

VISITING
[ARTIST]
series

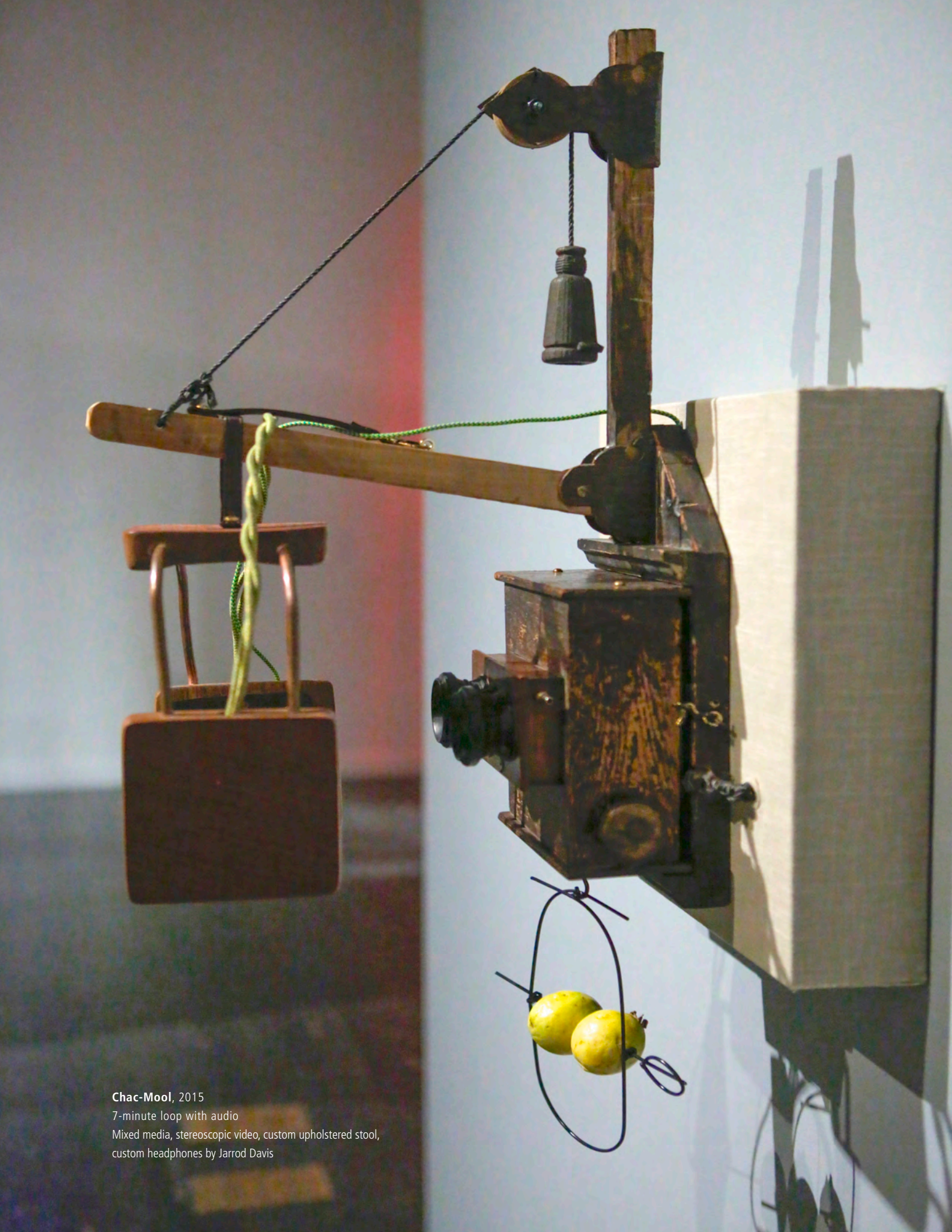


November 13-December 4, 2015

SOLDADERA
NAO BUSTAMANTE

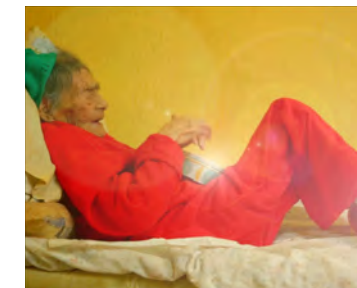
SOLDADERA

This exhibition is a creative engagement with soldaderas (Spanish for “female soldiers”) as imagined figures, and as actual women with their own histories. Today, we know the soldaderas through a romantic tradition that idealizes her: in song and on the silver screen she is celebrated for traditionally feminine values (for her beauty, for example, or for supportive labor such as cooking and maintaining the camp). In this exhibition, Bustamante deploys a methodology she calls “speculative reenactment.” She asks: How can we reach across time to know the soldadera’s experience of the past? How do we bring her into the here and now, to experience her future? — The artist’s search for the soldadera’s wisdom culminated in a unique pilgrimage: Bustamante traveled to Guadalajara, Mexico, to meet 127-year-old **Soldadera** Leandra Becerra Lumbreras, the last survivor of the Mexican Revolution, and notably the oldest person in the world. Their transformative meeting inspired work that will be featured in this exhibition, as well as an ongoing documentary project. Leandra, at times referred to as **La Abuela del Mundo**, passed over to the next life on March 19, 2015. We mourn her loss and are grateful for her contributions to the **Soldadera** project. — Bustamante creates hybrid works that hover over the line between fact and fiction, between the past and the future, and engage the soldadera’s capacity, as a figure, to signify vulnerability and violence. The artist places women inside historical scenes from which they are normally elided, and also imagines the soldadera protected by contemporary combat materials. Bustamante’s historically appropriate, period-specific dresses made from Kevlar® add a sculptural element to this exhibition. Kevlar is a modern material used in personal protection products such as combat helmets and ballistic vests. The artist fired shots at one of her frocks using weapons and ammunition appropriate to the period of the Mexican Revolution. This “fighting costume” was on view, displayed as an artifact of a fantastical battle. Soldadera is an expansive project which continues to unfold. Future iterations include an experimental documentary film and a large scale tapestry.



Chac-Mool, 2015
7-minute loop with audio
Mixed media, stereoscopic video, custom upholstered stool,
custom headphones by Jarrod Davis

