

Y HABRA TRABAJO PARA TODOS

Contextualising the Chilean Mural at Leeds University Union



Public Symposium

Friday 16th February 2018

Pyramid Theatre, Leeds University Union Building

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In 1976, a group of Chileans in exile painted a mural on a student common room wall in the Leeds University Union building. Later hidden behind a temporary ceiling and kitchen wall, the mural was finally uncovered in 2017.

To mark the restoration and interpretation of the mural, this symposium will examine the different visual and political contexts within which we can situate the LUU Chilean mural. Invited academics and arts professionals will present a series of examples which explore the politics and poetics of public art, politics and murals in Chilean, South American and other global contexts.

Schedule

13.00 – 13.20 Registration & Welcome

13.20 - 14.50 **Session 1**

- **Mario Alvarez Fuentes**
- **Uncovering the Chilean Mural MA Student Group**
- **Kasia Breska**

14.50 - 15.20 Coffee Break

15.20 – 16.50 **Session 2**

- **Nicole Cristi**
- **Lisa Blackmore**
- **Cara Levey**

16.50 – 17.00 Break

17.00 – 17.30

- **Jan Nimmo**

From 17.30 Drinks Reception and mural viewing

Abstracts and Biographies

Mario Álvarez Fuentes, University of Leeds

Making the meaningless meaningful: The pathway to the mural's restoration

This presentation aims to show the journey from the discovery until the restoration of the Chilean Mural in the Leeds Student Union. It all started on April 6, 2017 when I saw a massive Chilean flag painted in a wall, a closer look also let me identify the characteristic features of Brigadas Muralistas artwork that spread in Chile during the 60's and 70's. Since then, a team of four Chileans begun lobbying the Leeds Student Union for its restoration. The lobby consisted of putting the deteriorated materiality of the mural into a broader perspective of meaning. The team was formed by Victoria Vargas, a Chilean MA student in the Faculty of Arts, Gilberto Hernández, former Chilean exile and one of the painters of the mural in 1976, and Pedro Fuentes, former exile and leader of the Chilean Community Association in Sheffield. This presentation aims to present the main arguments we put forward to convince the Student Union about the significance of this mural and the necessity of its restoration. We highlighted its uniqueness as artwork, its relevance as historic document and its potential to help understand grassroots movements' forms of political communication.

Mario Álvarez Fuentes is a PhD student in the School of Media and Communication at Leeds. A former journalist in Chile, he is interested in the relationship between politics and the media.

MA students from Art Gallery & Museum Studies, University of Leeds

Uncovering the Chilean Mural - Interpreting Cultures Project



Illustration: Emily Merriott. Images with thanks to MA Interpreting Cultures Project, Uncovering the Chilean Mural

As part of the Art Gallery and Museum Studies MA Interpreting Cultures module our group worked alongside staff at Leeds University Union and members of the Chilean Community to develop a range of interpretive methods to promote the murals history. We will discuss the interpretive approaches we took and the materials we developed in order to do this.

Uncovering the Chilean Mural was an Interpreting Cultures student project developed by **Hitomi Ishida, Abigail King, Peitong Li, Emily Merriott, Sufea Mohamad Noor,** and **Sarah Rainey.**

Kasia Breska, Independent artist, Leeds

Murals as a site specific art- translating qualities of space into visual language of symbols and colours.

In her talk during the symposium Kasia will bring a number of examples of large scale mural projects executed in Leeds and beyond. The emphasis will be on the creative process leading up to the execution of a mural, including research, design and the final painting. Kasia will talk about the importance of site sensitivity, site specific approach towards her designs, interaction with communities, working with map typology, language scripts, symbolism of physical elements of the space, multi-dimensional integration of facts and knowledge, the role of art within an architectural space and a city as a habitat.

Additionally, as an artist behind the restoration of the Chilean mural, she will reveal the technical and contextual challenges faced during the project and the importance of preserving the painting.

Kasia Breska works as an artist with passion for developing places and spaces into a 'habitat' where relationship between the person and the place is based on the qualities of architecture and physical structures, as well as the space between them.

She is hugely influenced by the architectural philosophy of Jan Gehl who said: first we shape the cities - then they shape us. She uses art to 'shape' the environment in a way that allows to establish a feeling of connection, belonging, interaction with others and caring. In other words, she strives to work in a way that brings the city space closer to the idea of lively and sustainable city, where human scale is once again brought up and emphasised.

She mostly works within the technique of mural, where the main themes are geometry, symbolism, human script and vast spaces of colour. Her work is site specific which means that the final design is always influenced by the elements of the space itself - its architecture, landscape, history and people. As community and human interactions will always be at the core of the specifics of urban space, she puts a lot of focus to base the design on research done within people, the residents of a given area. It is achieved through a series of visits and dialogues, workshops and research into historical facts.

Nicole Cristi, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile / UCL

Political Posters of Resistance to Pinochet's Dictatorship in Chile

Like other Latin American countries, Chile suffered a coup that marked the course of its political, social, and economic history during the 1970s and 1980s. Augusto Pinochet led a dictatorship that lasted from the 11th of September 1973 to the triumph of the "No" in the 1989 plebiscite. During this period, the systematic State terrorism was resisted by political and grassroots organizations that even under the most adverse conditions of persecution, censorship and repression did not yield in the struggle against the neoliberal reforms, the violations of human rights and the demand for the return of democracy. The presentation is a critical examination of the role that graphic communication had as part of the opposition to the military dictatorship in Chile, following the history and experience of two collectives: Agrupación de Plásticos Jóvenes (Young Visual Artists Group, APJ) and Tallersol Cultural Center. Here, will be presents some of the findings of the research conducted between 2012 and 2016, recently published in the book *Resistencia gráfica, APJ-Tallersol, Dictadura en Chile* (Cristi & Manzi, 2016) focusing on the contextual conditions and systematic attacks against the graphic development in Chile from the dictatorship, and on the connections between the graphic communications and the muralism on this period.

