision of solidarity. For her, transnational collaboration, including her involvement with the seminal and vastly understudied 1984 activist campaign Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, for which she organized two exhibitions, was not simply about commonalities and forged identifications. Instead, she is keenly aware of the ways in which difference, including her position as a Brazilian and so-called Latina, informed her visual solidarity practices, at times, to contradictory ends.

Many of these inconsistencies are apparent in Carvalho's involvement with U.S. radical feminist practices in the 1980s, including the women's cooperative Central Hall and, later, the woman's group

Heresies Collective. In the interview, Carvalho speaks about how she navigated issues around belonging, community activism, and the art world within these largely white women's groups vis-a-vis her position as bi-national feminist artist who had been politicized primarily in Latin America. Besides understanding the complex connections between radical feminism and inter-American solidarity in the 1980s, from Carvalho's testimony, readers also learn how New York City functioned as an epicenter for these activities and those artist spaces—some of which, such as Central Hall Cooperative Gallery, may be surprising or even unknown—that were conducive to showing art work by Latin American artists. Additionally, Carvalho explains the political and practical realities which led her to use the silkscreen process and mail art as visual formats, as well as how her activist and solidarity work developed over time and place. Together, these recollections demonstrate not only how intertwined art and politics were during the 1980s but, more importantly, the necessity of taking up these visual solidarity practices through the critical lens of difference, identification, and (mis)translation. Carvalho's testimony, in short, stands as an act of resistance. It is a decolonial gesture that asks readers to rethink both canonical art historical discourses of the Americas and the lessons that visual solidarity practices of the 1980s hold for today's polarized political climate and war on immigrants.

2. Interview

ED

In January 1964, despite having already begun your formal art education at the Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, in São Paulo, you leave your birth place, Brazil, for the United States, where, since the late 1970s, you continue to live part-time. Why did you leave?

JC

I left Brazil two months before the start of the military coup, which lasted until 1985. I left not out of fear of being imprisoned by the military, but rather of being imprisoned by my culture, my family, and the social constraints under which I was brought up. I needed to breathe. Yet, I still don't think of myself as ever having moved to the United States. Up to today, I think of myself as a wandering passenger. I was separated from Brazil and yet did not belong to the United States. Probably, this was the motivation that led me in the 1980s to actively deal with identity and, in 1991, to work on the artist book *My Body is My Country* (Carvalho and Lippard 1991). This book acted as a political response to my own cultural separation and the struggles to preserve myself in this country (Figure 1). It was also about the destruction of both nature and culture—the cannibalism and erasure of cultures by other cultures. At that time, I wrote the constitution of my country, and the turtle became my official avatar. It was a metaphor for my identity: like the turtle, I carried my house and my history with me.

In the early 1990s, I started carrying my work/studio/life inside my computer shelter. I allowed myself to move between two worlds, feeling comfortably at home and not at home in both of them. It was then that the state of citizenship lost its historic value.

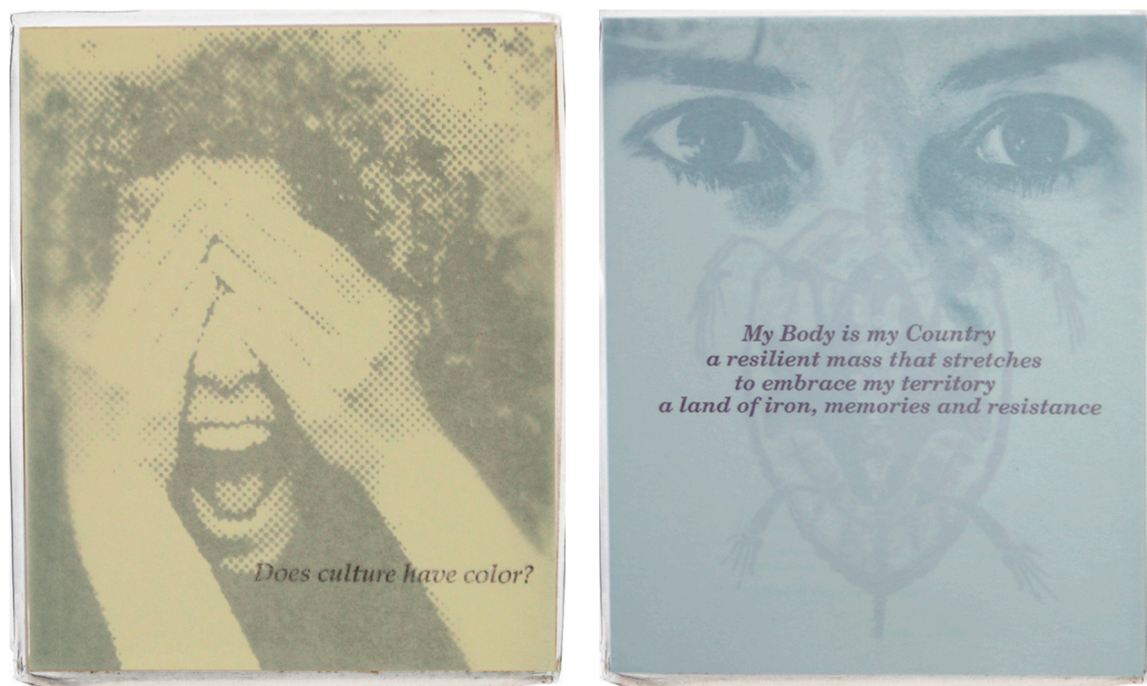


Figure 1. Josely Carvalho, *My Body is My Country*, 1991, Artist book, 12 pages, silkscreen and offset on paper, 8.26 × 7 × 0.98 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

So, though you have lived in both Brazil and the United States, you never felt that you belonged in either place?

