Mapping Street Cultures in Modern Latin(x) America. Washington University in St. Louis, Saint Louis, 2020.

Urban Creativity and Active Memory.

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Pull Quotes: Though we usually think of Street Art as a predominantly visual creative movement, the diversity of urban intervention practices escapes conceptual labels. And while murals often capture our attention, giant paintings of public squares are increasingly important in changing the ways people see the city.

Urban Creativity and Active Memory

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Though we usually think of Street Art as a predominantly visual creative movement, the diversity of urban intervention practices escapes conceptual labels. Images and objects with a variety of intentions (expressive, playful, self-affirming, artistic and political-militant) also play a pronounced role in exercising collective and social memory. This is more and more often the case of the artistic interventions carried out over the concrete tiles of Plaza Moreno, central hub of the city of La Plata, near Buenos Aires, Argentina. Different collectives have expressed themselves there, seeking not only to make their demands visible, but also to build meaning and imaginaries within a "geography in conflict."[1] The images in the plaza are there as complex artifacts whose everyday presence does not allow history, or the events lived in these territories, to rest.

[INSERT WHITE HANDKERCHIEFS IMAGE HERE WITH THIS CAPTION BELOW: White handkerchiefs, the unmistakable symbol of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo]

To begin, one of the oldest of these interventions depicts the face of Jorge Julio López (2008),[2] a witness in the trials for the perpetrators of genocide in Argentina's last period of military dictatorship. His second disappearance stirred society as a whole to protest the impunity that exists in the country, despite the return of democracy thirty-six years ago. With the passing of time—and with the help of the municipal cleaning service— Lopez's effigy was erased.[3] This sparked enormous outrage, and the image was painted once more,[4] refreshing its value as an object of memory.

[INSERT IMAGE OF LOPEZ WITH FOLLOWING CAPTION: Intervention with the iconic image of Jorge Julio López [view from the ground] after its repainting in 2017]

Large-scale interventions over the tiles—similar to massive murals—were also carried out to commemorate both the victims of the 2013 flood[5] and the soldiers fallen in the Falklands War[6], to give a presence to the demand for the return of Johana Ramallo (victim of a human trafficking network),[7] and to demand justice for the death of Emilia Uscamayta.[8] The latter two, created in 2017 and 2018, directly face the community center, interrogating authorities' responsibility in these events. The "murals" (can they still be called "murals" if they're on the ground?) are so large that they can only be seen from above. However, their presence in the plaza takes on an added dimension as an almost reverential site of memory.

[INSERT FALKLANDS HEROES IMAGE WITH FOLLOWING CAPTION:

The mural commemorating the Heroes of the Falklands (Héroes de Malvinas), as seen *in situ*]

[INSERT RAMALLO IMAGE WITH FOLLOWING CAPTION: Intervention for Johana Ramallo, behind which can be seen the 2013 "mural" of the Assembly of Flooded Neighbors]

[INSERT USCAMAYTA IMAGE WITH FOLLOWING CAPTION: Emilia Uscamayta's portrait, smiling and with the Wiphala flag of indigenous peoples, was requested by her family]

For this same reason, they have often endured vandalism that attempts to erase them, always resulting in new restorations of the images. This also happened to the green handkerchief symbolizing the campaign for the voluntary termination of pregnancy, whose vandalizing was filmed and went viral on social media. In an open competition to dominate public space, anti-choice protestors painted their slogan, "Salvemos las dos vidas" ("We Save Both Lives") next to the image.

[INSERT GREEN HANDKERCHIEF IMAGE AND FOLLOWING CAPTION: Handkerchief for Legal Abortion, facing the Cathedral of La Plata]

Each new mural in the city's main plaza adds to this new visual community of resistance that wages a symbolic battle.[9] They are testimonies to a new interaction between arts and politics (a new poetics, we could say) that seeks not only to make these struggles visible, but also to build community through creative practice and daily coexistence with dissident images that continuously question memory, even when they are vandalized, painted over, or erased.

[INSERT IMAGE OF VIEW FROM THE CATHEDRAL WITH THIS CAPTION: View from the tower of the Cathedral of La Plata: the Malvinas murals and the two interventions for and against the voluntary interruption of pregnancy. The handkerchiefs alluding to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are also visible. In the center is a representation of the city's layout, along with its foundation stone.]

