

BLACK HEN DUST:

A Study of Polvo de Gallina Negra,
the first feminist art group in Mexico

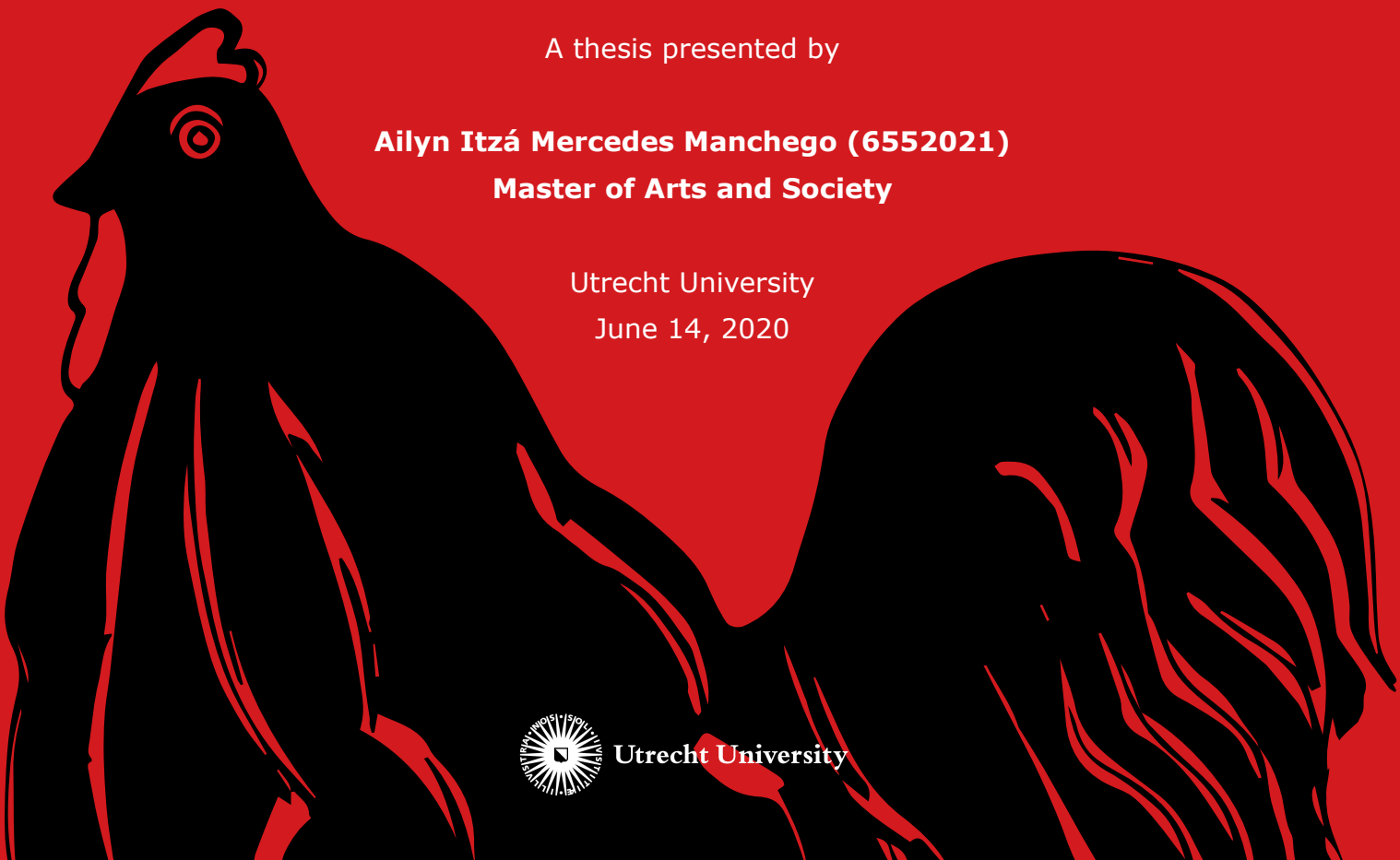
A thesis presented by

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Master of Arts and Society

Utrecht University
June 14, 2020



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Abstract

As part of conceptualism and through the group movement in Mexico during the rise of second wave feminism in the 1970s, Maris Bustamante and Monica Mayer started what is considered to be Mexico's first feminist art group, "Polvo de Gallina Negra". This group focuses on the intersection between art and feminism using innovative performance art practices and other cross disciplinary art forms in a playful and humoristic way. In their work, they addressed and analysed issues concerning their experiences as women in a patriarchal society, the image of women in the media and the arts, women's contribution to the artworld, and lastly, they raised awareness to feminist issues in order to reshape their reality. For many years, this feminist group and other conceptualist artists of this generation have been neglected within the local and global art history of Mexico. The aim of this study is to contribute and generate a better understanding of this period and of "Polvo de Gallina Negra". Therefore, this research will be focussing on the position and the context of the women who started this feminist art group in Mexico and what their motivations were in doing so. With the findings of the global and local social-political and artistic overview and through the analysis of the semi-structured interviews with Maris Bustamante and Monica Mayer, I will seek to provide an answer to the question; "What were the conditions that constituted the rise of Mexico's first feminist art group?"

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1

Introduction

Oops, the baby woke up; I will have to fix the world in another moment

Mónica Mayer¹

Violence against women is not a recent topic in Mexico. Machismo culture in Mexico is prevalent and women have been fighting for their rights and safety for several centuries. Recently, femicides have been increasing in Mexico, with a number of 1006 femicides in 2019, 580 more than in 2015.² Authorities have been negligent in handling these cases and murderers have been enjoying impunity. According to Natalia Reyes, only 8% of the murderers of femicides get prosecuted.³

Violence against women and the dominant machismo culture in Mexican society were for Maris Bustamante, Monica Mayer and initially Herminia Dosal the main reasons to start a feminist art group in Mexico in 1983. It is considered the first art group in Mexico that focused on the intersection between art and Feminism. At the time there was still a lot of prejudice and secrecy around women's experience, which can be hard to imagine, because much has changed throughout the years. In order to protect the group, they named it "Polvo de Gallina Negra" translated as "Black Hen Dust", which refers to the herbs and powders sold by Mexican medicine women against the "evil eye." As Maris Bustamante mentions, "relating the 'evil eye' to our profession as visual artists and in the midst of brutal Mexican machismo was quite funny and sarcastic, and thus we promoted the name."⁴ According to Bustamante, the group's main aims were "to change the image of women in the mass media through actions or performances in radio, television, and the printed press; recover the work of contemporary women artists and those from the past; and defend the

1 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

2 Tom Phillips, "Mexico: activists voice anger at Amló's failure to tackle 'femicide emergency,'" *The Guardian*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/mexico-femicide-emergency-activists>.

3 Amparo Natalia Reyes Andrade, interview by Michael Lettieri, in "Violence Against Women in Mexico," ed. by Michael Lettieri (PhD diss., University of San Diego, 2017).

4 Maris Bustamante. "Para quitarle a Freud lo macho (To Get Rid of the Macho in Freud)." (Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas San Carlos, Universidad Nacional de Mexico, 1982), 134.

living conditions and rights of women in a patriarchal society and our Mexican milieu in particular, through non-objectual art proposals.”⁵ In humoristic ways and through different interdisciplinary art forms, they addressed topics such as violence against women, domestic labour, maternity, machismo culture and the portrayal of women in Mexican society. Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante maintained the activity of the group until 1993, with much joy and hard work.

“Polvo De Gallina Negra” was active in a period where new experimental art forms were neglected by Mexican historians, academics and state institutions for a long time. This forced “Polvo De Gallina Negra” and many other conceptual artists of this time to look for alternative spaces and ways to exhibit and make their art. It is only recently that this period of conceptualism in Mexico has been researched, recognized and restored. An important contribution to the recuperation of this period is the research and art exhibition of Olivier Debrouse and Cuauhtémoc Medina in 2007, “La era de la discrepancia. Arte y cultura visual en México 1968-1997”, which discusses the different artists and movements between 1968-1997 and marks a beginning of restoring this period of conceptual Mexican art.⁶ After the investigation of Debrouse and Medina, the national and international academic attention given to the history of conceptualism in Mexico has increased. Yet, there is still a lack of attention academic texts and research on “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, and many other artists of this period. Conceptual art in Mexico has been important to the artists and the artworld as it brought “new-found freedoms, without which they would never have created a new art, with new audiences and new forms of reception.” It has also provided room for new narratives and new perspectives within the Mexican art world.⁷ The relevance of the topics that were addressed by “Polvo De Gallina Negra” in the 1980s can be very much seen through the events of these days. In social media for instance hashtags as “metoo”, “niunamas”, “sinnosotras”, “JuntasHastaLaVida” were trending in Mexico.⁸ There are also, are some strategies, as “Revolución Diamantina” (Glitter Revolution), that are being used

5 Ibid.

6 Olivier Debrouse and Cuauhtémoc Medina, *La Era de la Discrepancia, The Age of Discrepancies, Arte y Cultura Visual en México, Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968 – 1997* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 18-31.

7 Ibid.

8 Hashtags being used on social media platforms in reaction to recent events and protest against femicides “#niunamas” (not one more) “#sinnosotras” (without us), “#JuntasHastaLaVida” (together towards live).

during recent mass women marches, which are very similar to the ones used by Bustamante and Mayer.⁹

All these developments have drawn more interest to the group in recent years. This study will focus on the position and the context of the women who started this art group in Mexico and what their motivations were in doing so. Therefore, my main research question for this study is: **What were the conditions that constituted the rise of Mexico's first feminist art group?**

⁹ "Revolución Diamantina" (Glitter Revolution) is a movement where women toss pink glitter during protests in Mexico City. Tom Phillips, "Mexico's 'glitter revolution' targets violence against women," *The Guardian*, August 26, 2019., <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/desperation-and-rage-mexican-women-take-to-streets-to-protest-unabated-sexual-violence-glitter-revolution>



Figure 1 - *Polvo de Gallina Negra* (Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante), ca. 1983; Photograph, Hammer Museum Digital Archive, Los Angeles.

1.1

Structure

For this study I aim to explore the conditions that constituted “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. In the first part of this thesis I will construct a theoretical framework, which will discuss three main subjects: feminism, conceptualism, and conceptualism in Latin America. All three are key in understanding “Polvo De Gallina Negra” and where to categorize them within the art history canon. In the 1960s and 1970s, second wave feminism arose and new theories and ideas about gender were introduced. This was an important period for Maris Bustamante and Mónica Mayer; it formed the thoughts and ideas of both women during the start of their artistic careers. In this part I will examine feminism of this time and more specifically feminism within Latin America. I will also discuss how feminism during this time was translated into artistic and performative practices. “Polvo De Gallina Negra” explored in their artistic work the relationship between art and politics mainly through performances. They also created and explored new cross-disciplinary art forms, which I will further address in the last section of chapter two, which is about conceptualism. For this art group - which is considered one of the pioneers of conceptualism in Mexico - I will not only focus on what conceptualism is, but also where it came from - its genealogy - and from which perspectives it can be discussed.

In order to get a better understanding of the time and history these women lived through, I will provide an overview of the social-political and art history of Mexico in the third and fourth chapter. In these chapters, I will address important events that had an influence over and that developed the Mexican society and art world, and thus provide this study with an appropriate context. These chapters will also touch on some important women movements and perspectives throughout Mexican history, to get a better insight in these developments. Finally, they will present the rising of a new generation of young artists in the 1970s that rebelled against the nationalistic and traditional art world, by generating new art structures, spaces and styles. Together with the start of conceptualism in Mexico, it paved the road for the establishment of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.

Chapter five will be dedicated to a more in-depth chronicle survey of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. It will also address the personal backgrounds of Maris Bustamante and Mónica Mayer, which will show their initial motivation to start a feminist art group. In this section I will provide a detailed analysis of the interviews I held with both women and critically explore and discuss some examples of their artistic work. This will

position the group in its own time and context as discussed in the previous chapters. The full transcriptions of the interviews can be found in the appendices. Finally, in the last chapter I will summarize and formulate conclusions of my findings, in order to answer my main research question.

1.2

Methodology

For this study I used qualitative research methods. In the period between the 1st of April and the 3rd of July I was in Mexico and had the opportunity to do my internship at MUAC (Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo). This museum is part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the UNAM, and opened its doors at its new location in 2008. The museum was created because of the need for a place where Mexican contemporary art is conserved and collected, and its history restored. It is the first public contemporary art museum in Mexico City, which has the objective to recuperate, collect and exhibit contemporary art made by Mexican artists. This made MUAC an interesting place for me to conduct more research and get in contact with people who had a connection with the topic of my thesis. Monica Mayer and Maris Bustamante are artists that are part of this contemporary art history. This is also why MUAC possesses a small archive about “Polvo De Gallina Negra” in their collection. During the period I worked at the MUAC I had the chance to look into this small archive, which mainly consisted of articles written by the two artists and invitations for events and exhibitions. There was also an archival exhibition going on organised by ‘Centro de Documentacion Arkeia’.¹⁰ This small exhibition was about the history of “Arte Acción” or “Performance art” in Mexico. In this exhibition one piece was documented from a performance of “Polvo De Gallina Negra”, which gave me a more tactile understanding of the subject of my thesis.

Through the museum and through a contact outside of the museum I also had the possibility to get in touch with the two artists of “Polvo De Gallina Negra”. I was honoured to meet Maris Bustamante and Monica Mayer and conduct an open to semi-structured interview with each of them. For the first interview I was welcomed at Maris Bustamante’s home and with Monica Mayer, after several reschedules, I was able to have a Skype interview. Both interviews were around an hour and a half long, were recorded on my phone and transcribed to be able to conduct a preliminary analysis through codes.

Whilst being in Mexico City I also participated in a discussion group at ‘Local21’. Local 21 is an

¹⁰ ‘Centro de Documentacion Arkeia’, is the documentation centre of Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC). It consists of a library and an archive of all the expositions held in the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte (MUCA) and Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC) from the 1960 until this day. Alongside, Arkeia has a small space with alternating exhibitions.

“MUAC: Biblioteca,” Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://muac.unam.mx/biblioteca?lang=en>

alternative art space in Mexico City, which organises and experiments with new forms of exhibitions, events, discussion groups, collaborations, etc. The discussion group I joined in June 2019. was called, “Performance en revisión” (Performance review) and organised different meetings with different speakers, all revolving around performance art or “Arte Acción” in Mexico. Before I had to leave Mexico, I was able to join three of these meetings. All meetings and most readings were in Spanish, which made it sometimes more difficult to follow; nevertheless, these meetings helped me gain more insight into the performance art in Mexico and its relevant literature. One of the gatherings for the discussion group was held at the house of Monica Mayer and Victor Lerma, also known as the archive ‘Pinto mi Raya’, where performance and its registration in Mexico was discussed and where we were given a tour through the archive. ‘Pinto mi Raya’ is, aside from an archive, also an on-going conceptual art project of Monica Mayer and Victor Lerma. With this archival project both artists collect and register contemporary performance art of Mexico made since 1989, with the aim to build and preserve the Mexican contemporary (performance) art history.

For my research about “Polvo De Gallina Negra” I conducted a literature review to identify information, methods and ideas that may be relevant to my research, but also to broaden my knowledge and perspective about the context of my research. In this case the context is Mexico, and the Mexican (art) history, but also theories such as feminism and conceptualism. In the short period I was present in Mexico I got the chance to experience this context first-hand, but I mainly got my knowledge through literature. In my research it is also important to reflect on my positionality. Before 2019. “Polvo De Gallina Negra” was an unknown group for me. While doing research about feminist art and reading an article about the exhibition “Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985”, the group drew my attention.¹¹ My interest increased after doing more research into them and noticing the lack of information and under-representation of this group as the first feminist art group of Mexico. So, I continued my research. In the process of doing this research I encountered some limitations regarding my positionality, which I have to take into account. It is important to note that I am an outsider to the culture that the group is part of. I was born and raised

11 “Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985,” travelling exhibition curated by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta. The exhibition was first exhibited in 2017 in the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and is now part of the digital archive of the Hammer Museum. “*Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* presents the work of 120 women artists and collectives active in Latin America and the United States during a key period in Latin American history and the development of contemporary art.”

“Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985 Digital Archive.” Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, accessed, February 2020, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women>

in the Netherlands, and although my father is from Peru and I lived for three years in Mexico when I was very little, I have no strong connection with Mexico. Vincent Crapanzano in *Ethnographic Fieldwork, An Anthropological Reader* mentions one crucial criterion about encounters in anthropological research: “the need to be critically conscious of what one is doing as one does it.”¹² He also emphasizes that “though the encounter influences the data, its influence is constrained both by psychological blinkers (blinders) and by the orientation – the conventions and assumptions – with which one approaches the encounter.”¹³ In my case the encounters were not only with people through interviews but also with the culture, the “cultural memory” and the “communicative memory” of Mexico itself.¹⁴ A “cultural memory” is defined by Jan Assmann as “a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.” Furthermore, “communicative memory”, are “varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications.”¹⁵ Jan Assman makes a difference here between everyday communication, the “communicative memory”, and the “fixed points” within a culture, the “cultural memory.” I have a different cultural memory and communicative memory from that of Mexican society and from the people I encountered. This has an influence on my research, and this is relevant to take into account not only by reading this dissertation, but also in the process of my research and its outcomes. As Brian Brouke notes, “My positionality meets the positionality of participants, and they do not rest in juxtaposition to each other. The research in which I engage is shaped by who I am, and as long as I remain reflective throughout the process, I will be shaped by it, and by those with whom I interact.”¹⁶

12 Vincent Crapanzano, “At the Heart of the Discipline”: Critical Reflections on Fieldwork,” in *Ethnographic Fieldwork, An Anthropological Reader*, ed. Antonius C.G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka (UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012), 547-562.

13 Ibid.

14 Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, *New German Critique*, No. 65, (Spring-Summer 1995): 125-133, *Cultural History/Cultural Studies*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48853>

15 Ibid.

16 Brian Brouke, “Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process,” *The Qualitative Report* 33, no. 19 (2014): 1-9, <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss33/3>

2

Theoretical Framework

2.1

Feminism

Feminism is a concept that has been discussed elaborately throughout social sciences and the humanities for over a hundred years all over the world. For this research I will discuss mainly feminist theory and movements that were rooted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, also known as second wave feminism.¹⁷ The main reason for this is that throughout this period, “the international feminist movement, including the feminist art movement, was an important inspiration for women artists in Mexico”, where similar movements and theories also started to emerge.¹⁸ The second wave feminist movement “worked to make visible how politics were experienced at the subjective level of the individual, and how society’s institutions and ‘selective traditions’ assumed and deployed their power on the basis of the privilege of gender.”¹⁹ At its core, this political movement aimed to change the foundations of life itself by touching on many aspects, including art, which was “one weapon among many in the struggle for the enfranchisement of all women, both within and beyond the art world.”²⁰

Through comparative history, Karen Offen arrives at a definition of this developing second wave feminism, which is based on two propositions. The first is that feminism in the 20th century must be viewed “as a rapidly developing major critical ideology, or system of ideas, in its own right.”²¹ Secondly, she claims that “in order to fully comprehend the historical range and possibilities of feminism, we must locate the origins and growth of these ideas within a variety of cultural traditions, rather than postulating a hegemonic model for their development on the experience of any single national or sociolinguistic tradition.”²² With this she suggests that the notion of feminism itself should be revised and expanded with a thorough understanding of the multiple contexts where it originates. The author clarifies that the concept of feminism can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change, both being based on a critical

17 Sarah Gamble, ed., *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 25-34.

18 Edward J. McCaughan, “Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico,” *Social Justice* 34, No.1 (2007): 44-62.

19 Jayne Marie Wark, “The Radical Gesture: Feminism and performance art in the 1970s” (PhD diss., Graduate Department of Art History University of Toronto, 1997), 105.

20 Ibid.

21 Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14, no.1 (Autumn, 1988): 119-157.

22 Ibid.

analysis of women's subordination to male privilege in every society. Therefore, the primary category for this analysis is gender, "or the differential social construction of the behaviour of the sexes, based on their physiological differences."²³ Based on this, feminism problematizes "women's subordination to men in the family and society", pursuing the abolition of masculine hierarchy but not the sexual dualism per se.²⁴ It is undoubtedly pro-women and wants a "rebalancing between women and men of the social, economic, and political power within a given society, on behalf of both sexes in the name of their common humanity, but with respect for their differences."²⁵ Being a feminist, Offen argues, is taking on a humanistic challenge that is concerned with individual and collective freedom and responsibility while also opposing patriarchal thought, culture, and society.²⁶

While patriarchy is opposed by all feminists, including the second wave feminist artists and movement in Mexico, many feminists do have a different approach towards the conceptualisation of this term. Marilyn French traces, for example, patriarchal origins back to prehistoric times.²⁷ Moreover, Kate Millett and many other feminists during the 1970s, approached patriarchy as an ideology that dominated every area of culture. She broadened the term "patriarchy", known as the rule of a dominant elder male within a traditional kinship structure, beyond this by arguing it to be an institutionalised oppression of all women by all men.²⁸ She claims that patriarchal domination is principally maintained through ideological control: one is forced to conclude that sexual politics, while connected to economics and other tangibles of social organization, is, like racism, or certain aspects of caste, primarily an ideology, a way of life, with influence over every other psychological and emotional facet of existence. It has created, therefore, a psychic structure, deeply embedded in our past, capable of intensification or attenuation, but one which, as yet, no people have succeeded in eliminating.²⁹ With this she argues that the ideology of femininity and its traditional roles and status are internalised by women.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Marilyn French, *The War Against Women*, (Ballantine Books, 1993)

28 Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

29 Ibid.

Liberating works and writings from different Western feminists were readapted by Latin American and Latina feminists. They re-signified them “in relation to self-generated practices and theorizations of gender empowerment that have emerged from their lived experiences, particular histories and contestatory politics”, Klahn mentions.³⁰ Although many of Latin American feminists, including feminist artists from “Polvo De Gallina Negra”, have been silenced and unrecognized inside and outside their countries for many years, they were active during the early uprising of the second wave feminist movement. In fact, as Norma Klahn explains in her writing, “locating women’s writing and translation in the Americas in the age of Latinamericanismo and globalization”, feminists from this part of the world have opened up and contributed to a “discursive space for self-awareness, for self-inclusion in nation-state projects, and for their role in an increasingly globalized world.” She shows in what ways women’s work and writings that were grounded in “distinct temporalities and cultural and historical legacies”, circulated beyond and within their localities.³¹

³⁰ Norma Klahn, “Locating Women’s Writing and Translation in the Americas in the Age of Latinamericanismo and Globalization,” in *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Américas*, ed. Sonia E. Alvarez, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 1-18.

³¹ Ibid.

2.2

Feminist art and Performance art

As Jayne Marie Wark has mentioned, art was and continues to be one of the weapons for feminists in their struggle against patriarchal structures and thought. The art world at the start of the 1970s was mainly dominated by white male artists and, consequently, many women in this period were denied professional recognition and had a difficult time entering the male dominated art world. This was one of the causes that motivated the rise of feminist art movements around the world, also in Mexico. This did not mean that every female artist was by definition a feminist artist and there were indeed even some who preferred not to be defined as such. So, what can be considered feminist art? As Wark mentions in her research, feminists in this period used their art in two main ways. The first was “by validating or celebrating those aspects or characteristics of women’s experience that had been denigrated or dismissed within patriarchal culture”, and secondly “by employing subversive means to analyse, criticize and expose the endless ways in which that denigration was perpetuated.”³² Therefore, she claims that feminist art was “by definition a political art in that its purpose was to use aesthetic practice as a weapon in the struggle to change the social and cultural conditions that determined women’s place in the world.”³³ This also applies to the case of “Polvo De Gallina Negra”, who explicitly identify themselves as feminist artists. On the one hand, their work expressed the oppression and dismissal of women’s experience in a machismo culture and in the art world at large, while on the other hand it also exposed how this was maintained by culture, mass media and the art world itself. As the first feminist art group in Mexico, but also as part of the emerging movement of conceptual art in the country, it was difficult for these women to get recognition and access to state and art institutions in and beyond their localities. Due to their opposition of the patriarchal societal structures and their challenge to give a voice to the silenced women in Mexico, they were forced to rely on their own resources. They did this through the creation of new art forms, aesthetics, and new feminist structures. They moved within and around the given structures of “the art world, the Left, and the institutionalized feminist and women’s movements.”³⁴

32 Jayne Marie Wark, “The Radical Gesture: Feminism and performance art in the 1970s” (PhD diss., Graduate Department of Art History University of Toronto, 1997), 3.

33 Ibid., 2

34 Edward J. McCaughan, “Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico,” *Social Justice* 34, No.1 (2007): 44-62.

Performance art played a crucial role for feminist artists in the creation of their new relationship between art and politics. As many other feminist artists in this period, “Polvo De Gallina Negra” also used performance art as one of the main art forms in their artistic work. This performance art varied from live performances in different settings to private performances documented in different ways. In the 1960s and 1970s performance art consisted of audience interaction, political and institutional protest, improvisation, spontaneity, and interventions. Performance art in the twentieth century came forth out of the history of the avant garde, where artists were “breaking with each successive tradition”, as Roselee Goldberg claimed, “performance in the twentieth century has been at the forefront of such activity: an avant avant garde.”³⁵ The performances during this period were for conceptual artists a way of rejecting the use of traditional materials and an alternative experience of space, material and the body; “they covered a wide range of materials, sensitivities and intentions, which crossed all disciplinary boundaries.”³⁶ Goldberg considers performance art as an approach of giving life to the formal and conceptual ideas on which the making of arts is based and as a weapon that can be used against the conventions of established art.³⁷ She defines it as “live art by artists” where “each performer makes his or her own definition in the very process and manner of execution” which can be drawn on a number of different disciplines and deployed in any combination, for instance by music, poetry, literature, acting, dance, fantasy, architecture, film, photography, painting etc.³⁸

The focus of feminist artists on performance art was due not only to the transgressive character in which they could dissolve the boundaries between art and life while being able to improvise, opposing the formalist aesthetic values and judgements, but also to the possibility of positioning of the self.³⁹ This positioning of the self in feminist performance art differed from the, until then, known male focused performance art. Lucy Lippard explains that “when women use their own bodies in their artwork, they are using their ‘selves’; a significant psychological factor converts these bodies or faces from object to subject.”⁴⁰

35 RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance, Live Art 1909 to the present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1979).

