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TRANSLATING STAINED FABRICS INTO CONCEPTUAL TEXTILE ART: THE GLOBALIZATION OF TERESA MARGOLLES

In the catalogue for the 2015 exhibition *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread* (Neuberger Museum of Art Purchase College, State University of New York), curator Patrice Giasson makes the provocative statement that with this exhibition, which was comprised of bloodstained sheets that Margolles had given to six groups of embroiderers in Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, Brazil, the United States, and Guatemala, “the embroiderers’ powerful intervention...*transforms the stained fabric into a textile.*”¹ Giasson’s statement implies a discursive and material translation: stained fabric is not a “textile,” but stained fabric with embroidery *is*. This discursive translation, which

¹ Patrice Giasson (2015), Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles’s Textiles, in *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread*, edited by Patrice Giasson. Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art Purchase College, State University of New York, 14. Emphasis added.

was also enacted by the Neuberger Museum of Art when it exhibited these stained textiles as artworks, is particularly significant given the historical dismissal and denigration of textiles within western art history.² Contrary to Giasson's suggestion that it was the hand-done embroidery that translated the fabric into textile art, I contend that it is, rather, the exhibition and acceptance of Margolles's bloody fabrics by *western art institutions* that has translated them into works of "global contemporary art."

In this text I want to engage critically with Giasson's declaration that when embroidery is added to a bloody fabric, the cloth becomes a textile (or more accurately, a textile *artwork*). I want to complicate Giasson's statement, by suggesting that Margolles's textile art (which she does not in fact embroider herself) has not been accepted as "art" because of the addition of embroidery, but rather because her work can be understood as conceptual rather than as (simply) material. Put another way, it is not the embroidery that turned the bloody textiles into art, but rather Margolles's *concept* that was perceived as worthy of the global art world's acceptance. Margolles's textile works can be categorized as what Julia Bryan-Wilson calls "conceptual textiles," a term she uses to describe an overlap between dematerialization and materiality.³ Margolles's bloody textiles bring together the dematerialization of the violently-killed body and the materiality of cloth. As part of a lineage that goes back to the conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s, Margolles's textile works are, I argue, valued by the global art world as conceptual art rather than as textile art.

² See Julia Skelly (2017). *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft*. London: Bloomsbury, especially the introduction.

³ Julia Bryan-Wilson (2017). *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 139.

Margolles is now, to quote Claudette Lauzon, a “globalized artist” with “privileged mobility,” and she is using her privilege as a globalized artist to draw attention to the epidemic of femicide in a range of global contexts.⁴ There is a long history of feminists and feminist artists employing textiles for political reasons.⁵ From suffragettes to temperance advocates in North America, to the arpilleras (anonymous textiles representing violence) made by Chilean women to protest Pinochet’s regime, the available, domestic materials of craft have been taken up again and again by women in acts of resistance and rebellion.⁶ Craft—hand-made objects made out of materials such as thread and clay—have been, and continue to be, marginalized in western art history because of the so-called art/craft hierarchy.⁷ Margolles’s decision to engage with textiles is important, in part, because of the precedent of women of colour using cloth for socio-political interventions. Nonetheless, it is not insignificant that Margolles is usually described as a conceptual artist or a post-minimalist, but never as a textile artist. Not surprisingly, Margolles’s textile works have been under-studied in the literature on the artist, despite the fact that Margolles has been exploring the power of textiles for more than twenty years.⁸

⁴ Claudette Lauzon (2011), *Reluctant Nomads: Biennial Culture and Its Discontents*, *RACAR*, vol. 35, no. 2, 16.

⁵ See Bryan-Wilson, *Fray*.

⁶ Arpilleras are hand-stitched tapestries that are appliqued onto a coarse piece of thin burlap material. They employ “eye-catching,” “vibrant fabrics” that have been affixed with cross-stitches of matching thread. According to Bryan-Wilson, these “small tapestries [were] made by Chilean women who by and large were not invested in the category of ‘art’ but who were...using cloth and thread as a form of making to tell urgent stories and to push at the boundaries of textile politics.” Bryan-Wilson, *Fray*, 143.

⁷ See Elissa Auther (2010). *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

⁸ Giasson, Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles’s Textiles, 15.