CHAC-MOOL In January 2015, Nao Bustamante traveled to Zapopan, Mexico, to meet soldadera Leandra Becerra Lumbreras. During the Mexican Revolution Lumbreras led a battalion of **Adelitas** (“La Adelita” is the name of a well-known corrido celebrating the soldadera). At the time of their meeting Lumbreras was the last surviving soldier of the revolution. — This installation is the first of an ongoing series of works developed from Bustamante’s transformative encounter with a soldadera who was, at the time of their meeting, the oldest person in the world. **Chac-mool** offers the viewer a chance to travel across time in order to experience Lumbreras’s presence. During their meetings, Lumbreras clapped out a rhythm with her hands. That rhythm scores this work. The stool’s embroidered cushion is modeled after Lumbreras’s needlework. (Credits for the video at the heart of this work can be found on this exhibition’s acknowledgement panel.) — The title of this work, **Chac-mool**, refers to a Mesoamerican figure depicting a person on their back, with head and knees raised up. The figure is thought to represent submission and self-sacrifice. Some have interpreted the chac-mool to represent a fallen warrior suspended between the physical and the supernatural world.



Chac-mool Still

KEVLAR FIGHTING COSTUMES This exhibition is anchored by Nao Bustamante's speculative designs for fighting costumes that might protect the soldadera in battle. These imaginative works are made from Kevlar, an extremely strong synthetic fiber invented in 1965 by Stephanie Kwolek (1923-2014), a woman scientist employed by DuPont. This patented material (DuPont's slogan: "Dare Bigger™") is used in a wide range of ordinary objects, from bicycle helmets and tires to oven mitts and football cleats. Kevlar is most known, however, for its use in body armor (e.g. bullet-proof vests). Once body armor made with Kevlar has been "used" (pierced), the definitive bonds of the fiber's weave are broken, and the fabric unravels. ■ In her 1938 homage to the women who lived through the Mexican Revolution, **Las Manos de Mamá (My Mother's Hands)**, the Mexican choreographer and writer Nellie Campobello dedicates an entire chapter to the protective shield of the revolutionary mother's skirt: "Her skirt was our safeguard, our refuge," Campobello asserts, "only the power of her skirt was real." Bustamante reinforces the mythic power of the soldadera's skirt so that it might protect her body, just as she protects others.