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Jayne Marie Wark, “The Radical Gesture: Feminism and performance art in the 1970s” (PhD diss., Graduate Department of Art History University of Toronto, 1997), 5.

40 Lucy R. Lippard, *The pains and Pleasure of Rebirth: European and Americans Women’s Body Art*, (New York: Dutton, 1976), 121-138.

This positioning “allowed women to assert themselves as the active and self-determined agents of their own narratives and representations.”⁴¹ However, as noted by Wark in her research and by the artists from “Polvo De Gallina Negra”, there is still a lack of critical and historical literature on feminist art and feminist performance art of the 20th century, and especially for Latin American feminist art.

Performance art is one of the artistic practices that came to be part of the conceptual art movement in the late 1960s. Because of its aim of challenging social and political order by developing new ways of looking at the world, the conceptual art movement became of great importance to feminist artists from this time. In the following subchapter, we will take a closer look at this movement and explore the connections between conceptualism and Latin America.

41 Jayne Marie Wark, “The Radical Gesture: Feminism and performance art in the 1970s” (PhD diss., Graduate Department of Art History University of Toronto, 1997), 6.

2.3

Conceptual art

As stated earlier, performance art originated within the conceptual art movement. Conceptual art as an artistic movement is seen to have its roots in the mid-1960s, usually considered to be the natural successor of other avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Dadaism.⁴² Despite an inherent diversity, its unifying characteristic is its emphasis on the concept as “the most important element in artistic development”, over the formal and the aesthetic components.⁴³ Conceptual art aimed to create space for new ways of looking at the world, undermining the status quo not only in relation to art itself but also in the social and political order.⁴⁴ As Carter explains, “Western conceptual art has been, in essence, an assault on the traditional art that is grounded in classical theories” such as the Renaissance science of perspective.⁴⁵ However, the category of conceptual art has been widely debated by artists, critics and art historians. One of the biggest debates, of utmost importance for this study, concerns the Western historicization of this movement and the lack of visibility it has given to diverse historical, cultural and political narratives.⁴⁶ It was only in 1999 that the exhibition ‘Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s - 1980s’, which took place at New York’s Queens Museum of Art, openly challenged the pre-established conceptions regarding the movement, calling into question “the lesser or secondary place to which certain critical productions had been consigned.”⁴⁷ The exhibition, organized by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, distinguished between ‘Conceptual Art’, “understood as a North American and Western European aesthetic development associated with a formalist reduction inherited from abstraction and Minimalism,” and ‘Conceptualism’, a term which denoted a more broad critical approach, “that made visible certain aesthetic processes on a transnational

⁴² Maris Bustamante. *Para quitarle a Freud lo macho (To Get Rid of the Macho in Freud)*, (Mexico City: Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas San Carlos UNAM, 1982), 134.

⁴³ Seven Leuthold, “Conceptual art, conceptualism, and aesthetic education,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), in *Communicating Creativity: The Discursive Facilitation of Creative Activity in Arts*, ed. by Darryl Hocking, (Basingstoke: Springer, 2017), 277.

⁴⁴ Curtis Carter, “Conceptual Art: A Base for Global Art or the End of Art?” *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Vol. 8 (2004):16-28, International Association for Aesthetics, Marquette University, Wisconsin.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Miguel A López. and Josephine Watson, “How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, Issue 23 (Spring 2010): 5-21.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

level, allowing for diverse historical, cultural and political narratives to be set in place.”⁴⁸ Therefore, this notion of Conceptualism highlighted the multiplicity of points of origin and created a fracture on the privilege of Western Conceptual Art.⁴⁹ With this exhibition, an argument was made stating that “innovative, experimental art practices occurred in the Soviet Union, Japan, South America and elsewhere prior to, at the same time as, and after the European and US initiatives that had come to seem paradigmatic” while presenting these non-Western practices as much more relevant due to their social and political engagement.⁵⁰

Mari Carmen Ramírez, curator of the Latin American section of the exhibition, argued how Latin America formed a non-hegemonic response to modernism, which subverted some of the dogmas that were part of the movement in Europe. According to the curator, that was the crucial factor which allowed for an early emergence of conceptualism in Latin America, a movement largely focusing on public space instead of art institutions, reaching for a much broader audience than Conceptual Art in the Western World.⁵¹

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Terry Smith, “One and Three Ideas: Conceptualism Before, During, and After Conceptual Art” *e-flux*, no. 29 (November 2011): 117-144, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68078/one-and-three-ideas-conceptualism-before-during-and-after-conceptual-art/>.

51 Queens Museum, “Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s -1980s” Queens Museum, Last modified April 28, 1999, <https://queensmuseum.org/2017/11/global-conceptualism>.

2.4

Conceptualism in Latin America

In order to comprehend the characteristics of conceptualism in Latin America it is necessary to understand the context which contributed to its development. As explained by Mari Carmen Ramírez, this generation of artists had its coming of age during ‘desarrollismo’, a major post-war development effort and a “promise of liberation from the political and economic stranglehold of the United States.”⁵² Simultaneously, they witnessed a “shift of the art world’s centre from Paris to New York, reducing the distance—at least geographically—between that centre and the Latin American periphery.”⁵³ This contributed to a general optimistic atmosphere which ended up collapsing as the envisioned emancipation for Latin America never came, being replaced by the rise of authoritarian regimes in several major South American countries.⁵⁴ This forced artists into a situation where they had to find non-institutionalized ways to articulate their identities, as they “came to feel peripheral not only in relation to the ‘first world’ but inside their own countries.”⁵⁵ Considering these difficult circumstances, Carmen Ramírez explains that artists found interest in Conceptualism due to two main factors: its possibility of transcending the aesthetic realm, “which enabled them to explore problems and issues linked to concrete social and political situations,” and second, “its critique of the traditional institutions and agents of art”, which left the door open for a more broad critique of societal institutions and traditions.⁵⁶ Carmen Ramírez also points out how a ‘return to the object’ could be observed in the artistic practices of many conceptual artists from Latin America, as there was a “refusal to abandon the specificity and communicative potential of the aesthetic object.”⁵⁷

However, non-objectual art still occupied a central position in the artistic practices of the artists, which this research mainly focuses on. This artistic practice of non-objectual art was also known in Latin America as “non-objectualism.” The term was introduced by Juan Acha who tried to formulate a definition for Latin American conceptualism, that avoided Euro-American-Centrism, and which was introducing

⁵² Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Blue Print Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America” in *Latin american artists of the twentieth century*, ed. by Rasmussem, Aldo, (New York: MOMA, 1993): 158, Exhibition Catalogue.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 158-159

⁵⁶ Ibid., 159

⁵⁷ Ibid., 166

different forms of making and conceiving of art.⁵⁸ PIAS (performance, installation and ambient pieces) was another term, one of the initiators of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, Maris Bustamante, coined to refer to this kind of conceptual performance art. Bustamante argued that this was not only a new artistic movement but also “a new way of thinking about reality from the perspective of the arts and particularly the visual arts.”⁵⁹ In Europe, the first artists to engage in performance art had theatre as a background, but in Mexico, as Bustamante explains, it was the visual arts which laid the foundation of this practice. This was for instance the case of Mónica Mayer, one of the members of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, who had a long trajectory as a feminist and visual artist prior to the creation of the group.⁶⁰

The artists involved in the movement generated a convergence of different artistic fields, which had been previously thought of as distinct artistic disciplines. This is one of the reasons why conceptualism, and PIAS in particular, brought to the table a ground-breaking perspective on the world, constituted by “new forms of reasoning, perceiving, and sensing reality” which had its origins in “events and actions whose structure exceeded accepted forms at the time.”⁶¹ Similarly to Mari Carmen Ramírez, Bustamante has pointed out how the idea that the conceptual art movement began in Europe should be questioned, arguing that in Mexico the local context was propitious to the rise of non-objectual art on its own and not merely through importation. “Sometimes it worked inversely; Latin American artists and movements indeed influenced Europe”, Bustamante states.⁶²

58 Samir Gandesha & Johan Hartle, ed., *Aesthetic Marx* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017)

59 Maris Bustamante. *Para quitarle a Freud lo macho (To Get Rid of the Macho in Freud)*, (Mexico City: Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas San Carlos, UNAM, 1982), 134.

60 *Ibid.*, 145

61 *Ibid.*, 134

62 *Ibid.*, 135

3

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Social-political History of Mexico

3.1

Post-Revolutionary Mexico

Monica Mayer and Maris Bustamante grew up in the second half of the twentieth century, which were very turbulent times, both within and beyond Mexico. This period had much influence on the lives of both artists and their work in Mexico. In order to come to a comprehensive understanding of how “Polvo de Gallina Negra” was constituted, it is not only important to look at the personal history of the artists, which will be discussed later on in this study, but also to look at the socio-political historical context of Mexico and the world. History is a discourse with a complicated entanglement of subject-matter and meaning. Therefore, the perspective of the researcher is a crucial element within the study. In the case of this research, there is a perspective of ‘out of place and out of time’, which makes it crucial to get a better understanding of the society and the time that this group originated from and worked in. In this chapter, I will first look into the historical and political changes which took place in Mexico throughout the 20th century, then I will reflect on the developments within the realm of the arts.

The first half of the 20th century was characterized by revolutionary wars and decolonization processes within countries and conflicts that stretched far beyond them. This included the most destructive one in human history, World War II, which brought “unparalleled levels of death, devastation, privation, and disorder.”⁶³ At the end of war, the Eurocentric structure that had dominated the world for centuries disappeared and gave rise to two new dominant powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. During the following four decades both nations ended up in unavoidable tensions because of their “divergent aspirations, needs, histories, governing institutions, and ideologies.”⁶⁴ The events during this period, also known as the Cold War, were part of two major shifts of international politics; as Odd Arne Westad argues in his book, the first was the rise of new states that were constituted by nineteenth century European countries, and the second was the rise of the United States as hegemonic power in the world.⁶⁵ He explains that the United States played a significant role and influence on politics and societies around the world. Developments during the Cold War also gave rise to countercultures in many countries in the 1960s. The

63 Robert McMahon, *Cold War, A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2003.

64 Ibid.

65 Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War, A World History*, (New York: Penguin Books Ltd), 2018.

countercultures in this period consisted mostly of middle-class youth that rejected the dominant culture through interventions and protests.⁶⁶ These countercultures took different forms and were active separately from each other in different ways around the world.

The 20th century started for Mexico with a very long, violent, but very important uprising, also known as the Mexican revolution. Nearly 10 percent of the Mexican population died during this conflict, with the goal of taking down the thirty-five yearlong dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz.⁶⁷ With the Mexican revolution a new government took charge and the constitution of 1917 was created. This constitution had to take drastic measures to redistribute justice and to make social and economic improvements for the majority of the population.⁶⁸ This focus on the social agenda brought major social changes to Mexico. The first President to carry out these changes was Álvaro Obregón. A key figure of this first presidency was José Vasconcelos, who led the cultural and educational projects in order to form and give meaning to the nationalistic ideal.⁶⁹ Vasconcelos played an important role in the history of the cultural and artistic movements of Mexico, which I will further elaborate on in the next chapter.

The new constitution also created more distance between the national government and the church. As Héctor Gomez Peralta states in his article “the Constitutionals had a modern project which consisted of the capitalist development, and some elements of socialism (it included the help and support of the State to guide the industrialization of the nation).”⁷⁰ These developments clashed with the principles of the Catholic hierarchy, which culminated with the anti-clerical legislation of Plutarco Elias Calles, President of Mexico from 1924 to 1928. This legislation caused a civil war from 1926 until 1929, which is also known as “Guerra de los Cristeros”.⁷¹ This conflict is also known for being at the origin of the first manifestation of female activism in Mexico. While many women in other countries during this period fought for their right to vote, in Mexico women figured prominently in the “Guerra de los Cristeros”, while also resisting the “socialist

66 R.W. Larkin, “Counterculture: 1960s and Beyond,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2015): 73–79, Oxford: Elsevier.

67 Aureliano Ortega Esquivel, “Thinking about The Mexican Revolution: Philosophy, Culture and Politics in Mexico: 1910-1934,” *Rupaktha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 2, No. 3 (2010): 247-255.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Héctor Gomez Peralta, “The Role of the Catholic Church in Mexico’s Political Development,” *Politics and Religion* 6, (2012): 17-35.

71 Ibid.

education” propagated by the government.⁷² Many historians claim that because of this movement, carried on by secular Mexican women, women’s right to vote was postponed for 30 years, being granted only in 1953.⁷³ But John D. French argues in his article “Women in Post-revolutionary Mexico” that the period of the Mexican secular women activism “was marked by political effervescence”, and that they even nearly achieved women’s suffrage in 1938. In the decades after the “Guerra de los Cristeros” the relationship between the State, the Catholic Church and women stayed weak.^{74, 75}

After the Mexican revolution, national presidents were appointed mainly through the practice of “dedazo”, or finger pointing, which meant that the incumbent president chose his own successor.⁷⁶ All following presidencies during the 20th century in Mexico, were part of the political party PRI (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional - Institutional Revolutionary Party). The PRI is now seen as one of the longest ruling parties in the world. With this in mind, we can safely conclude that after the Mexican revolution took place, a democracy was never truly achieved.

While the rest of the world was involved in the Second World War, Mexico participated mainly as a supplier of labour and raw materials for the United States.⁷⁷ However, despite staying neutral at first, the country declared war on Germany after an attack on two Mexican tankers.⁷⁸ Once the conflict ended, the United States and the communist Soviet Union competed for worldwide dominance during the so-called Cold War. Throughout the decades that the Cold War lasted, Mexico, as most countries in Latin America, was more focused on developments and tensions inside the country rather than tensions abroad.⁷⁹ Even though these countries were more internally focussed, the United States and the Soviet Union had great influence and played a big part in those internal conflicts and politics, mainly through financial support. During most of the 20th century, Mexico was ruled by the PRI, who dominated heavily throughout all sectors of the country.

⁷² John D. French, “Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico: The Emergence of a New Feminist Political History,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 50, No. 2 (Summer, 2008): 175-184.

⁷³ Jean A. Meyer, “An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Duke University Press Books, 2006), 288.

⁷⁴ Héctor Gomez Peralta, “The Role of the Catholic Church in Mexico’s Political Development,” *Politics and Religion* 6, No.1 (2012): 17-35.

⁷⁵ John D. French, “Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico: The Emergence of a New Feminist Political History,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 50, No. 2 (Summer, 2008): 175-184.

⁷⁶ Tim L. Merrill and Ramón Miró, *Mexico, a country study*, (Federal Research Division Library of Congress, 1996), 49.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War, A World History*, (New York: Penguin Books Ltd), 2018.

3.2

Tlatelolco Massacre

Both artists of the group “Polvo De Gallina Negra” grew up during the second half of the 20th century, in a society with a freshly achieved women’s suffrage and with a lot of political oppression, restlessness and strikes, which came to its full (and tragic) expression during the student massacres in 1968. In a century full of conflicts, this massacre was considered, after the revolution, the most traumatic moment in Mexico’s modern history. This moment changed and formed Mexican society and history for the rest of the 20th century. It opened-up new desires for new understandings of freedom and for processes of revolutionary emancipation, radically influencing and changing the entire academical, artistic, and political climate.⁸⁰

With the Olympic games taking place in Mexico City in 1968, protesting students decided to make use of this international focus on the city and started protests against the ruling political party in order to demand more social justice and genuine democratization of Mexico. After demonstrations over a period of 9 weeks and many violent political interferences, a group of 15,000 students from different universities decided to march to the Tlatelolco square on the 2nd of October 1968.⁸¹ On their march they were joined by labour groups, other movements, and many supporting citizens. At the start of the evening, the Mexican army opened fire on the square which was filled with protesting men, women and children. This violent attack lasted the whole night, causing the deaths of hundreds of people, while thousands of others were wounded.⁸² However, the exact numbers remain unknown to this day as the government officially spoke only of a dozen wounded people.⁸³ They also claimed that the shots that had been fired were provoked by violent rebellious groups in the crowd itself.⁸⁴ This event completely changed the image that the world had of Mexico, while also causing a drastic decrease of people’s trust in the national government. This bloody massacre led many grassroots organizations to immerse themselves in the fight against the undemocratic

⁸⁰ Susana Draper, *1968 Mexico: constellations of freedom*, (Duke University Press, 2018), 23.

⁸¹ Arden Decker, “Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico” (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Joe Richman and Anayansi Diaz-Cortes, “The History Project: Radio Mexico’s 1968 Massacre: What Really Happened?” National Public Radio, December 1, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97546687>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

ruling Party of the Institutional Revolution.⁸⁵ Many of these movements kept active and present during the rest of the 20th century and some remain active even to this day. Simultaneously with these movements, activist artist collectives were founded that were directly and indirectly influenced by the events of 1968.⁸⁶ These new artistic collectives, also known as “Los Grupos”, were politically oriented and tried to subvert the influence of state over artists and other intellectuals.⁸⁷ In the upcoming chapter I will discuss the important influence of “los Grupos” in the Mexican art history and on “Polvo De Gallina Negra”.

In the ‘70s, women in Mexico also began to organize themselves again after a long period of inactivity in order to combat social problems.⁸⁸ The events of 1968 and the international rise of female activism sparked this second wave of feminism in Mexico.⁸⁹ In the following years after the massacre of 1968 the political environment became more repressive, violent and authoritarian. This violent oppression by the federal government, also known as the period of the Mexican Dirty War, was especially focused on left-wing oriented movements and citizens, against whom even armed forces were sometimes used.⁹⁰ In other Latin American countries, the cold-war repressions backed by the United States are well known, but the events of this period in Mexico were equally as brutal.⁹¹ There were many human rights violations made by the government, which have never been legally addressed or politically processed until this day.⁹²

The legalisation of different socialist and communist movements in 1982 brought an end to this period of the so-called Dirty War, but the repression and violence from the government did not end here; arrests, tortures, disappearances and killings continued after 1982.⁹³ In the same year, Mexico announced that it could no longer pay interest on its international loans, which brought not only Mexico to a financial crisis but also the rest of the world.⁹⁴ In exchange for aid during this crisis the International Monetary Fund

85 Edward J. McCaughan, “Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico,” *Social Justice* 34, No.1 (2007): 44.

86 *Ibid.*, 45

87 *Ibid.*, 45

88 Jennifer L. Bauermeister, “The Involvement of Women in Mexican Politics and Economics” (PhD diss. WSU Pullman, 1999).

89 *Ibid.*

90 Alejandro Guardado, “Mexico’s Forgotten Dirty War: Guerrero’s Student, Worker, and Campesino Activism,” *Perspectives, A Journal of Historical Inquiry*, no. 46(Spring 2019.): 35-47.

91 *Ibid.*

92 *Ibid.*

93 *Ibid.*

94 Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War, A World History*, (New York: Penguin Books Ltd), 2018.

demanded from Mexico a “structural transformation”, which meant that they had to incorporate neoliberal elements into their national economy.⁹⁵ This “structural transformation”, the economic crisis, a more urbanized and educated population, the growth of mass communication and a flexible and competitive electoral framework fomented an on-going process of more political participation and democratization.⁹⁶ Despite this fact, the PRI managed to hold on to its hegemony up until 2000, mainly through corruption and electoral forgery. One of the actors who tried to undermine their hegemony during these years was the church. In the 20th century, the church was not used by the state as an ideological apparatus to uphold the status quo.⁹⁷ However, on many occasions, this institution partnered up with other elites or negotiated with the state directly in order to try to achieve constitutional modifications, defend its own interests and fight for its own socio-Christian project. The influence of the church on Mexican society was very prominent, and it remains so to this day, as most Mexicans consider themselves catholic believers.⁹⁸

In 1993 the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was introduced, which brought a lot of change to Mexican society and economy, in both positive and negative ways. It made Mexico one of the biggest traders and a very attractive investment environment in the world.⁹⁹ However, it also signified the end for smaller local businesses and it only widened the gap between the rich and the poor.¹⁰⁰ Also, it made Mexican culture more open to the dominant American pop culture and lifestyle that NAFTA introduced through its products and trade, which together with political imbalance caused the partial loss of Mexican identity and history.¹⁰¹ Through this selective historical description, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the Mexican society that both artists discussed in this study were a part of.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Héctor Gomez Peralta, “The Role of the Catholic Church in Mexico’s Political Development,” *Politics and Religion* 6, No. 1 (2012): 17-35.

98 Ibid.

99 Maitane Zuloaga, “The Cultural Impact of NAFTA on Mexico” (diss., The University of Montana, 2001).

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

4

Art History of Mexico

4.1

Mexican art in the 19th century

The western concept of art was brought to Mexico by its colonial emperors. This does not mean that there was no art before this time, only that earlier art was created by people who did not have the same understanding of the western concept of art nowadays. As Davies argues “the absence of a single word for art in some non-Western cultures does not entail that they lack the concept.”¹⁰² However, recognition of pre-Hispanic art came much later.¹⁰³ The definition of art has been debated by many intellectuals over the years, but for this study I will follow the definition proposed by Stephan Davies. He argues that something is art:

(a) If its shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within the art tradition, or if it is intended by its makers/presenter to be art and its maker/ presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention.¹⁰⁴

For the contextualisation of the art history in Mexico it is important to note that in this definition something can be art also if it is not publicly recognized or falls outside all art worlds.¹⁰⁵ During different periods in the history of Mexican art, several art forms and artists have been ignored and not recognized by the dominant art world.

Before colonial times, pre-Hispanic art had been the dominant “art form” for centuries, as far as we know. These objects, structures and other forms that we now consider as art were produced by indigenous people and were mainly created for socially useful functions, such as religious rituals.¹⁰⁶ After the Spanish conquest and during the colonial rule, art remained tied to religion but this time it was produced in the European Catholic tradition.¹⁰⁷ Late colonial artists were trained at the first art academy of the Americas,

¹⁰² Stephan Davies, “Non-Western Art and Art’s Definition,” in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. by Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 199-216.

¹⁰³ Ray Hernández-Durán, “Modern Practice in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: The Academy of San Carlos and La Antigua Escuela Mexicana,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 1-11.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Davies, “Defining Art and Artworlds,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, No. 73 (2015): 375-384.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Stephan Davies, “Non-Western Art and Art’s Definition,” in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. by Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 199-216.

¹⁰⁷ Ray Hernández-Durán, “Modern Practice in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: The Academy of San Carlos and La Antigua Escuela Mexicana,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 1-11.

the Academy of San Carlos. It was founded in 1785 with a focus on classical European art, later becoming the place where a modern and national art would develop and rise.¹⁰⁸ This was the first institute in Mexico and in the Americas that occupied itself with the teaching of art forms and theory.¹⁰⁹ Aside from these developments during the colonial rule in Mexico, not much is known regarding posterior developments within the art world of the country. San Carlos was the first art institute where more information was found about in the archives. Therefore, I chose to look instead at the history of this specific institute. The academy saw through several revolutions and political independence and gave a place to artists to develop themselves under and after colonial doctrine. During colonial rule the academy of San Carlos gave the first spark to the rise of a national Mexican modern art and continued doing this after Mexico's independence. The first art competition and art exhibition in Mexico was organized in 1849 by the Academy of San Carlos, which mainly consisted of originals and copies of European paintings.¹¹⁰ Throughout the time José Bernardo Couto was president of the Academy of San Carlos, he started developing a collection of Mexican paintings, which were in this period mainly religiously themed.¹¹¹ Couto called this first collection of Mexican paintings "La Antigua Escuela Mexicana" or the "Old Mexican School" and it served both as an example for Academy students and as an element of national pride for Mexican citizens.¹¹² Many works that were not included in this collection were also not even recognized as art, such as "biombos (Japanese-inspired, free-standing, multi-panelled screens)", "caste paintings (eighteenth-century genre of painting that references miscegenation, professional trades, and social hierarchy in New Spain)", "Asian-inspired shell-inlay paintings", "works possessing salient indigenous or hybrid qualities", and sculpture.¹¹³ This had an important influence on what constituted the dominant artworld of Mexico, inside and outside of the country.

During the 19th century, women in Mexico were mainly bound to domestic and familial duties and were therefore only allowed to receive an education that was connected to these subject matters. Initially, only men were allowed to enrol as students at the Academy of San Carlos, but after the reforms in the

¹⁰⁸ Jean Charlot, *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos 1785-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ray Hernández-Durán, "Modern Practice in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: The Academy of San Carlos and La Antigua Escuela Mexicana," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 1-11.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

second half of the 19th century, some women were allowed to participate in a limited amount of courses and some even got recognized and honoured by the Academy.¹¹⁴ This limited artistic access for women was criticized for the first time in *“El Album de la Mujer”*, a journal for and by women that emerged in the late 19th century.¹¹⁵ The journal was also extensively used by *“Polvo De Gallina Negra”* as a platform for their critical articles and art.

Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, students at the Academy of San Carlos started criticizing the European style and themes that were taught at the Academy. As Elizabeth Wilder Weismann argued:

Human nature remains stubbornly natural, and creative invention is perhaps more natural than obedience. [...] The young Mexican painter using his eyes, sees that he is walking in a world of men who are not put together by classical canons of proportion. It becomes clear that Moctezuma’s costume, his face his figure, and his way of moving cannot be deduced from the ruins of Rome or even Egypt, and that these differences are indeed the cardinal interest of the Aztec Emperor.¹¹⁶

The students of the Academy of San Carlos began looking for an art that was more connected with the Mexican reality.

114 Lisandra Estevez, “Mexican women artists in the 19th century,” published March 2018 at Gove Art Online, Oxford University Press, accessed April 5, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oao/9781884446054.013.2000000026>

115 Ivonne Diaz, “El Álbum De La Mujer. Periodismo Femenino: El Primer Paso Hacia La Modernidad y la Ciudadanía,” *Desactos*, No.3 (2000): 107-114.

116 Elizabeth Wilder Weismann, “Foreword,” in *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos 1785-1915* by Jean Charlot, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 9-12.

4.2

Mexican Muralism

With the turn of the twentieth century, Mexico was caught in a revolutionary civil war for 10 years. During this period, the Academy of San Carlos was forced to close its doors. After the war, when the Academy of San Carlos opened again, the young artists felt an even stronger disconnection between Mexican culture and the art that was being taught at the San Carlos Academy.¹¹⁷ Students organised themselves to rebel and counter their school's conservative values.¹¹⁸ In this period, art also came to be very intertwined with politics, becoming a tool for the government and specifically for the minister of education, José Vasconcelos, to create and develop a national identity. The goal was to unite Mexico and its people through murals that visually reflected Mexican culture – because 90 percent of the population did not know how to read or write - giving people a common identity that they could recognise themselves in.¹¹⁹ Some years before, Vasconcelos argued in a published essay “that the material and spiritual suffering the Revolution brought in its wake had revealed the need for a Fatherland (patria).”¹²⁰ With the conceptual foundations that were argued in his essay, Vasconcelos and those who helped realise his project established the artistic movement known as “Mexican Muralism” or the “Mexican school”.¹²¹ Many of the artists that helped to implement this project came from the Academy of San Carlos and were also part of the reformation of the Academy itself.¹²² The murals idealised the national history with many national heroes, indigenous people and revolutionary symbols. Vasconcelos saw these murals as an important communication medium and gave several muralists instructions to create murals in different parts of the city and the country. The murals were mostly created on important government buildings and at important public spaces.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Tatiana Flores, “Strategic Modernists: Women in Post-Revolutionary Mexico,” *Women’s Art Journal* 29, No. 29 (Fall-Winter, 2008): 12-22.

¹¹⁹ Susana Pliego Quijano, “Muralism and Rupture: Crosscurrents in Mexican Art” (Paper Martha Miller Center, Hope College, October 2016), 1-15.

¹²⁰ Aureliano Ortega Esquivel, “Thinking about The Mexican Revolution: Philosophy, Culture and Politics in Mexico: 1910-1934,” *Rupaktha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 2, No. 3 (2010): 247-255.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Jean Charlot, “Diego Rivera at the Academy of San Carlos,” *College Art Journal* 10, No. 1 (Autumn, 1950): 10-17

¹²³ Tatiana Flores, “Strategic Modernists: Women in Post-Revolutionary Mexico,” *Women’s Art Journal* 29, No. 29 (Fall-Winter, 2008): 12-22.

Within a couple of years, several Mexican artists were commissioned by the government to develop this manifestation of patriotic history that embraced and actualized pre-Hispanic past and the contemporary world of indigenous Mexicans on buildings. The same artists were also being requested to teach this artistic style at art schools, becoming very important icons of Mexican art, within and outside of Mexico. Three of them came to be especially famous, known as “Los Tres Grandes.” They were not only responsible for establishing a new artistic period in Mexico, but also for helping to develop and educate new artistic generations.¹²⁴ “Los Tres Grandes” consisted of José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera. Being very socially and politically involved, they took advantage of the platform and the recognition that Vasconcelos gave them in order to organise themselves into a political communist party.¹²⁵ Even though the mural movement was mainly concentrated around the three of them, there were other important Mexican artists who helped to establish this new art movement and national identity. Many of these painters were actively involved in the Revolution, calling themselves painters for the people, and painting mainly Mexican landscapes, indigenous people, the daily lives of the Mexican workers, symbols of the revolution and even poems (in the Náhuatl indigenous language).¹²⁶

In Mexican art history, muralism is a very important and well-known movement, mainly because of the great support it received from the state. However, the evident dominance of this period and art movement did overshadow other artworlds and movements that took place at the same time. One of them was the female artists movement that began in the 1920s, and which was most certainly active during this period but has not been given its due recognition.¹²⁷ These women were pioneers for what the first feminist art groups and feminist artists later continued to do. As Tatiana Flores describes in her article, some were “critiquing the dominant avant-garde models, experimenting with diverse media that challenged the parameters of high art, employing pedagogy and activism as means to effect social and cultural changes, and asserting the relevance of art that engaged personal experience.”¹²⁸ Most of these women attended

¹²⁴ Shifra M. Goldman, “Mexican Muralism: Its Social Educative Roles in Latin America and the United States,” *Aztlan* 13 (1982): 111-133.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Dawn Ades, “The Mexican Mural Movement,” in *Art in Latin America: The modern Era, 1820-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 150-179.

¹²⁷ Dawn Ades, “The Mexican Mural Movement,” in *Art in Latin America: The modern Era, 1820-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 150-179.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

the what was known as “Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre” (open air art schools) that were established in the 1920s with a system of open admissions and where no fees were charged for attendance.¹²⁹ These schools did allow some form of experimentation, but they also had an ideological pedagogical theory behind it.¹³⁰ The works of the women artists in the 1920s were mostly overlooked during their lifetime; however, they do show the richness and vibrancy of Mexican Culture in the 1920s. After the Revolution, another state-sponsored art school named “La Esmeralda” emerged. At this school, many Mexican artists taught and were taught, such as Frida Kahlo and also Maris Bustamante.¹³¹

The Academy of San Carlos, which during the 20th century became part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, is now known as the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plasticas. This institution, as well as La Esmeralda and other art schools located in Mexico City, were important places where new art movements arose and began to spark.¹³² This period of social political art that is known as “the Mexican school” or as “Mexican Muralism” was dominant and was seen nationally and internationally as the national, institutionalised and monumental art form of Mexico from 1920s up until the 1950s.¹³³

129 David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

130 Ibid.

131 Arturo Rodriguez Döring, “Una historia de “La Esmeralda”, la escuela de arte del México posrevolucionario,” *Revista Arbitrada de Artes Visuales* 36, No. 3 (Julio/Diciembre, 2015): 64-72.

132 Ibid.

133 Rita Eder, “La Ruptura con el Muralismo y la Pintura Mexicana en Los Años Cincuenta,” in *Helen Escobedo* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades, 1982).

4.3

La Ruptura and Los Grupos

At the end of the 1940s, a new generation of young artists started to turn against this very political and nationalistic way of making art. These artists were later called the Rupture Generation, “Generacion de la Ruptura.” It was a diverse group of artists with a more international and universal point of view influenced by a new moving world, with new concerns and new ways of expression.¹³⁴ The Rupture Generation implemented a new artistic concept which was not linked with the idea of social and political art. Instead, it was inspired by the creative process itself, the imaginary, the figuration and the exploration of the possibility of abstraction.¹³⁵ In the first half of the 20th century, most artistic venues and academies in Mexico were controlled by the government, and, consequently, there were not many places where art was exhibited or sold outside of these institutions. Emerging in 1952, “La Prisse” became the first private gallery to open in Mexico. It was founded by a group of artists that tried to break with the Mexican Muralism movement and look for an alternative space where their art could be exhibited, because up until then their art had been censured by the government in many places.^{136, 137} “La Prisse” was not only a gallery, but also a place where the artists from the rupture movement came together to discuss and unite against the monopoly of the Mexican school. This resulted in the gallery being of great importance for the rupture movement.¹³⁸ During this period the gallery was also criticized by several members of the Muralist movement and was forced to close after a year because of accusations of it being administered by the CIA.¹³⁹ However, this gallery led the Rupture movement to create other alternative spaces and galleries, which all together became a platform for the new rising Mexican art and revitalized the art market activity, the public and private art collecting and patronage.¹⁴⁰ The plurality of styles and internationalism were essential factors for this new

¹³⁴ Rita Eder ed., *Desafio a la estabilidad. Procesos artisticos en Mexico, 1950-1967/ Defying Stability. Processes in Mexico, 1952-1967* (Mexico City: UNAM/Turner, 2014). Exhibition catalogue.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ David A. Fuente, *La Disputa de “La Ruptura” con el muralismo (1950-1970): Luchas de Clases en la Rearticulación del Campo Artístico Mexicano* (Mexico: Instituto Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2019.).

¹³⁷ Rita Eder ed., *Desafio a la estabilidad. Procesos artisticos en Mexico, 1950-1967/ Defying Stability. Processes in Mexico, 1952-1967* (Mexico City: UNAM/Turner, 2014). Exhibition catalogue.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

movement, which overcame institutional obstacles, an economic crisis and society's resistance to change but, most importantly, it helped to establish new roads and converting the ways of making and thinking about art.¹⁴¹ In the late 1950s and 1960s the artists from the Rupture movement started to get more recognition for their work. This first came internationally but later also nationally by the state of Mexico. As Rita Eder has argued, the artists of the Rupture movement "paved the road for the next generations opening the possibility of endless roads of contemporary art."¹⁴²

The movement "Los Grupos" was one of the young generations of artists to emerge at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Together with this movement, the artists of the Ruptura and other artists from the 1970s made an important contribution towards the introduction of conceptualism in Mexico.¹⁴³ Especially after the protests of 1968, where thousands of people were killed, these artists started to express their perspectives of the world and the society within which they lived. This group of artists, later known as "Los Grupos", searched for new models of art through which they could speak to the public. As Arden Decker argues, this need did not only grow out of the political unrest within Mexican society but also from their rejection of the dominant figurative Muralism and the tendencies towards abstraction from the Ruptura.¹⁴⁴ The groups were convinced that their collective work allowed them to create projects that were beyond the reach of the work of an individual and they were interested in discussing how art could contribute to new artistic practices.¹⁴⁵ The works and discussions in the groups were mainly socio-politically themed but, in contrary to the Muralist artists, they were actively involved in the critique of political structures (rather than supporting them) and institutes. Despite the seriousness with which they initiated conceptualism in Mexico, the group's contributions have been unacknowledged both during and after the activity of the group, and their work has remained hidden in their own archives for many years.¹⁴⁶ As Arden Decker mentions, the disconnection with the traditional way of making art made these artists search for new alternative ways for this process, but the lack of funding made many artworks and artists of this period disappear.¹⁴⁷

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Arden Decker, "Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico" (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

144 Ibid.

145 Olivier Debroise and Cuauthémoc Medina, *La era de la discrepancia the age of discrepancies, Arte y Cultura visual en México, Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968 – 1997* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 197-199.

146 Arden Decker, "Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico" (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

147 Ibid.

Another important factor of why this period has been neglected is the lack of texts about the developments of contemporary Mexican art within and outside of Mexico.¹⁴⁸ At the time, national texts about Mexican art had mainly nationalistic purposes, while outside Mexico, modern Mexican art was considered political or something exotic.¹⁴⁹ Only recently have attempts been made to develop and recover this unacknowledged period of contemporary Mexican art. It was the exhibition and research of Olivier Debroise and Cuauthémoc Medina that initiated this first recovery of the period from the 1960s through the 1990s. In their essays, they explain several causes for the lack of critical attention to this post-Rupture, post-Muralist period.¹⁵⁰ The artists of this period were disconnected from their previous generation in different ways and, as Debroise and Cuauthémoc argue, their “collective practice proved essential in allowing artists in Mexico to exercise new-found freedoms, without which they would never have created a new art, with new audiences and new forms of reception.”¹⁵¹ However, there has also been some criticism about the name that is used for this movement and even if the “Grupos” could really be called a movement at all. For instance, Arden Decker argues that, “the sheer multitude of platforms and strategies, coupled with their diverse political positions, make this trend difficult to encapsulate or contextualize as one coherent artistic movement.”¹⁵²

Criticism came also from the collectives themselves. In particular the group Maris Bustamante was part of, chose not to call themselves a collective and therefore preferred the term, “No Grupo”, a non-group. As they stated, “we are not a forced and fraudulent collectivism which frees responsibility in comfortable anonymity. The “No Grupo” is a workshop of critique, of attitudes, and positions.” “No Grupo” was active from 1977-1983 and introduced a humorous and parodical conceptualism or non-objectualism through new platforms, in order to radically criticize themselves, institutionalized art structures, and their colleagues.^{153,154}

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

150 Olivier Debroise and Cuauthémoc Medina, *La era de la discrepancia the age of discrepancies, Arte y Cultura visual en México, Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968 – 1997* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 197-199.

151 Ibid.

152 Arden Decker, “Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico” (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

153 Ibid.

154 Maris Bustamante, “Non-Objective Arts In Mexico 1963-83,” in *Corpus Delecti, Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (London: Routledge, 2000), 204-217.

The group movement is often seen as the start of conceptualism in Mexico, but as Decker, Medina and Debroise have argued similar art practices, networks and strategies of Mexican artists did exist before the rise of the groups.^{155, 156} In the early 1980s the movements of the “Grupos” began to fade as many artists felt the urge to focus more on their own artistic work and their own personal and professional growth.¹⁵⁷ Without a doubt, the movement of the “Grupos”, in which both Monica Mayer and Maris Bustamante were involved – albeit critically, helped them to constitute their group “Polvo De Gallina Negra” in the 1980s.

155 Arden Decker, “Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico” (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

156 Olivier Debroise and Cuauthémoc Medina, *La era de la discrepancia the age of discrepancies, Arte y Cultura visual en México, Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968 – 1997* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 197-199.

157 Ibid.

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Polvo de Gallina Negra

5.1

The rise of Polvo de Gallina Negra

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Grupos started with the use of subversive techniques in order to infiltrate and critique institutional cultural systems. The use of such techniques was the start of conceptualism, non-objectual, and performance art in Mexico. An important impact and influence on the rise of these collectives during the 1970s was the massacre of 1968 and the political unrest that followed. This period and the art forms that became common within these collectives, especially from the group No Grupo which Maris Bustamante was a part of, had a great influence on the start of the first feminist art group “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. Another important factor that had influence on the development of this group was the global and local rise of feminist movements and the introduction of feminist theory in the 1970s. Furthermore, the UN Women Conference of 1975, which was held in Mexico-City, was the main element that catalyzed the feminist movements in Mexico and later the first feminist artists and art groups in Mexico.¹⁵⁸ Apart from “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, two other groups arose in the 1980s: “Bioarte” and “Tlacuilas y retrateras”. Both of these groups were only active for a short time, which made “Polvo de Gallina Negra” the only remaining feminist art group in Mexico until 1993. Established in 1983 by Monica Mayer and Maris Bustamante, “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, which means Black Hen Dust in English, is considered the first and most important feminist art group of Mexico, remaining active for 10 years.

Bustamante and Mayer knew each other and were good friends before they started “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. With a shared interest in feminism and after attending several meetings, workshops and lectures, both women decided to start a feminist art group in Mexico. The group was initially not intended to only consist of Mayer and Bustamante. In our interview, Bustamante explained that before they started the group, they invited all their artistic female friends to discuss feminist issues and the start of the group over a coffee. From all the 60 females that were present on that day, no one decided to participate in the group.^{159 160} Both women were amazed and disappointed that these women did not want to organize a group

¹⁵⁸ Mónica Mayer, “Un breve testimonio sobre los ires y venires del arte feminista en México durante la última década del siglo xx y la primera del xxi,” *Debate Feminista*, Vol. 40 (Octubre, 2009): 191-218.

¹⁵⁹ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

¹⁶⁰ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

in a country where the machismo culture was so dominant.¹⁶¹ Bustamante explained that this hesitance by the women was due to several reasons: the first one being that many of them said that they did not face any problems with being a woman and that they did not need a group because of it. It was surprising for both women to hear this, considering that the art worlds, art institutions and art schools were dominated by men and that there were a lot of prejudices and myths about women during that time, which was for many another big obstacle to join the group. Those women who declined to become a member also thought the group was too rebellious and dangerous, since being a feminist was threatening for the conservative thought of Mexico.¹⁶² A third reason was that most of the women were in relationships with men, who would not like them to be in a feminist art group and might even become angry about this. Some of the women also stated that if they would join the group, they would not be able to get a boyfriend, because people would know they were feminists.¹⁶³ The last reason these women gave was that they thought collective work was out of fashion. In 1983 most collectives in Mexico had faded and contemporary artists started to work on their individual careers. Since Bustamante and Mayer were both part of the group generation, for them it was a natural choice to continue this collective way of working. However, after this unsuccessful meeting, they had to figure out a way to do so. At the same time, this fruitless encounter convinced them even more of the need for the existence of such a group and they decided to continue in a smaller format.¹⁶⁴ In the beginning, Herminia Dosal, who was a photographer and a friend of both Bustamante and Mayer, was also part of the group, but she participated only for a short period. Mayer explained that Dosal did not connect with the performative character of their actions nor with the personal investment she had to make in the group and thus she decided to withdraw.^{165, 166}

In the ten years that followed the group's establishment, Mayer and Bustamante experimented with different art forms in the search for the ones that fitted best with their concept and ideas. These different forms included performance art, public interventions, the use of different kinds of media, publications of

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

texts, curatorship, mail art, lectures and other multidisciplinary art forms and platforms.¹⁶⁷ It was a time where artists started to experiment and bringing new perspectives into the field. In the case of “Polvo de Gallina Negra” they helped constructing a new perspective in the arts of feminist thought and theory in the arts.¹⁶⁸ With their feminist art projects, they constantly questioned the role of the women in society, their image, their portrayal and the violence against them in Mexico.¹⁶⁹ The objectives of Mayer and Bustamante were not only to analyse the image of women in Mexican society, but also to study and promote women’s participation in the Mexican art world and to represent the experience of a woman in a patriarchal system, in the hope to create more consciousness about this and help change perspectives.¹⁷⁰

The artistic works of “Polvo de Gallina Negra” used a lot of Mexican humour, which was somewhat dark, and also engaged in a lot of word play and double meanings.^{171, 172, 173} Bustamante and Mayer thought this was the best way for them to address these heavy and sensitive topics which concerned women in Mexican society. Moreover, this approach was not new to them; Bustamante had been part of the group “No Grupo” for seven years prior to the start of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, where she had already made use of this humoristic and playful approach in her work. No Grupo had what was a unique style of humour, irony and satire at that time. “They conceptualized a brand of comedic conceptualism”, a strategy that was quite effective and was continued by Bustamante and Mayer in the group “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.¹⁷⁴ An example of this is the work; “Instrumento de trabajo/Para quitarle Freud lo macho” (Work Instrument: To Get Rid of the Macho in Freud), that Bustamante produced as part of the performance of No Grupo “Caliente-Caliente” (Hot-Hot) with Carlos Zerpa at Mexico City’s Museum of Modern Art (MAM). For this work Bustamante created masks made from her face and with a penis as the nose that had a sign on it that said;

¹⁶⁷ Gladys Villegas Morales, “Los grupos de arte feminista en México,” *Revista La Palabra y el Hombre* (January-March, 2009): 45-57.

¹⁶⁸ Araceli Barbosa, *Arte Feminista en Los Ochenta en México* (Cuernavaca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado Morelos, 2008).

¹⁶⁹ Gladys Villegas Morales, “Los grupos de arte feminista en México,” *Revista La Palabra y el Hombre* (January-March, 2009): 45-57.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

¹⁷³ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

¹⁷⁴ Arden Decker, “Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico” (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

“work instrument”.¹⁷⁵ It was created in a response to Sigmund Freud’s theory “that a woman who wanted to engage in professional endeavors suffered from penis envy.”¹⁷⁶ Bustamante asked her audience to wear the mask while she read “how it was better to be a boy because girls didn’t have as much fun as they did”, which was a song by Nina Hagen.¹⁷⁷

This humoristic approach was a strategy that was present and evolving during these times and through which Mexican artists inspired each other.¹⁷⁸ For “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, this approach was very important as it motivated them persist and made their experience of work during this time “joyful”.¹⁷⁹ Both women shared that their work process was very spontaneous and intuitive when they would come together, which was normally once a week, and how they always worked and discussed a lot, while also “having plenty of fun.”¹⁸⁰ During this time, Bustamante and Mayer both created works for “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, but also worked separately on their own projects and artistic careers. Their hard work ensured they became very important feminist artists in Mexico. Undoubtedly, they remained very passionate about the objectives and importance of the group amidst very turbulent and violent years in Mexico’s history.

¹⁷⁵ Maris Bustamante, “Non-Objective Arts In Mexico 1963-83,” in *Corpus Delecti, Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (London: Routledge, 2000), 204-217.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

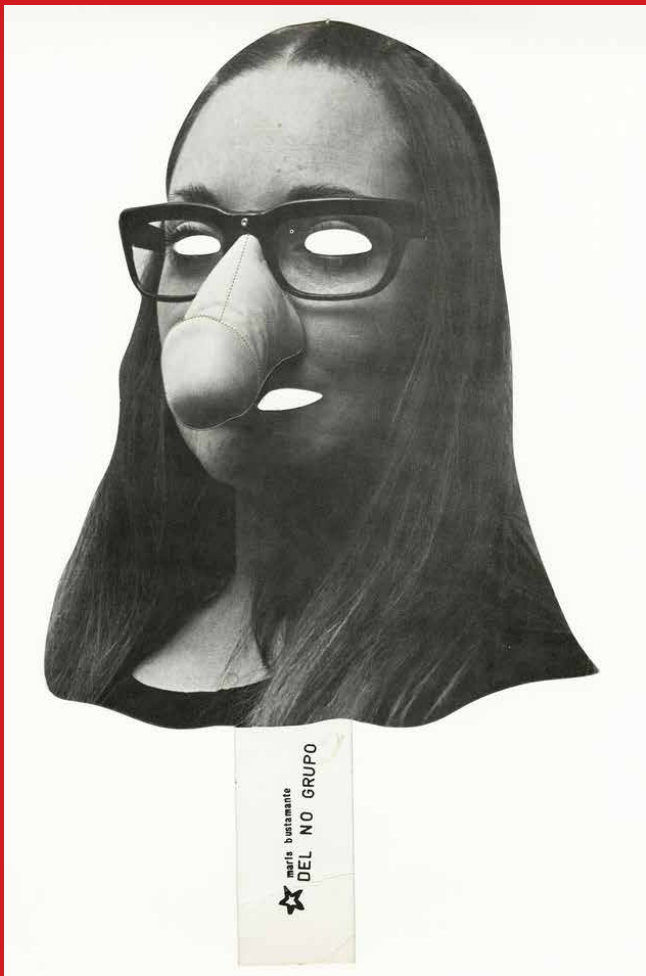


Figure 2 - Maris Bustamante, *El pene como instrumento de trabajo (The Penis as a work instrument)*, Fondo No Grupo, 1982, Hammer Museum Digital Archive, Los Angeles.

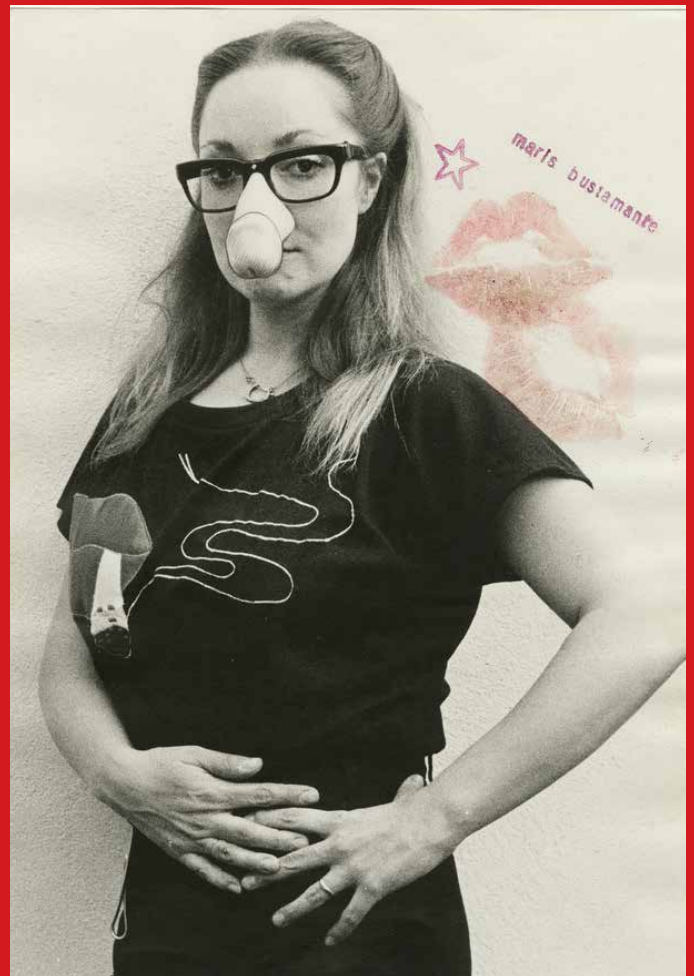


Figure 3 - Maris Bustamante, *El pene como instrumento de trabajo (The Penis as a work instrument)*, Fondo No Grupo, 1982, Hammer Museum Digital Archive, Los Angeles.

