

A Threatening Presence: Monumentality and Embodiment in Regina José Galindo's *Aparición*

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Avec *Aparición* (2020-), l'artiste de performance guatémaltèque, Regina José Galindo, interprète des personnages masqués au sein de chorégraphies mises en scène dans des espaces publics, en hommage à des femmes disparues. Chaque performance est spécifique à un site, le nombre de figures correspondant à la fréquence des féminicides survenus dans chaque lieu. *Aparición* est souvent le fruit d'une collaboration : Galindo a développé le concept depuis la capitale de Guatemala, tandis que des artistes locaux l'ont concrétisé dans des villes situées entre Buenos Aires et Berlin. Cet article examine le potentiel de la performance collaborative de Galindo et de sa documentation pour combler des fossés géopolitiques et temporels imaginaires ainsi que pour remettre en question les modalités traditionnelles de la monumentalité.

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Since 2020, Guatemalan performance artist and poet Regina José Galindo has been haunting public spaces from Guatemala City to Berlin. Through choreographed performances collectively entitled *Aparición*, meaning appearance or apparition, Galindo inserts cloaked figures into urban environments as temporary monuments to women who have disappeared. The first iteration of the work, *Monumento a las desaparecidas*, was staged in Germany in 2020 and included twenty-eight performers, representing the number of women in Guatemala who disappear on average every week. The gesture remains consistent across locations, though each is site-specific in terms of the number of performers; in 2020, in Berlin, a figure appeared every three days, corresponding to the frequency with which women in Germany are murdered by their intimate partners or ex-partners | fig. 1 |; forty-three figures appeared in Castellón, Spain, representative of the number of women murdered in the country between January and July of 2021.

Aparición is an iterative transcontinental monument to victims of femicide, which is defined as lethal violence against women and girls because of their gender.¹ Using performance, Galindo's work also interrogates and alters the strictures of monumentality and memorial. I will argue here that, rather than mourn or memorialize individual victims in Guatemala City, Berlin, Milan, or Castellón, Galindo's cloaked figures appear in the land and time of the living, establishing a shared temporal plane with their audience. Utilizing a mobile performance practice and a veiled anonymity, *Aparición's* monuments are about presence in place of remembrance, as performers and viewers across locations come together in a reorientation of time and monumentality, from a foreclosed past to an urgent and shared present.

Historically, as a device, the Western European monument enforces colonial and neoliberal notions of time. This is a time divided into past, present, and future; a time that Christina Sharpe has referred to as "monumental time," wherein the past is sealed shut or "pacified in its representation."² Galindo's iterative hauntings challenge this modality of time; they also query another, geopolitical, divide in how we think about the present tense. In his book *What is a World?*, post-colonial theorist Pheng Cheah posits that "the hierarchical ordering and control of the world as we know it is based on technologies of temporal calculation,"³ a system reliant still on



Figure 1. Regina José Galindo, *Aparición*, *Owned by Others*, Berlin, 2021.
Photograph courtesy of the artist and Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan-
Lucca. Photograph by Lutz Henke.

“the subordination of all regions of the globe to Greenwich Mean Time as the point zero for the synchronization of clocks.”⁴ Cheah sees this as a “synecdoche for European colonial domination of the rest of the world because it enables a mapping that places Europe as the world’s center.”⁵ An enforced measure of time that centers Europe in this way assumes the stability of one continent against the rest of the world. It also sets each region apart temporally. Narratives which imagine some nations as “developed,” and others as “developing/under-developed/emerging,” are examples of this logic at work in quotidian language. The mobility of Galindo’s *Aparición* across geopolitical borders breaches these imagined divides.

Aparición addresses violence against women in situated local terms while also taking account of a disastrous international pattern. Focusing on conditions of precarity shared by female-identifying subjects from Guatemala to Germany, Galindo upends the narrative of geographically bound “progress.” Interdisciplinary historian Lisa Lowe argues that “the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions do not extend is the condition of possibility for Western liberalism, not its particular exception.”⁶ Galindo’s work appears to agree, tracing the distinct neglect with which liberal societies treat victims of gendered violence in both former colonial powers and former colonies, making apparent the willful bias in our imagination that certain places are “safe places,” while others are not—and, by extension, that these “others” may then be in need of either a colonial-paternalism-style of protection or avoidance altogether.