JC

Since I was a child, I didn't feel that I belonged anywhere. I didn't think or behave in the way it was expected of me. This estrangement was a consequence of refusing to be placed in drawers. I had a very formal and traditional education in a school taught by highly educated Catholic nuns. Later, during the military dictatorship, some of them supported Liberation theology, and I heard a few went to jail.

ED

Can you speak more about this contradiction in your early education? The Catholic church in Brazil is known for its human rights activism against the military dictatorship, yet you seem to imply that this schooling was conservative, even stifling.

JC

During my years in Catholic school, the nuns didn't reveal their political views to students but they were always transferring ethical values. As a child, I probably sensed certain contradictions and it was only later living in New York that I was able to appreciate the contribution they made to my political identity.

ED

Why did you come to the United States? In order to go to school?

JC

Yes, eventually. My original plan was to fly somewhere. I took the opportunity to visit my sister for two months in St. Louis, Missouri, because her husband was the conductor of the St. Louis

Symphony Orchestra. Once there I was able to apply for an Organization of American States grant and then attend Washington University, where, in 1967, I earned a bachelor's degree in the School of Architecture. By this time the military had taken over Brazil and I didn't feel safe or welcome to go back.

ED

Why did you decide to study architecture and not the fine arts?

JC

Architecture was a way to study fine arts and to learn organization, discipline, and spatial knowledge. It also gave me structure. In a way, it opened up a new approach to explore the fine arts. My intention was not to work as an architect but as an artist. I took printmaking classes and had the privilege of studying with two woodcut printmakers: Leslie Laskey and Munakata Shiko.

ED

Did you also learn the silkscreen process at Washington University?

JC

No, only woodcut. My first solo exhibition *The Birds* in São Paulo in 1963 was composed of woodcuts and lithographs. I learned from working with Munakata Shiko, who was a Zen teacher at Washington University, that woodcut was not my medium. I could not respect the grain and the beauty of the wood. I needed to break traditions.

ED

Where, then, did you learn the silkscreen process?

JC

That was not until later, when I moved to Los Angeles, in 1970, with my son and my first husband, who was a social scientist from Costa Rica. In Los Angeles, I took a silkscreen workshop. It was interesting because the instructor, a woman, demonstrated silkscreen in a very simple way. And I said to myself, wow! Silkscreen has no history. This is what I want. Woodcut has a long history and tradition and I couldn't carry this load in the making of my art work. Silkscreen was like a chameleon. It gave me freedom.

ED

What kind of workshop was it? Was it held in a university?

JC

It was a workshop held in the community. I went a couple of times, just enough to fall in love with silkscreen. I got married to it. For 25 years I never did work without including, even subliminally, silkscreen. It was my brush. In 1995, while working on a permanent installation, a memorial to the Armenian Genocide of 1915, for a subway station in São Paulo, I realized I didn't need silkscreen anymore. In 2008, after a residency at the Frans Masereel Print Centre in Kasterlee, Belgium, silkscreen and I got officially divorced. I lost my desire to silkscreen.

ED

Did this workshop inspire you to found The Silkscreen Project at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery in New York City?

JC

No, not initially. After one year in Los Angeles, my husband and I moved to Mexico City as visiting professors at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). I taught there until 1973. It was the beginning of my politicization as an activist. My teachings in the School of Architecture coincided with a collective decision called *autogobierno* (Self-Government), which was intended to put an end to the established architectural curriculum that ignored the sociopolitical reality of Mexico. I supported the movement and with students created *Walking Posters* using stencils. The posters gave us a way of hiding our faces while in the streets disseminating this educational model. As you may know, at that time as a foreigner, I was not allowed to participate in national politics.

ED

It is really powerful to hear that the beginnings of your solidarity work with The Silkscreen Project took place transnationally. When did you leave Mexico? Is that when you came to New York City?

JC

In 1973, I left Mexico, the university, and my husband. I went with my son and my silkscreen equipment to Washington, DC, to be near the National Endowment for the Arts where I could get a grant as a Community Artist-in-Residence (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Josely Carvalho at a silkscreen public interactive event as a community artist-in-residence in Arlington, VA, a pilot-project grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, 1974. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

Being an artist-in-residence gave you the financial support you needed to develop community workshops around silkscreen?