5.2

Personal backgrounds

In the interviews that I was able to hold for this research I asked both artists about their experience of growing up as women in Mexico and how they came in contact with feminism. I did this in order to get a better understanding where they came from and what contributed to the constitution of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. Even though both women were born and raised in Mexico City, growing up in upper middle-class families during the sixties and seventies, they did have very different lives and upbringing before they started “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.

In the interview, Mayer told me that she was brought up in a family that was very involved in the social politics of Mexico of that time, which made her aware of the different social and political structures, perspectives and tensions within Mexican society from a very young age. In her household there were always many people around, important dinners for her father’s business friends, poor children from the neighbourhood who her mother taught during the day, family, etc.¹⁸¹ She grew up between three brothers in a bilingual, Jewish, Catholic, but mostly atheistic family. Her mother had done her studies at the San Carlos Academy and had many artistic friends. In our conversation, Mayer referred to her mother as a “professional housemaker” who always worked very hard.¹⁸² Unfortunately, when Mayer was a teenager her mother was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which changed her life completely. She testifies that in some ways she had “a very protective life economically” but it was also “very complicated”, as the oldest daughter who saw herself having to grow too quickly due to the crises that she had to endure at home.¹⁸³ Her father, on the other hand, was a busy businessman, a more authoritarian figure who was seen as the head of the family, and who she described as a largely “absent figure”.¹⁸⁴

In our conversation, Mayer explained that while growing up she had many strong female examples in her family, some of whom had a job and who were politically involved. For instance, her great aunt was the first woman ambassador of Mexico and the undersecretary of education when The Museum of Anthropology and Modern Art started. However, the first time she came into contact with the term feminism

¹⁸¹ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

was in South Wales (UK), where she attended high school for two years. During this time, second wave feminism rose globally as well as in Mexico. Feminism of this period did not only intend to understand the position of women within modern society; it was also a global project to propose new perspectives of the world and our societies, as Maria Dolores Paris argues.¹⁸⁵ For Mayer, it was after high school, when she joined the art school of San Carlos, that she became more interested in and further developed her own feminist theory and thought. She joined art school the year after the massacre of 1968, which meant that the political situation in Mexico was very tense. It was a year where Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, which was at the time part of the UNAM, and was previously called The Academy of San Carlos, started with a new academic bachelor and with newly commissioned teachers.¹⁸⁶ At this school, many were involved in politics and many women artists were also involved in feminism. Mayer stated that during this time she joined a lot of demonstrations; it was an important period that became a big part of her life.¹⁸⁷ After art school she was able to continue with her artistic work because of an exhibition that was organized by one of her teachers. One of her early interactive feminist works was “El Tendedero/The Clothesline”, which she produced in 1978. The work was Mayer’s response to her experiences of sexual harassment in the city, engaging with a subject that was not openly discussed at the time.¹⁸⁸ She distributed pink postcards with statements such as; “As a woman, what I most hate about the city is” or “As a woman, where do you feel safe? Why?”, “As a woman, have you ever experienced violence or harassment? What happened?.” The cards were meant to be finished by the public and pinned with clothespins to the pink clothesline, which deliberately referred to “women’s work” in Mexican society.¹⁸⁹ With much interest in the intersection between feminism and art, she participated in the Woman’s Building feminist studio workshop in Los Angeles, where she studied with Suzanne Lacy and joined the Feminist Art Program in 1978. Inspired by the workshop, and after finishing her master’s degree at the Goddard College in Sociology of Art, where she studied more about feminist art, she returned to Mexico and started the art collective “Polvo de Gallina Negra” together with Maris Bustamante.

185 Maria Dolores Paris, “Reseña del libro: La nueva ola del feminismo en México, Jaiven, Ana Lau,” review of *La nueva ola del feminismo en México*, by Ana Lau Jaiven, *Secuencia* 12 (September-December, 1988): 200-202.

186 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

187 Ibid.

188 Mallory Nezam, “Turning a Clothesline into a Powerful Feminist Statement,” *Hyperallergic*, January 3, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/419827/turning-a-clothesline-into-a-powerful-feminist-statement/>

189 Alberto McKelligan Hernández, “Monica Mayer, The Clothesline,” *Khan Academy*, 2019., <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/conceptual-and-performance-art/conceptual-performance/a/mnica-mayer-the-clothesline>



Figure 4 - Monica Mayer, *El Tendero (The Clothesline)*, 1978, instalacion, Salón 77-78, Nuevas tendencias, Museo de Arte Moderno, México City.

Bustamante was raised in a more conservative and traditional family than Mayer. Her father was a Catalan man who settled in Mexico after the Civil War in Spain. She grew up as the oldest daughter, with a younger brother and sister. Bustamante got in touch with art and culture from a young age, since her father had many friends who made art or gave lectures. In our conversation, Bustamante told me that her father always enjoyed art and brought her along to many different events. She explained how her father taught her to enjoy art and to develop a critical and intelligent thinking. However, the relationship between her and her father did change when she became older. Her father enjoyed art, but in a very traditional way and, in these times, art started to undergo many changes.¹⁹⁰ There was one specific moment Bustamante remembers as crucial to her noticing a generational gap between her and her father. It started with the performance of a famous Catalan actress that they both went to. The performance, which Bustamante really enjoyed, was something different, something new, but her father did not like it all.¹⁹¹ Throughout the years she developed a greater interest in art and decided to further explore her creative skills through her art study at la Escuela Nacional de Pintura y Escultura “La Esmeralda.” This was a well-known school where many important painters and artists taught. During the time that Bustamante studied there, the school was still very conservative, and there were not a lot of possibilities or freedom, aside from the traditional art forms, like paintings, sculpture and engraving, etc.¹⁹² In the interview, Bustamante mentioned that she did not like this approach and was very critical of everything, including the teachers, the school and the students. However, this did create a special relationship between her and the principal of the school, as he wanted to understand her. After the first exhibition they organised, he called her to congratulate her, but said that he thought the exhibition was not serious enough, as he found it too chaotic, and a “little bit of everything”.¹⁹³ Back then, people had never heard about “multi-discipline” or “cross-discipline” art, she explained.¹⁹⁴

After her studies, Bustamante continued her artistic career by being part of different art collectives, among which “No Grupo” and “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. Aside from this she also worked on her own projects. No Grupo was active between 1977-1983 and was an important collective within the group

¹⁹⁰ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

movement. They had “a multi-media approach to creating new artistic forms, employing actions or performances and other types of guerrilla infiltrations as a form of institutional critique.”¹⁹⁵ In this group, Bustamante was the only woman. Throughout the years in which Bustamante started developing a stronger interest in artistic practices, she mentions that the distance between her and her family grew. Her father and mother never accepted the things she did and the choices she made. At one point, her mother even begged her to leave the group and stop doing art. Her father tried to understand what she was doing but, after joining one of her earlier performances, asked her not to invite him anymore. She recalls him saying, “please, do not ask me, do not invite me anymore, because I feel embarrassed with your friends, because I do not understand these things and I feel embarrassed.”¹⁹⁶ For Bustamante this was a hard thing to deal with, but she made the decision to keep going and keep making art as a woman. After seven active years, No Grupo decided to put an end to their existence as a collective and focus more on their individual practice, because as Bustamante has stated during the interview “as a woman I always begin and end things, that is my main discipline.”¹⁹⁷ In the same year she stopped with “No Grupo”, Bustamante and Mayer decided to start “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.

¹⁹⁵ Arden Decker, “Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico” (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

¹⁹⁶ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

5.3

The first feminist art group of the 20th century

Before Mayer and Bustamante started “Polvo de Gallina Negra” - at the time of the global rise of second wave feminism - the term feminism and other feminist concepts and ideas were completely new. As Bustamante explained in the interview, there were many feminists she admired, at the time Theresa de Lauretis was the one she was inspired about the most, as it was through her that Bustamante and many others heard for the first time about the difference between sex and gender. Both Bustamante and Mayer understood from a very young age their position as women within their families but also within Mexican society, and how that limited them from doing things. In the interview, Bustamante explained how, when she was younger, her father always told her that she acted as a man, she was doing what she wanted and going out whenever she pleased; this did not allow him to see her femininity. Much later she understood that the patriarchal family structure and the concepts on his mind only allowed him to see her brother and not her.¹⁹⁸ In Mayer’s upbringing, the same burdens and limitation of this structure were present. In the interview she mentions that when her mother was not doing well, it was expected of the daughter to take care of her and be her support.¹⁹⁹ In Mexico these patriarchal family structures were very common, which was something that only later came to the understanding of these two women with the introduction of feminist theory in the ‘70s. Patriarchy literally means “rule of the father” and refers to the structure where the dominant authority is given by adult men.²⁰⁰

As women artists, they also experienced these dominant patriarchal structures in the art world. In an interview with McCaughan, Mayer recalled an experience in a seminar where her fellow male students stated that women artists would never be as good as the men because of their biology and motherhood, which took up all their creativity.²⁰¹ These comments and beliefs were very common at the time Mayer and Bustamante were active and were also seen within the group movement. Magali Lara expressed to McCaughan that many of the groups were formed in a patriarchal way, “with a leader and his followers”,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

²⁰⁰ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

²⁰¹ Edward J. McCaughan, “Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico,” *Social Justice* 34, No.1 (2007): 44-62.

and if there were women they were often looked down upon and had difficulty establishing their own identity.²⁰² Although Bustamante was an exception with her work in “No Grupo” (which addressed issues of sexuality and gender as mentioned earlier), there was still a lot of prejudice, and she was still looked down upon and criticized as a woman artist.^{203, 204} These experiences, beliefs and ideas were a reason for both of them to name their group “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. In English, it is translated as Black Hen Dust, a powder that is being sold at the superstitious traditional market in Mexico as protection against the evil eye. By giving this name to the group, “it would defend [them] just by saying it”, and this is what both women purposely did in all their performances, works and lectures.²⁰⁵ As Bustamante mentions in the interview, “it still is very difficult to be born as a woman and then try to become a good contemporary artist, it is very difficult, because it is always difficult also for men, and then in the same cocktail you put the feminist term and nothing is going to save you.”²⁰⁶ With this Bustamante points out that things became more complicated because they labelled their group as feminist art group.

“Polvo de Gallina Negra” started their activities with an artistic intervention during the sexual harassment protest in 1983 in Mexico City. At the monument of Benito Juárez where the protests took place, Bustamante Mayer and Herminia Dosal presented the performance “El respeto al derecho del cuerpo ajeno es la paz” (The respect to the right of the body of others means peace). With the name they played with the original saying; “El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz” (Respect to the rights of others means peace) which was mentioned by the Mexican leader Benito Juárez during the constitution of the Liberal Republic of Mexico in 1857. With “El respeto al derecho del cuerpo ajeno es la paz” (The respect to the right of the body of others means peace), Mayer, Bustamante and Dosal connected the famous saying by Benito Juárez in a provocative way to the feminist motives and ideas of the protest.²⁰⁷ During this performance the women were dressed in witch costumes while standing around a cauldron where they were supposedly brewing the potion “Polvo de Gallina Negra” (Black Hen Dust) which they handed it out to the participants so that

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Rosana Blanco Cano, “Maternidad, arte y ciudadanía: Proyecto ¡Madres! Del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante y Mónica Mayer),” *Journal of Theatricalities and Visual Culture*, KARPA 4.1-4.2 (2011).

they could give the evil eye to the sexual violators.^{208, 209} This satirical and humoristic aspect in their artistic work was a strategy often used by the women in order to address these important and serious topics. They placed themselves in the public as interlocutor, where the audience became part of the performance which reduced the alienation between performer and viewer and questioned and provoked the boundaries between art and life.²¹⁰ Out of this first performance they published a year later in an advertisement in the feminist magazine “FEM”, with the recipe of the group “Polvo de Gallina Negra” to give the evil eye to the sexual violators.²¹¹ The recipe they shared consisted of surrealistic ingredients which were linked to the empowerment of women and to aspects of the patriarchal society of Mexico. For example, one of the ingredients mentioned was “two fangs from a militant of the opposition party”, “a ton of steel muscles of a women who demands respect of her body” and “seven drops of men who support the fight against sexual harassment.”²¹²

In Mexico’s art world, “Polvo de Gallina Negra” had a difficult position. Not only were they conceptual artists, which was at that time a movement that was new and not taken seriously; they were also explicitly a feminist movement which addressed women’s issues from rape to motherhood stereotypes.²¹³ In our interview, Mayer addressed the fact that in monetary sense both women never lived or could live from their art. They both had, aside from their artistic projects, part-time jobs as teachers or translators and in the period of “Polvo de Gallina Negra” both were also fulltime mothers and wives.²¹⁴ Additionally, the Mexican art world was actively excluding them, as art galleries were still very orientated towards traditional art forms and were not interested in being part of the international art market. Furthermore, Bustamante and Mayer were not willing to make any changes and compromise their art for the sake of it being sold.²¹⁵

208 Ibid.

209 Monica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres y Performance en Mexico*, (Mexico City: Conculta, Fonca and AVJ, 2004).

210 RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance, Live Art 1909 to the present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1979).

211 Monica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres y Performance en Mexico*, (Mexico City: Conculta, Fonca and AVJ, 2004).

212 “Polvo De Gallina Negra: Receta Contra el Mal de Ojo, 1985,” Hammer Museum, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women>.

213 Edward J. McCaughan, “Navigating the Labyrinth of Silence: Feminist Artists in Mexico,” *Social Justice* 34, No.1 (2007): 44-62.

214 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

215 Ibid.

RECETA DEL GRUPO POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA PARA HACERLE EL MAL DE OJO A LOS VIOLADORES, O EL RESPETO AL DERECHO DEL CUERPO AJENO ES LA PAZ

Acción plástico-política para el hemiciclo a Juárez dentro de la marcha feminista contra la violación del 7 de octubre de 1983.
Duración: 20 minutos ante 1000 espectadores.

Ingredientes:

- 2 docenas de ojos y corazones de mujer que se acepte como tal.
- 20 kg. de rayos y centellas de mujer que se enoja cuando la agreden.
- 1 tonelada de músculos de acero de mujer que exige respeto a su cuerpo.
- 3 lenguas de mujer que no se somete aún cuando fué violada.
- 1 sobre de grenetina de mujer, sabor espinaca, que comprende y apoya a una mujer que fué violada.
- 30 grs. de polvo de voces que desmitifiquen la violación.
- 7 gotas de hombres que apoyen la lucha contra la violación.
- 1 pizca de legisladores interesados en los cambios sociales que demandamos las mujeres.
- Unas cuantas cucharadas de familias y escuelas que no promuevan los roles tradicionales.
- 3 docenas de mensajes de comunicadores responsables que dejen de producir imágenes que promueven la violación.
- 3 pelos de superfeminista.
- 2 colmillos de militante de partido de oposición.
- ½ oreja de espontáneo y curioso.

Siguiendo cuidadosamente las instrucciones sobre el modo de preparación lograremos tener como resultado final nuestra explosiva mezcla con la cual ud. podrá sorprender a los violadores que habitan su misma casa o la de la vecina, los tímidos y los agresivos, los pasivos y los activos, y los que la acechan en el trabajo o en el camión y finalmente a los que se esconden en la noche que hoy venimos a tomar.

GRUPO POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA
(Fundado el 21 de junio de 1983.)
Maris Bustamante
Herminia Dosal
Mónica Mayer



Figure 5 - Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Receta contra el mal de ojo* (Recipe against the evil eye), 1984-85, photocopy, Hammer Museum Digital Archive, Los Angeles.

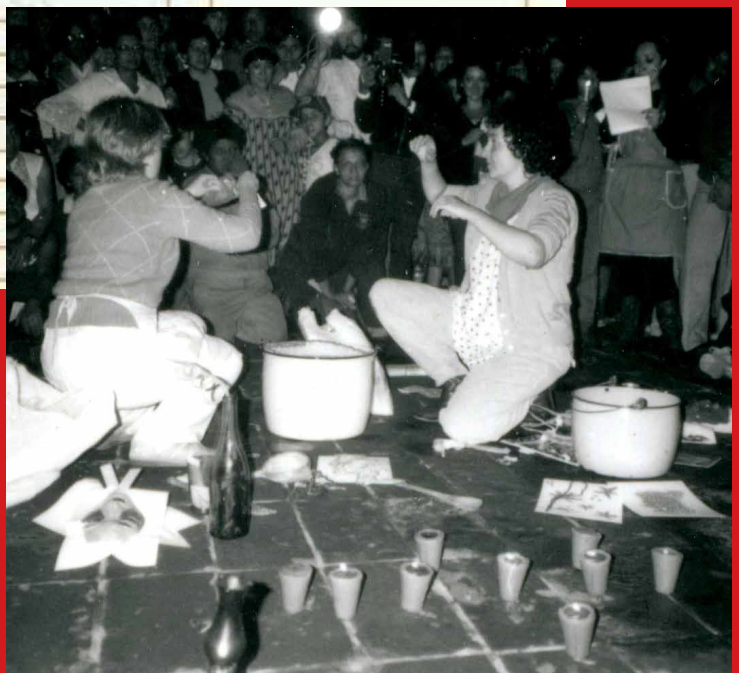


Figure 6 - Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Receta del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra para hacerlo el al de ojo a los violadores o el respeto al derecho del cuerpo ajeno es la paz*, 1983, photograph, Pinto Mi Raya, Mexico City.

They also experienced exclusion from academics and art critics, Mayer mentions, and these exclusions were often carried on by close friends and their network: “many people punished us by not talking about our work for a long time.”^{216, 217} This made them both understand that they had to create their own art system, by documenting their work, archiving it, writing about it, organizing the spaces for it and making sure it would be included in the history of art. As Mayer explains: “nobody is going to come and do it for us.”²¹⁸ She also addressed that these issues were often not just a struggle for women artists, but also a struggle for many Latin American artists “you have to participate actively to be part of the narrative” and usually this was also not effective. As a result, Bustamante argues, they were a “suicidal generation”, being against political, traditional, and cultural structures.^{219, 220}

However, the previously presented aspects of their personal lives and the experiences of these patriarchal and traditional structures as mothers, wives and artists, was addressed and touched on in many of their works. For example, in one of their projects Mayer and Bustamante did a performance during a series of 35 lectures in 35 different educational institutions throughout Mexico, organized and sponsored by the Secretary of Public Education.²²¹ The series was called “Las Mujeres Artistas o se solicita Esposa”, or in English “Women artists or looking for a wife.” It was a project that came out of conversations and works of fellow female artists and their own experiences. Their interactive and narrated performance started off by throwing “brujitas” (pop-its) on the stage and giving a short introduction about important feminist artists in history and the problematic image, encounters, aspirations and achievements of women and women artists in Mexican society.^{222, 223} They approached their audience, which were mainly students, in an amicable way and discussed openly feminist themes through feminist art works that were shown on a slideshow, which in several occasions resulted into heated discussions between men or detailed stories of domestic

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

²¹⁸ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

²²¹ Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante, “Las Mujeres Artistas o Se Solicita Esposa,” Archivo Artea, accessed May 8, 2020, <http://archivoartea.uclm.es/obras/las-mujeres-artistas-mexicanas-o-se-solicita-esposa/>

²²² Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

²²³ Monica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres y Performance en Mexico*, (Mexico City: Conculta, Fonca and AVJ, 2004).

violence.²²⁴ In this period both women were pregnant and performed their lectures dressed in aprons and farm boots.^{225, 226} During the interview, Bustamante shared that the title of this performance came from the idea that as a married male artist your life was organised, but as female artists you did not have a wife, so you had to be and do everything by yourself: you had to be an artist, be a wife, be a housekeeper, be a mother, etc., this is why they were looking for a wife to help them in their personal lives.²²⁷ This and several other performances by “Polvo de Gallina Negra” could be referred as ‘autobiographical’. As explained by Goldberg, ‘autobiographical’ performances were an “analytical investigation of the fine edge between an artist’s art and an his or her life”, it often also consisted of a description of its making.²²⁸ In the performance described above both artists presented their thoughts and ideas about their experiences as woman artists and asked their audience to discuss these and share their own. By representing and revealing this intimate information about themselves in a both serious and humoristic way they aimed to increase the awareness of their audience and make their performances easier to follow.²²⁹ However, according to Bustamante, these performances were held in very diverse institutions and not always completely understood by their audience.²³⁰ Furthermore, the artist states that she thinks “Polvo de Gallina Negra” was very ahead of its time and that only now, thirty years later, people are starting to realize the importance of the group and want to understand what happened in these times.²³¹

Another important project that had strong autobiographical aspects was their work “¡Madres!” (MOTHERS!, 1987), which was about prejudice, their experience as mothers and wives and the concept of motherhood in Mexico. It began in 1984, while both were starting their own families and continued until 1993, when the group ended. It consisted of several different art forms, such as performances, mail art, workshop exhibitions, and more.²³² As part of this project and with the support of

224 Ibid.

225 Ibid.

226 Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

227 Ibid.

228 RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance, Live Art 1909 to the present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1979).

229 Ibid.

230 Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

231 Ibid.

232 Rosana Blanco Cano, “Maternidad, arte y ciudadanía: Proyecto ¡Madres! Del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante y Mónica Mayer),” *Journal of Theatricalities and Visual Culture*, KARPA 4.1-4.2 (2011).

their husbands, who were artists themselves, both women decided it was necessary to have a simultaneous pregnancy “so that they could fully comprehend motherhood as a construct.”²³³ Mayer mentions that as good feminists they had daughters and from that point they could introduce themselves as the first group that believed in giving birth for the sake of art.²³⁴ One of their most famous works became their satirical performance “Madre por un día” or “Mother for a day”, where they let men experience how it felt to be a pregnant woman.²³⁵ For one of these performances they had the opportunity, mainly because Bustamante was the first to register a patent of the ‘taco’ for another artistic work, to join the live talk show “Nuestro Mundo” with the popular TV talk show host of that time, Guillermo Ochoa.²³⁶ For this performance, they made Ochoa wear an apron with a pregnant belly on live television for 200 million viewers.²³⁷ This performance illustrates how Bustamante and Mayer looked for and created their own alternative spaces to execute their work: as Bustamante mentioned during the show, “for us the television today is as a modern art museum” where they had the chance to be heard and exhibit.²³⁸ By pulling off this project risks were involved, Mexico has a very religious society where motherhood is considered as something sacred, but this did not hold them back from addressing these subjects and doing these artistic projects.²³⁹ Bustamante mentioned that the performance with Ochoa at the time had an impact and made the phone exchange of the television station collapse.²⁴⁰ She said that most calls were made by angry men asking why they would make fun of “la maternidad” (“Motherhood”), since it was something that should not be made fun of.²⁴¹ Aside from this often-heard reaction, Mayer also recalled that someone contacted the show after exactly nine months to ask Ochoa if he had a boy or a girl, and she stated that if she had thought of this herself she would have done this as part of their artistic project “¡Madres!”.²⁴²

233 Amy Sara Carroll, *REMEX: Toward an Art History of the NAFTA Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

234 Monica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres y Performance en Mexico*, (Mexico City: Conculta, Fonca and AVJ, 2004).

235 Rosana Blanco Cano, “Maternidad, arte y ciudadanía: Proyecto ¡Madres! Del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante y Mónica Mayer),” *Journal of Theoreticalities and Visual Culture*, *KARPA* 4.1-4.2 (2011).

236 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

237 Rosana Blanco Cano, “Maternidad, arte y ciudadanía: Proyecto ¡Madres! Del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante y Mónica Mayer),” *Journal of Theoreticalities and Visual Culture*, *KARPA* 4.1-4.2 (2011).

238 Maris Bustamante, interview by Rosana Blanco Cano, in “Maternidad, arte y ciudadanía: Proyecto ¡Madres! Del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante y Mónica Mayer),” ed. Rosana Blanco Cano, *Journal of Theoreticalities and Visual Culture*, *KARPA* 4.1- 4.2, (2011).

239 Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

240 Ibid.

241 Ibid.

242 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

In 1987, “Polvo de Gallina Negra” presented a mail-art project called “Carta a Mi Madre” (card to my mother). With this work they asked the public to participate by sending them letters, wherein they shared what they would like to say to their mother but were not able to.²⁴³ From all the 70 responses they received, they chose two winners for who they organised a small award show where they handed out the prize: a drawing from the artists.^{244, 245} This mail-art project, as Rosana Cano mentioned, showed a side of motherhood that was until then little explored within this public arena.²⁴⁶ Their approach for this work, again, consisted of a balance between parody and the rawness of life. As Goldberg mentions, the aim of many feminist performances, such as this one, was to give their audience something to think about, raise consciousness and participate with.²⁴⁷

In 1993, after 10 years of working together, Bustamante and Mayer ended their collaboration for “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. In the interview I asked both of them what was the cause to end the group. As Bustamante had mentioned earlier, her main discipline as a woman is to start and end things, and after 10 years she told Mayer that for her this was the end and it was time to concentrate on their individual work.²⁴⁸ In my interview with Mayer, she told me that life was the cause. In 1993 Bustamante lost her husband, which suddenly made her life as a female artist, a mother of two, and a university teacher very complicated.²⁴⁹ She also mentioned that the political climate changed in the ‘90s, as a neoliberal government was introduced which changed structures within the art world, making it more difficult for political art.²⁵⁰ One thing was very clear for both women, they never stopped because they rejected the ideas of feminist art. They both consider their artistic work made for “Polvo de Gallina Negra” as very valuable and something that is important and still very relevant to talk about today.^{251 252}

243 Monica Mayer, *Rosa Chillante: Mujeres y Performance en Mexico*, (Mexico City: Conculta, Fonca and AVJ, 2004).

244 Ibid.

245 Mónica Mayer, “De La Vida y El Arte Como Feminista,” in *Crítica Feminista en la Teoría e Historia del Arte*, ed. Karen Cordero Reiman and Inda Sáenz (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007), 401-414.