Tierra y Libertad – Kevlar® 2945, 2010
Protective Kevlar wearable fighting costume, 9mm slugs

Photo by Claudia Zapata



REBOZO The **Rebozo**, a woven shawl traditionally worn by Mexican women, invites carrying and cradling. It invokes multiple possibilities of protection from wrapping the whole body or perhaps serving as a shelter for a woman and her family. It hangs on the wall as if outstretched arms were giving it over, as a gift. Contextualized by the women's role in the Mexican Revolution, the stories hang ready to unfold in the viewer's mind.

Rebozo, 2015
Kevlar

ARCHIVES The visual language for Nao Bustamante's project was developed through her work with archives pertaining to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), housed in Special Collections and University Archives at Tomás Rivera Library at the University of California, Riverside. The Mexican Revolution was intensely documented: the coincidence of the modernization of camera technology and mass print culture meant that not only was it possible to bring a camera to the front lines, there was also a market for images of the decade-long conflict. Professionals and amateurs took photographs, for public, commercial, and private use. Woven into the archive are what appear to be personal photographs. These remind us that war is documented not only by journalists, but by the families who lived through it. Photographs centered on women are relatively rare, and they are scattered across the collection. Women appear embedded in crowds, and are caught hurrying down battle-scarred streets. They appear in portraits of armed battalions and in portraits of families living in exile. They are agents of revolution and witnesses to its violence.





Leandra Becerra Lumbreras earned her living as a seamstress. **Gallina, Post Revolución**, was made by Lumbreras in the 1920s and given to Bustamante, as a gift.

Leandra Beccara Lumbreras (born Tamaulipas, Mexico, 1887—died Zapopan, Mexico, 2015)

Gallina, Post Revolución, circa 1920

Crocheted cotton

Collection of Nao Bustamante



This embroidered textile was loaned to Nao Bustamante for inclusion in this exhibition. Lumbreras, who passed away in March 2015 at age 127, was the last surviving soldadera. She made her living as a seamstress.

Peacock in Profile, circa 1970

Needlework, acrylic on cotton

Collection of Maria Alvarez del Castillo



SOLDADERA

Soldadera Film Still, 2015
Speculative reenactment video montage
with archival photography
Courtesy of the artist

SOLDADERA, 2015 The Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) defined revolutionary cinema with works like Battleship Potemkin (1925) and October (1928). Eisenstein belonged to a generation of international artists drawn to the utopian potential of post-revolutionary Mexico. In the early 1930s, he attempted to make a film that would not just represent Mexico: it would, in his vision, be Mexico. This project was aborted when his American backers withdrew their support amidst a cloud of rumors (e.g. the film was shut down because it was over budget and/or its vision was distinctly homoerotic). This work (which has no official title, but is often referred to as Que Viva Mexico!) remains, perhaps, the most famous unfinished film in cinema history. — Eisenstein's script was broken into chapters: the only sequence that was not filmed is titled "Soldadera" and centers on the Mexican Revolution. The soldadera, in his words, "seems to physically personify the image of a single, nationally united Mexico." Nao Bustamante has "dipped a ladle into Eisenstein's script" to explore the unfinished project of the revolution. Soldadera's backgrounds are drawn from digital scans of photographs housed in Special Collections and University Archives at Tomás Rivera Library at the University of California, Riverside.