Applying her critical lens to European nations, Galindo’s project inverts the trajectory of international intervention and aid historically reserved for North American and European expert visitors and artists to the so-called “Global South.” This has too often been a one-directional exchange in which those visiting have “denied agency to the peoples they studied, and excluded them from the circulation of knowledge created about them.”⁷ On deciding to explore the issue of femicide beyond the bounds of Guatemala, where she is from and is still based, Galindo explains: “I don’t want to keep going to the first world and presenting the horrors happening in my country.”⁸ The artist describes a recurring distancing by viewers in the Northern Hemisphere toward her work, which almost always addresses issues of violence against women. Galindo quotes the detached rhetoric toward her work in Europe and North America: “What a disgrace they live in—here we are in heaven,” “That’s what happens to you—not to me.”⁹ Such sentiments maintain a sense of distance. They also elide the role of Western economic and political interests in fomenting unrest around the world for economic benefit, as well as the hushed reality of ongoing violence and inequality in the West itself. And yet, in the EU, twenty-nine percent of annual female victims of homicide are killed intentionally by their partners, and, in Germany, where several iterations of *Aparición* have occurred, there is to date no legal framework for femicide, though forty percent of female victims of homicide are killed intentionally by a romantic partner.¹⁰ While the term “femicide” has long been employed in Latin America to name gender-based violence,

1. Legal definitions vary slightly in language depending on the government-body or international organization. The UN defines femicide as violence against women with a “gender-related motivation,” the World Health Organization defines the word as “intentional murder of women because they are women.” It was Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell who popularized the term in English, with their book *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992).

2. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 62.

3. Pheng Cheah, “Missed Encounters: Cosmopolitanism, World Literature, and Postcoloniality,” *What Is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

7. Diana Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.

8. Regina José Galindo, Interview with Diana Taylor, *Hemispheric Institute*, January 24, 2010, <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-interviews/item/2228-galindo-int-2010.html>.

9. *Ibid.*

10. “Measuring Femicide in Germany,” European Institute for Gender Equality, November 22, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/measuring-femicide-germany>. It should be noted that the numbers in Canada are no less shocking. In 2021, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability found that a woman or girl is killed every other day in Canada, and it is approximately once a week that a woman is murdered by her male partner.

Germany only conducted its first public evidence-based study on the subject in 2022. Galindo's oeuvre works to collapse that imagined gulf.

When I asked Galindo about her experience of working on femicide as an international problem, she described "the horrible sensation of understanding and accepting that violence against women is a pandemic that is present in all countries, across all conditions."¹¹ In response to these ubiquitous statistics and generalized silence, Galindo's female apparitions appear and linger to haunt. Historian and anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has famously defined haunting in the following terms: "To haunt is 'to frequent, resort to, be familiar with,' to bear a threatening presence, to invisibly occupy, to take on changing form."¹² Galindo's monuments are anonymous and often still, but never idle. Instead, they are active, mutable, and agitating. Appearing frequently and internationally across public spaces as varied as a beach, museum, or subway platform, the cloaked figure can even become uncannily familiar as it returns to threaten, as I see it, the hegemony of colonial time that traditional monuments have historically enforced.