246 Rosana Blanco Cano, “Maternidad, arte y ciudadanía: Proyecto ¡Madres! Del grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (Maris Bustamante y Mónica Mayer),” *Journal of Theoreticalities and Visual Culture*, KARPA 4.1-4.2 (2011).

247 RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance, Live Art 1909 to the present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1979).

248 Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

249 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

250 Ibid.

251 Ibid.

252 Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.



Figure 7 - Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Las mujeres artistas o se solicita esposa*, 1984, photograph, Pinto Mi Raya, Mexico City.



Figure 8 - Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Madre por un día, Nuestro Mundo TV Show*, 1987, stills from video, Pinto Mi Raya, Mexico City, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnFrHTykomE&feature=youtu.be>



CONCURSO

'CARTA A MI MADRE'

EL GRUPO DE ARTE FEMINISTA 'POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA' CONVOCA AL CONCURSO 'CARTA A MI MADRE'. EL OBJETIVO UNICO DEL CONCURSO ES EL DE QUE CUALQUIER PERSONA, SIN IMPORTAR SU NACIONALIDAD, EDAD, SEXO, CLASE U OCUPACION, QUE TENGA ALGO QUE QUIERA O HUBIERA QUERIDO DECIRLE A SU MADRE LO PUEDA HACER CON ABSOLUTA LIBERTAD POR MEDIO DE UNA CARTA.

Lugar y fecha de entrega:

El concurso queda abierto con ésta convocatoria y hasta el 30 de octubre de 1987.

La carta deberá enviarse o entregarse en un sobre cerrado dirigido a:

CONCURSO 'CARTA A MI MADRE'

Museo Carrillo Gil

Coordinación de Exposiciones

Av. Revolución 1608

San Angel

México 01000, D.F.

La carta puede ir firmada con seudónimo pero debe adjuntar su nombre, teléfono y dirección.

Premios

Los premios serán dos de los cuadros de la exposición de Mónica Mayer 'NOVELA ROSA O ME AGARRO EL ARQUETIPO' que se presentará en el Museo Carrillo Gil a partir del 23 de septiembre.

Se otorgará un cuadro a la mejor carta según el criterio de las integrantes del grupo 'POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA' y el otro se rifará entre los participantes del concurso.

Premiación

La premiación se llevará a cabo en el Museo Carrillo Gil el 6 de noviembre a las 19:30 hrs.

PARA MAYORES INFORMES COMUNICARSE AL 2-71-30-82

Figure 9 - Polvo de Gallina Negra, *Carta a mi madre*, 1987, photocopy, Pinto Mi Raya, Mexico City.

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Conclusions

“Polvo de Gallina Negra” was not only the first but also, for a long time, the only art group in Mexico, that explored the intersections between artistic practice and feminist activism. In this study, I looked at what conditions contributed to the start and, later, to the rise of this group through my main research question; **What were the conditions that constituted the rise of Mexico’s first feminist art group?** The interviews I conducted with the initiators of the group, Monica Mayer and Maris Bustamante, provided me with a better understanding of the historical context they lived in, and granted me further insight into their personal lives, their work and their objectives.

In addressing the conditions that triggered the constitution of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, it is essential to mention the student massacre of 1968, which played an important role in shaping critical socio-political views, not only within their art practices but also in the art practices prior to this group. As argued by Arden Decker, Cauthémoc Medina and Olivier Debroise, there were already artistic practices and movements against nationalistic art prior to the events in 1968, but it was this massacre, together with what is defined as “the global and local movement towards democratic value”, that undoubtedly served as a catalyst for the birth of a radical conceptualism and a socially-engaged art in the form of collectives, also known as the movement of “Los Grupos”.²⁵³ These stimuli, which included new art practices, perspectives, forms, and movements, were able to contribute to the later establishment of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. The trend of transdisciplinary approaches and alternative visualisation introduced by the artists and collective movements in the 1970s and 1960s were used and continued in the art projects of the feminist art group, “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. In particular the humoristic strategy and approach of “No Grupo” and other strategies used by both women in their work prior to “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, for example Monica Mayer’s piece “El tendedero/ The Clothesline”.

Another condition that was important for the constitution of the first feminist art group in Mexico was the rise of the global and local second wave feminism. New views on sexuality and gender were introduced and political movements were formed in order to change the patriarchal structures and foundations of the society and life itself. In Mexico, the conference of the “International Women’s Year” in 1975, organised by the United Nations, was an important catalyst for the start of several political

²⁵³ Arden Decker, “Los Grupos and the Art of Intervention in 1960s and 1970s Mexico” (PhD diss., CUNY Academic Works, 2015).

feminist movements.²⁵⁴ Even though, as Bustamante mentioned during the interview, many of her feminist colleagues did not understand or take seriously what they were doing artistically at this time, I argue that these political feminist movements did contribute to the thoughts and ideas of this group considering that both women actively participated in them prior to “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.²⁵⁵ The two artists met in their student years and it was through their shared interest and involvement in feminist thought, theory and art that they connected and decided to initiate the group. With this in mind, we can conclude that the time wherein both women started their artistic careers played a big part in their development as artists and formed their thoughts and lives. It seems that this time of political unrest and resistance in the global and local society and in the art world created for Mayer and Bustamante the need, and in some cases a platform to artistically express their feminist thoughts and ideas. As Mayer explained, most of their performances in public space were done during demonstrations and they had access to different media outlets through their feminist colleagues.²⁵⁶

It can also be argued that their personal lives had an influence on their thought, ideas and objectives for the establishment of the group. Both women were raised in patriarchal structured families and were aware of their position as women from a very young age. Because it was difficult for them to follow their interest in the arts, it became one of their objectives to share and give visibility to their own experiences, to not only help themselves, but also to raise more awareness and help future female artist generations. When speaking about these experiences one of the main issues that their work revolved around was motherhood. In the time Bustamante and Mayer started the group they were both pregnant and in order to fully comprehend motherhood as a construct they decided to both get pregnant again to start their project “¡Madres!” The fact that they were mothers and artists within a patriarchal society sparked the need to share their reality and involve their personal lives in order to bring more awareness and understanding about the position of women. As Latin American conceptual and female artists in the midst of raising their families, these women had, I believe, very strong and brave personalities and objectives, to start and continue their work for “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.

²⁵⁴ Mónica Mayer, “Un breve testimonio sobre los ires y venires del arte feminista en México durante la última década del siglo xx y la primera del xxi,” *Debate Feminista*, Vol. 40 (Octubre, 2009): 191-218.

²⁵⁵ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

²⁵⁶ Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.

To a certain extent, the work of the group was quite successful while they were active; they received a great deal lot of attention and were seen by many people. Mayer relates this success to the effective humorous approach of their work and to the formal and informal spaces they were fortunate enough to work in. Despite this success, they did struggle with the neglect and ignorance of their academic and artistic colleagues and friends for many years.²⁵⁷ However, instead of functioning as a demotivating factor, I argue that this only strengthened their resolve to carry on with fighting for more visibility and a broader understanding of their work. It also implied, as they have mentioned, that as Latin American conceptual and female artists they had to create their own art system, be their own art critics, look for their own spaces, document and archive their own work, and to accept that, in order to finance themselves, they both needed to have outside jobs as translators and teachers.

After 10 years of activity, “Polvo de Gallina Negra” came to an end as both women decided to focus on their own artistic careers and projects. They mentioned that politics in the 1990s changed, but there were also shifts in their personal situations and lives. This does not mean that they rejected their objectives and ideas of feminist art. It is my position that the very same conditions that contributed to the constitution of the group in the first place, have also played a role in its termination. The developments in the art world, which had given them the possibility to get access to different and new spaces in the 1980s, changed. Politics during the 1990s became more liberal in Mexico, which made it difficult for them to continue.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, both of the interviewees refer to this period and collaboration as the most important experience in their artistic careers.^{259, 260} After this period both women continued exploring the intersection of feminism and art through their own artistic practices, where they used similar strategies as they did with “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. Mayer started for example another project together with her husband Victor Lerma in 1989 called “Pinto Mi Raya.” With this project they created an alternative space for artists and after 1991 they focused on, and still do, archiving and documenting contemporary Mexican art.²⁶¹ Also, several works of both women and of “Polvo de Gallina Negra” have recently been reactivated or exhibited, for

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Maris Bustamante, in conversation with the author, Mexico-City, June 2019.

²⁶¹ Gabriela Acéves Sepúlveda, *Women Made Visible: Feminist Art and Media in Post-1968 Mexico City*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

example in the exhibition “Radical Woman: Latin American Art, 1960-1985”.²⁶²

Sadly enough, the issues addressed by these women in the 1980s are still very relevant in today’s society, but Mayer mentions how recently she has noticed echoes of their artistic practices and a bigger interest in addressing women’s issues within both the Mexican art world and society in general. Furthermore, she highlights how there has been an increase of knowledge regarding these topics in both the academic and the art world, but this has been a long process after a long time of neglect.²⁶³

262 “Digital Archive, Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985,” Hammer Museum, accessed June 3, 2020, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women>

263 Mónica Mayer, in conversation with the author, Amsterdam, Mexico-City, September 2019.



Figure 10 - *Polvo de Gallina Negra* (Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante), 2007, photograph, Mexico City.

7

Limitations and Further Research

There have been some limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. First of all, the artistic work that was produced by “Polvo de Gallina Negra” consisted mainly of performances and other non-objectual interventions and live practices. These forms of art have been struggling with its documentation and preservation throughout the years and this has also been the case for most of the works of “Polvo de Gallina Negra”. Moreover, for this study I was bound to a limited number of articles about their work, of which many were descriptions that came from the perspective of the artists themselves and only gave short summaries without a more in-depth analysis. This made a deeper exploration of their artistic work more difficult and unilateral. Furthermore, the structural academic neglect of this group in the art historical canon and my intermediate skills of the Spanish language also served as a limitation on the access to literature. This was the case not only for the literature about the group itself but also for the sources concerning the whole cultural, social, and political History of Mexico. Although, recently there has been a general increase of interest, researches and knowledge presented, there is still a lot of work to do in order to make Mexican History more multilateral and inclusive. Lastly, as mentioned in my methodology another limitation has been my positionality within this research. I have challenged myself to study an art group that originates from a culture that has been foreign to me and therefore, that may have caused some blind spots within this research.

While conducting this study I have become aware that, as mentioned earlier, many of the sources that I have studied for this research were directly from the artists perspectives themselves. For any further research about this art group, I would suggest, when possible, a study that is focused on and giving a better understanding on other perspectives on the group. It would be interesting to explore, for instance, how others experienced their work at the time and through this create a more multilateral approach to their work. Through the interviews it also became apparent that only recently both women have been noticing an interest from younger generations in their artistic practices. It would also be relevant to conduct research on the cause of this sudden interest and of the relation and influence this group has had on their own work after the end of the group but also within the Mexican society and art world. I believe this feminist art group was a pioneer in many things and therefore any further research about them, their era in which they operated, and their art would be important and necessary.

8

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Illustrations

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- Figure 2** - Maris Bustamante, "*El pene como instrumento de trabajo (The penis as a work instrument)*" *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* Digital Archive. Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2019. <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/art/art/penis-as-work-instrument-full>
- Figure 3** - Maris Bustamante, "*El pene como instrumento de trabajo (The penis as a work instrument)*" *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* Digital Archive. Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2019. <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/art/art/penis-as-work-instrument-full>
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- Figure 5** - Polvo de Gallina Negra, "*Receta contra el mal de ojo (Recipe against the evil eye) [with Herminia Dosal]*" *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*. Digital Archive. Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2019. <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/art/art/receta-contra-el-mal-de-ojo-recipe-against-the-evil-eye-with-herminia-dosal>
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9



Appendices

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Lastly, I am truly grateful for the support of my friends and family throughout the ups and downs of this research.

Interview Maris Bustamante
Mexico City - 17/06/2019

A: Gracias por tenerme aqui. I will do it in english.
Thank you for welcoming me.... I will introduce a bit the interview. Today It's the...

MB: This is for your master's research?

A: yes it is

MB: Ok, What's the name of your research?

A: The name of my research is.... I don't have a name yet, but it is about Polvo de gallina negra

MB: Ah... it is specially about that grupo? Oh ok.

A: This interview will go about Polvo de Gallina Negra
I am here with Marisa Bustamante. Thank you for having me here.

MB: You are welcome.

A: I'm going to ask you quiet general questions. I'm mostly interested in how the group started and where you actually came from. So what were your motives to start.

MB: OK
let's begin saying that...

I was before Polvo de Gallina Negra. I found another group called No Grupo? because in the 70s here in Mexico mostly in the city we have a very big movement. And now we can say that it was a very important movement organized through collectives through groups that group the NO Grupo now is very very well known famous. And we were working seven years a little less than seven years and then we decided to end the work of the group because you know that groups have always a deadline. No. And you have to be very careful about it. What is going on in the group. Because the work is absolutely important and....Many times they're the personal part interfere and they let the groups end. [00:01:06]

So before that, before Polvo de Gallina Negra, I was in the NO Grupo. And then with Monica NO Grupo ended in 1983. And at that time, that same year with Monica, that we knew each other very before. .

We had constructed the friendship before and we decided to work together. No. And we were working from 83 to 93. Ten years. After those ten years I told her that it was time to end the group as a group. No. And we were talking a lot about that but uh...we can say that they in Mexico that time we had always very important critiques and uh also very famous feminists. What was new, and I think that iis part of our aportación, is that our group was the very first. And today we can say it's the most important arte feminista, feminist art group.

So at the very beginning we decided, we were talking about many things and we decided that it was time in the cuna of the machismo, that is Mexico, to try something like this. So we decided to organize a group and we invited like 60 different friends, female friends one afternoon to have a coffee together and to talk about total ideas and to invite all of them to organize a group. [00:03:50]

But from those 60 no one decided to be part of the group, which was like amazing.
And it was a little disappointing because.

We were talking after that. What's going on that most of the girls in a country like this, in a city like this are not moved to organize a group. And there were like three different ideas about the causes that they said why they didn't want to to be part of the group.

The first thing it was that many of them said --we don't have any problem being a woman--, so we don't need a group, which is more amazing, also.

The second criteria was at that time. Now is different. But at that time 50 years ago, most of the galleries or culture centres organized and directed by males. And that could be a problem, because you know Mexico like any other place which has these problem of the machismo. There are many prejudice and myths that the people have and if they see and hear woman saying that they want to become feminists they don't like it because Mexico on the other side is very conservative. Okay.

The third criteria was that most of them had boyfriends and they were afraid that the boyfriends would be mad or something, because of that. There was just one person that said that she wouldn't like to think that the group would say or indicate what the work could be.

But that was not the case. That was not the purpose of the group. But anyway.

After all these things Monica and I looked at each other and said --Okay there's just two ways or we end the idea right now here, or you and me decide to overcome these problems and just go on and make the group--. And that was the thing that we did.

At the very beginning there was Arminia Rosal and she was a photographer and she is a very interesting person, but she didn't like to think that ... because it's it's...Many problems come up when you begin to talk about organizing that group and you have to talk about many things about yourself, or the others. So it's hard sometimes. And maybe I think that Arminia maybe thought that it would be very hard. More than nice, the work, and maybe what would be the consequences.

But she decided to leave the group at the very beginning. And then Monica and I decided to...(as I like to say to go from.... what's the word, in the news). Well we decided to go from the idea to make a group with many people, and we decided to be just she and me, just two and we closed the group and we decided to begin to work and we did that for 10 years.

And I think that at that time is very different than now, which are the feminists that were best, things that we admire, those feminists were really famous at that time. But from all of them I always preferred Teresa de Lauretis, an Italian, 70s. Because she said something like: we born sex and we became gender. it was the first time that we heard about those things.

So that is why I always point out that it's very different. It was very different to work at that time than now, because now we can see that to make movement shows how different are the situations. But at that time to hear about gender, the differences between sex and gender, it was new, very new. And we began to work with all those things and we were always like free...to talk and then decide what to do. If you can see there those ten years, I just sold my archive, my complete archive. Maybe you know already about that. Okay. It was 50 years for an archive. [00:09:39]

It was not just one archive, it was different kinds of archives. No. Because in 50 years you can do many things. If you can see there that archive was 50 boxes and many other packs. Polvo de Gallina Negra was only one box. But it was extremely important. But it was in that box. Because we were almost alone doing quite within. And if it was because we were very synchronized and we were really very close friends, we always trusted in the other that we could really work very well.

Most of the things that we did in those 10 years, nobody talks about it. [00:11:34]

A: during those 10 years?

MB: Yes. Most of the critics they never talked about the work.

So it's interesting that, because I think that we were very advanced, our look of the situation, reality, or different kinds of realities, because there is not just one, we decided to work in our direct reality, but then we were working organizing many things in these other dimensions, that the people go inside and go outside and then we could organize many things that at that time maybe they were not really understood.

But then now after 30 years there is many people that wants to know what happened there. How you could really organize those things.

A: and were the motives?

MB: So what keeps you going you making art. Because if there was no real reaction from your audience?

Well because that's part of the thing that I think that we could..

We were very intuitive and we trusted in the other and we had fun because we used to make a lot of jokes when we, you know you become very sensitive about many things that always were there, but any time before you saw them in such a crude way.

So we had fun. We worked a lot. We studied a lot. And we talked a lot.

And that I think was our platform, main platform. So all the things that we were doing... with the No grupo was more or less the same thing. So I was already at that time with Monica like with the experience of not being accepted or being criticized, because you talk in a way, at that time when, before that time, all the artists, visual artists, painters, when you could ask them:

--please explain me year stuff--. They used to say: --no I can't. I am not able to talk about my things.

I need the writer or poet that is close to me and my stuff and my trajectory but I can't--. [00:13:51]

So it was very interesting because our generation decided to talk for themselves and we decided to write and to read lectures and organize courses and many other things to the fan we are defining. But at that time it was very different. When I was in the school and I was in that school where Frida taught, that is La Esmeralda. You Already know, there are two national art schools . One is called San Carlos and the other La Esmeralda. I finished my career in La Esmeralda. And at that time you couldn't organize an exhibition when where you could or you wanted to include painting, engravings, sculpture, whatever.

The director of that school he was very close to me, because I always was criticizing the teachers the school everything.

And he understood me. And he took care of me. And many times he asked me to come to the direction.

And he would ask me - what's the problem now. How would you feel. Why do you say those things-. And

he wanted for me to understand many things. And when we are organized our first exhibition outside the school , el Maestro Castro Pacheco called me and he said --congratulations with your exhibition--, but then I see that it is a little bit of everything and that it is not serious- .

Because at that time, the people never heard about multi-, whatever, or cross discipline. So. You had to organize just painting or just sculpture, just engraving.

But we wanted, we began also being rebels with those criteria. So we wanted to to do what we thought we needed to do. And it was really hard, because all the people was criticizing and they could stop you in many in many ways.

A: And was there an influence that let you through all these new..., I mean was there any influence from outside or from the family.

MB: No I think that Mexico has these very strong tradition about art and artist, that are very strong people. Because Mexico for now it will be different, because politically we are in a different moment and I am very happy with the actual situation here. But for 60 years, you know, where there were different developments. We were always considered third world, or poor country or an economy in process, and you know. You know all about that.

So, it was different. But in art we were always strong. I remember that I went to do things with the German feminists that asked me to participate in many exhibitions but also designing all the different things that were needed for the exhibitions, installations and many other things.

A: When was this, sorry?

MB: That was in 91 and when I was there in the museum, El museo de las Culturas del Mundo (.I don;t remember the name in German now) .

But the thing is, that they asked me to talk, to speak, in the opening and I said that in Mexico we could be very poor in different ways, but culturally we were always very strong and that in that sense we felt equal to them.

That had a very different situation.

So I think that is one of the characteristics of Mexico. That always has been very important in arts, in the different arts. And now it will be, it is (se están gestando, muchos cambios). And Mexico will be much more important and I think that it was never before. I think so, because I am left side and I agree with Lopez Obrador. Also I help in many ways from my Colonia because you know that we are organized in alcaldias and this is the Cautemoc Alcadia and is the one of de Centro historico, because here we are almost in the centro historico and it is the biggest and the most complex and I've been helping the young people that are the leaders of the Colonia Juarez to organize many things about political work here. And I think that Mexico always has been very strong and now will be, is implementing different big changes.

And I have these, I don't think,(hahaha) I don't believe in God, so I never say 'faith', but I see.

A: vision maybe

MB: Yeah. But I believe, I believe in what is going on now. So, we were the first generation after la ruptura. it was the Mexican movement first and then the most important La Ruptura. The name that someone decided to put to that generation it was not a good label, because they were not really ' rompiendo' ; ruptura that means to break things. And I think that it was really my generation who really broke many patterns many things and we decided to defend our Work by writing, lecturing, being teachers. I was in the university 30 years.

At that time there was a lot of myths and prejudice in the school, in the art school, because many people decided not to end their careers in the arts schools, because their believe was if you end your career in an arts school then you are like society is, so you are not going to be able to keep something new. But I always, as a woman, I always begin and end things. That's my main discipline. To be very flexible but also to begin and to close.

That is quiet after those ten years, I decided to, I told Monica that for me it was the end. Because it's always very difficult to keep on going.

And also I told her that it was time for all the things that we have done in the past, to try to be known for ourselves. That is always very hard for a woman, because you know that the name of the grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra, the name is because in the traditional markets there is always the part of the witches and the herbs and all those things, in the very superstitious part of the traditional Market, where they sell the black hen powder, because it would help you against the Evil Eye, el Mal de ojo.

So we decided that as Monique used to say --it still is very difficult to be born as a woman-- and then if you try, because you want to become an artist, a contemporary artist, but good (!) It's very difficult, because it's always difficult, also for men.

And then, in this same cocktail you put the feminist herb and anything is going to save you. So it was like part of these fun things that we used to organize and say, that Polvo de Gallina Negra was the name of the group, because as visual arts, with all these things in that cocktail it would defend us just for saying it.

A: This is also what you did in all your works saying that you were...

MB: When you say --Polvo de Gallina Negra--, It helps us. That was the thing that we say, because Mexico is very superstitious and very religious. And we had to play with all those things, that sometimes are difficult to try, because for example, La Maternidad. When we went to the TV program, it was really a thing because many people used to call to the TV program and the phones collapse and most of the calls were made by males, señores very angry. They used to say --why are you doing that--. Motherness, maternidad is sacred in Mexico, so you can't do that, because it's like you are mocking la maternidad. So Mexico in that way because of the conservative thing, it's like dangerous sometimes.

A : Did you feel there is in this 10 years that you made art or there are things you didn't do, or...?

MB: No, whatever we wanted to do, we did it.

That is why sometimes it was difficult to face the public or the audience. I remember (you already talked with Monica?).

A: No not yet.

MB: Well she's going to tell you more or less the same history but she has her preferences in the stories. Because one day we decided, we knew that Bellas Artes was organizing like a casting to contract for lecturing in different parts of the La Republica, particularly en el Estado de México, That is a very big state with people very ignorant in general, with political problems and all those things So culture helps in that way, in many ways it helps. So I knew about that and I told Monica we had to go to prepare something because maybe we will be contracted for those programs that they are implementing.

So we went and we organized these conference, this lecture, that was called: Las Mujeres artistas Mexicanas o se solicita esposa (Mexican female artists, or we need a wife).

The Main anecdote for that was that, there was a very well known famous artist female artist called Caitlin Escobedo, that also she became director of Museo de arte moderno en Chapultepec. And she was very agradable a very intelligent.

And one day she said that in Mexico because of their machismo male artist having their wives always had their life fixed, because the woman would do everything for them, everything, also being agents or presenting or whatever. As she said at that time --so we woman females artist females also need their wife-- in that sense...We need someone that could really help us in our personal lives.

And it was a very funny thing to say. And that is why we put their name for those series of lectures that we finally did. And in one of them we began the session, because the instituto nacional de Bellas artes accepted our proposal, they organized everything. So...they organized the places and we were, those places were told that two women, two artists were going to present X, and that we're going to talk about Women artists. And Feminist art.

And then they had to receive us.

And then when we presented in those many different places, there was one where we arrived and we began putting on mandil de La Cocina, an apron, because it was part of the prejudice that women have to be their place, their best place is the kitchen. So we used to begin with that. We had the slides and all those

things, but I remember that we began in one place and then the director of that technical school, can you believe how were all those people: technical, culturally Zero!.. So we went to present that day, we opened the session with the aprons and then the lights off. But I used to use cohetes, fireworks. And I always was prepared for any circumstances. So those special fireworks are called brujitas. You throw them and than they explode and they are very nice, beautiful. So I had in los bolsillos del apron I had those brujitas. And when the lights went off, when we have director there I began with the fireworks. It was black. [00:30:15]

So at that time, the director of the technology begins to shout and asks to light the place. And then he thought that it was the youngsters who threw the fireworks. And then when I saw that he was accusing all the people, all the youngsters, I said No, No excuse me. It was me, it was me. I threw the fireworks because it's part of the act. So he was absolutely amazed. And those things, all the youngsters where laughing. All they auditorium was crowded, because they were obligated to be there and then they were on our side with all that thing. So we had very interesting acts or events like that in different schools or museums or whatever. And we were always very imaginative about what we could do.

For instance, someone could say bad things to us. And one time (...) entonces... another time..We were in the auditorium. It was like a panel. We were preparing for a panel. We were part of the panel and we were going to talk about feminist business. And like 15 Youngsters heard about the content of the lecture. They stand up and they were going to go out from the auditorium. So they truly said Oh my God how boring. No. But as usual I had my fireworks. And then I threw them and I said....

