LAURA ANDERSON BARBATA
Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities
2016-17 Estelle Lebowitz Endowed Visiting Artist

Exhibition
Laura Anderson Barbata: Collaborations Beyond Borders
September 6 – December 16, 2016
Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series Galleries, Douglass Library
8 Chapel Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901  •  Gallery Hours: M-F 9am-10pm

Public Events
Reception & Artist Lecture
Tuesday, November 1, 2016 • 5pm
Mabel Smith Douglass Room, Douglass Library
8 Chapel Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

La Extraordinaria Historia de Julia Pastrana
A performance work in progress
Wednesday, November 2, 2016 • 10:30am
Scholarly Communication Center, Alexander Library
169 College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

#LABatRU
Cover: Laura Anderson Barbata, Happy Suit (detail), 2008 / Image courtesy of the artist.
The Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities’ Estelle Lebowitz Endowed Visiting Artist program annually brings to the University community and general public the work and ideas of exceptional women artists through solo exhibitions, lectures, and campus residencies.

The exhibition and events are funded in part by the the Estelle Lebowitz Memorial Fund and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. The Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series is a program of the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities in partnership with Rutgers University Libraries (RUL).

Co-sponsors: Art Library-RUL, Center for Cultural Analysis, Center for Women and Work, Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA), Department of Anthropology, Department of Art History, Department of Fine Arts-Camden, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Department of Visual Arts-Mason Gross School of the Arts, Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, Douglass Residential College (DRC), Global Village-DRC, Institute for Research on Women, Institute for Women’s Leadership, Margery Somers Foster Center-RUL, Paul Robeson Galleries-Newark, Zimmerli Art Museum.

Laura Anderson Barbata is a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores, FONCA-CONACULTA, México.
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Director, Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities

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Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies and Department of Art History,
Rutgers University

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was introduced to the extraordinary work of Laura Anderson Barbata in 2013 during ArtW, a salon style gathering in which artists and audiences are brought together in an intimate setting to explore the artists’ work. That evening Dr. Tatiana Flores, then the Faculty Director for the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities, engaged in a conversation style presentation with Barbata in which they discussed her life, work, and many international projects. I was taken then, as I am now, by Laura’s unique ability to build artistic bridges between multiple cultures, connect the individual and the community, and merge creative expression with social action.

The artwork in the exhibition Laura Anderson Barbata: Collaborations Beyond Borders illustrates the breath of Barbata’s commitment to feminist values and her profound belief in social responsibility, respect, and reciprocity. Barbata creates work that ties traditional utilitarian production as communal activity and historical ways of learning to her own reframed model of art and activism – cultural preservation, self-determination, and protest. Barbata does not appropriate other cultural customs and art forms, but removes it from the European patterns of confiscation, advancing and integrating them into an art practice filled with respect and integrity, honoring the traditions and those who carry them.

Barbata describes her work as Transcommunality, trans-national and trans-disciplinary, working collaboratively across language, age, geographic, and educational boundaries. One example is together with artisans, teachers, students, performers, elders and knowledge carriers, Barbata creates beautiful wearable sculpture, some for spontaneous stilt-walking street performances and politically charged “interventions”. These works, even at rest, transmit the spirit and original purpose of the stilt walking Moko Jumbie, West African and Caribbean shamans who provide their communities protection from evil. Standing in the exhibition space, among the uninhabited stilt suits of Intervention: Wall Street (pgs. 42-43), some of which reach over 12 feet tall, we feel the powerful and urgent message that Barbata is communicating. The giant suits remind us that we as individuals are small compared to corporate Wall Street and alert us to take action as a community against their economic and societal misdeeds.

Safeguarding human dignity led Barbata to a ten-year effort to repatriate the remains of a Mexican woman named
Julia Pastrana who died in 1860. Pastrana was born with two disfiguring conditions that cast her as a “freak” despite her intelligence and musical abilities. After a terrible life of performing and being exhibited as something less than human, Julia Pastrana died in Moscow along with her infant son. Pastrana’s body continued to be exhibited until it was stolen and then found in deep storage in Oslo. One hundred and forty three years after her death, Barbata began a global campaign to bring Julia Pastrana home to Mexico for proper burial. In 2013 she succeeded. Inspired by Pastrana’s life, Barbata developed La Extraordinaria Historia de Julia Pastrana (pgs. 31-36), a tribute and performance work that is a sensitive, insistent voice in protest of human trafficking. The artist performed this evolving and participatory piece during her Rutgers campus residency.

