

Chapter 5: River

Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez

September 8 - October 14, 2017

Since 2011, Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez has been writing a visual novel that takes form as paintings, sculptures, and installations. Inspired by the novel *The Savage Detectives* in which Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño tells a story through harmony and discord of forty narrators, the artist's goal is to reveal multiple perspectives surrounding contemporary circumstances that have been disentangled from their colonial histories. As with any reading and storytelling experience, Friedemann-Sánchez often returns to earlier parts of the narrative to create different throughways traversing the world she has created. And so, *Chapter 5: River* begins with *Crisóles*, an installation that is an integral part of the first chapter of Friedemann-Sanchez visual novel, and serves here as a reminder of the longer cultural, political, and aesthetic histories underlying her treatise. Not coincidentally, *Crisóles* and other works included in the 2014 exhibition *Chapter 1* are rooted in the artist's earliest memories.

The artist grew up wandering the halls of the National Museum of Bogota where her mother worked as an anthropologist studying the cultural contributions of African communities in Colombia. In the installation Crisóles, row after row of individually handcrafted objects resembling pre-Columbian smelting pots are presented across six tabletops mounted on sawhorses. Known as crisóles, these pots were used to melt gold, silver, and copper by indigenous peoples across the South American continent. When Africans were brought to Colombia as slaves in the early sixteenth century, knowledge of this smelting process passed into their hands where it was preserved and utilized until modern times. The arrangement of the crisoles at The Union is presented in a similar manner to how the artist experienced them in the museum, and yet the individual forms, carefully recreated in clay smudged with oil stick to resemble the original clay vessels, appear abstract when untethered from their original context. Drawing from her own memory, Friedemann-Sánchez enacts the haptic and visual transmission of knowledge through objects that bring forth the memories of other places in different times. The artist taps into her personal history to recover this indigenous knowledge, transformed by colonial circumstance and contributions by Africans, to imbue the museum object with a living resonance.

COVER: **River (details)** Ink on tyvek, 60" x 640", 2017 Photo credit: Larry Gawel



China Mopa mopa. tyvek and readymade. 80" x 40". 2017 Photo credit: Larry Gawel

Morisca Mopa mopa, tyvek and readymade, $80^\circ \times 40^\circ$, 2017 Photo credit: Larry Gawel

During Friedemann-Sanchez's earliest explorations of the museum she was especially interested in the fragments of objects. Those parts and pieces of a missing whole were not deemed important enough to put on display, and were instead relegated to the storage halls. Her interest in fragments would grow to produce a desire to tell forgotten stories, motivated by an understanding of history as only one part of the whole story as information is suppressed and withheld from dominant cultural narratives. For the drawing *River*, the artist revived her practice of exploring the archives of the museum; this time, the Smithsonian. Through a fellowship, Friedemann-Sánchez was able to research lace from colonial America, extending her investigations of the ways image and object production is sustained and transformed when different cultures meet under colonial circumstances northward to consider the formation of the United States.



At the Smithsonian, the artist focused her research on the ways in which early American colonial women copied and innovated upon patterns sent from England. There, she also found that the cultural products of women, such as lace but also sewn. knitted, guilted and embroidered handcrafts, were rarely on display, while those man-made versions produced by machine and industry were prized and prominently showcased. The artist sought to heroicize the work of women by making a painting incorporating the lace designs that unfolds across 53 feet on black Tyvek, a material commonly used to wrap houses during the construction process. Though the end result is epic in scale, Friedemann-Sánchez works like a lacemaker, carefully tatting individual sections of the painting that are incorporated into the larger whole. Cumulatively, the lace-inspired designs coalesce to form a baroque landscape: lace flowers drip from the branches of trees like Spanish moss and magnolia

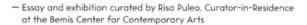
blossoms. Painted with a loose and watery technique, the landscape exudes a humidity in the air from the summer heat along one of any number of rivers that were the center of colonial life in the Americas. The titualar "river" itself is depicted with only the barest of indicators, a slight horizontal line that disrupts the even blackness of the Tyvek. The roofs of houses and the tipped ends of cars that peek out from above this waterline are evidence of a flood. Elsewhere, the height of islands of trash speak to the depths at which the pile is submerged below. A landscape entangled in the threads of the lace becomes the artist's metaphor for the dualism between nature and culture.

With Crisóles, Friedemann-Sánchez provides the context for her artistic inquiry, and with River, the setting. The suite of six drawings collectively called Casta Paintings, introduce the characters to the story. Again, the artist returned to art history and the museum for these drawings.

assume when being scanned by a TSA machine at the airport—with legs spread and arms raised above their heads. By bringing together the hierarchical organizing logic of the past with current technology, Friedemann-Sánchez identifies the way colonialism has morphed into contemporary forms of surveillance and racial profiling.