JC

Yes. In Mexico, I had already developed an easy and quick way of printing with paper stencils involving the general public. This process could be extended to posters, banners, t-shirts, bicycles, cookies, walls, and more. The screens were always kept off the hinges. In these workshops we discussed ideas and world events. I started from the basis that we are all artists. There were no

mistakes. Everything was collaborative and most of the workshops were in the streets. In 1976, I moved to New York City and that same year, as an artist-in-residence at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, I started The Silkscreen Project, which lasted until 1987 ([Herzberg \[1993\] 2018](#)).

ED

I never realized that St. Mark's Church also supported visual art projects. There is a tendency to think about this community center more in terms of the performing arts.

JC

There were several art/community projects at St. Mark's, including the Poetry Project and Danspace. It was the perfect place for The Silkscreen Project. David Garcia, St. Mark's Reverend at that time, gave me an empty basement in the rectory building. St. Mark's became an umbrella, or today I would say a shelter, to do my work. Every Wednesday, we met to discuss the public programs in the Church. Art, community, and politics were interconnected at St. Mark's. I was there until, 1987, when I moved to a loft on 13th Street. At that point, I needed to work alone.

ED

Can you speak about how you organized The Silkscreen Project? How would people find out about the workshops? Would people meet you at St. Mark's Church and then you would work together collaboratively?

JC

It was mostly through word of mouth. St. Mark's had an activist reputation and presence in the Lower East Side. We would work on collaborative banners that were used for marches around disarmament, solidarity groups with Latin America, women's rights, tenant's rights, and school board district elections ([Figure 3](#)). I don't have a lot of documentation from that time because the idea was to make the banners to become part of the demonstrations.



Figure 3. The Silkscreen Project, 1982, collective silkscreen banners with different Latin American solidarity groups, New York. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

How did this activism influence your subsequent art work?

JC

It was basic in the development of my art work. I believed that art and life were the same. Today, I sometimes question this logic. But I was very young and needed to experience life before knowing what to say through my individual art work. Community involvement, beginning with Mexico, was the thread that constructed my art practice.

ED

The relationship between art and politics or aesthetics and activism is often tenuous. How did your community involvement fit into the art world?

JC

The first three to four years I developed The Silkscreen Project, I was somewhat outside the art world. By the early 1980s I felt the need to find a place within the art community that focused on women. It was then that I became involved with a women's cooperative known as Central Hall. The Silkscreen Project and Central Hall projects existed separately but side by side.

ED

Tell me more about Central Hall. It was a women's gallery, correct?

JC

Yes, it was part of the women's cooperative gallery movement. There were three main galleries in New York City: A.I.R. Gallery, SOHO20 Gallery, and Central Hall Gallery. By the early 1980s, A.I.R. was already established; it was very structured, so I wasn't interested in it. SOHO20 didn't appeal to me either. But Central Hall, which had recently moved to West Broadway from its original location in Port Washington, in Long Island, didn't have set goals. Like silkscreen, it could go in different directions. It was open to new ideas. I became a member of Central Hall in 1981 ([Koppelman 1996](#)).

ED

Central Hall is vastly understudied in the history of women's cooperative galleries today. I wonder why that is?

JC

Could it be because of the Latin American direction it took? I co-organized several exhibitions there. The first one, *Latin American Women Artists Living in New York*, I co-organized with Central Hall members Katie Seiden and Majorie Apper-McKevitt. It included fifteen women artists from seven different countries in the Americas, who were living in New York. Then in 1985, with Kathie Brown and Janet Vicario, I co-organized *Choice Works*, an exhibition with thirty women on reproductive rights, and the following year, an exhibition on the environment. I also helped to start a *Latin American Women Artists Series*, which was a combination of poetry readings, film, and video events. Central Hall became a very exciting and creative art space in the middle of mainstream SoHo.

ED

Was Central Hall pivotal for you as a feminist artist? In your art work, you often take up issues around women.

JC

Central Hall was a space for me to exercise my feminist views. It was a place to be active. I didn't have a community of artists before joining this cooperative. Central Hall became the right venue because all the artist members were white Americans and I believed working with different cultural views could take us further. I liked the idea of organizing jointly. In the mid 1980s, I was aware that

mostly white feminists needed to include an “other”. We were tokens but we had a voice, if used well. I tried using it.

ED

How did you go about involving other Latin American artists with Central Hall? Were the women whom you included in *Latin American Women Artists Living in New York*, artists that you already knew?

JC

No. Some I knew only by name like Ana Mendieta. I already knew Catalina Parra and Liliana Porter. I had to search for different ones. I wanted to expand the participants and be out of the perceived ghetto of Latin American art.

ED

Did these women become a kind of community for you?

JC

Yes. They reinforced that I felt more Latin American than Brazilian. Although Brazil had not yet started to pursue a significant policy of engagement with its neighbors, many Brazilians were living under similar military dictatorships as those in other Latin American countries. I identified with the experience of oppression lived by all of them.

Growing up, I sensed a certain Brazilian arrogance vis a vis other South American countries, which it is not there anymore. I would say, in fact, it is quite the contrary. I also had the opportunity in New York to speak more Spanish than Portuguese because of my involvement with 1980s inter-American solidarity movements.