Barbata’s work is filled with joy, color, movement, purpose, and soul. She proves that crossing borders to bring differing cultural artistic contributions together is something only an artist of Barbata’s insight and fortitude can accomplish.

It was our privilege to bring the beautiful work of Laura Anderson Barbata to the Dana Women Artists Series Galleries and Laura herself to campus to meet with students, staff, and faculty. We owe much thanks to Dr. Tatiana Flores for introducing us to Laura’s astonishing work, and we are delighted to publish a recent dialogue between Dr. Flores and Laura Anderson Barbata that took place exclusively for this exhibition catalog.

Connie Tell
Director
Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities
Tatiana Flores: Let’s begin at the beginning. What made you decide to be an artist?

Laura Anderson Barbata: I do not recall what specifically made me decide to be an artist. I think I always saw the world differently and believe my thinking process has always been aligned with that of an artist. But I can identify the moment when I felt the responsibility to identify as an artist: it was in 1986, when I submitted a group of drawings to the Salón Nacional de Dibujo in Mexico, a national annual art competition. I had no previous exhibitions or experience in the art world before that time. I only knew that I had to draw and was immersed in exploring through simple mediums (paper, pencils, and charcoal) a language that could communicate emotions and sensations that
exist around us and are imperceptible to the naked eye. I was obsessed with this and drew seeds sprouting and germinating. I wanted to capture through drawing what was happening: the atmosphere that surrounded them, the life that was growing inside of the seeds and that made them change continually. The drawings I submitted received an award and I felt I had to uphold that award in every one of my works from that day forward. I knew that the jurors had taken a risk. They had believed in the work despite the fact that I clearly had no resume or trajectory in the arts to guarantee that this was coming from a serious and committed artist. This recognition validated my place in art, and I felt it was my responsibility to work hard to earn that award every day from that day forward.

**TF: What about painting? Given that Mexico has such a strong tradition of painting, was this a medium that attracted you?**

**LAB:** As you say, Mexico has a strong tradition in painting and particularly mural painting with social content. But Mexico is also a country that historically has a strong tradition in sculpture. I am attracted to painting and sculpture because I consider that these forms rely on drawing for their execution. Drawing has been the strongest influence and my greatest love. I find drawings by painters and sculptors to be so revealing because the success of their preliminary drawings will define the outcome. I started my work as an artist in drawing and then began to work in sculpture, which I consider to be drawing in space. I feel that everything I do is strongly related to drawing even though for several years I worked less on drawings on paper. But today I am drawing again, making works on paper with charcoal and graphite.

**TF: It is wonderful to hear that you are taking up drawing again. Is there something about your current life’s experience that has reignited this interest?**

**LAB:** Drawing is a discipline that I love; its immediacy and also the capacity of simple materials to communicate...
ideas and emotions. Actually, my love of drawing was rekindled by my recent Artist In Residence experience at the beautiful Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. I spent every day drawing in the museum, and it was wonderful to spend time carefully looking at the collection, observing and drawing. There is also something about making drawings that is not only thoughtful but also can be visceral. I am currently working on a number of portraits of Julia Pastrana, using charcoal and graphite on large cotton rag paper.

**TF:**  How closely does your work relate to your own biography and background?

**LAB:** My parents had a unique way of seeing the world. Only later did I realize that other parents didn’t see the world through the same creative lens. They both had a very sharp sense of humor, which comes from turning the things most people take for granted or barely notice and questioning them—pointing out the incongruities and nonsense in those things. I believe this shaped my way of approaching the world around me. I spent the early part of my childhood in Mazatlán, with little or no access to museums. We did not have a television, and my sisters and I played on the beach after school every day. We invented our own games and toys with things we found on the beach. I was always daydreaming, wondering how to build a world around me with the things we found on the beach: shells, branches, stones... I imagined myself as a type of Robinson Crusoe living on an uninhabited island.

When I was 10 years old, my family moved to Europe, and this is where my education in the arts became central. The first museum my parents took me to was the Louvre. I remember clearly the moment and the emotions I felt when I saw the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* for the first time. I believe that because I had little to no previous exposure to these art forms, the impression it made on me was profound and life-changing. As I stood there in awe of the *Winged Victory*, I felt that before me was a powerful language that is communicated through form, scale, and materials; that it was important in a deep and profound way, and that language is art. So I began to look at the world around me carefully, closely, and spend time with these explorations with a drawing pad and a pencil.
TF: Who are some of the artists that most inspire you?