Death Works

Margolles, who was born in Northern Mexico in 1963, has been producing death-related works since the early 1990s when she collaborated with art collective SEMEFO in Mexico City.⁹ As Rubén Gallo has written: “Though critics have argued that Mexican art of the 1990s is for the most part apolitical and obsessed with formalist concerns, I will show that many of these works establish a fascinating dialogue with the traumatic events that defined the history of this last decade of the twentieth century.”¹⁰ Gallo, among others, has noted the close relationship that Margolles’s work with corpses and death-related-detritus has with neo-conceptual practices in Mexico. In the nineties, Margolles attained the majority of her materials, including bloodstained sheets, from the morgue. After becoming a solo artist around 1998, Margolles continued to produce art related to death. With her exhibition *What Else Could We Talk About?*, Margolles’s contribution to the 2009 Venice Biennale, she moved from the morgue into the streets, using large cloths to absorb mud, blood and debris at crime scenes associated with narco-violence. She then manipulated the cloths in various ways in the Mexican Pavilion in Venice, including hanging some of them on the walls like tapestries or paintings.

⁹ SEMEFO refers to the morgue in Mexico City.

¹⁰ Rubén Gallo (2004). *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1.



[Fig. 1.] Teresa Margolles, *Tela bordada*, 2012. Embroidered fabric with blood stains. 202 x 206 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

In Margolles's textile works, the softness of fabric comes into tension with the brutality of violence against vulnerable bodies. As feminist art historians such as Janice Helland and Bridget Elliott (2002) have shown, textiles have long been denigrated and marginalized, dismissed not only as "feminine" but also as excessive or "in excess" according to the gendered hierarchies of western art history.¹¹ The use of textiles in art about violence is therefore symbolically powerful on multiple levels. Textiles have historically been denigrated as "women's work," but they have also functioned as sites of community, coping and self-care in a

¹¹ Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (2002). Introduction, in Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (eds), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 5.

range of geographical and cultural contexts. In her art practice, Margolles often uses textiles to bear material traces of violence, whether drug-related violence, suicide or femicide. Margolles's first engagement with textiles appears to have been *Dermis* (1995), a hospital sheet bearing the bloody silhouettes of two human figures. She also produced a series entitled *Dermis/Derm* in 1996 while she was still collaborating with the art collective SEMEFO.¹² Like much of her early work, Margolles collected the sheet for *Dermis* (1995) from the morgue in Mexico City.

In Margolles's video work *Women Embroidering Next to Lake Atitlán* (2012), a group of Mayan female activists are shown embroidering brightly colored images onto a stained white sheet (Fig. 1).¹³ The sheet, which Margolles collected from the morgue, is stained with the blood of a woman who was murdered in Guatemala City by her male partner. A high percentage of women murdered in Guatemala as a result of intimate violence come from Indigenous communities living in rural areas or on the urban periphery.¹⁴ While they embroider, the women in the video discuss domestic violence in Guatemala and around the world, pointing to the inter-subjective nature of collective crafting and the potential for change when women speak openly about intimate violence. This group of Indigenous women from the small town of Santa Catrina Polopo are members of the Ademkan Association, and provide support and advice on female sexuality and gender issues in their

¹² *Dermis/Derm* consisted of corpse imprints made by using a white sheet that would keep the bloody trace of a body part. The technique was also used to create imprints of whole bodies. The artist later proceeded with the making of "collective imprints," where several bodies appeared in a single work.

¹³ *Teresa Margolles: Mundos* (2017). Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 30-31.

¹⁴ Giasson, Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles's Textiles, 12.

community. Santa Catarina Polopo has 3,800 inhabitants and is located on the shores of Lake Atitlán in Guatemala. The town is governed by Mayan law, which is based on communal justice. Significantly, the town's economy is driven by the production of textile crafts.¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that these textile crafts were not being exhibited as "art" at western art institutions before Margolles's *Tela bordada* (Fig. 1), the cloth that the Mayan women are embroidering in the video noted above, was shown in exhibitions such as *Mundos*, which was on display at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in 2017.

