



Habitant. Photo: Mara Arteaga. Courtesy of the Chopu University Museum

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The arts developed in the public space of our country have been, in most cases, examined from a perspective that the Brazilian philosopher Suely Rolnik<sup>1</sup> has called “Colonial capitalistic”, meaning that the way in which we try to study them keeps them related to European practices and that link always leads us to parameters established by a production-exhibition circuit linked to the market and to the generation of capital. A new discussion on these arts forces us to rethink the approach of study in order to situate ourselves in a new non-Western and hegemonic paradigm, which implies a change of decolonizing perspective to establish new lines of possibilities for the arts in the public space of the region.

Adaptability and mutation are characteristics that have allowed

# STREET ARTS MAKING MEXICO CITY THEIR STAGE

## PERSPECTIVES FOR A NEW DISCUSSION

In the framework of  
Circostrada's Research Trip to  
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<sup>1</sup><https://www.lavaca.org/notas/entrevista-a-suely-rolnik/>

these creative manifestations to remain in the public space; however, the possibilities for exhibition and circulation in limited production formats have kept them in an increasingly narrow margin of subsistence within today's art field. This particular situation, which is different from that of many European countries, makes the street arts an extremely interesting field in which lines of development can be drawn in the short, long and medium term, always keeping in mind its unique singularity.

On this occasion, we tried to track clues that will allow us to broaden our perspective on the relationship between street arts and the urban environment in Mexico through proposals that are distant from a production and exhibition circuit, fit for festivals' consumption, and have used public space as a detonator of collective experiences, and have developed pieces that go beyond the field of artistic creation, to dialogue with the city and its inhabitants.

For further discussion we can quote André Carreira's work, "*Teatro de invasión. La ciudad como dramaturgia*"<sup>2</sup>, in which the city is presented as "a set of practices and processes that can be measured and mapped".

Living Arts proposals that we will further mention are determined by the work in a delimited context, which is why on many occasions the result or main goal does not imply a "product" or a show to be presented before a specialized audience or art consumer, but are rather conceived as a space for dialogue and collaboration between common agents.

We start from the premise that in order to conceive the city as a stage, it is necessary to consider the public space as the inside of society. Unlike the trend to consider the street as an external place, for our analysis the street is conceived as the inside of the society. The street is the place where hidden, isolated and private subjectivities, interact and negotiate their permanence. The street is the common scenario in which these subjectivities exchange sense to weave networks or project distances. If the street is the inside of society, some of the current proposals for the living arts are related to its environment in a specific way, articulating relationships that involve everything from physical space, design, architecture, and urban planning; to social, economic and political aspects.



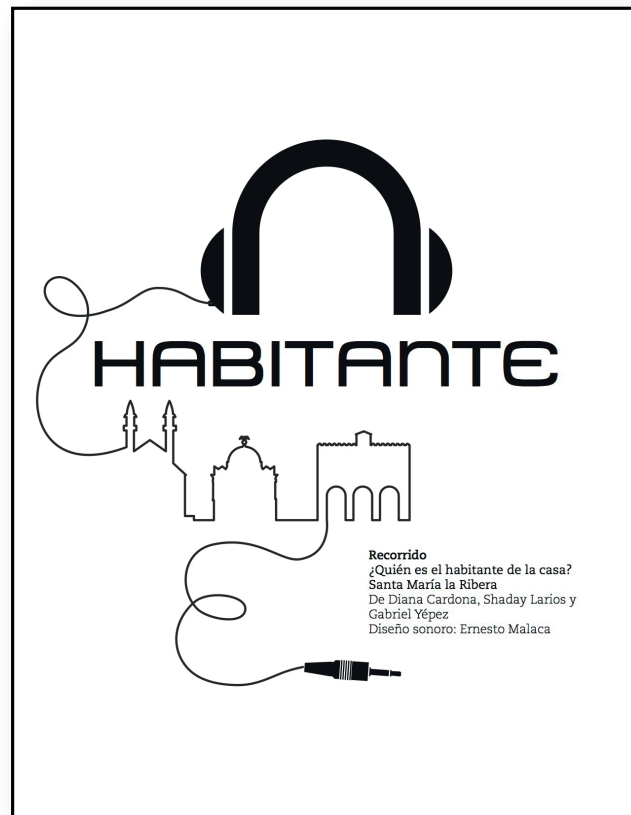
Habitant. Photo: Mara Arteaga. Courtesy of the Chopo University Museum