LAB: I have always admired the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, The Guerrilla Girls, Laurie Anderson, Joan Jonas, Kiki Smith, Anna Deavere Smith, Melissa Hilliard Potter, Elizabeth LeCompte, and The Wooster Group, to name a few in contemporary art. But I am also greatly inspired by artisans of Mexico. For example, the extraordinary weavers Francisca Palafox and Abigail Mendoza, and the master embroiderers Miriam Campos and her family. All of these artists and artisans inspire me to pursue my work as an artist and to strive towards greater challenges.

TF: It is interesting that you only mention women. What were your perceptions on the status of women artists in Mexico and in the art world more broadly when you were starting your career?

LAB: My perceptions on the status of women artists in Mexico and in the art world when I was starting my career were informed by undeniable facts. Galleries and museums exhibited male artists almost exclusively and female artists (to this day) do not have the same opportunities as our male counterparts. Art professors were mostly male, art historians as well, and the narratives written corresponded with those circumstances. The few exceptions of recognized women artists were always a strong reference and inspiration: Magali Lara, Mónica Mayer, Marta Palau, and Mónica Castillo, all my peers in Mexico. It is disturbing to see that today things have not changed much in Mexico. One look at the list of artists represented by the most important galleries, and you will find that the percentage of women is still alarmingly low. Recently, the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil had an exhibition that approached this disparity, Ejercicios Exploratorios II. Creadoras Contemporáneas en la Colección MACG (Exploratory Exercises II. Contemporary Women Creators in the MACG Collection), looking critically at their own collection, the representation of women artists in it, and also their exhibition history and impact that these exclusions have in the narrative of art history at large.

The problem is not only the limited opportunities for exposure female artists have, but the financial challenges that this carries. While recognition and financial success are not our primary objectives nor do they define our work, not having them poses tremendous challenges that impact production and can jeopardize the outcome and longevity of a project, and even a career. How to survive economically with your work as an artist is one of the most pressing issues facing artists today.
This reality has impacted us in multiple ways that are difficult to grasp. While there is no openly articulated discrimination and segregation, it is nevertheless evident and as women artists get older, the disparity is further accentuated. While the growing interest in socially-engaged work is encouraging for me, a quick survey of museum, biennial, and gallery exhibitions reveals that female artists are still underrepresented. In addition, younger artists are favored (many biennials, grants, and awards are for artists under 30). This is true not only for Mexico and Latin America, but everywhere.

TF: What do you consider to be your first really significant work of art?

LAB: My work is constructed on previously executed work and each piece, each series, is informed by what I have learned before. This process naturally leads away from complacency and towards the need to address more challenging questions that will make their way into future works or projects. So while I may feel strongly towards a specific work, usually it is the one most recently executed, at the same time it is also the beginning of the next work. Isolating one work from the rest and naming it as a significant work of art is a task that is not mine—I feel this can best be done by curators. What I can identify are significant moments in the making or working. For example, the impact that the Yanomami Owë Mamotima project has had on me as an artist and my practice, how I have grown and learned from the project and the experience, or from The Repatriation of Julia Pastrana (pgs. 31-36) and my work with Moko Jumbies in Intervention: Wall Street (pgs. 42-43) and Intervention: Indigo (pg. 46). But to identify one piece as my first really significant work of art (or art-making) is impossible for me to do. First of all because it would claim complete ownership of the work—these projects have many participants and offer various approaches for ownership. Secondly, these works continue in many ways for the individuals involved, and to single it out as the most important in my opinion would define the moment when it is finished and it has ended. The success of these works is that they have a life that continues after their central expression in ways that no longer connects me with them directly.
TF: Tell me about your work with the Yanomami people of the Venezuelan Amazon.

LAB: In 1992, I won an award and was invited to Venezuela. I had never been there and I wanted to get to know more about the place that I was visiting. My artist and curator friends in Venezuela encouraged me to go to the Amazon, saying “You will find that in many communities utilitarian objects are very similar to your sculptures.” I was at the time making sculptures in wood and large scale drawings.

The Yanomami people are an indigenous group that lives in the south of Venezuela, on the border with Brazil. They are among the most traditional of the indigenous groups and have the least amount of contact with others because they are so far south. The whole area is protected. You cannot travel there. The only people who can go are missionaries and the military, as well as anthropologists or scientists whose projects have been approved by the various institutions that control this area (government ministries, an office of indigenous affairs, INPARQUES, the military, etc.).