I am going to say it in Spanish....--De una conferencia de arte Feminista nadie se va--. But it was like a Joke, but for my surprise they come back and they set down.

So Monica always said that those kind of things improvisadas was good for the people to respect us.

A: Did you feel in this time that you needed more respect from the public or from the art world, because what I saw or what I heard is that....

MB: ...From all the places ... considering the work that I did with No Grupo..once I said that I consider it now..that my generation was like a suicidal generation, because we were against the politicians, against the agentes culturales, against the traditional artists, against the traditional arts, against the art market, So we were like suicidal.

So everybody from all places in the world were against us. We were, I think we had to be very strong young woman to go and do all the things we did.

And I think that...I mean in my own family, I had not resueltos many things about what they thought about me as een artist, because they didn't understand also.

But it doesn't matter that... it never mind that in our own lives, personal lives, public lives, we have all those problems we always in public were considering that we have to show ourselves in a very strong way for all the young females are were looking at us in a very.....es un país muy dictatorial..

Muy autoritario..no, very autoritario. (..No sé si te parece bien que sigamos asi ...?)

A: si si si si está muy bien

MB: No me van a entender mi inglés

A: No Si si si. Está muy bien. And when I see some.

MB: Si porque Mónica lo habla perfecto, ella te puede explicarlo muy bien...

A: Mi inglés tampoco no es mi primera lenguaje.

MB: No pero debes hablarlo muy bien.

A: Pero está bien...

MB: Bueno....Those days are very interesting very very alive and we did many things that I think through all the media , a nuestro alcance, because we decided that the traditional circuits of traditional arts, were opposing to all the things that we were doing, also that the feminists. We have theoretical, very important feminists. Some of them were also or are also politicians. But they didn't understand what we were doing artistically, for the feminine.They didn't understand..

A: that's funny

MB: Because they didn't understand the contemporary new proposals. And then...with a feminist thing they didn't understand and they'd didn't like it.

A: So you were also criticized by the feminists?

MB: ...from all the places, from all the people.

A: Did they accept you as feminists?

MB: They couldn't say that we were not feminist, because we were working on that and it was very clear that we had lots of work. But it was difficult for us to be accepted. And I think that many people..like punished us not talking about our work for a long time. The recognition came first from the outside. That's Very interesting.

A: that's very interesting, ya

MB: Yaya....Because in other countries they were looking for these kind of things. So we were like advanced for our time.

A: Were you, in this period you made art, were you well known in Mexico itself, or in only a part of Mexico, or in a circle?

MB: No, we were at that time I think that we were doing very good work about making our work known, no matter if the people liked or enjoyed it or not, but they knew about that, because we were working..it was like 40 years really really strong in work, in lectures, in essays, in magazines, in many things. So I think that the whole (?.....) circuit in general knew about us. Maybe the bad thing is that they'd didn't like it. And that is why they..or maybe they didn't feel sure to talk about our work, because they didn't understand. And it was like picking their sensitive spots... Maybe, I don't know.

But now there is no doubt that the work of la Gallina Negra was very important.

A: Because in this time you talked about how men reacted, very mad. But how was the reaction of women? was it the same? Were there also positive..

MB: Well, there was this couple in one of the other trainings where we went to talk. And at the end of the lecture the guy asks for the micro and he said --I want to make a question to you--. But he was like mad no.. and we said --OK-- , with our aprons. We say "ok" and he said --Why do you come dressed up that way--. It was not because of the apron, it was because we used to use Levi's and boots and those kind of boots that we like to use were very cheap and they 'duraban muchissimo', but those boots were used mostly for the

people who were workers in the trains (los trailers y los que trabajaban en los trenes), because, eran muy baratos y muy buenos, de piel, eran de piel, pero un poco rudos...
Entonces he was with a woman, his wife I think, at least his partner, and all he was saying I think the same

A: hmm...

MB: It's a very strong thing here, and it still is, still is yes, but it's changing...and because of the work of all the feminists in the world and all the work made by the feminist in the history. Things are changing globally. That is why I asked you if you consider yourself feminist, because the young females now still have a little prejudice about being accepted or recognized as feminist. When I began, I didn't have this idea, less than today, of consider myself as a feminist, but I always say, that to begin with I wanted to help myself, because I understood that I had problems because of how I was raised and how was the education in general for women. So at the beginning I wanted to understand for myself, to help myself. But in the way, I saw that like me there were millions. And at that moment when I saw that, I switched my position and then it became political, a political position.

A: During this these 10 years of Polvo de gallina Negra?.

MB: Yes.

A: You've changed your strategy? That's because you saw...

MB: That's why we made the group, because we were females, we were artists, we wanted to become very important artists, but also.... what about the fact the women in Mexico?

Monica comes from a family very different from mine, because her grandaunts, I think,.....sus abuelas y sus tías abuelas y todo esto, su mamá, eran feministas, entonces para ella fue algo conocido. Por eso se fue a Los Angeles a estudiar con los(...Par?), y todo esto, ella hizo su maestría allí, porque ella lo que quería era ser feminista y artista feminista.

A: And can you tell me a bit more about where you come from? [00:45:09]

Well, my family was a very traditional one. My father was Catalanian. He was Republicano. And he came to Mexico after the war. Because he went to war in 36 in Spain and then he organized his family here. And he never came back. My father was Catalanian. And he never came back, because of Franco. And my mother was part of her family medium class. In Mexico is very clear what you are saying when you say the culture of different classes. Medium high class. Very conservatives. And my mother was born in Luis Potosi, a beautiful city in the interior of la Republica, but very traditional, very traditional.

So they met, they organized the family. and I was the first...yo fui la que nació primero...

Y después we were three, me, my sister and a brother.

So one day that I was working with (.....) German place here in the GET centre, I told my parents that I was going to do Feminist thing with my friends and my father went with a record player like those that were at that time very big and days after he said please don't ask me. Don't invite me anymore because I feel embarrassed with your friends, because I don't understand these things and I always feel embarrassed.

A: But he didn't....uhm, like

MB: My father was traditional. My father enjoyed culture, painting, traditional painting, traditional things because the Catalanians are very good for those things. But he had problems, because art changed a lot.

I remember that one time a very important famous actress came, Catalanian came, called Nuria Espert , very

well known, as an artist and director. Because Catalonians male and female are very strong and I remember that I went to see this play.

And I loved what I saw. That was a very contemporary thing, because the actors were running up and down the stage and they had lots and lots of rice, so they walked on the rice and I loved that and I came home and I said: --Well I went to see Nuria Espert play and I loved it--. And my father said: --I went to see Nuria Espert and I am sad because I didn't like it because I am Catalonian and I didn't even like it--.

And at that time we were talking a lot of things. But then at the end I just lost my dad and I said "Look it doesn't matter that we have a different opinion about the same thing. It's just that while you didn't enjoy it, I did.

A: And did he accepted it?

MB: Yes, but he never accepted me, the things that I did. Aunque when he saw my very classic image, much less, my mother asked me begged me to leave and don't do anything more. Entonces, at that time it was very hard for me, because your first family is the family where you were born. And it's always, you have all the values and all the habits, and all the ways and all the talents that your family have. And you have also all the prejudice and all the myths, but you don't understand that at the beginning.

So. For me it was difficult, hasta que..Until I understood what was going on.
And that my way was different.

A: because that's very strong to still decide, continue with what you really want to do.

MB: You can say it very quickly but it's really, when you live it, it's very hard to endure, many things.
[00:50:52]

A: Were there moments that you felt like going another way, or?

MB: No. What I did was leave my family. And decided not to be with them anymore.

A: That's very strong...

MB: I mean, I saw them. I visited them but it was not to same.
Because they never changed.

But what was very interesting, Leaving my family, and trying to understand those things, was that the world has lots of people like my family values. So at the end the idea that I have today is that their emotional affects that you can have for people or your family is one thing, but they are really authoritarian, because they want you not change and not leave those values. So I think that these human race is very strange, because we are, as many philosophers have said (Delais en many others), they talk about the Self, in which we are born, and how these organize the society, the society for the people do not feel free.

A:That's very true...

MB: And that was very important for me when I was a teacher in the university because I used to say to my students that to develop conscious it's very important for all the people, because that makes a difference, but that the normal people that goes in the streets maybe don't have these responsibility, that yo have to develop and accept that developing your conscience is the surviving thing if you want to become a culture worker or an artists or whatever.

A: I agree...

MB: It is hard because the family doesn't understand that. And when the family see that the youngsters begin to change, they feel very bad. So that was part of what I used to say to the students to make them feel strong, understanding, dandose cuenta, of those things.

A: That's very important. But you also have to live through it I think of course, that's what you had in this whole period as well, but in a very complex society, I think.

MB: Es difícil. I had this example for the students that I said --we all understand, te das cuenta. We all understand, but humans have to understand that they understand, in a double way--.
And I used to say because, my dog, I interact with my dog and he interacts with me, through these conscience in between the two. So we understand, but the difference between my dog and you, or me, is that he just understands, not understand that he has to understand. So if he could do that, as humans do, he would have invited me already to a lecture about sex and the dogs or the female dogs. No.

That's the difference in between the levels of the conscience. And it's always hard to keep on developing it. It's like a muscle. And it's different from intelligence. I think.
Because all the people say "he is not intelligent". Everybody in the human specie is intelligent because they have brains. The thing is that they don't develop the consciousness.

A: I think also that's very true, that those things are separate things...

MB: So I think that Monica and I developed a lot, not just our brains, but also our consciousness about what being a female means and what being a female artist mean. Sometimes it was hard because we felt sure about many things that we were discovering, but the people didn't allow us to keep on going. [00:55:48]

So it was good. And it was hard. That is part of these developing of the consciousness. It's good because you feel better and you feel that you see much better and understand more than before, but then in a way you are a little alone...

A: especially if you feel you are the only one understanding.
...When was the first time you came in contact with feminist thoughts, feminist consciousness, was this in school, or in which environment?.

MB: I think since I was very young, when I understood that I was a woman.
When I understood that for my father and my mother it was not the same me than my brother or many things in the world, in that specific way, is when I understood. I had to do something about that, to help myself.

A: You felt you had a different position within your family, so it actually came out of your bringing up.

MB: Have you heard that men in general are afraid when a woman say "we have to talk". Have you heard that before?
(laughing)

A: Yes.

MB: That men then say --no no no I can't support I can't stand these things because women are very complicated. They're like mad--, just because we say "we had to talk" so it means something is wrong. It doesn't mean -we have to end that relationship-. It means - we have to talk to organize ourselves because you are you and I am me and it is different level of understanding and consciousness. So it's always very hard to work about that. It's always very hard in between women, in between men or in relationships about love or work... or frivolous relationships like in the streets. It's always difficult. Because you have to understand

very well what you are thinking, how you are looking at the things of the world and then how these so that people look at those same things and then you have to go...tienes que irte afuera de ti y vas al otro, al otro, al otro y tienes que regresar y tienes que interactuar en estos dos niveles, es muy difícil. Eso es el coco de la humanidad.

A: It is very true...

MB: And then if you want to become an artist and to become a good artist, most of the time, what you look at, or you develop or you research or you organize your thoughts, around you nobody looks at those things like that. And then as an artist you have to sympathize all these complex things and levels... because in the visual arts, for example, the people may say --I don't understand--. It would be much better if they say " I don't know".That is why I don't understand because I don't know. And it's very interesting because no matter they don't understand is that thing that they in front of, is well organized, it's perfect, they work in their own lives with that thing inside, for ever. [00:59:45] ..Se lo llevan puesto.....

A: that's very beautiful

A: And when was the first time you came in contact with art. Was it always in your family..?

MB: Si!...Because my father always looked for intelligence or enjoyed intelligence and he had a lot of friends that used to make or give lectures. My mother didn't like it. I did, so I went with my dad. And I always remember that when we were for example in a lecture of a very important mathematician, Catalanian, in a moment my father used to say "how intelligent is he".

So he taught me how to enjoy and look for intelligence. He developed intelligence

A: that's very interesting actually, that through your father you came in contact with arts.

MB: So my father always was close to music, opera and those things, because music was for him very important. And.. but he had his place for work, like I do, with lots of books and things and when nobody was at home. I used to use the key and go inside and look for the things.

A: And in primary school and you do a lot of art already. Or how did you develop your art.

MB: I began very little, very little, to make drawings and things. But that's all the children. If all children have the opportunity to have pencils, they use them. Where it is not the logical thing is that those children that have these opportunities do that as a profession when they grow up. I did. And I loved it and I still do.

A: That's beautiful.That's very nice.

So maybe to go back to Polvo de la Gallina Negra. How did your creative process work. What were your strategies? Did you come together?..

MB: Bueno...we were talking all the time, about all the things that we were looking at, all things happening around us and we had specific days that we had meetings. If we had invitations or not, it was not important, we were always working. We were always working.

In a week, one or two, if we had to do something more, more days, so we were working.

Studying and visiting people, exhibitions, talking about them, meeting people and then ideas come up. And then we should work about that. We should do this. We should do that. And then, when there were began to appear the invitations, more.

A: Because what were your main art forms or how did you develop your art forms with the group.

MB: We always work together and alone and we talked and we said --Okay for this exhibition we accept or not the invitation-- and --yes we accept the invitation--, and --Okay what are we going to do--. And we were talking and we were making the 'traduccion morfologica'. And then we decided what to do. And that was the way the work appeared. [01:05:02]

A: very intuitive. Yeah.

MB: Intuitive and practical, pragmatic.

A: And did you feel like you have influences other artists or did you have other inspirations...

MB: I think that I've been always opened.

But you know that people all the people are not...

...We all have structures inside and your structures look for structures like your structure. Sometimes it's a bad thing, because you see or understand or locate a structure in yourself inside that you don't like it. That makes you reproduce what you will learn. And you don't like it and you have to work with yourself fighting with a part of yourself to change it. but most of the people don't even understand what is going on inside of them. So It's a hard work to do, but it's a beautiful work. It's hard. It's many times sad.

And disappointing. But the day comes when these problematic way of living becomes easier. And it's like automatically. And then you see or hear a bird (...like I'm doing)..and then I know what I would like to do. It's like a muscle.

A: And in this period of Polvo de la Gallina Negra, do you feel like you were in this kind of state?

MB: Yeah...

So it was very intuitive..

and she's very little, I think.. I was very open and when I saw things here, I heard things. I liked to understand what I was looking, what is that? why? And then as an artist trying to.... that is why my work in general has these parts of funny things. Because life itself is absurd, extremely absurd and we accept all the absurdity of life like normal. And there are lots of things that are not normal.

A: And in this process did you also have like .. did you get influenced by for example the audience like you are making an art work...did you already think in the process about how it will be received? was that important in your work or not..?

MB: No!.. When you like a boy, if you're heterosexual, and then you would like for him to be your boyfriend, many times you feel bad, because it's about inseguridad, Incertidumbre, and many times you feel bad and with lots of doubts. And most of the time that ruins the relationships or possible relationships. What we learn through life is to understand what I am looking and what does that mean my presence in that and how I can substancializar lo que veo para dar algo muy concreto. Es muy maravilloso el arte.

A: So it is a very personal process.

MB: Yeah it's personal. But you being personal, you're not ever alone. We are always the other. The others. Your ideas and everything it is most of the time is not your ideas. It's the ideas of other people that were put inside you. Until you change all of that and than you organize your structures and then what you are doing is what you really want to do. And then it is going to be a maldición porque ya no lo vas a poder detener.

A: Do you feel this way?

MB: Si! That is why I like to begin and to close...

A: Did you ever have struggles in this period of Polvo de Gallina Negra

MB: Struggles.

Struggles is life itself.... always.

A: And can you give an example of what your main struggles were.

MB: My struggle was.... one of my big struggles was..... If I could maintain my femininity. Mylo voy a decirlo en español, porque son temas difíciles. [01:11:00]

A: That's ok..

MB: Siempre tuve problemas, porque lo que quería era defender era mi feminidad. Porque mi papá cuando yo era niña me decía --pareces hombre, haces lo que quieres, sales, te vas con quien sabes quien...eres como hombre--

A: Eso es una definición de hombre..

MB: Pero es muy fuerte, porque yo entendí un día que mi papa tenía un concepto de hombre,...que no le permitía verme a mi como mujer. O sea...El tenía un concepto de lo que es el hombre, el machismo, la autoridad, todo..!. Y eso no le permitía verme a mi. El vio a mi hermano. Pero a mi hermana y mi nos veía y nos quería pero no nos veía porque éramos mujeres.
El principio de invisibilidad empieza ahí, cuando la sociedad no contiene a todo el mundo. Entonces lo que es prioritario es lo que se sobrepone a lo otro, a lo que está ahí. Eso era una complicación que tuve durante mucho tiempo, porque para ser una persona desarrollada, y una artista, en serio artista. Como persona tienes que tener una serie de cosas: afectos, situaciones resueltas, yo si quería tener hijos, quería tener hombre, y como artista quería tener mis temas de trabajo. De la mayor parte de la gente no tiene tema ni de vida. Viven la vida de otros. Así les dijeron, así lo hacen. La gente en general nada más reproduce de lo que se les enseña. Y no se mueve del lugar. Toda la gente nace, se queda y reproduce, eso es la humanidad en general. Entonces por otro lado hay cosas muy falsas de la humanidad, muy perversas, el odio, la violencia, el crimen, todo esas cosas que vemos, ahora tantos porque antes se nos escondían, pero ahora nos las muestran. Entonces he visto que la humanidad... bueno...Me tiene bastante desencantada. No quiero ser ya parte de la humanidad. Pero todavía no se puede cambiar de especie. Entonces no puedo cambiar de especie, entonces tuve encontrar lo que hiciera feliz a mi y encontré que nada más hay, todo es catolico
Pero que hay dos puntos sublimes, maravillosos, que se centran en uno es la producción del conocimiento, La producción del conocimiento y arte ciencias tecnología eso es Maravilloso, Sublime, fantastico, generoso, emocionante.
Pero casi todo lo que vemos todos los días no tiene nada de eso.
Entonces esto es un esfuerzo también. Cómo lo voy a hacer para moverme del lugar para irme adonde yo tenga todas estas cosas. Entonces así mi vida cotidiana cuando lo logré...la vida siempre tiene muchas problemas..eso es lo que yo tengo ahora.
Soy feliz desde que me levanto hasta que me duerme
Porque no tengo que demostrar nada, lo que tengo es lo que es,es lo que he hecho, es lo que va siendo.

A: Pero durante el periodo del Polvo de la Gallina negra no estabas así o si..

MB: No o sea se estaba gestando. Pero había problemas. Luego Murió mi marido, el papá de mis hijas, y fue muy fuerte. Porque entonces vi partes de la sociedad que no había visto antes. Cuando me quedé sola. Y de mi familia también. Como quería decir mi familia por eso te pasan esas cosas, porque eres diferente,

quisistes ser diferente. Muy fuerte. Pero cuando ya resolví todo eso, pues ya..ya sé...
Pero Lo que pasa es que ellos esperaban que yo regresara.
Y Los veía y todo, pero era diferente.

Entonces todas estas problemáticas pues hay ilucidarlos hay que desbrozarlos y saber porque están.
Y por eso cada exhibición que hicimos, cada obra que hicimos, tenía un objetivo o varios y tenía una forma específica de ser presentada.

A: Eso fue un tema muy fuerte en todos los trabajos que hicieron ?

MB: Imaginate

Y ahora qué hacemos?

Pero es fascinante.

Y Después de 10 años, este...le dije a Mónica que yo ya no podía trabajar más. Que 10 años ya habían sido muchos. Con el No grupo estuve 7, con ella estuve 10 y ya..

A: Porque durante esa época de Polvo de Gallina Negra también estabas haciendo otro arte?

MB: Si, cosas mias,

Y con Monica.

Pero también eso tenía mucho interés en estas cosas en ese época. Para que se lograra algo

Pero La vida es muy exigente. No te pide una sola cosa.

Como mi maestro el director de la escuela dijo que no puedes hacer exposiciones donde haya de todo

Yo dije: Porque no?

No es seria ..

Porque no? (y en los setenta por lo que hicimos un poco de todo, un poco ...)

Los cruces transdisciplinarios

A: y... Cómo escogieron donde hicieron sus exhibiciones, había algo muy principal en eso ó..

MB: Pues...Todo se va dando es parte de la vida. Empieces a trabajar y vas entendiendo que te van invitando algunas cosas, o tu organizas otras. Monica organizó varias exposiciones de puras mujeres

Antes de las exposiciones que hicimos de puras mujeres, muchas veces los hombres se organizaban entre hombres nada mas para ser sus exhibiciones y nunca nadie dijo nada.

Y cuando nosotras organizamos exposiciones de puras mujeres, dijeron que éramos sexistas.

Yo creo que eso fue muy importante en una etapa, pero después de 10 años, 15 años de estar haciendo cosas, ó más.

Hoy día creo que tiene que haber que la humanidad se tiene que salvarse completo hombres y mujeres.

Eso es lo que yo creo ahora.

Si a mi me invitan a una exposición de puras mujeres, no me gusta.

Porque yo siento que no debe de ser el criterio por que en

los setentas era revolucionario ese criterio, pero hoy día no, yo creo.

Hay personas que si creen que tienen que haciendo todo no mas para mujeres.

Que el feminismo es no mas para mujeres.

Yo creo el feminismo es también para hombres,

Porque si a víctimas vamos,

Los hombres tambien son victimas del sistema.

Bueno...Hazme dos preguntas más y ya, porque ya me cansé.

A: Está bien, creo ya casi estamos..

MB: Casi ya barrimos todo, ya las vi, mas o menos vi lo que me preguntabas , por eso me solté ...

A: si

Todavía es necesario el trabajo que hicieron ustedes durante....?

MB: Ser artista es como un científico. El que hace , que descubre la vacuna del Polio, tiene un proceso. La descubre y la da al mundo, para que

Lo Dificil era hacerlo. Ya producirlo es facil

Entonces para mi, un artista real tiene que soltar

Cuando las cosas ya están hechas. (....)

Tienes que saber cuando dejarlo, Eso es así,

Hay que saber Cuando hacerlo, cuando completarlo y cuando dejarlo..

Por ejemplo a mis alumnos es distinto les decía cuando yo estaba dando clases en tantos lados.

Les decía --mira llega un momento que el trabajo lo que haces tienes dudas si el trabajo está o no está pero ante la duda la gente lo que hace es ponerle mas cosas. Y yo un dia descubri que les permite que las cosas estén bien organizadas no es ponerle más y menos si le sobra si no incluso a veces quitar--.

Cuando me di cuenta de esas cosas se les explicaba a los alumnos y algunos después de treinta años me dicen --ay me acuerdo perfecto que hay que quitar en lugar de ponerlo, y hay que hacer esto y hay que

hacer el otro , de las clases que les daba--, y yo les digo perfecto...porque es analizar todo... y las cosas como materializarlas.

A: es lo mas dificil...

MB: Y si tu crees es importante es una cosa pero tu no puedes decir que es importante, porque no lo es. Es importante cuando te buscan y cuando te preguntan que cómo estuvo eso porque puedes decir que estuve hasta allá...(?)

A: The principals you had when you started with el Polvo de Gallina negra, is it still the same at this point?

MB: No, las cosas nunca son iguales. Todo lo que hicimos (.....) otras cosa. Ves más.

Lo que fue revolucionario en los setentas, y ochentas, hoy dia ya no lo es a la mejor.

Y si tu lo sigues haciendo, te estas copiando a ti misma, no funciona.

A: so do you consider yourself still a feminist?

MB: Ah claro eso si. Si Porque eso fue la posición....

Lo que hace que haces feminista es un posicionamiento político.

Donde tu peleas porque otras mujeres tengan oportunidades y tengan lo que necesitan y no que por ser mujeres no se les de.

Entonces cuando tu peleas por mujeres quiere decir que empezastes contigo y quieres que las demás lo tengan, es una posicionamiento político eso es lo que nunca se quita, porque yo soy mujer.

Ahora hay hasta Hombres feministas, hay hombres que se aceptan como feministas, porque ellos

entendieron esos procesos. Pero yo siendo feminista, ahora me parece que hacer exposiciones con puras

mujeres no es correcto. Yo creo que no es el criterio no si es hombre o mujer, el criterio tiene que ser -

vamos a hacer una exposición maravillosa sobre este tema- y sobre ese tema los que estén. Y así.

Pero eliminar el prejuicio.. el prejuicio es un pre....antes del juicio hay algo que hace que tu reproduzcas

cosas que ya no funcionan la mayor parte de las veces. El racismo, La discriminación , todo eso es muy

fuerte. El mundo ha cambiado mucho, como ..Mónica siempre decía que yo era pesimista, y yo siempre

decía que yo era la optimista. Entonces yo ahorita digo que yo soy optimista, yo creo que el mundo es mucho mejor y va a ser mejor. Siempre va a ver cosas feas. Pero la oportunidad de estar aquí, la existencia en si misma es el mejor regalo que todos tenemos. Y cuando lo valoras, como cuando les decía los alumnos, o sea de los 400 millones y millones de espermatozoides, nada mas uno llega. Y ese uno, entre tantos era per competencia y eso hace que tu estés aquí. Les ganastes a 400 millones y millones de espermatozoides, o sea...los que nacemos ya somos todos los ganones, todos somos suertudos... Hoy.. Copernico, ven! Entonces hay que aprovecharlo, hay que aprovecharlo..Y este, para que la vida sea algo maravilloso . Porque en principio lo es.

Y Hay gente que lo malgasta. Le ganó la parte donde sus orígenes(...) que fue cuando fue conformado...el robotece...así (...)?

Bueno mi querida...

A: Si, creo que...

MB: Me da mucho gusto haberte conocido..

