



Figure 117. Graciela Gutiérrez Marx and Martín Raúl Eckmeyer, *They Are Still Alive*, Argentina, 1988. Print.



CHAPTER 32

A FOLK ART WITHOUT ARTISTS

Graciela Gutiérrez Marx

“We must have a folk art without artists!” This controversial slogan, for which no solution has been found, is but a gesture I’m using to share some critical thinking regarding a very delicate situation: that of the South and Central American artist.

I despise theories, logical and rational foundations, test-tube analysis and aesthetic considerations. I only want to talk about a *necessity* as I understand it. Together, with many others, we must work urgently before the political space given to us in favor of freedom of expression is taken away. We must work before expressive illiteracy (by genesis or by disuse) continues to harm the creative possibilities of entire communities that have survived the social, economical and cultural depredation of the powerful—those who silence and sterilize us in our most everyday expressions through a pasteurization process of mass media communication.

I feel, as does Italian mail artist Bruno Talpo, that the best work of Latin American art is the work of survival. That as human beings, more than artists, we are trying to deliver a final message of *necessity*. We could speak of art as a new project of man (and consequently as a social model) that becomes credible and human in its struggle. To live is to be in contact with life. To create life and transform it into reality is much more important than simply giving form to new or old objects of art that indefectibly fall on a buying or selling market. The practice of aesthetic or historical criticism won’t be sufficient to incarnate our slaughtered peoples. We must abandon privileged positions and assume consciousness and commitment to firm, revolutionary, almost mystic positions.

“To live—that is to say, to maintain oneself with life,” as stated by Bertold Brecht, “has become an entire art... Who

feels like pondering how to maintain art with life?” The very sentence stated here seems cynical in our present circumstances. This is how goodwill and solid spirit is expressed by one European, who, like those of his geography, have difficulty understanding our struggles. Perhaps our hope, my own hope is centered in a heartbeat that’s barely audible. What we feel, I feel, is taking form here and in other places on this planet is more than building monuments made of noble materials or super-specialized universities. We choose, I choose, the modesty of a collective labor with equal rights for all men and women that populate these lands. I think of Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador... the Chile of Chicho Allende, the Brazil of Paulo Freire and the so many “olden days” or “future days” of our many ambushed nations. I think of Ivan Illich.

The creative act is by necessity a dialogue, a shared conversation created by the people... like a spontaneous birth, often painful and symbolic. It is like the paper doves made and thrown away by political prisoners, or the silhouettes of life painted by hundreds in our streets, that make the “present-absence” of our “missing” loved ones known to all. The creative act is the rumbling of a riot that reveals the intimate and the intimately lived. Yet creation is also present in the manipulation of tools, simply handled by innocent hands. This can be found in the corners of the underdeveloped nations of our world.

We must rescue the domestic and manual poetry of the American man and woman that has yet to be domesticated by technology; the women who knead dough by hand or sew with small and simple needle and thread; the women who wash their clothes with a scrub-board and a bar of soap. This too is ecology.

CASILLA DE CORREO 749 - C. P. 1900 - LA PLATA - REPUBLICA ARGENTINA

HOJE HOJA HOY

METANET 1992

Asociación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Artistas correo



Figure 118. Graciela Gutiérrez Marx, *Hoje Hoja Hoy*, Argentina, 1992. Mail art zine of the Association of Latin American and Caribbean Mail Artists. Edited by Graciela Marx (portrait above).

The Latin American reality is so strong and contradictory that it can almost permanently besiege us without weighing possibilities or stages of a patient consciousness in a change of situation. Ours is the land of great contrasts, and on a major or minor scale, South America is just that: colder than, yet as painful and penetrating as the Caribbean sun. We are always out on the ledge and we like that in spite of the fear and terror that are present.