The collaborative work of 2012 (Fig. 1), conceived of by Margolles and embroidered by a group of female Indigenous activists, anticipated the 2015 exhibition *We Have a Common Thread*, which was organized by the Neuberger Museum of Art Purchase College, State University of New York. For this exhibition, Margolles collaborated with embroiderers from Guatemala, Panamá, Nicaragua, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States, who shared her concerns about violence, particularly violence against women, although in Harlem the embroiderers produced a textile specifically to memorialize Eric Garner, an African American man who died as a result of police brutality. Following discussions with the embroiderers, whose words about the project are transcribed in the exhibition catalogue for *We Have a Common Thread*, Margolles provided each group with fabrics that had been stained through contact with bodies of people who had suffered violent deaths. With the exception of Eric Garner, the embroiderers were not given the names of the victims whose blood was on the textiles. This namelessness mirrors the anonymity of many victims of femicide in Mexico and elsewhere.

¹⁵ *Teresa Margolles: Mundos* (2017). Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 28.

Patrice Giasson describes these collaborative embroideries as “stained screens,”¹⁶ a suggestive phrase that might be illuminated by Amelia Jones’s observation that “the televisual delivers bodies and subjects, through the tangible texture of its intimate screen—*collapsing* the very distance through which, paradoxically, the cinematic imaginary signifier does its suturing work.”¹⁷ The television screen and the textile might seem like they exist on opposite ends of the material spectrum; however, both have their own textures, their own weaves, and their own modes of storytelling. Note also Jones’s use of the term “suturing” here to theorize the televisual screen. This textile, but also surgical, metaphor is highly significant for Margolles’s work, particularly her works that employ threads that have been used to suture the skin of post-autopsy corpses in the morgue.¹⁸ Giasson notes that during a conversation he had with Margolles in Harlem in 2015, the artist noted that “the art of closing up bodies after an autopsy was reminiscent of the practice and ritual of sewing.”¹⁹ Margolles’s body of work has repeatedly been described as “collapsing” the distance between living subject and death via material traces of dead bodies.²⁰ In fact, as Giasson has observed, “While talking about the display, Margolles expressed her desire that the visitors have the freedom to touch the work, as the weavers touched it while working on it. Her request was

¹⁶ Giasson, Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles’s Textiles, 11.

¹⁷ Amelia Jones (2008), *Televisual Flesh: The Body, the Screen, the Subject*, in Olivier Asselin, Johanne Lamoureux and Christine Ross (eds), *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 314. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ For example, *36 cuerpos (36 Bodies)*, 2010. This work consists of remnants of post-autopsy suture threads from the morgue in Guadalajara, Mexico. Each thread signifies a body.

¹⁹ Giasson, Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles’s Textiles, 16.

²⁰ See, for example, Edward Bacal (2018). *Pervasive Death: Teresa Margolles and the Space of the Corpse*. *Human Remains & Violence*, vol. 4, no. 1, 25-40.

meant to *reduce the distance between the viewer and the textile*, and to initiate the possibility of a relational identification.”²¹ Further to this, the textiles in the Neuberger exhibition were displayed alongside television screens, doubling down on the interwoven nature of these media.

According to Valentina Locatelli, “In the first half of the twentieth century, national art institutions and academies throughout Latin America were often not accessible to women, and women’s participation in the arts was long limited to the field of popular and folk arts and crafts, that is, to ‘hobbies’ which were considered compatible with domestic work.”²² One of the remarkable things about Margolles’s textile works is that she herself is not the embroiderer; she is usually using “found” textiles like sheets from the morgue or cloths to clean up crime scenes. For the Venice works, she employed large pieces of cloth to absorb blood from the streets of Mexico, but the traces on the cloth index not the hand of the artist but the death of an unnamed victim. This distances Margolles, one could argue, from the category of “textile artist.” Yet it is not insignificant that she uses textiles in so many of her violence-related works. Her early textiles are not evidence of skill or formal innovation, although this is not the case for *Tela bordada* (Fig. 1) or the works created for *We Have a Common Thread*, as the embroiderers skillfully employed a range of colours and symbols to create beautiful, original imagery. The fabrics in Margolles’s oeuvre are used to both signify and index the vulnerability of flesh and to literally absorb the insides of bodies: blood, brain matter and skin. The textiles

²¹ Giasson, Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles’s Textiles, 15. Emphasis added.