ED

Your project *Conexus/Connections* (Figure 4), which was a collaboration between 32 women artists from Brazil and the U.S., seems to explore a similar set of issues, in that it adopts a comparative lens in relation to Brazil.

JC

This is why the *Conexus/Connections* project, which I organized with Sabra Moore beginning in 1985, became so important for me (Carvalho and Moore 1986). It was the first time I presented myself as a Brazilian. We developed an exhibition and a set of nine collaborative artist books that looked at the themes of birth, blood, shelter, body, environment, spirit, race, and war/death through a comparative lens of Brazil and the U.S. We were interested in both capturing the specificities of our culture’s expectations around gender and also offering a transnational comparison of them.

The exhibition opened at the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MoCHA) in New York City in 1987, together with a Latin American women artists event. It travelled to the Southeastern Massachusetts Art Gallery in 1988 and then to the Museum of Contemporary Art in São Paulo in 1989. It was not recognized by the media and art world because of its feminist focus and has yet to receive much scholarly attention. Today, Ana Mae Barbosa, then the museum’s director in São Paulo, considers it the first feminist exhibition presented in Brazil.



Figure 4. Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore, *Connections Project/Conexus*[*Projeto Conexões/Conexus*], 1986, photocopies on Howard Bond Permalife Paper and screenprint on Indian handmade paper, 8.6 × 5.5 × 0.8 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

MoCHA opened in 1985 to showcase the work of so-called Hispanic artists who were underrepresented by mainstream institutions. Its predecessor, the Cayman Gallery, was another space dedicated to Hispanic culture. But, in her 1983 essay *Is There a Space for Latin American Artists?* Carla Stellweg argues that spaces as these, which declare themselves “Latin American or Hispanic,” are limiting to Latin American artists who do not always feel that their work aligns with their community orientation (Stellweg 1983). What art spaces were available to Latin American artists living in New York City in the 1980s? For instance, Franklin Furnace, which was founded in 1976 by Martha Wilson as an exhibition and performance space, usually does not get discussed in relationship to Latin American artists. Yet your work was exhibited there. How did you become involved with this arts organization?

JC

Martha invited me to participate in an artist’s book exhibition in 1983. My work, a pocket book, consisted of eight panels constructed in the shape of large envelopes suspended from the ceiling. Photographs and text were silkscreened on transparent polyester. It was titled *From the Memory Books of Underdevelopment* (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Josely Carvalho, *From the Memory Books of Underdevelopment*, 1983, Artist book, 8 pockets, silkscreen, dyes on silk and acrylic, different sizes. Courtesy of the artist. Image credit: Pat Kilgore, used by permission.

ED

How did you select the title *From the Memory Books of Underdevelopment*? Did it refer at all to Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* from 1968?

JC

The concept of books within books is ingrained in how I see the totality of my art practice. Probably, the addition of “Underdevelopment” was intended to reference the poverty and hunger in many Latin American countries, but mostly Brazil. I remember I saw *Memories of Underdevelopment* by Alea but can't say for sure if my title came from that film specifically. Writing poetry is a very intuitive process for me.

ED

Is Franklin Furnace where you met Fatima Bercht, with whom, in 1984, you organized *Solidarity Art by Mail* at Judson Memorial Church as part of the activist campaign Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America?

JC

No. I met Fatima in a solidarity street protest. I think it was on First Avenue. It was one of the demonstrations for which several banners were silkscreened at The Silkscreen Project. A little later, we co-organized *Solidarity Art by Mail* for Artists Call. I recently was very happy to reconnect with her through you. She couldn't believe that we still have all the mail art works organized and well kept.

ED

Tell me more about how you got involved with Artists Call.

JC

I don't remember exactly. It may have been through Lucy Lippard. Or it could have been through Nancy Spero and Leon Golub.

ED

Spero and Golub were important role models for many artists and activists in the 1980s.

JC

Yes, they were a very special couple. I may have also gotten involved with Artists Call through Group Material.

ED

Group Material organized an exhibition in 1982 at the community center Taller Latinoamericano called *¡Luchar! An Exhibition for the People of Central America*. Your silkscreen of a screaming woman was in it (Figure 6). Golub's *Napalm I*, from 1969, and Spero's *Torture of Women III*, from 1981, were both included as well ([Duganne forthcoming](#)).

JC

Yes, that may have been the seed.



Figure 6. Josely Carvalho, *The Rape of Emmatroupe*, 1981. Silkscreen and crayons on paper, 51 $\frac{1}{2}$ \times 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Courtesy of the artist. Image credit: Sarah Welss, used by permission.

ED

Yes, I think so too. After *¡Luchar!*, Daniel Flores y Ascencio, whose work was also in that exhibition, started the Institute of Arts and Letters of El Salvador in Exile (INALSE). In 1983, less than a year after the opening of *¡Luchar!*, Flores along with Dore Ashton and Noel Correa sent a letter on behalf of INALSE to a group of New York-based artists, writers, and activists, inviting them to attend a meeting to discuss the possibility of organizing an art exhibition at the United Nations in support of peace in Central America. It

seems that it is from this gathering that the more broadly-based activist campaign Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America emerged (Flores y Ascencio and Lippard 1984).