On my first trip to the Amazon in 1992 I met the Ortiz family, who are of the Ye’Kuana community. They were teaching the Mavaca Yanomami community how to build a canoe. The process made a very strong impression on me. It is a collaborative endeavor whereby every person in the community has a role in its construction. The use of the immediate resources available and the techniques applied to woodworking were all things I wanted to learn and apply in my work. So I asked the Ortiz family if they would accept me as an apprentice. They replied that I had to make that request to the whole community and village counsel, and a month later I returned for my interview. The village elders, women, men, and children were assembled and I showed the community catalogues of my sculptures, assemblages in wood, and my drawings, and explained why I wanted to learn how to build a canoe. After lengthy discussions – to which I was not privy – the response was: If we teach you how to build a canoe, what can you teach us in return? This question immediately set the basis for our relationship, one that recognized each other’s value on equal terms, where we could all be active participants in an exchange of knowledge as teachers and as learners. It is a lesson on the value and importance of responsibility, reciprocity and balance, and that they must be applied in all interactions. This question changed my life and made a permanent impression on my
work and my approach to art-making. It became the basis of my working methodology, of my relationships. How can we bring this exercise of shared knowledge always into practice? How can we make it happen? When it was posed to me then, I had to think fast because the whole community was evaluating this and they had to decide yes or no.

TF: Being originally from Venezuela myself, I know how remote the Amazon is from the rest of the country, not only geographically but conceptually. It is not integrated into the country’s sense of national identity—it really is another world to most Venezuelans, so I cannot help but be impressed with how you made your way to the Yanomami and figured how to return on numerous occasions. How did you obtain permission to go there?

LAB: It is true that a lot of Venezuelan people have traveled around the world and within Venezuela but few have gone to the Amazon. They can’t really, as much of it is prohibited territory. If you do not have a project that has been approved by all of the institutions I listed you cannot enter the territory legally, as you are not authorized to travel there. That’s the reality. The first time I went, I must admit I did not have my permits. I did not properly inform myself of all the restrictions that were in place, which I discovered once I was there and had to face the consequences (for example, being escorted out of a missionary base by the military who followed me with a machine gun pointed at my back). Despite drawbacks like these, I decided that I would return and would go through all of the proper channels, and I did. I presented a project to all of the government institutions and organizations that control the area and was able to get all of the legal approvals necessary for my return. I went straight back to the Yanomami community first and then to the Ye’Kuana community in Culebra. Later I also began to work with the Piaroa communities in the northern area of the Amazon.

TF: What was community life like? How did you fit in?

LAB: Every time I went, I made every effort to be consistent. I would conduct myself in the same manner as before and take the same exact shoes, clothing, and personal objects. But this is something that I learned there.
The Ye’Kuana leaders explained to me that they honor and respect consistency, that this is a sign of a well rounded person. So I became aware of the importance and value of consistency and understood it as fundamental for establishing solid relationships.

I didn’t travel with food, except I was prepared for emergencies by always having with me a little bag of beans, some salt, and would try to get limes wherever I could. But other than that no food. But I did take lot of repellent! Plus my hammock, toothbrush, toothpaste, and a bar of soap. That is all I took with me besides my working materials. Of course people could appreciate that I needed food, and that I depended on them, so we had to figure out how to negotiate exchanges so I could get food. I don’t eat meat and I was a very strict vegan. But on my first trip I felt I had to make an exception when a Yanomami leader offered me a small piece of meat. To reject such a sign of generosity would have been an insult. Consequently, I have eaten all kinds of things... worms, insects, amazing fruits, leaves, and nuts.

I spent a lot of time with the Ortiz Family of the Ye’Kuana community of Culebra. Ye’Kuana means “people of the canoe.” They are master canoe builders, as I mentioned. The canoes are called bongos. They are amazing because they are an extremely efficient mode of transportation, and as a sculptural object, they are beautiful. A whole community can fit into a canoe and go down the river. If a community can master the river, are able to move freely up and down the river, then they have mastery, control, and a great deal of autonomy. You can solve problems for your people, for your community, and you can get things from other areas. On my first trip, they were teaching the Yanomami how to make a canoe. When I saw that process I saw the way that canoe building is a community endeavor, it is a project and a practice that involves many people. It is collaboration. Today, collaboration is a word you hear everywhere, showing us new working models and processes. But it has been a concept that has been successful and used for centuries by indigenous communities.