Like River, Castas Paintings are also painted on Tyvek, a material of economy that rolls for easy transportability. These qualities make it the ideal medium for telling the stories of those who are stopped on airplanes and who cross borders, often marked by rivers, on foot: stories about the movement of people and knowledge through diaspora and migrancy. For Friedemann-Sánchez, the matte black surface of Tyvek also carries associations to the oil stick drawings and black paintings of Minimalist artists Richard Serra and Frank Stella, respectively, and the dark backgrounds of Spanish colonial paintings. Black has been used throughout history to signal

dominance, power, and authority, aesthetically and politically. This ideological structure forms the background in the artist's world and is the very fabric upon which her tale is woven. At The Union, Friedemann-Sánchez subverts these associations to construct a more complete understanding of history that recognizes the forgotten contributions of stories not written into history books.





Mopa mopa, tyvek and readymade, 80" x 40", 2017 Photo credit: Larry Gawel



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nancy Friedemann-Sanchez has exhibited at La Bienal de Cuenca in Ecuador, The Sheldon Museum of Art, The Joslyn Art Museum. The Portland Museum, El Museo del Barrio and Bronx Museum of the Arts. She is included in the Elizabeth Sackler Feminist Art Base at the Brooklyn Museum and is a member of the Artist Pension Trust and participated at the 20 Congreso Internacional: La Experiencia Intelectual de las Mujeres en el Siglo XXI in 2012 in Mexico City. The artist was awarded a Nebraska Arts Council Grant, a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship; a Puffin Foundation grant; a Pollock Krasner grant; an NALAC grant and was nominated to the Rema Hort Mann and to the Anonymous was a Woman Foundation. She was an artist-in-residence at PV Art, Art OMI, The Fountainhead, Tamarind Institute. Yaddo, Gasworks, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, and Bronx Museum for the Arts. Her work is in numerous public collections including The Sheldon Museum of Art. El Museo del Barrio. The Cleveland Museum, The University of New Mexico Art Museum. El Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Panamá. El Museo de Arte Moderno, Cali Colombia. and in the private collections of Karen and Robert Duncan. Kathy and Marc LeBaron, and Jose Mugrabi. Her work has been reviewed by El Nuevo Herald. The New York Times. Artforum, The Paris Review, Time Out New York, Art Papers, and Art Nexus.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Risa Puleo is the 2017 Curator-in-Residence at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska. She is currently working on exhibitions that will be presented at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha; Charlotte Street Foundation; Kansas City, ArtPace, San Antonio; Franklin Street Works. Stamford, and the Leslie-Lohman Museum in New York City. Puleo has Master's degrees from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and Hunter College's art history program. She has written for Art in America, Art Papers, Art 21, Asia Art Pacific, Hyperallergic. com. Modern Painters and other art publications. The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts' curatorial residency provides the opportunity to work alongside residency and curatorial staff, actively contributing to the overall vision of the organization's renowned exhibition program. As an integral member of the Bemis Center's Artist-in-Residence Program, Puleo stimulates intellectual discourse surrounding contemporary art practice through studio visits, knowledgesharing workshops, and other organized programs with fellow artists-in-residence. She also serves as a part of the cultural fabric of Greater Omaha, as a professional resource for local artists and arts professionals, and as an ambassador of the Bemis Center in the community. This program is the first of its kind in Nebraska.



Artist in Conversation September 9, 2 pm

Join the artist and Dr. Claudia Garcia. Professor of Foreign Languages and Literature at UNO for a community dialogue that "unweaves" this exhibition's many influences.

Embodied Loom September 16, 1 pm

Join us as Victoria Hoyt and Camille Hawbaker lead a hands-on workshop in which participants will become both the weaver and the loom as they construct a rug together. We will discuss the ways in which textiles can be a gateway for understanding the interwoven nature of the "fabric of society" while we work. Thoughts and personal experiences can be written on fabric strips and woven into the rug. The rug will be joined to other pieces being woven with various groups in Omaha, creating a floor tapestry of intersecting narratives: "The Warp and Weft of Us." No previous weaving knowledge needed—just an open mind and willing hands!

Borders, Corridors, and Lines of Desire Wednesdays October 4-25, 6:30—8:30 pm

Borders | Corridors | Lines of Desire is a four-week collaborative laboratory for kindling critical but accessible discussion and production around "modes of management of collective life." Organized by Bemis residents Gustavo and Gaelyn Aguilar, the goal of this workshop is for participants to identify an injury (a persistent injustice) and develop a small act of repair (a way to address this injury). Omaha area art practitioners whose work deals with and/or advances justice and equity (in the social, cultural, economic, and/or environmental realms) are encouraged to participate.

See **u-ca.org** for more information.



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The Wanda D. Ewing Gallery

Open Tuesday-Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm

The Wanda D. Ewing Gallery is dedicated to the Omaha artist, educator, and founding Union for Contemporary Art partner who passed away in 2013. Ewing encouraged dialogue around questions of who is allowed to make, see, and be seen in visual culture, and whether the arts look like the communities we live in, challenging her audiences to believe in the transformative power of art.

Our 2017 exhibition series is generously sponsored by Paul and Annette Smith.



To view our exhibition schedule and for more info on the program, visit **u-ca.org/exhibition**.