JC

Yes, yes. I remember Daniel. I always remember Daniel in association with Lucy. They were great friends. We had lots of discussions at the meetings, which were often held at Leon's or Lucy's loft and at Coosje van Bruggen's studio. She was a key organizer in the group as well.

ED

Your connection to Central America precedes your activism with Artists Call. As part of The Silkscreen Project, which you founded at St. Mark's Church in 1976, you helped inter-American solidarity groups produce materials for political rallies and demonstrations. What was your role in facilitating the participation of Latin American artists in Artists Call?

JC

With over 400 exhibitions happening as part of Artists Call across the country, most of the artists were living in the U.S. Fatima and I thought about mail art as a way to include artists from all countries in Latin America.

ED

This makes sense, given that in 1983 Fatima curated *Multiples by Latin American Artists*, an exhibition of artist books, pamphlets, posters, periodicals, and mail art at Franklin Furnace. It included artists from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay, Panama, and Guatemala (Bercht 1983).

JC

Yes. Fatima had a large list of artists working with mail art. We sent a call to these mail artists and also to artists in general who could really jump into the mail art structure and experience this format as a way of participating. One hundred and fifteen artists from 10 countries contributed.

ED

Did you decide on the mail art format because of the difficulty of trying to bring Latin American art to the United States to be part of Artists Call?

JC

Yes. It had to be simple. We had no money and not a lot of time. It was the only way.

ED

This must be why so much of the mail art you exhibited varies in size. You often think of mail art as being smaller and more consistent in format.

JC

Everyone worked as they wished. It was up to the individual artist. The work would just need to arrive by mail on time. We also wrote a text about the exhibition for Franklin Furnace's *Flue* (Figure 7). It was published in 1984 as part of a special issue called *Mail Art: Now and Then* (Bercht and Carvalho 1984).

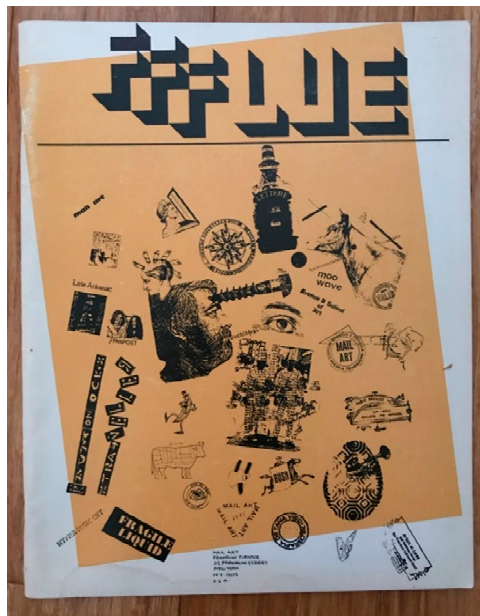


Figure 7. *Flue*, special issue *Mail Art: Then and Now*, vol. 4, issue 3 and 4 (Winter 1984).

ED

The mail art works were exhibited on tables at Judson Memorial Church (Figure 8). Were you happy with this display?



Figure 8. Installation shot, *Solidarity Art by Mail*, Judson Memorial Church benefit exhibition for Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, 1984. Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America, miscellaneous uncatalogued material, MoMA Library, used by permission.

JC

We were happy to be able to include Latin American artists not living in the U.S. Could it have been done better? Maybe. There was very little time and no money. Today looking at the installation shots one could say perhaps they could have been displayed differently.

ED

Artists Call was intended, in part, to raise money in support of Central American self-determination and culture. To that end, many of the exhibitions, including the one at Judson Memorial, where the mail art was displayed, were organized as benefits. Was the mail art for sale?

JC

I don't think so. I have every work documented ready to be donated to a museum or archive interested in Latin American mail art.

ED

Maybe it was just that certain works were for sale?

JC

I don't remember any transactions. I went to all the meetings and was part of the Steering Committee. Coosje's husband, Claes Oldenburg, designed the Artists Call poster, which we raised money to reproduce as an advertisement in the *New York Times* (Figure 9). The poster was based on Coosje's suggestion. Artists Call was not just in New York. It also took place in many cities in the U.S. For these locations, we had to use our connections. Lucy was key to finding places for these exhibitions. I don't remember if the poster by Claes listed the artists who contributed with mail art.

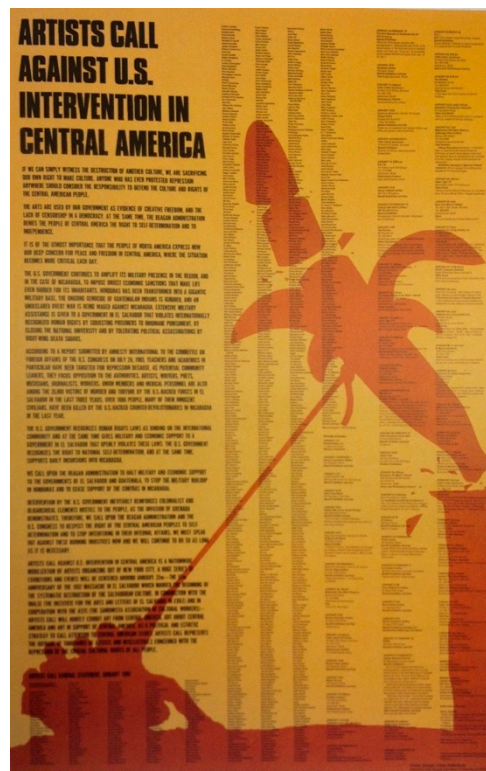


Figure 9. Claes Oldenburg, poster for Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, 1984, offset printed, 37 × 24 inches. Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America, miscellaneous uncatalogued material, MoMA Library, used by permission.