I was very interested (we are talking about the early 90s) in what I was seeing. I thought it was not only because I was working on sculptures in wood myself, but I was seeing collaboration take place. Collaboration between different groups, different groups that are neighbors, different groups that have different belief systems and different traditions, all working together towards a common objective. And the use of resources around them was very important for to me to learn from. You go out into the forest looking for a specific tree that you know will make that perfect canoe. Once you find it, you make it right there with all of your people, so you travel very light. With only a machete and a small ax, a glorious tree is transformed into an amazing canoe that will serve the whole community for many years.
**TF: Could you describe your first impressions and experiences?**

**LAB:** Travel through the Amazon takes many days. It is a journey that is not easy and for someone with little experience can be treacherous. There are no roads or easily accessible modes of transport, everything in the area works on a network of connections that link communities, and I was not part of any community. I had to find my own place in this network and begin to construct relationships, working relationships, friendships, which cannot be done overnight – these take years. On my first visit, after many days in which I stopped in various communities, missions, and villages, I arrived in Mahekoto which is in the Yanomami territory along the Orinoco River. I was approached by the elders who wanted to know what I was doing there. Then children came to talk with me. I don’t speak Yanomami and they did not speak Spanish. I had a notebook and I began handing out blank pages from my handmade paper notebook and pencils, thinking that art is a universal language so therefore we were going to communicate in the language of art. The response, however, was unlike anything I expected. I was thinking in a linear fashion: we could communicate through drawing, but each child responded in a completely different way and had a unique relationship to that piece of paper. One of them picked up a fiber on the ground and tied it to a corner of the paper to make a kite and ran with it and watched it move in the air. Another child held it up against the light and pointed towards leaves in the trees. Another held it close to her face to feel the texture and the scent of the paper. I was the only one drawing. There was one thing in common though: each one of us appreciated the surface, the texture, the smell, and each one responded to it in a personal way.

You have seen handmade paper. It is unique, it does not have straight edges, and depending on the fibers used, the surface will have a particular texture. What do you do when you see handmade paper? You look at it; you look at it against the light. That’s how people who make handmade paper assess the quality of it. I could see that the children had never seen handmade paper, and they started talking about it, pointing to leaves and then to fibers in the paper and then holding it up against the light to look at it. And I realize that before me are master papermakers, but they don’t know it yet. Every child had a different reaction to paper, and it was clear to me that I was seeing papermakers in front of me, master papermakers.

**TF: Were you a papermaker yourself?**
LAB: At the time I did not have much papermaking experience. I had seen and worked with handmade amate paper in Mexico, and had seen the process also in Pondicherry, India. I worked with these papers regularly, but I had next to no experience, especially in those conditions of extreme humidity sometimes as high as 95%, no electricity, no equipment such as Hollander beaters, no studio with controlled humidity, vats, hydraulic press, stoves for cooking the fibers, or running water, etc. The lack of such resources in the Amazon relates our experience to ancestral papermaking techniques from Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, etc., with the difference that at the time there had been no extensive research on tropical fibers from the Amazon. There was little to no information on making paper in such conditions, so we proceeded through trial and error. I began to explore the fibers that the children had been pointing to, and the harvested fibers that were used traditionally by the community. I had to test every fiber around. The community became very involved and interested in the results. They brought me fibers and we tested them out together.

Our first experiment was a failure. But we learned quickly with the help of the Dieu Donné paper studio in New York, which became our de facto project advisor. I would take samples of our paper, fibers and my detailed reports of the process for their experts to review, and they would make recommendations that I would take back to the community on my return. We started to soak fibers in the river, which required several months because this process will begin to breakdown the fibers. We utilized other methods as well. The project’s goal was to produce high quality paper made in the community that would be used for making books. Making it required that we develop a process that would be successful in these conditions, and we developed a specific process for each fiber. As a result of this research and experimentation, now there is a big fiber log reference book (I made two copies), on tropical fibers of the Amazon and how they respond to traditional papermaking. I donated one book to the Dieu Donné reference library and the other to the library of the Instituto de Estudios Avanzados IDEA in Venezuela.

TF: And how did the paper making evolve into storytelling and bookmaking?

LAB: When the Ortiz family responded to my interest in learning how to build a canoe by asking me the question: “If we teach you how to build a canoe, what can you teach us in return?” it allowed me to propose a paper and bookmaking project. I said:

“I can teach you how to make your own notebooks for your school, and you can write your own history in your
own words. I have seen several anthropologists in these areas all writing books about your communities, I have seen their books in libraries and bookstores, and I have read many of them. I have seen you in their books; I have been in your homes and have not seen a copy of any of those books, but most importantly I have not seen a single book by you. You know how to read and write. So why don’t you write your story, your own history? I can help you. And we don’t need to bring anything new to accomplish this, we can use the materials that you have around you and repurpose the technology that you already utilize. We will find ways to interpret them and reconfigure them, and you can make handmade paper here using natural fibers and also recycling trash that is produced by the missions. You can be an example to follow. You can make your own books right here, right now. And you choose what you want to preserve, to pass on.”