Interview Monica Mayer
Mexico City - 02/09/2019 - 10.00 (CEST)

MM:.....Lucido en Leonardo Mayer. I had one half brother from my mother's side, he had been from a previous marriage. two brothers, my parents... and first we lived in Colonia del Valle, when I was a child. My grandmother also lived with us and an aunt of mine. And then when I was around six or seven we moved to el Pedregal, which was a zone, an area in the south of the city which was just developing with very spectacular houses built on lava foundations. And I went to private schools most of my life, Bilingual private schools. My family is bilingual. My grandfather was English. He Came from an non religious Jewish family and my mother's family was Catholic, so I was brought up in both religions, having family from both and many of us didn't believe in anything. And it was a middle, middle upper middle class family.

A: And can you tell me about how your relationship was with your parents maybe, like, in what kind of environment..,

MM: It was okay, when I was a younger child and then my mother was diagnosed with being bipolar (bipolar). I don't know how you call that in English, bipolar, and so she had since I was very young around 14, she had suicide attempts as... and usually since I was only...as I was a girl in the family I was the one had to...I was the one my mother would phone first or call first or let me know that she had taken pills or whatever...

So it was in a way a very protected life, economically and stuff and in a way a very very complicated, because of this situation with my mother...would get very difficult with my father when I had to either take sides with one or the other. And it was always living in a situation of crisis.

So it had some very very good things. My mother was a wonderful person full of imagination and life with her was on the one hand very loving and fun and creative and on the other hand we had to be dealing with crisis all that all the time.

My father was a businessman who was very busy with his business. Most of the time so he's like a very absent figure in the way he was there to...he was the head of the family. But he was not present and he was... my brothers used to call him Sir... not dad, but they used to call him Sir. it's more that generation of men who participated in the Second World War. My father and his sister actually volunteered from Mexico when they were 18 and 21 and went to England to participate in the second world war. So with that generation of men who are very, were very (...) distance and authority.

A: How old were you these problems or this complexity in your family starting. How old were you?

MM: I was fourteen.

A: Oh yeah. Okay

MM: ...but it probably started a bit before, but the actual suicide attempts started when I was 14.

A: Mm hmm. Okay. And can you also maybe tell me something about like...What the city looked like in these times you grew up.

MM: Mexico City was a lot smaller. There was no periferico for example. It was...I think it was, It was still a large city, it was six million people, but it's not the 22 we have today. It was much much smaller. I remember la Ciudad (...) it was just starting at the time. We had the first... I remember when the first Mall was opened in ciudad satelite, it was like a big a big thing all over the city, because we had markets and we had...even the mobile marketplaces, el mercado sobre ruedas, those didn't exist when I was very young, just the market place and the first supermarket. I remember also when that started.

So it was a different kind of life. Much smaller, no Metro, no underground. Just buses and veceros, Stuff like that. [00:04:51]

A: and the social political environment?

MM: Well I don't remember that when I was very young, but I remember the 1968 and the student movement, particularly because an aunt of mine, my mother's sister lived in Tlatelolco. So she wasn't right where the student massacre happened. She was about a mile away, but there were even bullets...A bullet went into one of her windows.

A: oh wow

MM: So we were much aware of that. We were much aware of that when the guerilla was there that there was, that's when economic crisis started. And I remember my father being very worried because they were going to take their money away and they had Gasoline stored in the house in case we had to run away. There was a real crisis feeling. My parents coming from, especially my father, from the Second World War..

I think.. the sensation of crisis and being persecuted on the one hand happened and a (...) safety.. so my mother, for example, had a storage room, ..

A: Yes

MM: ..which had food to last....I don't know....a long time. I think it combined many things, because... it was also the time of the Cold War..

A: Yes

MM: ...The Valle de los Cochinos, the crisis with Cuba and being eight years old and being during recess, eh.. hiding under my desk, because I thought they were going to bomb..

A: Oh wow

MM: .. so this world tension and the one hand this feeling international feeling of crisis and people having bomb shelters, on the other hand economic crises and and having to look for, for...,worrying about what might happen.. which I feel must be pretty much like what people in the Mexicans in the United States must be feeling now...

A: Yeah, like the insecurities

MM: Yeah, the..very very insecure moments ,you know so, so that happened. On the other hand it was... I mean I come from a situation of privilege, so we traveled, there were people working in the house, there was a cook, there was someone who did the bedrooms, there was a driver. There was... I mean it was

...this contrast of situations and what was,... what was going on. But there was fear,...the political sphere, after 68 it did become very tense. When I started going to demonstrations in the 70s my mother started going with me because she was worried about the violence and people disappearing. So yeah we were aware of what was going on. And that...but still we lived in a very privileged position. [00:07:27]

A: Yes. And can you maybe tell me something about.. in your younger years, what your confrontation was with feminist ideas or feminists in general. [00:07:58]

MM: I was...As a child, it's not something I remember, in the 50s. It however, my grandmother's cousin on my mother's side, was Amalia Castillo Ledon, who was the first woman secretary, the press woman ambassador in Mexico. And she was under Secretary of Education when the Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of Modern Art started.

So I did have the image of very strong women in my family. My aunt on my father's side, who had been to the war, also was a very high level translator. So there were women in my family who were working and there were women in my family who were homemakers, like my mother, who was homework like a professional homemaker. My father would phone occasionally and say ' I'm coming home with 10 people for a business dinner' . There were days we had 60 guests coming for you for lunch. among them my mother's friends who were artists and my father's businessmen. But I think that it was it was in a way cheaper for him to to have these these things. The whole social life that had to do with a business.. and...

but my mother was a professional housewife. She was not just regular family, but all this kind of social social life that came hand-in-hand with my father's work, you know.

But it was very interesting because it was also...on the one hand there was the privilege I lived in, but my aunt was very very much middle class Tlatelolco and my mother's brother lived in Ciudad de Juarez and his wife worked in a maquiladora.

So I have all the experiences of the different social classes, different religions in one same environment, different political attitudes. My father was a businessman and my mother was for example a friend of Carlos Jurado, the painter. And one day we were coming back from Guernavaca and we saw the headlines in the newspaper that Carlos Jurado and Adolfo Mesiac had been caught as young artists in Guatemala, distributing communist propaganda and doing political work and they were going to be shot. So my mother immediately intervened because she knew the Lisa Echeveria, who had been a friend of hers when they were children and he had been Chanvillan in her 50 year old party. So she'd go off to to defend her communist friend with her political friend, who was a president at that time.. [00:10:07]

(laughing) ..and who my father and all his friends were completely against, because it was because of the economic crisis. So it's this understanding situations from all these different points of view, that I think was very interesting to me. My parents were also very much involved with education.

For example my mother had not been able to study. She married very young and then had my brother and... her husband was a military doctor and he died of TB when my mother was 18, with a child and so she had to start working to take care of him and my grandmother and my grandfather, who had lost a leg, so she was working very hard since she was...

...very young. So she was never able to finish studying. So then at one point when I was 13 when I started secundaria. Which is between 13 and 16. I suppose it's like Junior high... and they started in Mexico TeleSecundarias which was the same grade in school through television.

So my mother opened school in her house and in her life (...) Pedregal house. And we had 30 children coming in from the poorer areas around the rich area where I lived and they would come...30 kids would come every day and a teacher and they had secondary school through television in my house and my mother studied secondary school with them.

So two generation of kids came to my house everyday with problems like... there was a child I remember that used to fall asleep every day and at one point they asked him what was going on and he worked all night so that he could come to school.

..so my mother put a shower in the house for the children.

So it was a situation of privilege, but very much with an awareness of other situations and with this sort of commitment of having to do something about it that being in a privileged position, also had obligations. That you are more obliged to do things if you were in a privileged position than if not.

So that was on the one hand then on the other hand...when you were asking about feminism.. I grew up with brothers. So in a way I grew up like one of the boys. There was also like a contrast there and not thinking that there were things I couldn't do. And on the other hand I also grew up very protected by brothers.

I always knew that they were there, whatever I needed, you know. So it was on both sides.

I started hearing about feminism when I studied, the last two years of high school between 16 and 18, in South Wales, at a place called Atlantic College, which was the school that, that, that....a whole project. Now they have schools all over the world that promote international understanding through education.

So it was a mixed boarding school with people from all over the world and there I started, I remember the first talk I ever had on feminism, but it was very strange, because the women who came to talk to us, probably from a feminist group, started talking to us about motherhood and being paid enough the same when you work.. and I don't know what things...

But we were 16 17, so. It sounds interesting, but it didn't make any sense for me at the time.

You know it's sort of something I couldn't relate to very much.

But a cousin I have, who lives in England, a distant cousin, when I came back to Mexico she started sending the magazine Sparerib, so I was reading about feminism since I was 17, 18.

Even if I didn't start participating in the movement, it was something I was aware of. [00:14:11]

A: Yes so, but you came in contact with this term in like a European environment, not in Mexico..

MM: It was probably something that was talked about also in Mexico.

..but, eh, no, it was not part of my...it was part of the examples I had from women...

Well I knew Amalia had had the.....she was the one that politically implemented for women to have the vote in Mexico.

I'm not saying that she's the only one who did it, because obviously it was a very big struggle, but the president told her...she went to..someone high enough (...)...he...she went to tell him that women should have the vote and he said something like 'Okay get 500000 signatures and I will look into it'.

And she did. So I always knew there was this struggle for women. But I don't know when people started talking about feminism in Mexico. Probably in the very early 70s also.

Which is when I was in Europe.

So I think it was when people were starting to talk about these things in general.

Grupo MAS, Mujeres en Accion Solidaria. Probably is from the early 70's.

A: Yeah that's interesting. And can you also tell me something about your school experience. So where you did the elementary school, your middle school and your high school, and what did you study

MM: I went to the grammar school, I went to a Pan American workshop, a bilingual school, then after that I went into the modern American school which was right next to it. It was also a bilingual school and then I went to the Atlantic college to the United (...)college, in South Wales and then I came to arts school in Mexico.

A: and for how long did you study in in Wales then?.

MM: [00:17:50] Two years.

At that time it was the equivalent of the... They were just starting with the International Baccalaureate.

but it was implemented yet, so I did... this what is called the Sixth Form in England, the A levels and O levels, A level actually.

A: Okay. And how was your school experience?

MM: (....)...Here the grammar school it was great. I didn't like it so much at the modern American school. I don't know if it is because I had come from another school and it took a long time to get used to it, or because the whole...the general culture of the school was more bullying and I was bullied. Probably, I came from another school, and probably because I was starting to do ...On the one hand it coincides with my mother being going through this very difficult stage of suicides.

So I would come and not go into class and ask the teacher for my best friend to come out to talk to me, because I was obviously having trouble. So the other students must have sensed it and I was also very much involved in reading about psychiatry and psychology. [00:18:49]

So I was reading..my mothers psychiatrist was really interesting. And he started giving me literature to think, to understand what was going on. So when I was 14 ,15, 16 I was reading about schizophrenia, catatonia, all these things..

..and we had an English class and we each had to do a speech in front of the class. So I decided to do a speech where I talked about schizophrenia and then I ask friends of mine in the class without the teacher knowing, to act it out.

So I would go and... catatonia is when someone becomes sort of completely paralyzed and I would go up and I would try to move the student and the student wouldn't move and and the other is... I don't even remember,... but if someone starts hallucinating and someone in the class started hallucinating. And the last, they become violent so the student came up to me like if he was going to kick me, you know, so the teacher got scared and stopped the whole thing and I think, I was out of the norm.. I started doing performances...

A: already

...you know.

So I think partly I was out of the norm.

So I think that part of the bullying had to do with, with that.

But it was that great, because last year he student committee of the same school ,it still exists, the young girls and young kids they have..they organised the talk and they invited me to go and talk about sexual harassment and they did a clothesline and it was wonderful you know because it was in the whole auditorium full of kids and I went to all..I had been harassed there and they shouldn't let that happen.

And it was wonderful you know it was like being able to, to, to change the narrative of a place where I had been very unhappy at, for years later, I don't know how many, the students inviting me to come and being able to talk and being able to support them back. So they were not in the same situation I was at and seeing how things that changed ,you know, because they are so they were so they are so empowered and they are so well organized. So that was wonderful last year. [00:21:01]

Yeah. And they did their own clothesline. It was very good.

And in Wales I had a great time, because I was away from my family. So it was a time when I was able to enjoy being a teenager without having to be responsible for my mother, you know. Though I had a great time. I had a.. I did all these other activities, cliff rescue and social service and I had friends from all over the world. And I didn't.. I had difficulty with the actual studying, because I didn't have a discipline coming from Mexico of writing essays, for example, or actually studying. and... I was much more interested in the experience of being there and meeting people and finding out about different cultures. And so my studies didn't go too well. I passed with enough to get into an artschool over there, which then allowed me to get into an arts school here.

But it's two years. I remember as very good. When you read my letters home. They sound like a depressed teenager. Not so much because I was depressed, but I think because I was very melodramatic, so I would love going to the to the ocean front which is what else is nothing to do with the beaches in Mexico. You know it's more like a Jane Austen novel and the cliffs and the wind and the rain. I would sit there and cry, it was, it was, it was very very good stage four for being a dramatic teenager, but I had a great time I enjoyed it very much.

A: That's nice. And the artschool in Mexico?

MM: Oh that was, that was fantastic. I loved every every minute of it. And..oh another thing that had happened in Wales is that, I started becoming independent, because I had never been out in the street alone in Mexico. So until I went over there I started sort of moving around more and traveling on my own and being able to go out in the street alone.

Art school was great fun. It was, it was the first year when they were, we were having... We actually had a, I don't know how you call it..a University level. We had a B.A. level. Before that they didn't have that equivalent. So the teachers were new. For example, we had Juan Acha, who was an outstanding Peruvian theorist and then we had a teacher, Hernando Torremichua, Juana Gutierrez. Teachers were very supportive, weren't tired at the time still. It's not the same when you've just started teaching that after 30 years of doing the same thing. So the groups were starting. The students were getting organized. It was a bit after sixty eight. So it was very political. And there was there was a very strong group of women artists that... we were all getting involved in feminism because it was just starting you know.

So Magaly Lara was there at the time. Jesus (...) went through there for a few months and Rosala Huerta, Lucy Santiago, Robina Morales, (...)we were starting to talk about all these issues. So I remember it, I met Victor there. [00:25:15]

..and since I went in and we do we started our relationship in 1975. I had friends who are still my friends today like Esperanza Valderas.

I started really... my social life, you know. I'm not friends with the people who were with me in grammar school or high school.

With my friends in Europe, they are all over the world they lost contact because there was no email at that time and I was very lazy with letters. So that (...)my social life and my friends everything started at the artschool.

A: It formed your life actually. This period formed your life?

MM: Yes.Yes. Yes.

A: Okay. That's that's very beautiful. But, ...you already told me something about it, for example that your mother was very creative. But, do you remember your first experience with creativity and ...yes how you developed this interest actually..?

MM: My mother was in artschool when she was pregnant with me.

A: So maybe it started there..

MM: My mother painted, so Carlos Jurado would come to our house and give her art lessons. But funnily enough, I took classes of everything except art as a child. I went to ballet school. I took ballroom dancing. I took..all sorts of things, you know, dancing and ... music. I went to the conservatory and I took piano lessons and I was in the choir and I would, I took theater lessons as a child, these kinds of kids that the mother took two different classes every every day. And until I was 16, literature, writing classes everything you know. But they only took up art classes when I was around 16, a bit before I went to Atlantic college, 15 ,16, that there was... I don't know, some teacher came to give classes to my mother and I started taking painting classes with her as well. And I liked it very much it was ...I actually wanted to be a writer when I was a kid, since I was 6 or 7, I read, I don't know, everything, I would read absolutely everything I kept journals since I was 8. So I was more into the writing part and... but the part of the visual arts I think it started, I tell you when I started with these classes and then thinking what I would do it university, I wasn't sure.

On the one hand I wanted to study communications, when I came back from from art school. The career was just starting when I even went to the university to see if I would study communication and then it was like a Catholic university ,The Anoac, which had that career and then they interviewed me they asked me what my religion was and I said Jewish and Catholic, you know, I grew up I grew up in both of them and then the psychologist, when she interviewed me, she said what I was interested in or what was going on in my life and I said: Well my mother just tried to commit suicide and my boyfriend from the college just came out of the closet. So I was dealing with those things at the time, you know, and they told me they accepted me at the university, but that I shouldn't talk to the girls my age because I was going to shock them.

So I decided, it was better for me to go to the art school for they would shock me.

Now going into the art school was on the one hand I was allowed because I was a girl and then my education wasn't as important or serious. I had a brother who wanted to study theater and the pressure was very strong, so he ended up studying economics and being very miserable about that his own life.

So I was able to do what I wanted, because I was a girl. But for example, the year before I wanted to join San Carlos, which is how we called the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, they used to have these huge balls and parties, where everybody got dressed up in disguise and everything. And it had become very violent and the brother of someone we knew had been stabbed thirty four times as he went out of the ball. So my parents were terrified for me to go to the art school, you know, so that's why I said I'd rather be shocked that. So I was they allowed me to go to the art school as long as I never went to a party. Which was no problem, because there were no parties anymore. They stopped after that you know but...

But it was interesting to me that was the only condition,they let me have. Also being at the Art School at the time, on the one hand they had had this problem and on the other hand, they had stopped because of the student movement, there were no concerts, so I never went to a concert in my life.

No those restarted afterwards having public concerts, or gatherings of young people. So we had small parties. We had small reunions and for example people would go to discotheques, but discotheques, as arts students sounded like -no-, no. Peñas, where you went to listen to music, or private parties in our houses, but never this sort of big social gathering, because of the repression.at the time.

I don't know if I went off to, too many things.

A: No it's very good. It doesn't matter .
It was about your experience with creativity in your younger years.

MM: So by the time I, by then I had decided, you know, when I went to...when I went to attend the college, my most important subject was art. I knew then, art and literature, art and Spanish, you know. So I knew that that was what I was interested in...

A: And then that was also when you began making art, or did you already make art before.

MM: When I started more seriously, consciously thinking about it. I'd probably done drawings and paintings throughout my life. Because you do that in school. My father would take us in the summer to art classes so. so we had started doing that. But more seriously when I when I went to to attend college, there I was at art classes, six eight hours a week, plus the homework, plus extra classes so it was my basic activity.

A: You were very artistic involved.

MM: Yeah, I liked it very much. I've always liked it very much. It's like... I don't like the other subjects. I always used to think.. chemistry?...Do. over there..eeuu

A: haha, numbers

MM: I didn't like school. I.
I never liked school, until I was I started doing my, the university, you know, because I was studying what I was interested in, but I never did... I always felt it like a waste of time... studying chemistry tricks example. No matter, it makes no sense to me, you know.

A: I can understand that, I have the same I think. And what did you do after your study in art school,when you graduated.

MM: Once, while I was still in art school .I had started becoming very interested in feminism and I read about the Women's Building, so in nineteen seventy six I went for a two week workshop and I decided, I wanted to go to the whole program, the whole feminist studio workshop. So I came back to Mexico, both Victor and I had been to (...) we went to, that time to the workshop I had in LA and to a design conference in Nazca, that we were interesting, because of art school. And I came back and I joined the feminist movement and... I started becoming an activist during those two years. Because I was already going to go to the Woman's Building and I was already interested in feminist art and I started organizing exhibitions and I started my relationship with Victor started since 1975. So we were working that. We were both teaching since we were in the second year at university. So we were both working at...and several other friends from artschool had a secondary school, so life started, you know, we started doing all those things, working and building up our relationships and...getting ready to doing artwork, participating in exhibitions, etc..

A: Yeah. So you actually after artschool you continued your artistic work, because..

MM: (...)I think I was very lucky, or we were very lucky. One of our teachers was Sebastian, the sculptor, and he organized and invited us to the salon 77-78. So that was in 78. So we were right out of art school and we were already exhibiting at the Museum of Modern Art. And that we.. he invited us to another exhibition at the Palace of Fine Arts, which was a highest space (...) you know and an exhibition in Japan. and so,our professional careers started, not that we were making any money from that.

Because I haven't lived from my, from my art work until I had a grant from the Sistema Nacional de Creadores, when I was already 60.

So, which is for the first time I said, I don't have to do translations or English classes to make a living. I can really do only my artwork. But we were exhibiting and we did have a presence. And my work was coming... It was being written about and... by artcritics and it came out in newspapers..So, so that was very good yeah.

A: So you were already quite well known in that time, for with your art?

MM: But we were beginning to be well-known. Yeah. Yeah.

A: But you never actually really earned money from..You always had another job on this side.

MM: Always always.

I was translator, english to Spanish, of technical things and business reports and insurance reports and we gave classes, English classes at companies. Both Victor and I we both did the same thing.

A: And do you know why you had to do this. Was it because of the cultural sector in Mexico at that time.

MM: We live in Mexico, where 60 percent of the population or more live under poverty levels.

If you think you're going to make a living in Mexico as an artist? It's unreal.

There isn't a market, there isn't a market big enough. It's the third world. This is not Europe or the United States.

So maybe a few, a very very very small minority of artists, would make a living of their artwork, or they might make a lot of doing decorative things.

There is a market for. But if you're doing feminist art, if you're doing political art ,if you're doing work that has to do with performances with installations that didn't have a market until very recently, you know, That is not something you were going to make a living of. And we were very clear about it. We were very clear that we wanted to do our art work whatever we wanted to do and then we were going to have to pay for it by something else. [00:38:08]

Victor and I were also very clear, because we lived in the United States for, when I was there, and Victor had lived there for a long time, because he is from Tijuana and he studied his university and high school and everything in the States, that it would have been a lot easier for us if we had stayed over there. And we could have at the time. It wouldn't have been difficult to get papers to stay there. But we were committed politically to working in Mexico.

So then we were very clear that we had to make our living off something else. As most artists do in Mexico. I think very few live exclusively from their artwork.

A: And was this ever a goal of yours, or actually never. This wasn't...Did you have a goal...

MM: No.

A: This was just like making..

MM: It still isn't

A: okay. That's interesting, because for some artists it is.

MM: Yeah. I think that marks a difference of the times.

And I think it also means different contexts.

And then you have to work, for example. I think Magali, for her it was a goal.

And at one point she said - I'm not going to have an extra job and I'm going to really only make a living of my painting-.

Yes.

And she did it.

A: it works

MM: And.. I also think she probably had to do certain...she had to have. a certain ability for public relations, that I have no patience with.

And she also had to have certain... I don't know the word... to adapt her artwork as well.

A: and a strong network of...

MM: A strong network and also some compromises with her work.

Which I wasn't interested in having. I tried. We both tried. Victor and I both tried to ...to get into the. Gallery system and we actually did have exhibitions in the gallery system and then they never made a big effort. For example Victor showed at the (Matos?) gallery at the Juan Marti gallery. And...I even had experiences like: My half brother, who has a different name, wanted to buy a piece and he left his card and they never called him from the gallery. So they're bad system of galleries not a lot of market. They're not interested. I mean I was told (...) -Why don't you do drawings in color, instead of what you do-. Because... (...) I don't work with colors.

You know, we weren't willing to make those, those... changes either, you know, and we weren't very convinced with the galleries...They still..., I think the galleries have become stronger in Mexico, after the art fairs, the international art fairs. So galleries, like OMR etcetera, started being able to sell, because it became an international market. But those are very few galleries. And the once more of our generation, Juan Martí, Pecanins,..etcetera, that those did not jump on to become part of that international market.

So I think it has to do with very many things.

It's not just, it's not just one thing. Probably there were artists like Gabriel Macotela from my generation, who started with the Galeria Pecanins and he probably made a living for a while and there's artists like Carla Rippey, whose drawings, she's had collectors all the time. I don't know. There are some who did manage. But we started doing things like performances and installations and all these other things also that ..that, or feminist art, you know, the image of the woman split up into half, I didn't really expect a lot out of people to want to have that in their living room.

A: Yeah, that's true. And is this still the case in Mexico or is it changed.

MM: I'm not very sure, I'm not into the market. I don't go to galleries, I haven't been to them. I think the

strong galleries are, Kurimanzutto, OMR, the ones that have an international presence. But for example, ... there are very few galleries that are interested in artists of my generation.

So I think (...) Aguirre is now in grupo de proyectos Moncloa . But Marie's, Lourdes Grobet, Magaly Lara, Felipe Herrenberg and my work are all managed by a gallery in Argentina.

A: Oh, that's interesting.

MM: So there's a gallery that the artists in the 90s have Kurimanzutto and have other galleries. Which is, ... it's when the market changed, is when the neoliberal stuff became, the Tratada...how do you call it, Nafta, started and things changed a lot in the 90s. And what we had opened as artist, with performances installations, other kind of work, this other generation of Gabriel Orozco and Alvaro and Avaran, Cruz Viyegas, they came to harvest upon what we had opened.

And we don't have an art history system, that is fast enough to start putting into perspective this work. There has been art exhibition that includes the work of the groups, that was La era de la Discrepancia. And that has been it. So then artists of my generation are sort of left out of history and sort of left out of the market. So it's interesting now that the market is starting to do exhibitions. But the market is very recent.

Ten years old, you know, so they've done process (...), I have shown there and a few artists, but, but it's not, but it's still sort of outside of the art, of the general narratives of art history in Mexico.

A: Yeah. I will come back later on this I think. But first I want to ask what your motivation was to start Polvo de Gallina Negra. I will ask some questions about Polvo de Gallina Negra now.

MM: When I had come back from Los Angeles, I wanted to work with feminist art. Although I had already given a workshop here. After the first workshop I gave over and, I took in 1976, I came back and I gave a workshop for the feminist, movement of feminist art. And I wanted to work collectively both because I am part of the generation of the groups, although I didn't participate in the groups at the time. Maris did, Magaly did and I thought it was interesting to do collective work and I had worked in Los Angeles with Suzanne Lacey and Leslie Lebowitz with yet another social art network and I was interested in doing that kind of more collective work.