²² Valentina Locatelli (2016). Contemporary Mexican Women Artists Without Restraint, in *Without Restraint: Works by Mexican Women Artists from the Daros Latinamerica Collection*. Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 23.

signify skin and absorb skin simultaneously. To be even more precise, textiles signify, stand in for and *force us to acknowledge* the vulnerability of human skin and therefore the fragility of human life.

The language of textiles is one that is usually associated with domesticity, but Margolles's textile works undermine this association, as she finds and deploys her textiles in public spaces such as the morgue and the street. This concern with undermining the domestic has been identified by Marci R. McMahon as characteristic of the work of many female Mexican artists and writers. She argues that these authors and artists enact "domestic negotiations" that both "challenge and reinforce geographical, racial, gendered, and national borders."²³ While McMahon does not discuss Margolles, her phrase "domestic negotiations" illustrates the way that Margolles rejects the domestic associations of textiles, while employing blood-stained fabrics to illuminate that the domestic is not always a safe space for women.

According to Maria Margaroni: "As geographical and cultural borders give way under the pressure of economic or political interests and at a time when all sorts of hetero-phobias threaten to erupt into violence, the need for mediators (i.e. translators, individual or institutional go-betweens, facilitating tools or practices) is becoming more and more urgent."²⁴ Is it unproductively utopian to envision Margolles as one of these mediators? As a global artist—one who exhibits internationally with the intent to disseminate knowledge about violence against

²³ Marci R. McMahon (2013). *Domestic Negotiations: Gender, Nation, and Self-Fashioning in US Mexicana and Chicana Literature and Art*. London: Rutgers University Press, 3.

²⁴ Maria Margaroni (2013). Towards an Iconomy of Violence: Julia Kristeva in the Between of Ethics and Politics, in Griselda Pollock (ed), *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis: Art and the Image in Post-Traumatic Cultures*. London: I.B. Tauris, 143. Margaroni writes that "violence is taken to be the distinctive mark of contemporary political experience..." (145).

women of color in different global contexts—to what extent is her status as a “nomad” contemporary artist useful in the context of socially-responsible art?²⁵ Jill Bennett has argued in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005) that a politics of testimony “requires of art *not* a faithful translation of testimony; rather, it calls upon art to exploit its own unique capacities to contribute actively to this politics.”²⁶ I in turn want to argue that Margolles is exploiting in a range of different ways cloth and thread’s “unique capacities”—to absorb, to stain, to invite touch, to touch (or *move*, affectively speaking)—in order to contribute to a politics of testimony specifically concerned with violence against women.

Lisa Newman has argued that “the materiality of blood makes explicit the socio-cultural value of the body through an intersubjective corporeal exchange with the audience, in that they allow for the assertion of agency and validation of the marginalized social citizen through provoking a shared perception of the body in crisis.”²⁷ I want to complicate this statement by noting again that the blood absorbed by Margolles’s textile works is often from the bodies of women of color, particularly vulnerable individuals whose lived experiences are vastly different than most of the gallery goers who view Margolles’s work in cities such as Venice and Montreal. There is perhaps, then, not so much an intersubjective exchange between anonymous victim and viewer, as

²⁵ For more on the global contemporary artist as nomad, see Lauzon, *Reluctant Nomads*, 15-30. See also Angela Dimitrakaki (2013). *Travel as (Gendered) Work: Global Space, Mobility and the “Woman Artist,”* in *Gender, artwork and the global imperative: A materialist feminist critique*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 107-49.

²⁶ Jill Bennett (2005). *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 3.

²⁷ Lisa Newman (2013). *Blood for Money: The Value of the Bleeding Body in the Performance of Michael Mayhew, Ron Athey, and Teresa Margolles*, *Theatre Annual* 66, 21.

a *failure* to occupy the subject position of the victims because of the gulf between lived experiences. As Amy Sara Carroll has observed, Margolles's work "raises ethical, political, and aesthetic questions that resonate across her oeuvre, including: Does a remembrance and deployment of dead bodies in artwork give anonymous victims voice, or does it exact further violence, this time epistemic, against them?"²⁸ Furthermore, Newman's point about blood in Margolles's work signifying the "agency and validation of the marginalized social citizen," fails to hold up. These works do not illuminate the victims' agency, nor do they validate them. They are usually unnamed—a fact that Margolles has been criticized for—and these works do not bring closure or celebrate their lives. Rather, I want to argue in a more pragmatic fashion, that the bloodied textiles in Margolles's oeuvre index the extravagant and excessive vulnerability of skin that is not white.