Monumental Place

Berlin's Museumsinsel (Museum Island), on and around which *Aparición* was staged in 2020, is already a site where monuments and artifacts rule the scene | fig. 2 |.¹³ The island was designated a World Heritage site in 1999, on the criteria of its outstanding architecture and for representing an "important interchange of human values."¹⁴ One of the most visited attractions in Germany, the 21.25-acre island is home to the Berliner Dom, the Kolonnenhof, the Berlin Palace, and the Humboldt Forum, and five large museums built under Prussian rule between 1830–1930: the Altes Museum, home to a re-creation of a lavish ancient Roman villa as well as busts of Cleopatra VII and Julius Caesar; the Neues Museum, which houses a thirteenth-century BCE bust of Nefertiti; the Alte Nationalgalerie, containing a survey of 1500 sculptures and 1800 European paintings, including Caspar David Friedrich's nineteenth-century painting *The Monk and the Sea*; the Bode Museum, with its *Münzkabinett* of 300,000 collected objects including coins from most countries of the world; and the Pergamon Museum, which holds the Ancient Greek 35.0-metre-wide and 33.4-metre-deep Pergamon Altar, ca. 150 BCE, the 17-metre-high Roman Market Gate of Miletus ca. 100 AD, and the 15-metre-high Babylonian Ishtar Gate, ca. 575 BCE—which, not incidentally, Iraq has been requesting to have repatriated since 2002.¹⁵ Writers have described the German archeologists' dismantling and transporting of the Ishtar Gate to Berlin as an act of enormous proportions, as though the English had taken not just the Elgin Marbles, but the Acropolis itself.¹⁶ And yet, Museum Island enacts a powerful mode of world-making that brings the artefacts contained in its institutions together as an apparently logical whole—regardless of their disparate origins, often-sordid paths to acquisition, and present-day demands for repatriation. In fact, UNESCO specifically commends the way each museum is "designed to establish an organic connection with the art it houses."¹⁷

11. Regina José Galindo, email correspondence with the author, October 13, 2022. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

12. Ann Laura Stoler, "Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen," *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

13. *Aparición* in Berlin was part of the *Owned by Others* artist initiative organized by Lutz Henke and Raul Walch. The project included contributions by twenty-four international artists and describes itself as "...an artistic endeavor uncovering narratives, places, and artifacts from, around, and on Berlin's Museum Island. The project assembles methods for thinking about and tactics for claiming the site as a new city center of the commons. Who is responsible for telling the story of this place, and where might they be stuck in times of the pandemic?" For more, see: <https://ownedbyothers.org/>. Last accessed March 7, 2023.

14. "The Criteria for Selection," UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1999, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

15. Ewan MacAskill, "Iraq appeals to Berlin for return of Babylon gate," *The Guardian*, May 4, 2002: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/may/04/iraq.babylon>

16. *Ibid.*



Figure 2. Regina José Galindo, *Aparición*, *Owned by Others*, Berlin, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan-Lucca. Photograph by Lutz Henke.

“Monuments are meant to last,” writes Martha Langford on the relationship between photography and monumentality, “but their significance changes over time: they function as flashpoints for demonstrations of dissent and revisionist debate.”¹⁸ As hyper-visible symbols of power and prowess, monuments often invite dissenting modes of address as well as reverence. “Only by defamiliarizing both the object of the past and the established methods for apprehending that object,” writes Lisa Lowe, “do we make possible alternative forms of knowing, thinking, and being.”¹⁹ In the face of these encyclopedic colonial collections, amongst the institution’s imposing architecture, Galindo’s *Aparición* operates on its own terms, opening new ground for debate | fig. 3 |. As a counterpoint to the fruits of German-funded archeological digs in Egypt and Iraq, her figures, dressed in asphalt-grey cloth and choreographed to stand still, are haunting interruptions to a story of imperial and intellectual prowess. They are also strikingly temporary. Their ephemerality shimmers in a critical juxtaposition with the acquisitive nature of the institutions they visit.

“Performance,” writes theorist Peggy Phelan, “resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends.”²⁰ Part of the power of her apparitions, Regina José Galindo explained to me, is in the “shock of their presence, their ability to land a singular blow.”²¹ The tension between the live elements of performance and their mediation has long been noted as central to the ontology of performance art.²² The element of surprise and potential is there both in the liveness and in the disappearance. Though Galindo’s figures insinuated themselves into Museum Island, the universality of femicide and the simplicity of their gesture means that while they are site-specific, they are not bound to the institutions they visit. One performance carries on to the next, and, I would argue, their potential is further amplified by the photographic documentation which lives on past the finite original.

