

# **“Journeys to Rawson Prison”**

*2014. Mixed media. 40”w x 16.5”h.*

***David Feinberg, Beth Andrews, Antony Lakey and storyteller Arístides Vargas, with contributions from artists Dylan Hansen, Michele Coppin, Sara Feinberg, Diana Albrecht, Tessa Loeffler and writer Carissa Hansen.***

Arístides Vargas comes from a family of Argentinians who were hit hard by the dictatorships in Argentina in the 1970s. Arístides was exiled from Argentina when he was just 20 years old and moved to Ecuador. He is a playwright who focuses on themes of recovering memory, exile, imprisonment and travel. He sees himself as a “late writer” because much of his writing centers on the events surrounding his exile and his brother’s imprisonment by the Argentinian government. He says he is just now beginning to process these events through his plays.

Arístides’ brother, Chicho, was imprisoned in Rawson Prison in Patagonia. A replica of the prison’s towers appears at the top of Arístides’ piece. Rawson Prison is infamous for the Trelew massacre in which 16 prisoners were executed after attempting to escape. His brother was incarcerated for being a member of the youth wing of the Peronist political party. The party was a mixture of people from the far left and the far right. Arístides and his father visited Chicho at Rawson many times, spending days making the grueling trek by train. Arístides’ father died on one of these journeys to visit his son in Patagonia. Arístides’ recent play, *La Razón Blindada*, is based on Chicho’s imprisonment and stories of how he and other prisoners escaped prison life through storytelling and acting.

Snow is a motif in Arístides’ life, which is why the color white is a dominant color in his piece. Seeing the snow in Minnesota while on his way to the interview with the Voice to Vision team brought him back to his childhood. He grew up in Mendoza, Argentina by the Andes, which are covered in snow. When Arístides moved to Ecuador he missed the snow, and he says that in his mind it was always snowing. The design of Arístides’ piece pertains to another recurring symbol in his life: a train. One of Arístides’ childhood memories consists of he and his mother waiting for something to happen at a snow covered train station. For Arístides, the train station represents the idea of a trek or a journey. Consequently, travel is a motif in most of Arístides’ plays.

His plays often feature people with suitcases and bags waiting to go somewhere.

Arístides says that exile is a thought or a state of mind. When people ask him why he didn't return to Argentina after being exiled, he tells them that it doesn't matter that he *can* return. He says that returning is a decision that has to "be born in his mind." When we asked him if he would be safe to return to Argentina now, he said yes because impunity is no longer as prevalent in Argentina and people are being tried and punished for crimes associated with the corrupt dictatorships of Argentina's past. However, he feels the trials are often incomplete and unsatisfying, and many intellectuals and victims of the dictatorships feel that justice is still a problematic issue for Latin Americans.