My proposal was accepted by the community and by the institutions that control the area. I began to work with several different communities: Yanomami, Ye´Kuana and Piaroa. As we began to work together, the project grew and evolved. The Yanomami Owë Mamotima project and community decided to write their own story of Shapono, which is part of the traditions and knowledge that are passed on orally. Shapono relates the way people build their homes today follows the teachings of Omawë and Yoawë, two god brothers who taught the Yanomami how to build their first Shapono (communal home). The project participants decided to capture this onto paper by interviewing the Shaman, then worked to organize it into written form, and held workshops open to the whole community to illustrate the book.

The first book made by the Yanomami Owë Mamotima papermaking project received the Best Book of the Year award by Venezuela’s Centro Nacional del Libro. After Shapono received this important award, I consulted experts on ink, libraries, books, bindings, conservation, and so on. They recommended that we make an edition of the book. Today Yanomami books are part of important collections such as the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library, among others. Each community has directed their project which continue to this day.

TF: What was the impact of the award on the community?
LAB: The award was very important for the Yanomami people because up to that point, they had very little visibility in comparison with other indigenous populations of Venezuela. They had very few rights, and even within the missions that were there to serve them, mostly they were not treated with respect. This project and the award their first book received brought about national recognition and became a vehicle to reaffirm and value Yanomami traditional knowledge as active and contemporary in our society.

This recognition empowered the community to become more active politically and to defend their rights. One example is Sheroanawe, the Yanomami Owë Mamotima project leader, who at the time was called Juan Bosco. Many of the Yanomami have names that were given to them by the missionaries, and once the names are registered on their government issued cards they can never be changed. Sheroanawe felt great shame in having his ID card read Juan Bosco. It was not his name. His name is Sheroanawe, which he has reclaimed. I feel that having received public recognition of their work and culture through this award helped bring about changes that the Yanomami themselves were propelling.

TF: And the bookmaking project continued without you...

LAB: Sheroanawe and the community have continued making books - extraordinary, exquisite books, not big editions, focusing on different traditional stories, and exploring pigments, fibers, and book structures. All the books are about their history. As I mentioned, the first is about how the Yanomami first learned how to build their traditional circular communal home, the Shapono. Another book is about how the Yanomami people obtained fire. When Sheroanawe talks to us about the content of these books, he says:

“This all happened. This is all true. People say its fiction or that it is a myth, but it isn’t. It all happened exactly this way, this is our history.”

Sheroanawe continues to lead the project and has been invited to residencies and to give workshops in the United States at Columbia College Chicago; in Mexico at La Esmeralda Escuela Nacional de Escultura, Pintura y Grabado; and at La Curtiduría in Oaxaca; in Colombia, and many others. He also has a larger project - He wants to create a school in his community that will bring together keepers of traditional crafts and knowledge of his culture so that it can easily be shared with the younger members of the community. Having traveled has given him a wider perspective and he sees that traditional knowledge is not being past down as before. It is in danger of getting lost
and he wants to do what he can so these important skills and traditions are not abandoned. For him this is urgent.

**TF:** You stayed close to Venezuela for your next social interventions, which took place in Trinidad starting in 2001. Could you discuss your two projects there—in Grande Rivière and then Port-of-Spain?

**LAB:** I first traveled to Trinidad and Tobago in 2001 when I was invited to Trinidad by Caribbean Contemporary Arts CCA7 for an artist residency in Grand Rivière, a small community on the north of the island. The village is next to the last town where the road ends. At the time, very few people visited. It's a rural community and has the largest population of leatherback turtles that go and lay their eggs on their beaches. That is pretty amazing. In other places, the population is diminishing because of poaching and the illegal market for turtle eggs. It was like that in Grand Rivière as well. The turtles were on the verge of extinction, but the community organized and created a system of volunteers to patrol the beach and to take care of the turtles as they laid their eggs, which is when they are most vulnerable. During hatching season, after the hatchlings are born they will follow the moon to swim into the ocean, but when there are clouds covering the light of the moon, they will go towards the street light. There is one street light in Grand River because it's a very small place. So the volunteers would keep watch during hatching season and if any of them became disoriented, they would take them gently back so that they could follow the light of the moon and safely swim into the ocean. This collective community effort was very successful in reversing the trend towards extinction of the leatherback turtles. Over a period of a few years, they could see the impact of their actions, and scientists corroborated the growth of the leatherback population. This spirit of group participation, working towards a shared goal and seeing the success of their actions as the turtle population returned was proof that with community organization significant changes are possible. And through this process of all ages and all genders working together for the protection of the environment, also generating a spirit of work, and love, for the environment, community and neighbors. It was a source of great pride and one that people wanted to share with visitors as well.