ED

The poster only lists the names of the participating venues in New York City. It does not include any artists' names. It does include the Yvonne Séguy Gallery, which is where another exhibition that you curated was held. The exhibition was titled *Rape/Intervention* (Cockcroft 1984) (Figure 10).

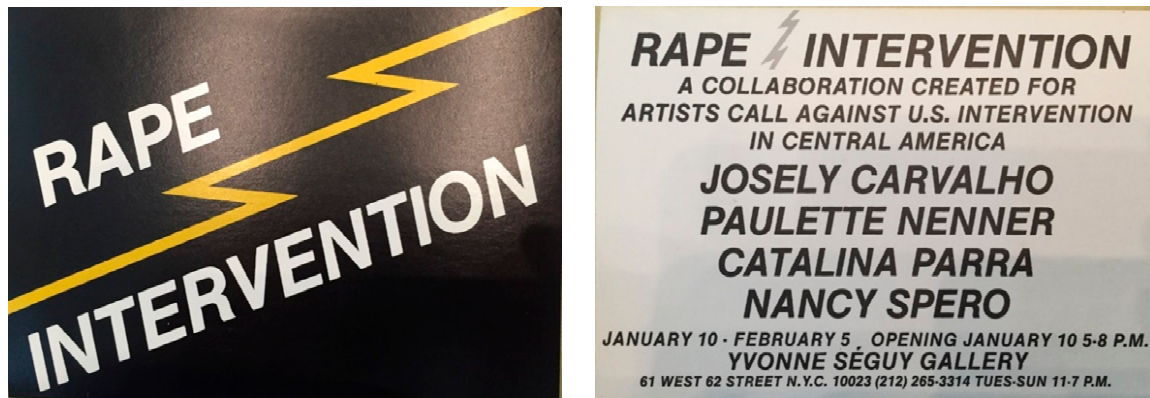


Figure 10. *Rape/Intervention*, Yvonne Séguy Gallery, postcard announcement for Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, 1984. Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America, miscellaneous uncatalogued material, MoMA Library, used by permission.

JC

Yes. I had a solo exhibition at this gallery as well. The owner was from Chile. Yvonne Séguy was the name of his wife.

ED

Did this gallery traditionally support Latin American artists?

JC

Yes. Catalina Parra and Ana Mendieta showed in this gallery as well.

ED

Can you tell me more about where the idea for curating *Rape/Intervention* came from?

JC

Rather than curating, I would say organizing. For me, the making of this show was an art work in itself. At that time, I was working on a larger series on rape and intervention.

ED

The exhibition included work by you, Paulette Nenner, Catalina Parra, and Nancy Spero. How did you select these women?

JC

The idea was to create a structure where Latin American and North American artists would work together. It was probably a result of my own bi-national identity.

ED

In *Rape/Intervention*, you exhibited six silkscreen panels, which together were called *Craters of Blood*, I believe.

JC

Rape/Intervention, the title of the exhibition, was also the title of this installation. To avoid misinterpretation, I changed the title of the installation to *Craters of Blood*, which I never liked.

ED

Why not?

JC

I think it is too dramatic.

ED

Did you make this work specifically for *Rape/Intervention*, or you were using an already existing body of work for this exhibition?

JC

I was actually doing a whole series or what I like to call a chapter on rape. The series began in the early 1980s with the silkscreen of a woman screaming, which was included in Group Material's exhibition *¡Luchar!* (Figure 6). I later made *Rape of a Culture*, which included photographs from an old book about Guatemala. *Craters of Blood* was part of this larger series (Figure 11). It was a connection between the rape of a woman and the rape of a culture.

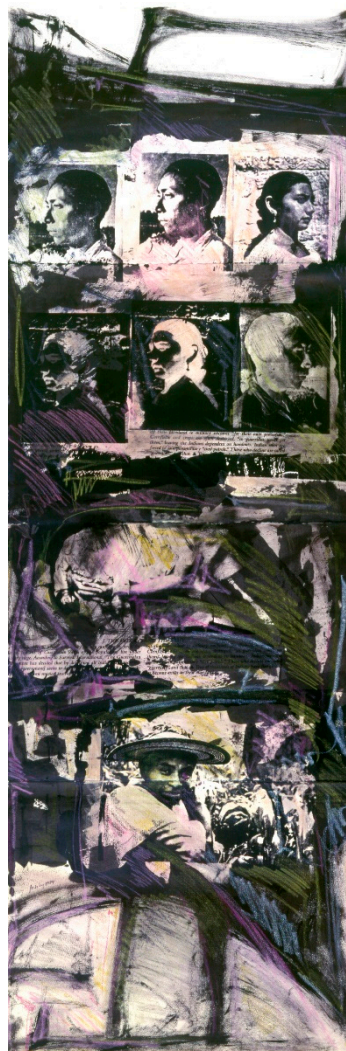


Figure 11. Josely Carvalho, *Rape of a Culture*, 1984, silkscreen, Indian ink and crayon on paper, 88 × 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist. Image credit: Sarah Welss, used by permission.