In still images, the figure’s spectral quality is amplified. As Performa festival’s founder RoseLee Goldberg describes, images of performances serve to “project the performance into the future.”²³ In photographs, Galindo’s figures, cloaked in black or concrete grey, stand in otherwise-unstaged public spaces, giving the impression that they might have been photoshopped into place. Or—more in keeping with their ghostly appearance—like they might have appeared only through the camera’s lens. The photographic documentation of the performance is impactful, and lends itself well to our current documentation-obsessed era—images of Galindo’s ghosts were pasted on twenty advertising pillars across the German city of Bochum in 2021,²⁴ the artist’s Barcelona gallery sells sets of prints of the staged images, and passersby snap unauthorized photos. The eerily photogenic quality of the work amplifies its potential audience. In galleries, private collections, Instagram feeds, and wheat-pasted on city streets, the haunting nature of Galindo’s figures carries on.

17. “Museuminsel (Museum Island), Berlin,” UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1999, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/896/>.

18. Martha Langford, *Paper, Scissors, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007), 17.

19. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 135.

20. Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance: Representation Without Reproduction,” *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 148.

21. Regina José Galindo, email correspondence with the author, September 14, 2022.

22. Key voices in this debate on the ontology of performance and its documentation include: Richard Schechner *Performance Theory* (New York, Routledge, 2003); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Amelia Jones, “‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 11–18.

23. RoseLee Goldberg quoted in “Performa, New York,” in *Histories of Performance Documentation: Museum, Artistic, and Scholarly Practices*, ed. Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 63.

24. See: <https://www.ruhrtriennale.de/en/calendar/aparicion-erscheinung/891>.



Figure 3. Regina José Galindo, *Aparición*, *Owned by Others*, Berlin, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan-Lucca. Photograph by Lutz Henke.

Counter-Monumental Time

Building on the curator Helen Molesworth's view of the feminist potential of choreography and collaboration, art historian Amy Tobin writes that:

The choreographic, provides a way to move and relate without the confines of spatial boundaries, or places to be, or particular configurations—like homes and families—to occupy. It creates a space of possibility, for new bodily contortions and new relations. Here 'the world' is not represented as a map or a cultural heritage but as a set of relations that can reconfigure the terms of coming together entirely and, in turn, that can push up against the boundaries that still limit artistic and political reality.²⁵

Visitors to Museum Island during the performance of *Aparición* were confronted with figures from beyond the tight narrative boundaries of cultural heritage contained and presented within the institutions. As errant visitors, themselves on display without being on show, Galindo's apparitions trouble these narratives, embodying the fact that the story is, indeed, not over. *Aparición* calls forward what poet Billy-Ray Belcourt calls the "undead past colliding with a still-to-be-determined future."²⁶ Drawn out in public, Galindo's ghosts insert themselves into a present and future that relates intimately to all who pass by.

Aparición stages what Lisa Lowe refers to as a "history of the present," one which "refuses the simple recovery of the past and troubles the givenness of the present formation. It is not a historical reconstruction of the past that explains or justifies our present, but a critical project that would both expose the constructedness of the past and release the present from dictates of that former construction."²⁷ These figures stake ground for the dead to return and make visible both the ongoing nature of this kind of violence (for example, every three days), and the ongoing nature of public inaction in the face of it. Lowe's present echoes Walter Benjamin's formulation of the revolutionary potential brought on by an awareness of history's "presence of the now."²⁸ Benjamin famously argued that a historical awareness of a present tense not marked by the inevitable storm of progress, but rather, one in which time "stands still and has come to a stop,"²⁹ fosters a sense that we are each constantly engaged in "writing history."³⁰ Mostly silent and still, it is the uncanniness of Galindo's figures that invites viewers to construct their own narratives and consider their own roles in that construction.

