

Mira. Indigenous Lives through Indigenous Eyes **Executive Summary**

When exhibits about indigenous matters are curated, often they are *about* indigenous people, and seldom *by* indigenous people. And when the work is done by indigenous peoples, they tend to be academically trained experts in a given field. The proposed project, *Mira.* (“look” in Spanish), is an interactive travelling photographic exhibit curated *by* novice Maya teachers in Guatemala. The Central American nation’s expansive photographic archives tell untold stories about indigenous lives, diversity, education, history, and the imagination. The broad umbrella under which the exhibit will be curated is indigenous matters and education. This project creates a platform for Maya teachers to intervene nationally and internationally in how history about indigenous matters is told and thought about through the exhibit as an educational space.

The group of novice teachers-curators in this project were teachers in preparation during my dissertation research on the history of indigeneity in Guatemalan education. As student teachers three years ago, they had innovative ideas that were not always translatable in the classroom. Their ideas challenged the curriculum, and carried aspirations for the improvement of education that were often lost in the dominant languages of the school. *Mira.* has a double intention: 1) To draw from the teachers’ innovations and aspirations to challenge the colonial history of exhibits by piercing academic and non-academic spaces with images of indigenous lives through indigenous eyes. 2) To invite viewers to learn, meditate, inquire, reflect, and attempt to understand one of the most violent historical contexts of Latin America: the experiences of Mayan people. In the Americas, where the United States is a crucial entity, Latin American histories, and indigenous Guatemalan histories in particular, are a fertile space to join efforts in rethinking, for instance, *schools, social and racial relations, politics and families, history and geography, indigenous ways of being, migration, and how we see the other.*

The Mayan teachers will curate *Mira.* this November (at the end of the academic year in Guatemala) in collaboration with CIRMA, the AGCA, and the *Academia de Geografía e Historia*, Guatemala’s major archives. The exhibit will be assembled in Madison in February 2017. During the spring, starting in March, *Mira.* will be shown at various locations in Madison, and during the summer it will travel back to Guatemala. In the fall 2017, *Mira.* will cross the Pacific to continue its journey in Melbourne, Australia where the travels will temporarily conclude.

This project aims to have a profound impact on both the Mayan teachers who currently work in intercultural rural schools throughout the Guatemalan territory, and the local communities where the exhibit will travel, including the university. Viewing the photographs in archives will be an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on the history of indigenous relations, participation, and engagement. The conversations in the curating exercise will be a space for the teachers to articulate their innovative ideas, their intercultural education challenges, and their aspirations for educational improvement. The text that will accompany the images will reflect the teachers’ voices that will be both written and audio recorded. The recordings, in addition to making the exhibit more

accessible, will open a conversation with the viewers on the issues the curators aim to raise. Members of the university community, the Madison public, native Americans, Australian aboriginal communities and their scholars, youth, and any other visitor will be invited to interact with the curators and the photographs. They will record the impact *Mira.* had on them in relationship to the Mayan teachers' work, what the images generated for them, or any historical connection they can draw to their pasts or the past as they know it. A crucial impact of *Mira.* will have is the exchanges that it will generate among people who would most likely never happen to meet, who have a lot to share, and who can inspire each other's public engagements.

The exhibit will be publicized through listservs and Facebook pages such as the School of Education, the Arts Institute, Center for the Humanities, Anthropology, History, LACIS' *Noticias de la Semana*, Chicano & Latino studies, and through *Voces de la Frontera*, *La Comunidad News*, Latino Voices, the Isthmus, and specific classes related to *Mira.*, for instance, Latin American History, Internationalizing Education, Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, post-colonial studies and art history classes, various FIGs and ethnic studies courses.

I heard about the New Arts Venture Challenge through the Arts Institute mailing list.

Exhibition Plan

The Maya teachers who have already agreed to curate *Mira.* will travel from their villages to Antigua Guatemala in November, which is the end of the Guatemalan school year. Prior to this, in June I will be travelling to Guatemala to personally reconnect with the teachers and talk more about *Mira.* and hear more about how they envision the exhibit. From June to November I will stay in touch with the teachers through social media, as we do in the present, and occasional phone calls. Anais García, the director of the photo archive of CIRMA (a major photo archive in the country) has agreed to host and support the team during the archival research and curating process. Anais is a historian with extensive experience both in the photo archive and in curating exhibits in the country. The AGCA and the Society of History and Geography (two other main archives in Guatemala City) will be delighted to support this project especially considering the commitment of the two institutions to the Guatemalan public. CIRMA has already agreed to create high quality resolution copies of the images at no cost. The digital images, and other exhibit materials will be printed in Madison in January. The director of Latin American Caribbean and Iberian Studies at the university has expressed interest in supporting the assembling and promoting of the exhibit. The School of Education associate dean Dawn B. Crim has agreed to host *Mira.* in the School's exhibit space (tentatively scheduled for March 2017) at no cost. To reach a wider audience, the exhibit will cross the borders of the university and into the community to Centro Hispano, Madison's Public Library, and other venues which are interested in hosting the exhibit. In June 2017, I will take *Mira.* back to Guatemala to be shown in CIRMA's gallery. CIRMA has put its long trajectory and name to the service of the exhibit to publicize the event. During my trip to Guatemala this June I will be meeting with directors of exhibit spaces and organizations such as *La Oficina de Correos* in Guatemala City, and La Pastoral Social in Ixcán, Quetzaltenango. While in Guatemala this June I