ED

What photographs were you working with for *Craters of Blood*?

JC

For the *Craters of Blood* installation, I silkscreened photographs from Brazil and El Salvador (Figure 12). Daniel Flores from Artists Call gave me images of soldiers and guerrillas in Central America. One panel includes one of my poetic texts from my artist book *From the Memory Books of Underdevelopment*.



Figure 12. Josely Carvalho, *Craters of Blood*, 1984, 6 panels of various sizes, silkscreen, crayon, and dyes on silk. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

When the panels were displayed at Yvonne Séguy Gallery, they were not framed but instead were suspended from the ceiling (Figure 13). Why did you display them in that manner?

JC

I wanted movement and fragility in the installation. I also wanted to bring the public closer to the work. They could walk through the transparent panels. Layers and transparencies have been present in my paintings and installations perhaps as metaphor of uncertain borders. When only a single panel was included in Deborah Wye's exhibition *Committed to the Print* in 1988, she displayed it framed (Wye 1988).



Figure 13. Josely Carvalho, *Craters of Blood*, 1984, 6 panels of various sizes, silkscreen, crayon, and dyes on silk. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

Craters of Blood is made up of six panels that range from 77 to 91 inches in length. You work in that vertical format a lot. What draws you to this structure? Do you think of the panels as scrolls or in terms of the human body?

JC

It was not the format but the content that was associated to the body. My tiny studio in St. Mark's Church's dictated the scroll format. I did all my work on two six feet long tables, the same tables we would use to make the silkscreen banners for the demonstrations. At that time, I signed the banners as The Silkscreen Project, and kept my individual work separate. I continued working with pieces from The Silkscreen Project after it was finished in 1987, perhaps as a metaphor for the fragments that make up our lives. My present series of installations is made up of glass shards. Perhaps they are better reflections of our world today.

ED

I am interested in how you came to use photography in your work? Was it solely through the silkscreen process or for another reason?

JC

Photography was an instrument of documentation and silkscreen became the medium to imprint the captured image. At that time my darkroom was set up to process high contrast film only and my photographs were all black and white. When I was behind the camera, I saw the image printed through the silkscreen. Photographic silkscreen took me closer to the world around me and yet allowed me to maintain a screen through which I could perceive elusively its layers and meanings. I still take pictures today and keep them on file. I hoard them for the times when they acquire a reason to be used. There is no chronology in this process; only the connection of past, present, and future. Parts were silkscreened, printed, torn, burnt, glued, sewn, patched, and so on. Today, I work with digital photography as a printmaker.

ED

Many of the photographs that you silkscreen in your work are ones that you have taken yourself. Correct?

JC

Yes, I like to be behind the camera. It's another layer. It changes my perception of the subject or object. There is a 'peeping tom' quality that also embarrasses me.

ED

But some of the photographs that you silkscreen are ones that you find?

JC

Some are found in newspapers, others I discover while researching on the internet, some are given to me, and most I take. I still keep a very large archive of 35 mm black and white negatives.

ED

Are any of them from your family?

JC

Yes. I started with old photographs of the women in my family. I then extended to photographs of my sister and friends in the early 1970s. The body was the focus.

ED

The nude women that you've photographed, you always knew them (Figure 14)?



Figure 14. Josely Carvalho, *Female Tales of Purgatory*, 1983, silkscreen and crayon on paper, 30 × 22.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist. Image credit: Sarah Welss, used by permission.

JC

Yes. I looked for their strength and their friendship. It was mostly in the early 1970s and little bit in the 1980s when I photographed women and men in the nude.

ED

You seem to vary the kind of materials onto which you silkscreen. Some materials are more transparent or translucent. While others are more sheer. Some you can't see through at all.

JC

I silkscreen on paper, cloth, wood, plexiglass, walls, and more. Actually, the installation *Cirandas*, which I made in the 1990s, was printed ninety percent direct on the walls (Figure 15). Once I finished the exhibition, the walls were painted over. I have never created editions. They were all one of a kind. Silkscreen was merely my brush.