<sup>2</sup> <http://edicionesdocumenta.com.ar/2019/01/teatro-de-invasion-la-ciudad-como-dramaturgia/>



The practices to which we have referred go beyond the field of artistic creation and mutate in order to adapt themselves, like transhumant artists, to the environments that shelter them and generate new possibilities of existence. We propose two examples that have common investigations, where the public space has not been thought as an exhibition spot for performing artists, but where the street and its inhabitants are the ones that produce meaning and the material to develop artistic projects. As the artists of the Galería de Comercio<sup>3</sup> collective once said about their public art project in the historic center of CDMX, “to take advantage of the energy of the street, its people, its movement, its rhythm, its space, its economy and its life.

Ángel Hernández<sup>4</sup> is one of the creators linked to the processes related to the environment and specific circumstances. For more than a decade, the work of Hernández has been consistent in terms of the relationship between the pieces he proposes and the environment in which they are developed, an example of this is the “Festival para el fin del mundo TFM<sup>5</sup>”, which for the past 7 years has been held in the abandoned area of the city of Tampico, Tamaulipas. In addition to this initiative, the work of *La Guarda Teatro*, a company directed by Hernández, has developed Festival *La Bestia*<sup>6</sup>, a festival that, due to its direct impact on migrants in transit from Central America, has been one of the most significant spaces for stage creation linked to a defined context and community. In this brief overview of proposals linked to the city and specific contexts, we mention *Exodus Lectures*, a project developed by Ángel Hernández and commissioned by the Münchner Kammer-spiele in 2017. In this project, the intention was to bring together the community of asylum seekers living in Munich and coming from countries in armed conflict, mainly Syria and Iraq. For this project, Hernández carried out a creative residence in the city of Munich, during the creation phase, he articulated conversations between different speakers; asylum seekers, some associations focused on defending their right to stay in Germany and the theatre area dependent on the German government and located in one of the most exclusive areas of the city. In this Reading of



Poster Tour Who is the inhabitant of the house? Santa María la Ribera

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lagaleriadecomercio.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://laguardateatro.blogspot.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.teatroparaelfindelmundo.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-14-1-expulsion/14-1-dossier/el-festival-de-la-bestia-en-la-ruta-migrante-una-entrevista-con-angel-hernandez-arreola.html>

the Exodus, Hernandez's work was a bet on the bond, although ephemeral, between diverse communities living together in the city in contrasting circumstances.

In a different path, but with coincidences in their practices and proposals for the public space and the usage of the city as dramaturgy, we mention the local creation project "*¿Quién es el habitante de la casa? Santa María La Ribera*" (Who is the house's inhabitant?), a project of a journey with headphones developed in the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera by Shaday Larios, Diana Cardona and Gabriel Yépez.

From a first approach in 2013 with the project "*¿Quién es el habitante de la casa? Zócalo*", a group of artists gathered to think about the urban space as a scenario of daily events susceptible of being set in a specific frame. This insight into the architectural space opened up the possibility of interpreting and sharing a possible reading of the urban space. In 2015 we started a new approach to this way of reading the landscape: "*¿Quién es el habitante de la casa? Santa María La Ribera*", this second creative journey in site specific, gave us the opportunity to deepen in many of our previous premises and to propose a relational dynamic with the neighborhood and its inhabitants.

This project was commissioned by the Museo Universitario del Chopo in 2015 and is located in that neighborhood located in the north of CDMX. The intention was to generate a link between the inhabitants of the neighborhood and the architectural space. To do so, several approaches were generated that structured a tour of specific locations using some emblematic buildings of the neighborhood as enhancers, such as the museum itself, the Kiosco Morisco and the geology museum. The intention of this tour was to summon a group of inhabitants to walk around the streets and to gaze at aspects that had not been observed on a daily basis. In this tour, the architecture of the beginning of the last century, the affluence of people and the constant mutation of the population were summoned, and contributed to generate a dialogue of memory and recognition of the common territory to think about who are the inhabitants of that enormous city.



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<sup>7</sup><http://www.chopo.unam.mx/english/teatro/QuienEsElHabitante.html>