When I arrived here as part of the art residency, I was in heaven. This community is sensitive and aware of the impact of what they do. I learned a lot from being there. I found out that their school did not have an art program, and I resolved to act fast and proposed a handmade papermaking project. The kids learned very quickly and were immediately testing different fibers and even making books by themselves. Almost immediately they did not need me, they said, “Yeah OK, we got it”, and took off running with it. They created their own logo, which is their beloved
turtle. I think it also symbolizes the community. It signifies beauty, nature, environment, and their dedication to preserving it. In the local school they began to recycle paper waste from the school. They also were active making natural fiber paper. I've never seen anything like it. The kids would just go home and make more paper, find ways to do it, and come back and bring me samples. Amazing. Really beautiful.

**TF: And you eventually made your way back to the capital city of Port-of-Spain.**

**LAB: While we were working on the project in Grand Rivière I wanted to expand my work to the urban areas of Trinidad and learn from the rich Carnival traditions practiced there. I had initially intended to work with Peter Minshall, a brilliant carnival designer for whom I have great admiration, but life took me in a different direction. Through a friend of CCA7, I was introduced to Dragon, the founder and director of Keylemanjahro School of Arts and Culture in the neighborhood of Cocorite in Port-of-Spain. Dragon has set up on the patio of his house a place where the youth from his community could learn the art of stilt dancing after school. This is a community project that serves his neighborhood and is open and free-of-charge for all kids. The hope is to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble while engaging in the cultural tradition of stilt dancing as it was passed down from West Africa to the West Indies, with the objective of having the group participate in the annual Junior Carnival Parade (pg. 45). The group worked with little to no resources and exclusively with the help of parents in the neighborhood. I was immediately attracted to the project, both for its social impact and the cultural tradition it promoted, and felt that we could initiate a collaboration in which each could bring forth our skills, exchange knowledge and enrich each other's practice. I asked Dragon if he would accept me as a volunteer, and he agreed. I worked with Keylemanjahro for 5 years alongside the kids and parents creating costuming and thematic development for their Carnival presentations. This collaboration made a great impact on both of our lives and work, and to this day I continue to work with stilt dancers.
When I began to work with Dragon and the Keylemanjahro school, I felt that through my work as an artist I could help to strengthen several things that I thought were important. At first, I was only assisting the group with whatever Dragon needed, considering that it was important to first get to know the group well, their practice, the group dynamics, and their tradition. My challenge was how to find a place, a connection, a bridge, that could strengthen the meaning of what they do to support and further their practice. I felt that if they recognized the importance and legacy of their tradition, of where it comes from, and recognize that they are holders of an honor that has come from an important source, they would feel a greater and deeper connection and not abandon it. We don’t all need to stilt dance. I don’t stilt dance. But we need it - we need it alive in our world. It is a sacred tradition and it is important. Stilt dancing is practiced in Latin America, Mexico, and many parts of the world. There are images of priests and priestesses on stilts on Pre-Columbian pottery. It was also practiced in West Africa, and it still is, as something sacred. I also felt that this practice could be a platform for education.

In the past, the group participated in carnival with the same “costume,” which was actually house paint covering their bodies. It is toxic for your skin, but it was what they had access to. Although it presents a striking, powerful image, it was unhealthy for the kids. Another problem was that it was the same presentation every year, which excluded them from both challenging themselves as stilt dancers and from competing for character awards. I put forth the idea that through costuming and thematic development we could learn about the environment and other cultures. I felt it was a perfect place to creatively explore these topics without the kids feeling burdened and could enjoy themselves as they learned something new. Dragon and I would discuss possible themes and design of characters for the kids to portray and compete. The awards not only bring money; they also bring prestige.