[INSERT IMAGE OF MURALS IN FRONT OF CITY HALL WITH THIS CAPTION: The "murals" that face the La Plata City Hall: Jorge Julio López, disappeared in democracy; interventions for the cases of Johana Ramallo and Emilia Uscamayta; other interventions (a barely visible Santiago Maldonado, the Choiols project, etc.)]

INSERT IMAGE OF FULL VIEW FROM CATHEDRAL WITH THIS CAPTION: Full view of the interventions, as seen from the La Plata Cathedral tower]

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[1] See: Chempes, G. (2009) "El recurso a la cultura en las marchas por Julio López en la ciudad de La Plata. Período 2006 – 2008" ("Resorting to Culture in the Marches for Julio López in the City of La Plata from 2006-2008") in *Indymedia Argentina*: https://archivo.argentina.indymedia.org/images/24mesesDeMarchasPorLopez_chempes.pdf

[2] The original intervention took place on June 18, 2008, as a strategy to make visible the iconography that social movements were creating in relation to the disappearance of Jorge Julio López, a key witness in the trials for crimes against humanity for the perpetrators of genocide during Argentina's last period of military dictatorship (1976-1983).

[3] See: "Denuncia y polémica en torno a dos murales de la Plaza Moreno" ("Complaint and Controversy Surrounding two Plaza Moreno Murals"), *El Día* [Electronic edition] 4 October 2017: www.eldia.com/nota/2017-10-4-1-21-58-denuncia-y-polemica-en-torno-a-dos-murales-de-la-plaza-moreno-la-ciudad

[4] The mural had already been restored in 2014 following a public call to do so. It was then re-painted with slight modifications, including a new caption, on October 14, 2017. See: "Repintaron el mural de Julio López en la Plaza Moreno de La Plata" (Julio López Mural Repainted in Plaza Moreno de La Plata), *ECy P Noticias* [Electronic edition] 14 October 2017: http://cypnoticias.com.ar/2017/10/14/repintaron-la-imagen-de-julio-lopez-en-la-plaza-moreno-de-la-plata/

[5] This intervention was also recently restored. It displays the same flag that the Assemblies of Neighbors use to identify themselves in marches.

[6] At 1700 square meters, this is the largest "mural" dedicated to the Falkland Islands. It was established on April 1 of this year to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the Argentine landing. The public was invited to shine flashlights and cell phones to reflect on the recent efforts to recognize unidentified soldiers buried as "NN" in the Darwin Cemetery after the war's end. Images of the emotional performance were also captured from the air, where the silhouette of the islands, outlined by lights, can be seen. See: "Malvinas: Plaza Moreno se iluminó para homenajear a los Ex Combatientes" ("Falklands: Plaza Moreno Lights Up to Pay Homage to Former Combatants"), *Infoplatense* [Electronic edition] 1 April 2019: https://www.infoplatense.com.ar/nota/2019-4-1-14-21-0-a-37-anos-de-la-guerra-plaza-moreno-se-ilumina-para-homenajear-a-los-ex-combatientes

[7] Johana Ramallo has been missing since July 26, 2017. See "4 meses sin Johana Ramallo" ("4 Months without Johana Ramallo"), *AnRed*, [Electronic edition] 27 November 2017: https://www.anred.org/?p=70553

[8] Emilia Uscamayta drowned at a clandestine party. Her family and friends demand that political leaders be sentenced. See: "El rostro de Emilia Uscamayta Curi reclama justicia desde Plaza Moreno" ("Emilia Uscamayta Curi's Face Demands Justice from Plaza Moreno), *Infoplatense* [Electronic Edition] 18 February 2018: https://www.infoplatense.com.ar/nota/2018-2-18-10-37-0-el-rostro-de-emilia-uscamayta-curi-reclama-justicia-desde-plaza-moreno

[9] They have also painted the handkerchiefs that identify the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in this plaza--symbols that were erased, vandalized, and painted again. The face of Santiago Maldonado, whose case moved Argentina throughout 2017, accompanies that of Jorge Julio López. A series of small-scale interventions—stencils and graffiti with feminist slogans in particular—are also scattered throughout the area.