Globalizing Margolles

Of the globalization of Mexican artists, Rubén Gallo has remarked:

The 1990s also witnessed a radical change in the institutional receptivity to experimental art. Most artists who began showing in alternative spaces like Temistocles or La Panaderia have since exhibited in prestigious museums in Mexico and abroad, and most are now represented by commercial galleries in New York and Europe. And just like it happened with the dematerialized conceptual projects of the 1960s and 1970s, work that was once

²⁸ Amy Sara Carroll (2017). *REMEX: Toward an Art History of the NAFTA Era*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 130.

deemed unsellable has suddenly become a hot commodity in the global art market.²⁹

In 2009, Margolles's textile works reached a newly expanded global public in the context of the Venice Biennale, a major stop in the global flow of artists and artworks and part of what Claudette Lauzon refers to as "globalization's excesses."³⁰ Margolles has been identified as an important figure in the globalization of Mexican art that has been occurring in the post-NAFTA art world.³¹ She has exhibited in Italy, Canada, the United States and Germany, among other countries, and her dealer is based in Zurich. As Caroline A. Jones has demonstrated, annual biennials have played a crucial role in the globalization of contemporary art.³² In 2009 Cuauhtémoc Medina curated an exhibition of Margolles's work for the 53rd Venice Biennale, a show that represented Margolles's artistic transition from the morgue to crime scenes. Like many of her earlier projects, the works included in Margolles's exhibit at the Mexican Pavilion were concerned with the drug trade and so-called "narco-murder" in Mexico City.³³ Not surprisingly, as Ana Garduño has noted in an unpublished text, during Margolles's Venice exhibition, there were some Mexican political

²⁹ Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art*, 10.

³⁰ Lauzon, *Reluctant Nomads*, 19

³¹ Carroll, *REMEX*, 130.

³² Caroline A. Jones (2017). *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³³ See, for example, Beto O'Rourke and Susie Byrd (2011). *Dealing Death and Drugs: The Big Business of Dope in the U.S. and Mexico: An Argument for Ending the Prohibition of Marijuana*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press; Miguel L. Rojas-Sotelo (2014). *Narcoaesthetics in Colombia, Mexico, and the United States: Death Narco, Narco Nations, Border States, Narcochingadazo? Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 41, no. 2, 215-31.

commentators who were concerned about how Mexico was being represented and perceived on the global stage.³⁴

The textile works included in *What Else Could We Talk About?* are not textile artworks in the traditional sense. That is, unlike the textiles produced for the 2015 exhibition *We Have a Common Thread*, the textiles in the Venice show were, for the most part, not embroidered. There were a few exceptions, including *What Else Could We Talk About? Embroidery*, one of the “extramural actions” or “joint activities” in the streets of Venice, which involved volunteers embroidering “narcomessages” into bloody fabrics with gold threads. The cloths had previously absorbed blood collected from execution sites near the north border of Mexico.³⁵ The embroidered phrases were taken from messages that were left at scenes of drug violence to send a message. The phrases included “See, hear and silence,” “Until all your children fall,” “Thus finish the rats,” and “So that they learn to respect.” These fabrics were then hung on the walls of the Mexican Pavilion.

The exhibition catalogue for *What Else Could We Talk About?* frequently describes these fabrics as “impregnated with blood,” a significant feminizing of the textiles that anticipates the blood covered embroidered sheets of *We Have a Common Thread* (2015) that index incidents of femicide in Mexico and Guatemala, among other global contexts. Margolles’s “impregnated fabrics” index death rather than birth, although according to Mexican views on death, death is inextricably linked with re-birth. As Rebecca Zorach has noted in her

³⁴ Garduño is a curator and art historian at El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (CENIDIAP, part of Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes) in Mexico City. Her chapter “Damage Control: Teresa Margolles, the Mexican Government, and the 2009 Venice Biennial Mexican Pavilion” is part of a proposed book project.