Just the other day my good friend Gustavo Mariano said to me with a beaming face of true happiness, "We've tried everything, and everything has failed, that's why I have hope—because we have the privilege of having to begin again, to inaugurate." Now it seems that a new wind blows here like a sleeping need that begins to bellow. We must learn to live, we want to live together! We must work for a united anti-

imperialist front among ourselves (those within Argentina) and with all our brothers from Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Central America. We must learn to be born again. We must be allowed to be born again, but this time with equal opportunities.

Only by means of a permanent and unrestricted exercise of freedom to critically express or represent reality can we produce new forms, or "languages of transformation," capable of modifying the horizon of our popular poetic consciousness. Only these creative events, by and for the people, will be both the answer and resistance to oppression and silencing as well as the first utterance in a new language of creation.

Here there must be only one privilege: that of the eternally subdued, oppressed and suppressed. That we, the intellectually privileged, must offer ourselves to them, so

that they can express and overcome the living contradictions of their being in the world, with dignity, justice and liberty!

And vanguard art? I believe we can't go back and ask ourselves how to communicate better to "ill-informed" spectators, or how to better articulate our individual "games" in social relations that our daily lives so niggardly propose. We can't "self-install" ourselves in apparent vanguard positions as seekers of new languages, and believe that a revolutionary art takes form beginning with conceptual, functional, and formal innovations.

To renounce ourselves as "creators" of works of art with or without profession is a complete statement and a re-acknowledgment of our limitations as well as an incarnate commitment to reality.

The great Latin American work of art should be the social practice of a new creative consciousness that will indefectibly fly into the birth of a new poetic that will mark the beginning, not the end of a liberating process that can no longer be professionalized.

We must create. This impulse to make something new, to construct another reality, the unhappiness that has gone before us in the past, the permanent insurrection in our people, is now almost a generalized and solid sentiment, a sentiment that will allow us to rescue, on all levels of human culture, creative and poetic processes that are also involved in the realization of acts of great simplicity.

Today's artists (Artist?) will offer themselves as project programmers (according to Neide de Sa), that will be poetically built by public heterogeneity and will be now an artist by and for the others. From this collective activity that we hope will determine new forms, rituals, and fashion will serve life and liberty.

Love is not obedient. It is eminently subversive. It never adapts. It's an eternal movement or change, nor does it run out or consume itself, and for that very reason, any kind of passion or creation, such as art, is generally understood as a danger to the stability of the civilized system.

Art is at the same time love, a form of knowledge (as our clever and radical professor of Philosophy and Aesthetic, Manuel Lòpez Blanco, taught us) and a transformation of reality. In every living culture, contemporary or archaic, poetry is a vital, social, even liturgical act. Therefore, the poetic function is at the same time a cult, a game, a celebration, craftsmanship, knowledge, an extension of the conscience and freedom. Hence, there will be confusion in languages and intimacy between the relation and knowledge of equal rights for the transformation and creation of an "another-same" reality.

We must create, we are creating, a work of art that will be within itself, a gathering of offering, an open proposal of education for voluntary modesty. Thus the sign will become again a tool to create and not the point of arrival for culturization. Only recently have we been able to defend collectively the right of all men and women to use their creative energy, without subjecting each message to one of "consumption" or "knowledge," which they are obliged to, as a necessity.

There are many paths to choose, in spite of the might of this world, and these paths are opening up in the poorest and most exploited regions of this earth. They are probably the only ones capable of initiating a new development of man, thanks to progress, or the lack thereof.

We can't convince ourselves of the idea that "only a handful of poets are born." Undoubtedly, the "systems" take an active role in exercising their controls to assure that "many more poets" aren't produced. But, when that happens, when "the man on the bottom rung" raises his voice to speak his mind—that in itself becomes a feat. There will be no armies that can silence him because his message will be incarnate and will always grow.

For the unity in creation, and as an homage to the marginal peoples of Central and South America, this pamphlet is written and delivered.

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"We Must Have A Folk Art Without Artists" was read in Rosario, Provincia de Santa Fe, on September, 1984 by Graciela Gutiérrez Marx.