Nicole Cristi is a designer with a degree in Aesthetics from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Currently a student of MA Material and Visual Culture in Anthropology at University College of London. Professor of history and theory of design in the School of Design in Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and Universidad de Chile. Researcher on design history, political graphic communication in Chile and on design production processes. Author of the book '*Resistencia Gráfica, Dictadura en Chile APJ-Tallersol*' (Cristi & Manzi, 2016), and the chapter '*A des-sitiar Chile*' (Cristi, 2013) in '*El Afiche Político en Chile 1973-2012*' (Vico, 2013). Project coordinator of "R. Red Archivo de la Resistencia", in the Red de Conceptualismo del Sur, aimed at the rescue, conservation, and dissemination of material made during the military dictatorship in Chile.

Lisa Blackmore, University of Essex

Painting over the past: Spectres of dictatorship in the Dominican Republic

The thirty-year dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo ushered in a consistent and ambitious era of myth-making, which sought to install the tyrant as the "Father of the New Homeland". Among the cultural artefacts that glorified the ruler, in 1944 Spanish emigré muralist José Vela Zannetti was commissioned to create a mural for the Palacio Consistorial in the historic main square of Ciudad Trujillo (today's Santo Domingo) which would offer a visual narrative of Dominican history in which El Jefe played a starring role, pictured astride a horse and dressed in military attire. Today, that mural still covers the walls of the building, but Trujillo has since been removed - painted over in a drive to expunge him from the cultural imaginary and physical landscape in the wake of postdictatorship. In this talk, I'll explore the mural and the questions it raises about the way in which memory is formed precariously at the intersection of traces of the past and voluntary amnesia.

Lisa Blackmore is Lecturer in Art History and Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Essex, where she teaches courses on Latin America culture. Her research centres on the intersection of modernism, authoritarianism and memory. She is the author of *Spectacular Modernity: Dictatorship, Space and Visuality in Venezuela 1948-1958* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), co-editor of *From Mall to Prison: El Helicoide's Downward Spiral* (Urban Research, 2017), and co-director of the research film *Después de Trujillo* (2016). Lisa has lectured at universities in Venezuela and the UK. From 2014-2017 she was a Postdoctoral Researcher on the project "Modernity and the Landscape in Latin America: Politics, Aesthetics, Ecology" at the University of Zurich.

Cara Levey, University College Cork, Ireland

Between Commemoration and Commodification: Palimpsestic Memory in Post-Dictatorship Uruguay

In 1994, Punta Carretas, the former Montevideo prison where political detainees were tortured during the 1973-85 Uruguayan dictatorship, was re-opened as a modern shopping mall by President Lacalle. Overshadowed by societal and political debates over whether to punish those responsible for human rights violations, the remodelling and conversion process can be read against a broader backdrop of legal impunity and 'moving on' from the past. (Lessa and Levey, 2012). Several years later, in a more favourable context, construction began on a memorial to those disappeared during the dictatorship began in a park on the fringes of the Uruguayan capital. However, in spite of this more propitious environment for revisiting the past, the Memorial, completed in 2001, was not safe from obsolescence (Levey 2012, 2014, 2016). In late 2009, controversy erupted over the filming of an advertisement for the soft drink Sprite, when it was claimed that the Memorial was temporarily concealed by the production company. The conversion of Punta Carretas and the construction and cover-up of the Memorial reveal the inevitable tension between the dynamics of preservation and obliteration of the past in post-dictatorship Uruguay. I propose that the two case studies can be better understood through discussion of the concept palimpsestic memory. As Huyssen's seminal work established, the palimpsest permits the existence of 'memorials of what was there before and imagined alternatives' (2003:7). Taking this further, Silverman asserts that the palimpsest is more than just the coexistence of distinct traces of the past, but it also 'holds out the prospect of new solidarities' (2013:4). Viewed together, Punta Carretas and the Memorial demonstrate that (com)modification of sites of repression is not entirely anachronistic with memorialization, nor is the intended goal of remembrance that underpins the Memorial's construction necessarily guaranteed.

Dr Levey's work focuses on the politics of memory and activism in the Southern Cone. She is the author of *Fragile Memory, Shifting Impunity: Commemoration and Contestation in Post-dictatorship Argentina and Uruguay* (Peter Lang, 2016) and articles on commemoration and intergenerational memory published in *History and Memory*, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *Journal of Romance Studies* and *Latin American Perspectives*. In 2014 she co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies* and *Argentina since the 2001 Crisis: Recovering the Past, Reclaiming the Future* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Her current work addresses the role of perpetrators in commemorative culture in Argentina, and the manifold ways in which the past is treated and "worked through" virtually and spatially by second generation post-dictatorship activists in Europe.

Jan Nimmo, Independent artist, Glasgow

Ayotzinapa: Mexico's Missing Students



Images courtesy of Jan Nimmo. Visit: <http://www.jannimmo.com/Ayotzinapa.html> for more details.

Scottish artist and filmmaker **Jan Nimmo** studied at Glasgow School of Art. For many years now her work has focused on building bridges across cultures; through portraiture, testimony and documentary film. She has worked in collaboration veteran Cuban musicians, Mexican artisans and, for over a decade, worked closely with banana workers in Latin American and Cameroon.

Having travelling extensively in Mexico over the years she was affected by the disappearance of 43 students in 2014, when she embarked on a series of portraits of each of the students. This work, which was made in solidarity with the students' families, has now become an integral part of their campaign for truth and justice.

Images from the restoration of the mural, January 2018



Images courtesy of Kasia Breska. With thanks to members of Chile SCDA.