will also seek the support of the International Cooperation with Spain, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands to sponsor the exhibit's travel and show in Guatemala City and Ixcán. These organizations have a strong track record in supporting indigenous matters and public engagement in the country. In Melbourne, where *Mira.* will travel from Ixcán in August 2017, the Director of the Center for Spanish and Latin American Studies and the Deputy Director of the Melbourne Social Equity Institute are important resources who have shown interest in bringing *Mira.* to Melbourne. Finally, part of *Mira.* is the exchange between curators and visitors. Digital voice recorders will be accompanying the exhibit, along with a guide including questions or prompts the Mayan teachers have for those who visit *Mira.* The audio files will be e-mailed to the curators by the support personnel in each site showing the exhibit. The digital recorders will be donated by former graduate students in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin.

Audience Analysis

The fact that *Mira.* will be shown in academic and non-academic spaces including local villages, faith and cultural spaces will naturally draw various publics. Because of the issues *Mira.* will expose to the public, which are not just Mayan, or Guatemalan, but interrelated to multiple locales, *Mira.* expects to meet university students, academics, teachers, community leaders, parents, intellectuals, the youth, community organizers, pedagogues, and the elderly. As explained in the executive summary, *Mira.* aims to open up an exchange that, through the images, invokes a rethinking of racial relations in the present, a vivid concern in the current political and racial climates in the US and Madison as well as Australia. The connection to questions of education and migration will welcome the participation of Madison's latinxs and undocumented communities actively concerned with these matters. In Guatemala, both the elite, for whom exhibits are a common cultural practice, especially if they involve visual objects, and the populace, concerned with indigenous matters in a time of social movements will both find in *Mira.* a participatory space. Finally, *Mira.* would draw avid interest in Australia given its increasing interest in Latin America and its vibrant engagement with aboriginal Pacific communities.

Timeline

The project will build upon efforts already in place. The teaches-curators have already been contacted. Partnership with CIRMA has already been established. The first venue where *Mira.* will take place has been confirmed. The timeline below outlines the additional steps in bringing *Mira.* to life and to produce the effects it promises on both the Mayan teachers and the viewing audiences.

- **June 2-15, 2016:** Visit Mayan teachers-curators in Guatemala. Contact additional Guatemalan venues (CIRMA, *Oficina de Correos*, *Pastoral Social-Ixcán*)
- **July-September, 2016:** In-kind donations drive. Promote inclusion of *Mira.* in spring 2017 courses. Establish contact with additional venues in Madison and Melbourne. Remain in contact with the Mayan teachers-curators to ensure their input is directly informing planning the exhibit.
- **November 1-15, 2016:** The Mayan teachers travel to Antigua Guatemala and Guatemala City to curate the exhibit.
- **January-February, 2017:** Prepare the exhibit (printing, framing, etc.). Begin

advertising the event in listservs, social media, local newspapers and radio. Set up exhibition at first venue.

- **March 1, 2017:** Opening night.
- **March, 2017:** Exhibition on display at first venue. Continue contacting press and making radio/newspaper appearances.
- **April, 2017:** Exhibition on display at second venue. Continue contacting press and making radio/newspaper appearances.
- **May, 2017:** Exhibition on display at third venue.
- **June-August 2017:** Exhibition on display at three locations in Guatemala.
- **September 2017:** Exhibition travels to Melbourne, Australia.

Key Personnel

Ligia (Licho) López López is a PhD student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction where she has been involved in the preparation of pre-service teachers with multicultural sensitivities and through international perspectives. Her dissertation *Indígena: A history of Curriculum, Teacher Education, and the Making of Human Kinds*, draws from her indigenous and assimilated background in the Caribbean Coast of Colombia to ask questions of the histories of education, exclusion-inclusion, and indigenous matters in Guatemala. Aware of the power and challenges of written academic work, Licho participates in the arts, making theater with teachers, collaborating in community arts initiatives, exhibiting her photographic work through a social justice lens, and volunteering through guest teaching and dancing with children in schools. In the fall, Licho will be joining the University of Melbourne as post-doctoral fellow.

Gioconda Coello is a PhD student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at UW Madison. She is interested in indigenous worldviews, philosophies and religions and how people use them as foundations for social justice and environmental education projects. Following her interests in her homeland Ecuador, she organized and participated as an instructor of programs for environmental education through contemporary dance in museums and public spaces. Always interested in religious and indigenous ways to seek socio-environmental justice, she studied and volunteered with the network of Socially Engaged Buddhists in Thailand on two projects that bring together indigenous people, peasants and urban activists in order to create spaces for alternative education, natural agriculture and community-centered economies. At the same time she has remained connected to indigenous philosophies and activists in her country and she is currently interested in studying the uses of Kichwa-inspired narratives in the proposals for a national curriculum as put forward by “the citizen's revolution” project of Ecuador's current government.