Aparición makes space for history to skip a beat—and potentially, take on a new shape—by marking not just world statistics of femicide, but what art historian George Kubler calls, "the instant between the ticks of the watch,"³¹ or, "the void between events."³² The frequency of Galindo's apparitions is steady and confronting. Theorist Diana Taylor, writing specifically on the relationship between history and performance states that in effective performance, "The past might be conceived not only as a timeline—accessed as a leap backwards, and forward to the present again—but also as a multi-layered sedimentation, a form of vertical density rather than a horizontal sweep—not an either/or but a both/and."³³ Rather than commemorate or memorialize lives past, Galindo's *Aparición* follows Judith Butler's definition

25. Amy Tobin, "On Feminism, Art and Collaboration," in *A Companion to Feminist Art*, ed. Hilary Robinson, Maria Elena Buszek, and Dana Arnold (New York: Wiley, 2019), 454. See also Helen Molesworth, "Worlds Apart," in *Artforum* 45, no. 9 (May 2007), 101–102.

26. Billy-Ray Belcourt, "An NDN Boyhood," *The Paris Review*, July 14, 2020: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/07/14/an-ndn-boyhood/>. Last accessed January 9, 2023.

27. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 136.

28. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," (1940) *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 260.

29. *Ibid.*, 262.

30. *Ibid.*

31. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 17.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Diana Taylor, "Performance and/as History," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 83.

of “specter” as “foreclosed and yet surviving.”³⁴ Their time is ours, and vice-versa. This extends beyond the live event into its photographic documentation and circulation.

Bodys Monument

This isn't Galindo's first time making work in Berlin. For a 2010 project entitled *Looting*, the artist had eight gold inlays drilled into her molars by a Guatemalan dentist. With the precious metal in place, the artist travelled to Berlin, where a German doctor extracted the gold fillings.³⁵ The dental drill, she explains, represents the international “extraction industry, drilling wantonly, stealing gold without any moral qualms.”³⁶ Once pulled from her mouth, the Guatemalan gold remained on display in Germany, while the artist herself returned to Guatemala, her teeth hollowed out. “I always say that history is written mostly on women's bodies—but now I would say it is written on the bodies of those considered to be other. The plunder of life, culture, resources, is written in our DNA. We are an eternally looted people, but also a resilient people, a people of struggle and resistance,”³⁷ describes Galindo in a 2021 interview with MoMA magazine.

For Galindo, the human body bears the weight of history as its “archive,” while also being a site of individual agency and potential resistance, through what Diane Taylor calls “the repertoire”³⁸ of performance. Galindo's own body often withstands great physical trials: for (279) *Golpes*, in 2005, the artist created a sound performance in which she shut herself inside a cubicle and hit herself once for every time a woman had been assassinated in Guatemala between January 1–9 of that year; in 2012, she stood naked in a field while a massive extractor dug into the ground around her, as commentary on the mass graves buried as a consequence of violence ordered by former President of Guatemala José Efraín Ríos Montt; for Documenta 14, Galindo staged *La Sombra*, in which the artist ran while a Leopard, a German World War II tank, followed her in a circular loop. I list only three pieces for the sake of brevity, but Galindo is extremely prolific, making five to ten large-scale works per year, most of which involve performance and the placement of her body in both real and figurative crossfire. It is through this embodied practice that the artist finds a means of addressing social and political questions that can otherwise feel paralyzing.

In 1977, artists Leslie Labowitz³⁹ and Suzanne Lacy employed a similar visual technique of withholding or defamiliarization to address a subject matter in line with Galindo's. Their setting was Los Angeles, in the era of the murderers known as the “Hillside Stranglers,” two men who raped and strangled ten young women, leaving their bodies on the hillsides around the city. In response, Labowitz and Lacy staged a performance entitled *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977) at Los Angeles' City Hall to address the misogynist nature of the murders, which the police and the media had until then been describing as “random.” Sixty women formed a motorcade that followed a hearse to City Hall, where, on the front steps and in front of a crowd of reporters, ten women, fully cloaked in black cloth like nineteenth-century mourners,

34. Judith Butler, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (New York: Polity, 2013), 16.

35. This action holds an echo of the Third Reich's practice of extracting gold fillings, crowns, and dentures from the teeth of the victims of Aktion T4 and Nazi concentration camps. On September 23, 1940, Heinrich Himmler issued an order to SS doctors and dentists to forcibly collect gold from the teeth of both the dead and the living. See Xavier Riaud, “History of Nazi Dental Gold: From Dead Bodies till Swiss Bank,” *SAJ Forensic Science* 1, no. 1 (May 29, 2015).