³⁵ *Teresa Margolles: What Else Could We Talk About?* (2009). Barcelona: RM Verlag, 70.

book on excess in the French Renaissance, “Blood signifies both violent death and the continued life of generations—in warrior blood, menstrual blood, medical blood: it is characterized by purity and impurity.”³⁶ It is worth noting that Zorach’s observation that blood and its symbolism have always been central to European culture is not a straightforward corollary for Margolles’s work. Nonetheless, the dual meanings of blood—death and also continued life—is in fact relevant for the Mexican view of death, as art historian Janice Helland has discussed in an article on Frida Kahlo’s work and politics.³⁷

In the Venice exhibition, Margolles was concerned with the idea of contagion: not simply the threat of disease, but the threat of moral taint, the transfer of violence, death and foreignness via miasma containing bodily fluids. Cuauhtémoc Medina, the curator of the exhibition, speaks of this aspect of Margolles’s work and the threat of the “unclean.” Many of the fabrics that had been “impregnated” with blood in Mexico were steamed in Venice, releasing the material traces of drug violence into the air and onto the skin of art lovers in Italy. *Recovered Blood* (2009) was an installation of fabrics “impregnated” with mud and blood: “The transfer of this material to Venice [was] performed through the remoisturizing of these fabrics.”³⁸ The “groundwork” for this installation was done by a group of volunteers cleaning up sites where people had been murdered in the north of Mexico in the spring and summer of 2009. The work *Cleaning* (2009) involved individuals hired for the purpose of cleaning the floors of the Mexican Pavilion with a

³⁶ Rebecca Zorach (2005). *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 33.

³⁷ Janice Helland (1992). Culture, Politics, and Identity in the Paintings of Frida Kahlo, in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*. New York: Harper Collins, 396-407.

³⁸ *What Else Could We Talk About?*, 54.

mixture of water and blood collected at crime scenes in Mexico; the bloody water was retrieved from soaked and twisted cloths.

In Medina's contribution to the exhibition catalogue, "Materialist Spectrality," he states that "This invasion [of Margolles's textiles into Venice], propelled by the commissions and invitations of the world cultural circuit, functioned as a debased analogy of the globalization process."³⁹ To build on this, I want to underscore that the Venice Biennale, in exhibiting these "impregnated fabrics," gave them the stamp of approval that discursively transformed (or translated) them into conceptual textile artworks. Medina goes on to describe the process of Margolles's textile works: "The blood and dirt, after drying into lengths of fabric, is re-humidified and thus brought back in [to] the exhibition room... ..The phrases that buzz around the killings are 'tattooed' [sic] onto the walls or embroidered in gold thread over the blood-soaked fabrics, setting up a friction between luxury, greed and the peculiar moral code supposedly ratified by every assassination."⁴⁰ Of the miasma, imagined or real, resulting from these works, Medina remarks that we are left "with trash under the skin."⁴¹ In a subsequent catalogue essay, "Toward a Critique of Sacrificial Reason: Necropolitics and Radical Aesthetics in Mexico," Mariana Botey observes that some artworks (Margolles's included), "appear to be arguing for a register of poetic production dispersed in the social body and woven through the threads—in the specific case of our examples—of an imaginary cathexis at work in *the idea of Mexico*, a manifestation of a figure of aesthetics that returns in fluctuations (rotations), and that exceeds and overflows the dichotomy of rationality-irrationality on which modernity grounds

³⁹ Cuauhtémoc Medina (2009), *Materialist Spectrality*, in *Teresa Margoles: What Else Could We Talk About?* Barcelona: RM Verlag, 19-20.

⁴⁰ Medina, *Materialist Spectrality*, 23.

⁴¹ Medina, *Materialist Spectrality*, 25.

itself.”⁴² Here Botey brings together various pertinent threads—the ostensible excessiveness of Margolles’s project, the materiality and rich metaphorical-ness of textiles, and the specter of modernity biting at the heels of contemporary art. It is also worth pausing with her phrase “the idea of Mexico.” As previously mentioned, some Mexican politicians were concerned about how Margolles’s exhibition represented Mexico to the global art world. The “idea of Mexico” as a site of extreme violence was crystallized and further circulated at the Venice Biennale.

