

“Seven Activists and a Brother”

2014. Mixed media wall construction, collage, and Plexiglas. 55”w x 14”d x 12.5”h.

David Feinberg, Beth Andrews, Antony Lakey and storytellers Luis Ramos-Garcia, Ernesto Silva, Demetrio Anzaldo González, Davide Carnevali, Carlos Satizábal, Gerson Guerra, Paulo Guerra and Nelsy Echávez-Solano with contributions from artists Dylan Hansen, Michele Coppin, Sara Feinberg, Diana Albrecht, Tessa Loeffler and writer Carissa Hansen.

“Seven Activists and a Brother” is a piece of collaborative artwork created by seven human rights activists who participated in *The State of the Iberoamerican Studies Series: Human Rights Across the Disciplines* conference at the University of Minnesota in March 2014. Each collaborator gave a personal testimony during a workshop-interview with the Voice to Vision team. In order to draw out their testimonies, the activists were prompted to create a collage from a set of abstract images. Then the Voice to Vision team presented the activists with a set of nine photographs representing nine different occupations. The activists used their abstract collages to determine which photograph they were most drawn to, and they told personal stories based on their selections. Finally, the activists were asked to create a personal symbol using their hands. Miniature versions of the collages, photographs of the hand symbols, and many of the photographs they selected appear on the piece. One of the participant’s brothers gave his testimony to the Voice to Vision team as well.

Luis Ramos-Garcia

Luis Ramos-Garcia is an Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Studies at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. He is currently researching and writing a book on South American street theater, which is used as a way to bring awareness to human rights issues and injustice. As part of his research, he visited a women’s prison in South America. During Luis’ testimony he told the story of meeting one of the prisoners, Elena Iparraguirre, the wife of the leader of Peru’s Communist Party called Shining Path. Out of a crowd of other female prisoners, she pointed at Luis and told him to come to her cell. Elena wanted to show Luis a painting that she was doing. Luis says he was surprised that she wanted to talk to him because up until that point they did not know each other. During their meeting he realized that she was responsible for killing thousands of

people. Elena sought to convey the message that women were in charge through her painting. However, Luis saw a contradiction to that message. He pointed out that in one corner Elena had painted a woman handing something to a man, thus symbolizing a woman giving up power to a man. Luis says that this was probably the first time in a long time that someone told Elena Iparraguirre she was wrong.

Ernesto Silva

Ernesto Silva was born in Lima, Peru, and is now an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Spanish at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. During his interview with the Voice to Vision team, Ernesto created a collage of shapes that he associated with the creation of life, offspring, and family. Prompted by these associations, he told the story of the birth of his son. In 2005, he had a son with a woman in Las Vegas. Ernesto was present for his son's birth and cut the umbilical cord, but his son's mother was apprehensive about Ernesto being a father to her child. Ernesto says she was worried "because I am Peruvian and I may take him away to the jungles of the Amazon." So, she took Ernesto's son away, and he has not seen him since. A miniature version of Ernesto's collage appears on his panel in the piece.

Much of Ernesto's work revolves around issues of immigration, and he sees the story of his son's birth and his separation from him as an immigration story. He describes it as a story "of a very important moment in the development of a family trying to establish itself in a new place."

When asked to create a hand symbol, Ernesto formed a twisted shape with his arms and fingers. The hand symbol appears on his panel in the piece. He remembers having difficulty making the symbol as a child. He says the symbol "has to do with the twisted life that sometimes we don't know what it's going to bring forth."

Demetrio Anzaldo González

Demetrio Anzaldo González is an Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He grew up in a neighborhood in Mexico City where very rich and very poor families lived side by side. He played with wealthiest children in the neighborhood, but belonged to one of the poorest families in the neighborhood. When he was a young child he became extremely ill and does not remember what happened for four and a half months of his life. When Demetrio's friends came over asking for him while he was sick his mother would tell them, "Be quiet, the baby is sleeping." She called the act of sleeping "meme," a made-up word that she would use to help Demetrio fall asleep. After recovering, this word became his new nickname and it has stuck with him throughout his life. The "MM" that

appears on Demetrio's panel in the artwork represents his nickname and is a tribute to his mother or as he says, "mi madre." Demetrio has a deep respect and admiration for women, and he tries to be part of the movement seeking to change Mexican cultural attitudes toward women.

When asked to create a hand symbol, Demetrio chose to make a triangle. The triangle is a very important image in Demetrio's life and it represents his inclination to see everything from different angles. A photograph of Demetrio's hands making the triangle symbol appears on his panel surrounding his painted depiction of the same symbol. Demetrio says, "The triangle for me has no specific position. You can twist it, turn it around, because everything is in movement." For Demetrio, the triangle is a symbol that represents the idea that everything in life is connected.