36. Regina José Galindo and Madeline Murphy Turner, “On the Violence of the World: A Conversation with Regina José Galindo,” *MoMA Magazine*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/484>.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

39. Currently Leslie Labowitz-Starus.



Figure 4. Regina José Galindo, *Aparición*, Owned by Others, Berlin, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan-Lucca. Photograph by Lutz Henke.

took turns approaching a microphone and announcing different ongoing forms of violence faced by women. “Mourning,” Lauren Berlant writes, “is what happens when a grounding object is lost, is dead, no longer living (to you). Mourning is an experience of irreducible bounded-ness: I am here, I am living, he/she is dead, I am mourning. It is a beautiful, not sublime, experience of emancipation: mourning supplies the subject the definitional perfection of a being no longer in flux.”⁴⁰ *Aparición*’s figures remain in flux, in limbo. Rather than bind her subjects through mourning to a past tense, placing them at a distance, Galindo creates figures—like Lacy’s and Labowitz’s—that are undead. The violence they represent, planted in the whirr of the present—among workers coming in and out of a city hall, shoppers and vendors at a marketplace, commuters at a train station—is not over. Less didactic and more eerie and silent in nature, Galindo’s figures do not direct themselves toward the police, the government, or the evening news, but rather diffusely at the general public.

Collaborative Authorship

A key component of the work’s power is the opacity of the cloth the figures wear, calling forth Lauren Berlant’s definition: “To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence.”⁴¹ The affordability of cloth and the simple way in which it conceals the wearer makes the material both flexible and eloquent | fig. 4 |. On the one hand, this opacity acts as a visual sign of absence, and of the frustrating lack of information we can obtain once a person has disappeared. On the other, as Fred Moten has written about Brazilian artist Lygia Clark’s *Cabeça Coletiva* (Collective Head)—which enveloped its wearers’ top quadrants, concealing their heads—such a gesture of “(non)performative withdrawal” of the body’s presence “might also be understood... as a complication: body turned through absence into present paradox.”⁴² In such a lack of definition, Moten sees an “instantiation of another condition of possibility.”⁴³ Under Galindo’s choreography, an accounting of loss is turned into a declaration of personhood despite a now-absent victim.

When I asked Galindo about the veiled nature of the work, she replied simply, “The covered bodies represent the anonymity of bodies behind the statistics. We don’t have names, we have a body count.”⁴⁴ The anonymous function of *Aparición* is in contrast to much of Galindo’s oeuvre, which usually centers her own body. In *No perdemos nada con nacer* (We Lose Nothing by Being Born) (2000), the artist also comments on the quotidian nature of femicide, this time inserting her own body, anesthetized, into a transparent bag at the municipal garbage dump in Guatemala City—the horror here is in seeing her body folded into a clear garbage bag in the fetal position, discarded among crumbling cardboard and old soda bottles. Here, as in most of her work, the artist’s own physical vulnerability and bodily specificity are at stake and on show. “Galindo represents trauma,” writes Candice Amich of the artist’s practice of reenacting physical violence on her own body, “not to get stuck there, but so that her audiences will grasp the collective nature of

40. Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics,” in *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics and the Law*, ed. Austin Sarat and Thomas Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 51.

41. Lauren Berlant, introduction to “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 281.

42. Fred Moten, “Collective Head,” *Women and Performance*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.womenandperformance.org/bonus-articles-1/26-2-3-moten>.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Regina José Galindo, correspondence with the author, October 13, 2022.

this shared pain, which is what the individualist neoliberal sensorium disavows.”⁴⁵ But with *Aparición*, the bodies, cloaked rather than bagged in clear plastic, are shielded from view, and not always the artist’s own. While *No perdemos nada con nacer* is brutal, it is also finite, whereas the power of *Aparición* is in the project’s transferability—it can be taken up by another performer in a future, and that invitation has been extended by the artist.