So I came back and it was a way of also to start networking in Mexico, because even if you are away for two years it is a long time, you know. I was starting my family and I had my, Victor and I had Adan. So it was all these changes going on. And I started first the workshop at San Carlos, where Taquielas entre Rateras started, which was a two year, I think the workshop lasted a year and a half or two years, and with Maris we had met more before... In between coming back from Los Angeles and settling in Mexico, Victor and I went several months to Europe to give talks about feminist art and the group's movements in Mexico, political art, contemporary political art in Mexico. And we had met with people from all the different groups, with Grupo Mira, (...), Tepito Artaca and No Grupo. [00:46:43]

So I got to know Maris and Rowena a lot more and a very close friendship started then.

So when I came back from the United States, we got together and we decided to invite all other women artists to form a group. And so we decided to form a group and we tried to form a group and we invited all our friends. And except for Erminia Rosal, who was in the group for a little while, nobody else wanted to participate because they said that the groups, that collective work was already out of fashion. That they didn't want to be in a ghetto and that they wouldn't be able to be a boyfriend if people knew they were feminists. And also it's interesting. Excuses. So we decided to form the group the three of us. Erminia stayed just for a short period, because she didn't really like performance art. And that was it . When we began. We began the group. It was great fun.

A: And so you started it...Did you both decided it or was it more your initiative, or?

MM: I don't remember exactly. I mean that, I knew I was going to do it. It was very probable that I came and said, or something that came up in a conversation. I don't remember it being Maris telling me -let's form a group-, because I knew I came with the impulse of doing the groups. I was adding both of them at the site. But I don't remember I don't remember anything up in a conversation. I don't know if she remembers.

But it was it was something. It's it's not like I came here and I was invited to be part of it.

A: It a kind of grew, or it's how you say, it became a group together by talking with each other.

MM: Yeah.

A: Yeah. And in this period that you started the group, like what was the artworld,how did it look like? When you started Polvo de Gallina Negra, how did the artworld look like. Was it still very traditional or was it, or....

MM: [00:50:16] Well it was still very traditional, I think. No gallery showed anything that was not traditional, that for sure. There was...eh.. The museums there had been the exhibition in 1978, the Salon 77, and they were probably starting to open up a bit more. There was Helen Escobedo, who had done all the work with the groups, and really I always say that she actually invented the groups, because she invited them to come together and she invited them to Paris. So there was this background, so the groundwork had already been set.

But it was just starting to.. form, it was still not something that was...there were no grants, for example, there was a salon. I suppose.... You have to check ... IMBA had a several salons. And at one point they started an alternative art salon. I don't remember exactly what year that was, that it was set. So it was beginning to be more legitimized, but it was still not something that was very much written about, or that you had spaces. In the 80s, after the earthquake, a lot of things changed, because people started organizing in different ways. What we always say that we suddenly had the sociedad civil, the civil society became organized. We clearly noticed that the government was eh...was not getting organized and not doing things. So we had to organize ourselves.

And there was a movement of independent galleries. There was a movement for example of...there was a gallery like,...which was opened by Yani Pecanins and Gabriel Macotella...

I don't remember... Armando.... I don't remember his name right now, the grandson of Garillo Ajil. And they opened a. Gallery for artist books. So there was a movement of artist books. There was a movement of male art. Things were happening, a lot of things were happening, but it was just beginning to become more legitimized.

Other independent artists run galleries started forming in 67 68 and no 86 so the other way around the numbers 86 87 88 89 , Pinto Mirallas started in 89. Adolfo Patiños started his own gallery... (...) What's it called? I don't remember... you can all this..., I've written about it, you can look it up in the books, you know.

So he formed his own gallery. So there were all these independently run spaces starting. So that was, I think that was important, because they became very visible in the press and it was like a launching path for a new generation. We started at Teresas, that so that was like the first places that started more officially accepting other kinds of work. So it was very intense in that way, the whole 80s, you know.

They put the galleries another decade to open up
Well...

A: How did you choose these art forms?The artforms in that time were very knew, right?, like the performance art?

MM: Yeah. They were very new. But I don't know. It's like someone right now asks how did they choose to work with digital art. Well that's what was there. That's what we were reading about that's for. There is a background here in Mexico. It's not like something you were taught at art school, but it's something you read about in magazines, you saw when you went away there were people here doing it. I mean there were people from the ruptura that were doing performances. And there was Godorovski and they were doing events and there was Cuevas and he would do performances, yeah..there were people. It was something that was going on and it was just I suppose a matter of figuring out of trying and experimenting with all the different things and...just deciding what you'd like more, in terms of start with both. At the time both Marisa and I were more interested in that kind of work.

Maris definitely with her whole experience with the No Grupo and her own work. And I was coming back from Los Angeles work with political performances with Ariadne.. So it seemed logical..

Could you wait for me for a second because I want to get some water. [00:55:17]

A: Yes of course

MM: I'll come back in two seconds.

A: No problem.

MM: I'm back.

A: So we're talking about the art forms.

So there wasn't a specific choice of...like this was the best form to translate your objectives of the group. It was just...an interest

MM: No I don't think...As an artist I've never taken decisions like that.

I mean, there has to be a congruence between what you're saying, the means with which you're saying it and how it's being shown.

But I don't think....the projects don't come out of a theory and they don't do them.

You have the theory ,you have the awareness of the context, you have the awareness of your personal feelings and history and than it comes out.

A: okay

MM: And so, I would never say -I'm going to do a piece that has to do with motherhood. So I'm going to work with a performance-

Sometimes I do a performance that has to do with motherhood. Sometimes I do a drawing that has to do with motherhood. Sometimes I can say this through one media. Some things I can say for one medium. Some things I can see through another media with the Polvo de Gallina Negra and Taquielas entre Rateras

And I think it was with the kind of work we were trying to do, with collective work, with political work, with work that had to do with our experiences as women and working in the consciousness raising groups et cetera. The natural form was performance. That was like the logical thing to work with. I mean I was obviously very aware that, that performance is a kind of art work in which they can't invisibilize you as a woman. Because they can do it with the painting.

There have been paintings of many women, attributed to men, or who sit there (...) I was very much aware of having been at the Woman's Building you know so....

And it was very practical in terms of collective work doing performances and we were doing performances. the first performances we did both Polvo de la Gallina Negra and Taquielas, was during a demonstration.

You don't carry your paintings to a demonstration. Although in Mexico when the Virgin of Guadalupe, every birthday on the 12th of December, you'll see lines of people on bicycles carrying the painting, so you can actually do a demonstration with it.

But It was logical to do performance, not to do other things. [00:59:13]

A: Yeah. And you only ,did you only used performance, or were there also other art forms.

MM: Yes, Polvo de Gallina Negra, we had performance and we did male art and we did different different things. Yeah. There were also... I was doing exhibitions of my, of my own artwork, which was also feminist art. I have no problem with using the different things. [00:59:30]

..to express, to work on the same issues.Yeah.

It's more like a feeling of, which is something that I clearly learned from Suzanne Lacy, that feminist art has to be what we needed to be...,

...whether it's defined as art or not. At the time

A: yeah.That's interesting.

Because what were the main objectives of the group.

MM: Those are written down. I don't remember them any more, but if you look them up.

We were like questioning the history of women in the arts, promoting and in the media and promoting new images etc. But we had them out, clearly written.

A: Okay, so that was a very theoretical part of your group then

MM: Not so much theoretical, but because I think theory has to do with other things.

But it was more like a statement. These are our objectives, you know.

A: Yeah. clear. Okay can you tell me something about your, creative process like how did you organize yourselves. Was it very spontaneous and intuitive, or was very organized.

MM: Basically very spontaneous and intuitive. And we laughed a lot. What I remember of working with Maris is that we would get together, we would talk a lot, we would laugh a lot and we would invent things. And it was very, very joyful experience of work, to get together and do that. And yeah, then we would sit down and do what needed to to be done to implement whatever was being done, you know.

A:Yes. And did you ever have issues or struggles as a woman artist in this period. Or was it actually very accepted in Mexico.

MM: No it was not. It wasn't at all. Not that that stopped this. But for example, there is a book that was written on performance art. I think it was published by Richard Martell in Canada and Victor Muñoz wrote an article an essay on performance art in Mexico. And Polvo de Gallina Negra is mentioned as footnote. So we always said - we were a footnote artist-, you know, La Era de La Discrepancia, this big exhibition they did in ...(...)

They didn't invite Polvo de Gallina negra...

When the exhibition went to Argentina they sort of told them (...):- how could they have not included Polvo de Gallina Negra?- And for example I know it was a big discussion within the curatorial Theme Group Team. And they discussed whether they should include us or not. And half the people were very upset that we weren't. And then one day I talked with (...) who was a curator.

And he asked me - what do you think about the fact that we're not including Polvo de Gallina Negra?-. And I said You are the curator you have to decide it.
I'm not going to tell you what to do.

I don't know what he expected. If he expected me to say -I think you're an idiot that you're not excluding it - But I think he was an idiot not to include it. And history will judge him.

Though, so we..But that was also very clear about from the beginning.

And we were working under certain conditions in Mexico. And we're working under certain conditions as Latin American artists and we're working under certain conditions as women artists. And nobody's going to come and do it for us. And as performance artist and as installation artist and his feminist artist, you know. So you have to become your own complete art system. You do the work, you document it. You write about it, you organize the spaces where it's shown, you made sure that it's included in the history of art, you made..you sort of go through all the different processes and not expect someone else to be there to do it for you.

Because it's the same struggle as Latin American artists. It's not just a struggle as women artists, you know it's about, it's on both, on both fronts. So, for me there. I mean I studied with Juan Acha, I understood this was an art system.

You understand how it works. I studied with Suzanne Lacey. I understand how women have been left out of history and I learned over there the things that you have to do. You have to participate actively to be part of the narrative. So that's why for me it's always been important to write to archive, to do the work, to teach, to make this an integral process, you know. Right now we're putting together a book on my text for the 40 years. There is one which I find very moving, because it was more or less at the time when we formed Polvo de Gallina Negra, that my son Adan was still a baby.

And I'm writing about all the strategies that we need for feminist art and it's OK that we did the magazines, but we have to do workshops and we have to have more of a presence and we have to make it grow. And it has to be like Ripples and I'm writing about in my journal about this old strategy. And in the end I say - oops the baby woke up. I'll have to fix the world in another movement-, you know.

So those I hope you can check at a certain point, because I think the interesting in this whole process of how one works, you know.

So I had very clear from the beginning how this strategy for this whole thing had to go, you know, about feminist artists in Mexico. [01:06:01]

A: That was actually a lot of work then, especially if you don't earn any money for it.
It took a lot of time,I think if you...

MM: It took a lot of time, and we were raising kids at the same time, you know. So we had the energy.

A: So the objectives of the group were very strong, like you have a very strong personal objective, as well with this group.

MM: Oh yeah. They were part of a general strategy to change the world.

To question how women were seen in our... in history and in the media and to create other images.

A: Because the artworks and the performances took a lot of times place in public spaces...

MM: Yes.

A: Did you ever have trouble with the audience that they didn't honor them or that you got yelled at or... because...

MM: No not really. In the public. The ones we did in public space were during demonstrations.

So we were a kind of surrounded by an army of women, you know.

So that was OK. And in the media world, you've seen probably the program with Guillermo Ochoa

A: Yeah I've seen it.

MM: He says in the end that he didn't understand anything, but we were very lucky that we had those spaces. It was interesting, because on the one hand we were able to go into all the Ochoa programs, because Maris patented the (Ataco...). And he read about it. Whatever we did was usually was very attractive to the media. Because it was humorous and it was....

...It was humorous, intelligent, questioning, but not threatening or aggressive in a way. More in a subtle subversive way. And so, she patented the Ataco and he thought this was wonderful. So anyway we... the place was opened for us. And it was open to us also in the mainstream radio and television and government owned spaces, because there were feminists in all the different spaces at the time. The women's bars,

...in the morning etc. were run by feminists. So we had a lot of access to the media and to newspapers. Newspapers always love things that had to do with performance art and feminist art, because it was news.

It was active, you know so, so we were always... we were, when we were going to do the... Madres project... we had someone interviewing us, even before it started.

We sort of had to invent it very quickly.

So my interest in the from he media. So on that one the one hand we have that interest and we had open spaces everywhere. On the other hand we had even our close friends not including us, in that either in the essays he wrote or the exhibitions they organized. So it was, it was...

...complex as usual.

A: mmm..And I have a very personal question: What was the artwork you're most proud of like or your, in your opinion, was the most important work of the group in this period?

MM: I think our most successful piece was definitely the Guillermo Ochoa

Because people, even today, tell me they saw it when they were children, which might be fake memories, or (...) memories, but it still happens to me, you know, that people tell me.

It also... nine months after the program took place someone phoned Ochoa to ask him if he had a son or a daughter, which I would have done, if I wouldn't be part of it, but it was actually someone from the audience who took the trouble to write down the date en than contact nine months later.

That kind of thing is really interesting, it was almost successful.
I think the bravest one was when we took our daughters to another television program.

I actually think that's the most radical one. Because the other one was humorous and was very successful.
But I think the one with the, with our daughters, was extremely radical.

Because the kids were really jumping on top of us and biting the cables. And it changed, it did, it really brought out the personal, the private life, into the public sphere.
I like all the works, I like the things of paper we did, that were questionnaires, the performance we did for the 15 year old party, where we questioned a lot of issues that had to do with feminist art.
I liked it very much when we wrote a letter to Raquel Tivol in the newspaper. That kind of attitude.
...the letters we sent. I like all the work we did with Polvo de Gallina Negra, I think Polvo de Gallina Negra is probably one of my favorite pieces of all my work, I would say.

...you know, more than just one part of Polvo de Gallina, but the whole project of Polvo de Gallina, I think was very, very successful and very, very propositivo, It was really radical in many ways.

and we had a lot of fun. I really remember it like having a lot of fun.

A: That's nice.
And what was the influence of the group, like..was there any influence only inside Mexico, or also outside Mexico in this period. Do you feel like you changed something or..?

MM: I think it does have an influence, It depends it goes on different stages.
The program was seen by many millions of people.
(I'm going to move places, because they're going to be working here.
But don't don't hang up. If we lose contact with them if we lose that call me again okay I'm to move somewhere somewhere else. With with less noise let's see.)

That's the kind of thing that is difficult for for us to judge, that kind of influence we had. It was seen by many, many, many ,many people. I tell you is still remembered by people who come and tell me that they saw it. It's a piece that became mythological. It's a piece...
Polvo de Gallina has affected the younger generation.

(It's just as bad here.
They have the washing machine here and A: I don't hear it that hard to be honest. Yeah but it makes me and you have to talk louder and find somewhere else.)

I think in the long run it has had a big influence. I mean there's people like you are doing their study on.

you know, from other countries. So. So I think it has had a big a big influence. It has had a big influence in Latin America. People know about the group. This has to do with how the whole movement has....

Just a second. A: Yes. You are getting a tour of all the house. [01:14:28]

...It has to do with...with how the feminist movement in general has developed with how the feminist art movement has developed. And also here, It's part of like the whole strategy.
You do the work and then you write about it. My book was published in 2004. Maris has written articles, I have written articles, magazines have dedicated issues. It's a matter of building up the information.

Then other people started doing their masters and PHD degree and it was very hard for them at the

beginning, because nobody could advice them and there was no information so they had to go directly to the archives. That has grown so that ...that influence has grown in the academic world. There are more artists, more younger artists, of I I think of another generation, who are interested in our work. Because unfortunately in a way, fortunately and unfortunately, that issues of feminism have become very present. With the Me Too movement, with the murders in Mexico of women, with all sorts of different conditions. So issues that the artists, the women artists from the 90s, they used to think well -feminism is outdated and that was something our mothers did and we don't have to worry about it anymore-. The younger generation has seen that this is not the case. So they're also interested in our work and they've recovered it.

So I don't know I think it has had a big influence.

The work is, Polvo de Gallina Negra is an international reference in many, in many books, so I don't know. What do you think?

A: Well I'm very interested in the question -why the interest is rising now?- because that's why I ask what the influence was in that time.

Did you see any influence or... because there's also been a very long period of kind of neglectance of the rest of the world?

MM: There is a neglectance, I think it's a matter of how it builds up. I tell you, I've been very close to seeing how the academic world in Mexico has changed.

Araceli Barbosa, who wrote one of the first feminist artist books, thesis for PHD on feminist art. Gladis Villeras who was doing it in Spain and came here. They all ended up in my archive, because they were even going to stop doing their thesis, because there was nothing they could consult. So it was a matter of opening up the archive and then for example Araceli Barbosa had to go to the UNAM and explain the whole history of womankind, so that in art history they would accept it. So her thesis is 400 pages. And then Lorena Zamora who did it at the Women's Studies at the UAM, she had to explain the whole history of art so that her work would be accepted. They had a lot of trouble because women's studies did not have advisers, who could advise on art and feminism and art history didn't have advisers who could advice on women, gender issues and art.

So they had to open the way and that was like the first generation. It's interesting to me for example with this old generation, what they do, is repeat the story we told them .

And now there is a complete the other generation, I don't know, if you have the thesis of Gabriela Gutierrez (de Pulvura), that was in English. And she did it in Canada and she's like another generation of academics and she's not just repeating the history, but seeing it from others theoretical points of view.

And there's also Alberto... I'm not going to remember his name right now. But he did it at CUNY in New York. He wrote a thesis on my work and also his perspective is very different to my perspective. He is not just repeating the history, but analyzing it from another point of view.

So I see how the knowledge has grown In the academic world. I think it has to do, I tell you, with political reasons, like the Me Too movement and the...it has to do with art reason, big exhibitions like Wack! that started. ..This whole process of other women artists exhibitions, feminist artist exhibitions, That had to do with Judy Chicago's work finally going to the Brooklyn Museum, where it had not been accepted anywhere, and finally it was accepted there. So this was a big thing for feminist art. And then you have all these other big exhibitions. And then from Wack!, 10 years after, it comes radical women.

And this brings a lot of interest. So it's political. It's the art world, it's the feminist movement, it's so.. all sorts of things. It's I think also with artwork it often happens that it takes a whole period 30, 40 years so to see what resists the... what resists history and what is forgotten even even though it can later be taken up again or forgotten.

But...feminist art is dialoguing very much with what is happening today. So that's why there's a big interest in it. I think.

Now the... the important thing will be if it is able to permeate the market.

I think, our glass ceiling. [01:21:13]

...and when we were working on... I was able to talk to the women who are closer to Wack!, art and the feminist revolution. And I was asking them for example -what happened with the feminist art market then?-. They did actually such a visible exhibition, help other women join to become part of the art market, feminist artist. Then they told me that only, that for a while, a group. And then only a few really penetrated the market. I think the same is going to happen with radical, radical women. That... There's a lot of visibility right now, because it was such a strong exhibition and maybe a few will be able to penetrate the art market. So it's interesting. There's still, there's still frontiers to conquer. No there's more visibility. There's not that much more in general art books. I think we have our books in our own bubble and we have our visibility in our own bubble, but it's not something that has necessarily gone out into the general art history... world. I think that there's a lot of work still to be done there, you know.

A: Yeah, I think so. But what do you think your, your... the influence of the group has been? Just existence, or also something else like political?

MM: The existence and the things we were questioning. Nobody was questioning motherhood at that time.

And the whole thing of popular art. I think many, many things that have to do with the artwork that was being done at that time and with the issues we were dealing with and with the humor. I think -yeah there has been an influence-. There were some things that were only ours, but I think there's, there's ways of working that have been taken up by, by other, by other women. For example.... there was very recently a demonstration here in Mexico...I don't know if you heard about it?

At the Angel of Independence and the whole thing and the women breaking, doing physical damage to the Metro Insurgentes and there was also one thing that was very strong, was a very strong symbolic element, that they used the glitter and they used a lot of things of visual things during the demonstration.

I wouldn't say that that had...was because of our influence, because it was we've never been the only ones that have been doing this kind of work, but I think there is a tendency of of...the sort of work being nourished, even approaches being nourished by ideas that have been worked at different times and often that have had to do with the, with the artwork.

I don't... It's not only us and it's not necessarily a direct influence, but I think Polvo de Gallina Negra has been part of the culture..

And it's there.

It's like like my clothesline, which is very interesting and weird, how it has now become integrated into into culture and people repeated all over the, all over the place...Yeah it has become, part of our works have become part of the, of the culture.

A: Then it actually... yeah. Then you had a very strong influence on the Mexican culture.

MM: I think so, but, but it sounds bad if I say it, No?

A: I don't think so that's bad to say it...

MM: but I say it. You would have to prove it.

A: I will say it for you then.

MM: No but, the interesting thing would be to actually prove it. I don't know how you can prove something like that. Maybe ask the younger generations, or the younger generations that have been influenced by Maris and myself, by Polvo de Gallina Negra.

Have they been influenced because of our work? or have they been influenced because of what we've written? or, have they been influenced because we were their teachers?

So I think it probably has to do with all our work in general.
...not just our artwork.

A: but also the visibility now in.. like the musea...that's also already...They are also forming kind of the cultural history. So yeah.. I think that also helps.

MM: Yeah.

A: and education of course.

MM: Yeah. Now knowing if there's an influence or or not, That depends... I would say for example, there is groups... I see the influence of our work in younger artists, for example, but both my personal work and the work of Polvo de Gallina Negra. You know a group called PRESS de (...) Ibarra

For example they do work... they did a project recently, that had to do with asking younger, . asking women artist to write a letter to another woman artist whose work they admire.

Obviously that has to do with the work as a woman's building, it has to do with our work, it has to do with with the feminist start and how it questions, the relationship and the supporting women from different generations. So yeah, I see, I see, I see echoes of all of the work the feminists start work in the 70s and 80s in these younger generations. I see the influence of my own work in someone like Lorena Wolvert who goes out and asks women how they feel about domestic violence, or whatever.

Yeah, I see, I see a continuance and also that they take it to other places and also work up younger feminists, who are doing completely other things. And there's a mixture, you know and I think it's it's great that there's all these all these groups right now that are, all the individual feminist artists that are doing a lot of work.

A: Yeah...okay.. so I think I'll ask my last question, because we're already talking for a very long time.. and that's..my question is -Why did you and Maris end the group after 10 years. What was the cause of this, What was this?

MM: I would say that life. Ruben died.

I think that was a very important reason. Life became very very very very very very very complicated for Maris. With two young girls, with two little girls. With having to organize her whole, her art, her work, her life as a mother, her life as a teacher at the University, her house as one-income-parent. It must have been extremely difficult. We managed to do one piece after that, with some some of the performance as Madres tres. But it was really very complicated. I think the 90s changed. Some...a lot of the impulse we had in the 90s, in the 80s had changed, with the neoliberal Government, with grantsystem, with trying to promote artists that was interesting, life was not political, but having being part of a market and participating in art fairs and Biennale. I think it probably had to do with things like that. We had become a bit distant over some disagreements....that also happened. We also had a complicated life, because we had two children and we had to work on this and the other.

Pues it becomes very, very, very difficult. I don't think... we tried to work together on opening a gallery in the late 80s with Ruben and with two other friends of Maris and with ourselves, here at Quinto (Vireyes?), that didn't work so well.

So I think it had to do with with some things.

So it never had to do with rejecting the ideas of feminist art.

I don't think it had to do with it at all. It is not like one of us said -I'm not a feminist artist anymore-, you know.

I think it has to do with all these other, other situations..

A: factors that came to this decision...

MM: I don't even think it came up as a decision.

A: Oh, so..

MM: I don't remember us getting together one day and saying,

..maybe we did and I don't remember it, a sort of saying -we're going to quit the group-.

Yeah we just stopped doing things.

A: That's how it ended?

MM: Yeah.

A: Mm hmm. Okay. I think I covered all my questions.

So, yeah, I would like to thank you very very very much for this very nice talk.

Sorry that my camera didn't work

MM: Haha

A: And yeah. Is there still something you want to say maybe or...?

MM: No, If you have, if you have other questions at other points you might come up. Just get in touch and I'll let you know and that's I don't know if you have...What kind of documents your consulting or what your what you're seeing.

A: I would like to give the social political context of where this group started in and then the idea is actually to a kind of describe the group and put in both of your interviews like.... But I'm actually really starting, so it still has to be done a lot of work, but if you have some recommendations about the social context of Mexico I'm still a kind of looking for it.

MM: I think it might be better if you look at someone like Gabriela's PHD, because it might guide you but you probably had to give the whole context. And that's a hell of a lot of work.

So as someone who's already done it I think there's also ...I have some of the or many of the documents of Polvo de Gallina Negra digitalized, So you might have access to them and see the actual work and there are many... you can find a lot of information on Polvo de Gallina Negra, of what other people have written about, which might also be interesting.

A: Mm hmm yeah.

MM: So is it that I think might be good. You would probably have to analyze the feminist movement also

in that time. That I just the political in performance. That's right. Art that's like far away you know.

A: But I also had some access in the archive of MUAC. It wasn't that much, but I think that also help me. So..

MM: Yeah, But we, I'll tell you.. I have... Maris.. I don't know the part of it has..a part of it has...I don't know how much she had digitalized, but I also have it digitalized, so there's a lot of information.

A: Okay. Okay. Well that's very good to know. And thank you for that.

MM: And we'll keep in touch. [01:34:49]

A: Yes certainly. And I was I wish you a very nice day

MM: You too.

A: Thank you.

MM: You're welcome, Bye

A: Bye.