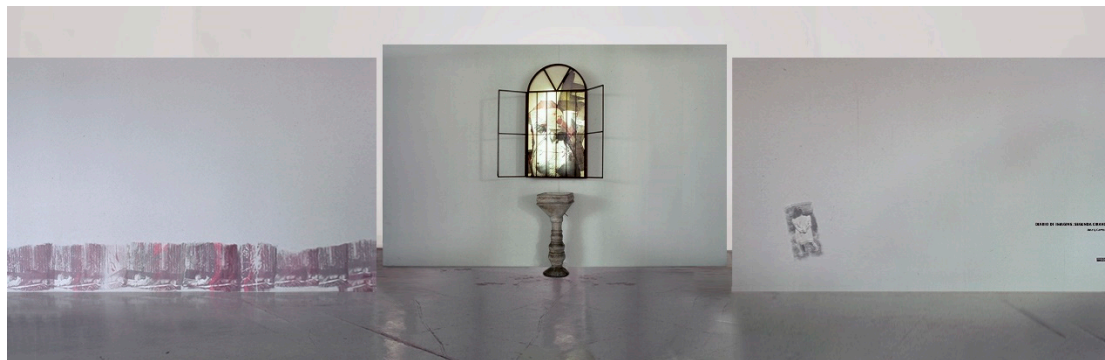


Figure 15. Josely Carvalho, *Cirandas II*, 1994. Installation: silkscreen on walls, light box window, U.N. Declaration of Children's Rights printed under water in baptismal font. Exterior view. Museu de Arte Contemporânea MAC/USP, São Paulo. Courtesy of the artist.

ED

And the words? Do you only use text that you write or also text that you find?

JC

Most of the texts are my poems. Sometimes phrases come from newspapers when they document a particular event or story.

ED

When you write the text, do you mainly write in English or in Portuguese?

JC

This is an interesting question. I usually write in English and then rewrite in Portuguese. When I write in English, I don't have the constraints of having learned the language as a child. English as a language is more flexible and adaptable. I feel free to invent words. I can cut and even change a letter. It gives me poetic license. I perceive Portuguese grammar as very structured. Perhaps, the years of Latin classes and philology have made the language too confining for me.

ED

Hearing you describe how you use language and photography, and given your position between two places, makes me think about translation and how it functions in terms of your work. Do you think about your work in terms of translation or even mistranslation?

JC

I like your idea seeing the work in terms of translation. As I travel from English to Portuguese and from photography to silkscreen, from sculpture to smells, miscegenation takes over between the

crevices. I'm usually in the intersection. I may want to translate the poems I write but often I cannot say exactly the same thing in both languages. I am forced to search for new meanings.

ED

I want to conclude by turning to your involvement with the woman's group Heresies Collective. Did some of the same difficulties you just described about translation and difference in terms of language also apply to your involvement with this group?

JC

I don't remember how I got involved with Heresies. Could it had been that they needed a "Latina"? There was not a lot of participation of other members of the collective, with the exception of Lucy Lippard, in the 1993 *Latina*, the last Heresies issue before the publication ended (Carvalho et al. 1993).

ED

What led you to want to be involved with Heresies? Was it because of your commitment to women's issues? Heresies was founded in part to change the political climate as it related to women.

JC

Heresies was a wonderful collective. But I never felt that I really fit completely and yet I learned a lot. Here I'm talking mainly about the relationship between North Americans and Latin Americans within Heresies. For me it was a wonderful opportunity to increase my involvement with women's issues in the art world. We had common intentions and yet we were very different. But we worked well together. And yet, I was surprised when the movie *The Heretics* was produced, I was not interviewed. Does that omission mean something?

ED

Is part of the issue that you are raising here about difference within feminism? Was your perspective singular coming from Brazil? Was there specificity around your interest in women's issues that was perhaps different from many of the North American women artists involved with Heresies?

JC

Probably. In 1980, I was invited to the U.N. Mid-Decade Conference for Women in Copenhagen, Denmark, where I participated in a panel and used silkscreen to make collective banners in solidarity with the miners of Bolivia (Tinker 1982). I met a few Brazilian feminists who were social scientists. We discussed the social and economic inequalities that prevailed in Brazil and in other Latin American countries and how women were working together with men to change these situations. It made sense, for me. So, when I entered into the feminist art movement in the United States I came with this perspective. The perspective of feminism at that time in the United States, on the other hand, was more micro vis a vis these Latin American feminists.

ED

Where were you politicized, then, as an artist? Did your ideas about political activism in fact come from Brazil, even though, as you began this interview, you never felt that you belonged there?

JC

I was politicized outside of Brazil but I never lost contact with this country. I had to learn how to perceive and absorb from the other side of the ocean. Perhaps, my working with layers and transparencies come from that distant, hazy horizon of Brazil. Nothing was defined. Most of my installations have kept this duality of not being there physically but being there emotionally. At the same time, I cannot help but think about these struggles to digest difference in the 1970s and 1980s in

terms of the angry regression we are currently experiencing today. I have to ask: haven't we seen this film already? What can we learn from returning to the memories from this period of time?

There was a tension in the art world in the 1980s, which I did not find in my activist work with The Silkscreen Project. Could it be competition? I could not accept the constant labels placed on us, such as Hispanic, Latina, Third World, women of color, and even now, LatinX! There was, at that time, a need to categorize, whether out of political purpose or naiveté, and, most probably, a disguised racism. To accept these categories was to become a racialized object rather than a subject. There are cultural differences within Latin America and also differences between Latin Americans living in the U.S. But we don't need labels. We should just be.

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