In March 2021, with Galindo’s consent and collaboration, the performance collective SOMOS MAS (We Are More), made up of Sofía Smaldone and María Marcela Cortez, initiated a variation of *Aparición* that travelled through public spaces across Argentina where SOMOS MAS is based. Their iteration began in Buenos Aires, staged at historically significant sites across the city: the Iglesia de Santa Felicitas, the site of the 1872 public murder of the twenty-five-year-old Felicitas Guerrero by a suitor; and another at el Riachuelo, where the body of twenty-eight-year-old Carla Soggiu was found in 2019, having been murdered by her partner. “The performance’s journey weaves a network of women artists and activists with a shared desire to do something to stop feeling depressed and vulnerable in the face of statistics,”⁴⁶ they explain. Part of what drew Smaldone and Marcela Cortez to the project was the ability of *Aparición* to engage with the victimization of women without putting victims themselves on display. Marcela Cortez explained their motivation as a desire to address ongoing violence without “revictimizing.” “Art is not the news,” she insists, “it is a modification.”⁴⁷ Galindo’s *Aparición* and its subsequent variants are shifts in our relationship to time, monumentality, and mourning.

On October 19, 2022, at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, Spain, a group of thirty women covered in black cloth danced flamenco under Tintoretto’s *The Paradise* in the museum’s Great Hall, for a performance Galindo calls *Nuestra mayor venganza será estar vivas* (Our Greatest Revenge Will Be to Stay Alive) (2022).⁴⁸ There, performers broke with the silence of *Aparición*, as the tapping of thirty sets of flamenco heels in the museum’s hall means thunder.⁴⁹ With their bodies covered in simple black cloth, the effect of the performance was in the sound made by their feet—the *zapateo*. In flamenco, this combination of sounds made with the tip of the shoe, the ball of the foot, and the heel of the *tacón*, is a visual and sonic display of strength, resulting in more of a polyrhythmic stomp than a tap. Though the dancers each stayed on their own *tablón* at the Thyssen-Bornemisza, the tempo and volume of their dancing grew to sound like the march of an army closing in. The “threatening presence” of Galindo’s ghosts comes to fruition in their plurality, as iterations multiply and alter across sites. The coming together of bodies under dark cloth to honour women who have been murdered is a gesture of collaboration at each site, but also across locations. If we were to put pins on a globe, we could see *Aparición*’s growing constellation.

Writing on feminist modes of artistic co-creation, Amy Tobin points out that “Appearing together requires space, or results in the delineation of a space. Collaboration is, therefore, a demand for ground, and a means of standing ground.”⁵⁰ As opposed to a singular monument, grounded in

45. Candice Amich, *Precarious Forms: Performing Utopia in the Neoliberal Americas* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 152.

46. Sofía Smaldone and María Marcela Cortez, “Un proyecto artístico para visibilizar los femicidios,” *Página 12*, April 27, 2021: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/338039-un-proyecto-artistico-para-visibilizar-los-femicidios>. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

47. *Ibid.*

48. This performance was part of a series of events held at the Thyssen-Bornemisza, curated by Semíramis González in the spring and fall of 2022.

49. Dancers at the Thyssen-Bornemisza were from the Conservatorio Superior de Danza María de Ávila.

50. Amy Tobin, “On Feminism, Art and Collaboration,” in *A Companion to Feminist Art*, ed. Hilary Robinson, María Elena Buszek, and Dana Arnold, (New York: Wiley, 2019), 441.

place and raised in honour of a national or otherwise social event, here the space allotted to performers' bodies roughly mirrors the area that would be taken up by the absent victims. By virtue of the project's iterative expansion, the ground occupied threatens to grow if femicides continue to rise. While Galindo has often stated firmly that she is not an activist,⁵¹ and her work will not change the world, there lies in *Aparición* an insistence that the present will haunt us if we fail to change. ¶

51. See Regina José Galindo, interview with Diana Taylor, *Hemispheric Institute*, January 24, 2010, <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-interviews/item/2228-galindo-int-2010.html>; Regina José Galindo Interviewed by Francisco Goldman in *BOMB*, Jan 1, 2006: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/regina-jos%C3%A9-galindo/>.