

“Memoria Catalina: Patricia Ariza”

2014. Mixed media wall construction, collage, and Plexiglas. 24”w x 50”h x 9”d.

David Feinberg, Beth Andrews, Antony Lakey, and storyteller Patricia Ariza, with contributions from artists Emily Weber, Dylan Hansen, Michele Coppin, Sabine Darling and writer Carissa Hansen.

Patricia Ariza is an activist for human rights and justice in Colombia. During political conflicts in Colombia, the police force and the state itself have posed the biggest threat to civilians. In response to injustices associated with these political conflicts, Patricia began a theater program and directs street theater performances. The performances involve hundreds of civilians and aim to spread awareness of human rights and social justice. One of her most well-known plays, *Antigona*, has created dialogue concerning proper burials of rebels, the disappeared, and “false positives” – civilians who have been kidnapped, dressed in guerrilla uniforms and killed by the Colombian government to increase body counts.

The police force in Colombia directly brutalized Patricia and many of her friends during her adult life, but her experience with injustice began when she was just an adolescent. Patricia went to a Catholic girls’ school in Colombia that was near an army base. She recalls falling in love with one of the men in the army, but she says she knew it was an “impossible love.” Nevertheless, she decided to write a fictitious story in her diary in which the relationship between her and the soldier was possible. In order to hide the contents of the story from the strict nuns in the school, she kept her story secret by writing the story backwards. The nuns eventually discovered what the story said, and she was expelled from the Catholic school. Patricia says that this was her first experience with injustice both personally and artistically.

One of the most significant instances of injustice that Patricia witnessed during her adult life involved one of her close friends named Bernardo. Bernardo was travelling early in the morning with his wife when the police injured him. The police brought him to a police clinic. When Patricia heard about what had happened to her friend on the radio, she rushed to the police clinic. When she got there, they refused to let her in and they punched her in the chest. When they finally let

Patricia into the clinic, she encountered Bernardo's wife who was covered in blood. Later on she learned that Bernardo was dead.

During her interview, we presented Patricia with a collection of objects and asked her to select a few and explain why she chose them. She selected a masked figurine and the figurine of a naked woman that appears at the center of the piece. She says that the masked figurine reminds her of the men associated with the state because she never saw their faces. The naked woman represents exposure and women's rights issues that Patricia serves as an activist for.

At the very bottom of the piece is Patricia's drawing of her daughter, Catalina, and her daughter's father, Santiago García. Photos of each of them appear on the wooden dowel at the top of the piece. Santiago co-founded Patricia's theater program with her and played a large role in her activism. Patricia made numerous sacrifices involving her daughter because of her activism. At one point Patricia had to go into exile in order to avoid being killed by the government and militias, and during this time she had to leave her daughter in Cuba. Despite these sacrifices, Patricia is responsible for rallying hundreds of people to promote awareness of human injustice issues and she is now internationally known for her activism. Because of this international notoriety and because of a shift in government policy, she was able to return to Colombia without fear of assassination. Through her plays about common people, Patricia now serves as an intermediary between political groups and the government. In 2014, she won an international award from the League of Professional Theater Women.