To put it bracingly, if we theorize these works according to Giasson’s logic set out at the beginning of this text, in Mexico the cloths were bloody, muddy fabrics, whereas in Venice they were translated into conceptual textile art. This is the globalization of Teresa Margolles’s textiles at work. It is a process of translation into the language of the global art world as well as western art history: privileging “textile (art)” over “craft,” but also privileging conceptual art over textile art. The translation was not complete until the textiles were exhibited in western art institutions. These include biennales such as Venice, but also museums and galleries in sites such as London, Berlin, Zurich, New York, and Montreal. As Angela Dimitrakaki has remarked, “The larger project of institutional critique, in the practice and theory of art, has already placed considerable emphasis on how, for instance, the museum machine mediates the production, circulation, and consumption of images.”⁴³ Globally produced objects (including, but not limited to, textiles) are translated into “global contemporary art” when they are accepted (and exhibited) by, and in, the western art world. The

⁴² Mariana Botey (2009). A Critique of Sacrificial Reason: Necropolitics and Radical Aesthetics in Mexico, in *Teresa Margoles: What Else Could We Talk About?* Barcelona: RM Verlag, 132. Emphasis added.

⁴³ Angela Dimitrakaki (2011). The Spectacle and Its Others: Labor, Conflict, and Art in the Age of Global Capital, in Jonathan Harris (ed) *Globalization and Contemporary Art*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 193.

tenacious thrust and propulsion of globalization and global “museum machines” has not translated Margolles’s bloody textiles into textile art for altruistic reasons such as to raise awareness about the global epidemic of femicide. Rather, as Gallo has pertinently noted, the globalization of Mexican art is “lucrative,” if not for the artists, then certainly for the museums, biennials and art fairs that consume their work.⁴⁴

Lisa Vinebaum “locates globalization within a historical trajectory of industrialization and deindustrialization, in an industry that has long been characterized by movement. Globalization is an economic phenomenon, but it is also a social and intersubjective one,” and she draws “attention to the devastating effects of globalization on individuals and communities.”⁴⁵ As Vinebaum, among others, has observed, the high rate of femicide in Mexico has been tied to a “complex web” of factors, including the vulnerability of women who work in the garment industry at *maquiladoras*, facilities built for the assembly, processing, and manufacturing of cheap goods for export.⁴⁶ The “human consequences” of globalization, then, are inevitably and problematically entangled with the “gore capitalism” that characterizes Mexico and other nation-states (including Canada and America) where the bodies of women are broken, consumed and discarded.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art*, 10.

⁴⁵ Lisa Vinebaum (2016). Performing Globalization in the Textile Industry: Anne Wilson and Mandy Cano Villalobos, in Janis Jefferies, Diana Wood Conroy and Hazel Clark (eds) *The Handbook of Textile Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, 169.

⁴⁶ Vinebaum, *Performing Globalization*, 176-78.

⁴⁷ See Zygmunt Bauman (1998). *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. New York: Columbia University Press, and Sayak Valencia (2018). *Gore Capitalism*. Trans. John Pluecker. Cambridge, MS: The MIT Press. Valencia writes that “gore capitalism” refers “to the undisguised and unjustified bloodshed that is the price the Third World pays for adhering to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism. It also refers to the many instances of dismembering and disembowelment, often tied up with the

The global contemporary art world has bestowed its official stamp of approval on Margolles's travelling stained fabrics, translating them into conceptual textile art by exhibiting them in Venice, Montreal, Zurich and other cultural centers. Margolles's textiles continue to cross increasingly policed borders and spatio-political boundaries, forcing us to acknowledge ongoing violence against women of colour, even while concretizing an "idea of Mexico" that has been deemed acceptable, if not advantageous, in a conflicted global world.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented in the Département d'histoire de l'art et d'études cinématographiques, Université de Montréal. I am grateful for the comments that I received at that venue. I would also like to thank the Friends of the Archives (CAMH, Toronto) for funding, which allowed me to undertake research for this paper.

organized crime, gender and predatory uses of bodies. In general, this term posits these incredibly brutal kinds of violence as tools of *necroempowerment*" (19-20).

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