Davide Carnevali

Davide Carnevali is an Italian playwright from Milan. During Davide's testimony, he spoke of what he calls a "contrast" within himself. On one hand, Davide says he yearns for stability and security, but on the other hand he says he lives in a "fragmented world."

Davide associates this contrast with his family's history. Davide's mother's family comes from a small village near Milan. None of his mother's family members had left this village until his mother. Davide's father's family is more fragmented. His paternal grandfather came from a small village, but moved with Davide's great-grandfather to an Italian colony in Africa when he was a boy. In Africa, Davide's great-grandfather opened an Italian restaurant, but the family moved again after just a few years at the start of WWII. Eventually, Davide's grandfather settled near Milan and opened a new restaurant. However, after he lost everything, he moved to the United States where he worked as a chef, leaving the rest of his family, including Davide's father, behind. To Davide, his mother's side represents stability and his father's side represents fragmentation and immigration.

Davide also sees the concept of fragmentation in his work as a playwright. In his writing, he aims to work against coherent, linear story lines and instead tries to create an "atmosphere" that is closer to how we actually experience reality. One of Davide's plays is about Alzheimer's disease. This subject matter allows Davide to explore fragmentation in his writing because he says a person with Alzheimer's can "live in different spaces and different times at the same time and in the same place." Davide has had a grandfather and a grandmother who experienced Alzheimer's.

Carlos Satizábal

Carlos Satizábal is a Colombian poet, playwright, actor, and human rights activist. As part of his activism, he works alongside Patricia Ariza, a

well-known Colombian playwright and activist, in leading a street theater program for victims and survivors of violent political movements in Colombia.

During Carlos' testimony, he was presented with several images and selected one that he was drawn to. He chose an image of a black robe much like one a priest would wear. When Carlos was a young man he thought he wanted to become a priest. He says he thought about this as an adolescent because as a child he hated priests due to an incident when a priest tried to rape him. Another reason that he chose the image of the robe is because in one of the productions he acted in he played a priest who was one of the greatest criminals in Colombia's history. The priest, whose character is based on a real political leader from the 1950s, used his position to call for liberals and Communists in Colombia to be killed.

When asked to create a collage with shapes provided by the Voice to Vision team, Carlos created a collage that he described as fragmented. He associates fragmentation with war, which he says is a reality that he lives with in Colombia, where political genocide and violence have been prevalent. Millions of people in Colombia have died as a result of political genocide. Carlos says, "War divides us, cuts us, separates us, makes us run away" and now people in Colombia "are looking for peace."

Gerson Guerra

Gerson Guerra is an actor from Ecuador who has worked alongside Arístides Vargas in a number of theatrical productions. Gerson's father is from Ecuador and his mother is from Brazil. When the Voice to Vision team presented Gerson with a set of images during his interview, he was drawn to an image of a referee's uniform because it reminded him of games he used to play as a young boy. From the time Gerson was four years old, he would sneak out of the house with his brother to go on "adventures." During one adventure, he remembers sneaking onto an airport landing strip.

These early attempts to escape were precursors for escapism as a recurring theme in Gerson's life. As an adult, Gerson dealt with alcoholism and drug addiction, which he says served as a means of escape and entertainment for him. However, after being confronted by his mother and father about his addiction, Gerson eventually asked for help and found a healthier outlet for escapism and creativity through theater.

Paulo Guerra

Paulo Guerra is from Ecuador and is Gerson Guerra's younger brother. He lives in Chicago as an artist and engineer. During Paulo's testimony, he spoke of dealing with acceptance in his life. Because he was the youngest in the family, Paulo recalls being kept outside the house during the last days of

his grandfather's life and wondering what was happening inside. When he was allowed to enter the house, he remembers seeing his grandfather turn into a fish in his imagination. The days leading up to Paulo's grandfather's death have stayed with him his entire life, and he sees his grandfather's transformation into a fish as a way he tried to accept or rationalize what was happening. It took Paulo twenty-two years to accept that he never really knew his grandparents. He even made a special trip to visit their graves in Brazil.

Nelsy Echávez-Solano

Nelsy Echávez-Solano is an author, scholar, and Professor of Hispanic Studies at the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University in Minnesota. Her areas of research include Linguistics, Language Acquisition, Latin American Literature, Latin American Studies, U.S. Latino and Hispanic Theaters and Cultures, Transatlantic Studies and Human Rights. Though she has never been interviewed on camera by the Voice to Vision team, she has been present two years in a row for the interviews of other participants in the *Iberoamerican Studies Series* conference and she collaborated with Luis Ramos-Garcia in organizing the conference. She is also collaborating with Luis Ramos-Garcia in researching information for a book on South American street theater. In the "Seven Activists and a Brother" piece, she contributed the orange question mark and a photograph of her hands which can be seen on the far right side of the piece.