Dr. Faisal Abdu’Allah is an associate professor in the Art Department at UW Madison. He has exhibited/curated extensively in the UK and internationally, including shows at Tate Modern, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno-CAAM, Studio Museum Harlem and 55th Venice Biennale. Abdu’Allah has been the recipient of numerous prizes; including the Mayors prize for sustainability for his film *Double Pendulum*. Abdu’Allah is featured in *The Fade*, directed by Andy Mundy-Castle, starring Pharell Williams. His works are

housed in numerous museum collections and is represented by Magnolia Editions, California, USA and Autograph ABP, London.

Financial Plan/Budget

The New Arts Venture Grant Proposal will be crucial for sponsoring the Mayan teacher's curating process. This is at the core of making *Mira*. possible.

Item	Cost	Explanation
1. Travel to Guatemala in June	\$0	I will use personal funds for this.
2. Travel expenses for 5 Maya teachers in November 1-15, 2016	\$250	The Mayan teachers live in <i>aldeas</i> (villages) fairly distant from Antigua Guatemala and Guatemala where the archives are located.
3. Room and board for the 5 Maya teachers in November 1-15, 2016	\$ 1200	The team will be staying in a hostel in Antigua Guatemala and in Guatemala City. A hostel is not only more reasonably priced, but also encourages conversation and reflection in a communal space that I hope will enrich the creative production of <i>Mira</i> .
4. Printing and framing in each location	\$450	In Madison, the center for Latin American Caribbean and Iberian studies has shown interest in contributing to this expense. In Guatemala, CIRMA has confirmed loaning the frames. I will seek in-kind support for printing and framing the images in Guatemala and Melbourne.
5. Venues	\$0	The places already confirmed are free. For the venues to be confirmed we are planning on using spaces made available at no cost.
6. Audio playback device	\$0	I will loan/donate a Bose speaker system to play the audio materials accompanying <i>Mira</i> . The recorded messages will connect the curators and the audience and provide a space for visitors to reflect on the exhibition.
7. Electronic voice recorders	\$0	To be donated by alumni of the Curriculum and Instruction program at the UW.
8. Comment book for exhibition	\$100	The comment book will serve the same purposes as the audio recorded reflections. Additionally it will allow the organizing team (Licho, Gioconda, and Faisal) to gather feedback that may be used to further advertise the project.
9. Flyers/Posters for promoting the event	\$0	Promotion materials will be provided through in-kind donations in Madison, Guatemala, and Melbourne.
10. Opening night reception	\$0	Opening night receptions in the School of

		Education, CIRMA, and the University of Melbourne will be provided through in-kind donations.
Total Costs	\$2,000	While the limited budget relies on in-kind donations, it is essential that <i>Mira</i> . is <i>free and open to all</i> .

Marketing

- **UW Programs Listservs, Websites, and Facebook pages:** I will ask programs and centers on the UW and Melbourne campuses to promote the event including: the School of Education, LACIS, the Arts Institute, History, Arts History, Anthropology, Sociology, History of Science, Geography, Center for the Humanities, Morgridge Center, Chicano Latino Studies, the WID, the Center for South Asia, and the Center for South East Asia.
- **Social Media:** Social media will be a crucial part of the marketing strategy. *Mira*. will have a Facebook page where the curating process will be documented in real time and shared with the event pages created for the exhibits in Madison, Guatemala, and Australia. *Mira*.'s site and events will be shared widely with in the centers and programs mentioned above as well as the websites of the venues where the exhibit will be shown.
- **Flyers/Posters:** Flyers and posters will be posted in the departments and centers mentioned above, libraries, grocery stores, coffee shops, and other public and private spaces such as, (in Guatemala) the Spanish Cooperation with Guatemala, Universidad de San Carlos, Popol Vuh Museum, CIRMA, AGCA, *Academia de Geografía e Historia*, and former Normal Schools.
- **Newspaper and Radio:** In Madison, the Isthmus and The Cap Times will be given the opportunity to cover *Mira*. as will *Voces de la Frontera* and *La Comunidad News*. Advice is being sought on media coverage in Melbourne.

Troubleshooting

The arts continue to experience defunding. The challenge *Mira*. may face is receiving the material support that matches the enthusiasm it receives at a time of heightened concerns for underserved indigenous communities, and groups marginalized along the lines of race and ethnicity. This challenge is at the same moment an opportunity to seek support for the *need* to hear and see what marginalized, silenced, and disappeared groups have to show us about how they make sense of their lives in remaking their histories.

Recent Work Sample

Drawing from photographs to ask critical questions of policies affecting education and indigenous people, Licho wrote a chapter that appeared in a Routledge edited book. This chapter has also been the basis for multiple speaking engagements in conferences and graduate classes at the UW.

Attachments

- Key Personnel's CV.
- Work Sample and Project summary slide