Soldadera Film Still, 2015
4-minute loop with audio
Speculative reenactment video montage
with archival photography
Courtesy of the artist

Soldadera Film Still, 2015
4-minute loop with audio
Speculative reenactment video montage
with archival photography
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS This project is dedicated to the memory of José Esteban Muñoz. — The exhibition *Soldadera* was made possible thru the curatorial vision of Dr. Jennifer Doyle and support funding from Queer Lab at the University of California, Riverside, the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts, UC MEXUS, and with the support of Special Collections and University Archives at Tomás Rivera Library at UC Riverside, and the Culver Center of the Arts. The artist's research was also supported by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and by a CMAS-Benson Latin American Collection Research Fellowship. We are grateful to students and staff at UC Riverside. Special thanks to UCR staff Tyler Stallings, Eric Milenkiewicz and Sarah Stallings, and to UCR's Digital Humanities Working Group. We are grateful to Project Director Marcus Kuiland-Nazario, for helping us to realize this exhibition. — *Soldadera* would not have been attainable without the Becerra Lumbreras family's hospitality and collaboration. — Film Credits for *Chac-Mool*: Featuring Leandra Becerra Lumbreras; director and editor, Nao Bustamante; director of photography, Alison Kelly; producers, Marcus Kuiland-Nazario and Maria Alvarez del Castillo; on-set historian, Moises Medina; music, Nick Hallett; sound design, Kadet Kuhne; assistant editor, Joe Leyva; connectivity fabrication, Joe Seely. — Film Credits for *Soldadera*: Director & editor, Nao Bustamante; producer, Marcus Kuiland-Nazario; director of photography, Ben Peyser; specialty costume designer, Sybil Mosley; assistant director, Visperd Matad-Doust; camera assistant, Eric Romero; compositing, Pascual Sisto; sound design, Kadet Kuhne; assistant editor, Joe Leyva; voice-over recording, Boryana Rossa; costumer, Tawny Featherston; wardrobe assistant, Blaine O'Neill; choreography consultant, Crystal Sepulveda; production assistants: Autumn Lopez, Johnny Tellez, Marcelo Guardado. Cast: Zulma Aguilar, Juana Chavez, Sandra de la Loza, Michael Anthony Ibarra, Madalyn Le, Rossana Martinez, Moises Medina, Adrian Manuel Villanueva, Crystal Sepulveda, Arlyne Stockhausen. Russian Voice Over: Oleg Mavromati. Additional thanks to: McBride family, Jaime Ashida, Gina Osterloh, Eduardo Sarabia, Laboratorio Sensorial, Matt Johnstone Publicity, Shanna Goldman, Pilar Tompkins Rivas, Vardui Sharapkhanyan and to Ricardo Duarte Mendez, Secretario de Cultura del Ayuntamiento de Guadalajara. Catalog copy provided by Dr. Jennifer Doyle, Guest Curator Vincent Prince Art Museum where this work was first exhibited. All photos are by Dale Griner, unless otherwise noted. All work and images appear at the courtesy of the artist.

NAO BUSTAMANTE (B. 1969, SAN JOAQUIN, CA) is an internationally known artist, originally from California; she now resides in upstate New York. Bustamante's precarious work encompasses performance art, video installation, visual art, filmmaking, and writing. The New York Times says, "She has a knack for using her body." Bustamante has presented in Galleries, Museums, Universities and underground sites all around the world. She has exhibited, among other locales, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the New York Museum of Modern Art, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Sundance International Film Festival, Outfest International Film Festival, El Museo del Barrio Museum of Contemporary Art, First International Performance Biennial, **Deformes** in Santiago, Chile and the Kiasma Museum of Helsinki. In 2001 she received the prestigious **Anonymous Was a Woman** fellowship and in 2007 named a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow, as well as a Lambent Fellow. In 2008 She received the Chase Legacy award in Film (In conjunction with Kodak and HBO). And was the Artist in Residence of the American Studies Association in 2012. In 2013, Bustamante was awarded the (Short-term) CMAS-Benson Latin American Collection Research Fellowship and also a Makers Muse Award from the Kindle Foundation. In 2014/15 Bustamante was the Queer Artist in Residence at UC Riverside and in 2015 she was a UC MEXUS Scholar in Residence in preparation for *Soldadera* at Vincent Price Art Museum in Los Angeles. Bustamante's video work is in the Kadist Collection. — 2010 she was an unlikely contestant on TV network, Bravo's "Work of Art: The Next Great Artist." In Bustamante is alum of the San Francisco Art Institute, New Genres program and the Skowhegen School of Painting & Sculpture. Currently she holds the position of Associate Professor of New Media and Live Art at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. **NAO BUSTAMANTE.COM**



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