**TF:** And that project has continued in New York? And later Mexico...

**LAB:** I always understood that working with Keylemanjahro was for a limited time. The experience was mutually enriching, but it was also necessary for me to work close to home. Around this time, my gallery in New York invited me to have a solo exhibition. I proposed that we turn the gallery into a workshop for kids and teens and apply what I had learned in Trinidad and to show some of the work I had made there. They liked the idea. Next I had to find partners and collaborators. I had heard about the Brooklyn Jumbies, a group of stilt dancers from the West Indies and West Africa, and approached them with a project in which we would have weeknight workshops in the Chelsea gallery and the street to train young stilt dancers and prepare a presentation for the group for a street performance.
on 24th Street in Chelsea, and then for the West Indian American Junior Carnival Parade. The project was titled *Jumbie Camp*, and it was what launched my collaboration and relationship with the Brooklyn Jumbies, which continues to this day. To date, we have presented a number of projects together such as *Intervention: Wall Street*, 2011 (pgs. 42-43) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGvlVFzQ79s); *Intervention: Indigo*, 2015 (pg. 46) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-m0wLE7dSbY), performed at MoMA in 2007; and *What-Lives-Beneath* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs72qGXl3GU), performed in Kingston, Jamaica in 2016.

From the start, the Brooklyn Jumbies and I decided we were going to create spontaneous interventions with a message to address social issues that we felt were important, but also to offer a moment of surprise within a familiar space. So we started to do these small interventions in SoHo, Chinatown, and in Chelsea. At the same time, we were doing extensive outreach programs in different parts of the country, especially in communities or areas that are populated by Mexican descendants and African-Americans. These outreach community projects made their way into museums. This was also important, for we were bringing to the museum new audiences as performers.

**TF:** Tell me about *Intervention: Wall Street*.

**LAB:** *Intervention: Wall Street* (pgs. 42-43) was created in response to the economic crisis that impacted the whole world. In the performance, which took place in the financial district of New York, giant men in business suits, Moko Jumbies and I, small and without stilts, walk towards Wall Street handing out gold-covered chocolate coins. The back of the coins had the word Mexico on it. We are working with a layering of symbols and metaphors integrated into a piece that involves performance, procession, and protest. The giants of Wall Street, and me - a very small woman, symbolized the lack of opportunities and the proportion of women in corporate America in relation to men. It asks, what does it mean to be a giant? What makes someone a giant and what responsibility does that carry? But it was also about sharing, about gold extracted from Latin America and Africa.
TF: How did the exchange with the zancudos in Mexico come about?

LAB: I have been very interested in the concept of building bridges, and as I was working with stilt dancers I felt that this practice, which I consider to be of great cultural value and beauty, was a vehicle for this. I wanted to work with traditional stilt dancers from my country, who at the time were not very well known. In 2008 I traveled with one of the Brooklyn Jumbies to meet with the Zancudos de Zaachila. That initial meeting was very positive and resulted in several years of collaboration between the Zancudos de Zaachila, the Brooklyn Jumbies, and me (pg. 47). By 2011 I invited other traditional crafts makers and artisans from Oaxaca, Chiapas, and other Mexican states to be a part of the project.

TF: Could you speak about your individual performances and the role of performance in your art more broadly?

LAB: My interest is to integrate into my work the various traditions and customs that surround us and with an artistic lens insert them into a familiar space. Stilt dancing for me combines many things. To start, we are working with larger-than-life characters that have the possibility of capturing our attention. The movements of a dancer towering over us expand in space. All movements are accentuated and can extend themselves through their use of textiles and different materials. This is where costuming is essential to the performance’s visuals and message. Stilt dancing brings forth numerous ways of performing that include dance, procession, performance art, ritual, music, costuming, and it is also a vehicle for communicating a message through contemporary art. My performance work brings together these different forms and, depending on the narrative, can integrate protest into the unfolding of the performative work. My role as a performer is to be the link between the spectator and the stilt dancer, which I believe brings audiences closer to the experience.

TF: In the past, our understanding of art has been structured by different dichotomies: form/content, self/other, abstraction/representation, local/global, center/periphery, but in your use of the descriptor “trans,” as in transcommunality or transdisciplinary, you suggest other possible means of understanding and connecting.
Could you speak to your use of this term? Are binaries ever productive?

LAB: My hope is that through these concepts, we are able to work without the limitations, borders, and lines that structure dichotomies. Lines are usually drawn to divide and set boundaries. My approach is to bring together diverse perspectives and traditions where each one maintains their individual knowledge while at the same time exchanging and sharing diverse ways of seeing through our work together. Also, I aim for that moment when the spectator and the participants see and experience the totality of the work without disengaging the subject matter from the way it is presented. For example, in Intervention: Wall Street (pgs. 42-43), there comes a point where it is absolutely clear that through stilt dancing we are addressing the giants of Wall Street, but there is no effort in perceiving the message. They are intertwined. The metaphor in this case works off of all the layers of meaning embedded and the form through which it is expressed.

TF: Religion and spirituality play a large role in your early work. Could you speak to that? Do you consider these themes to be as prevalent now as they were then?

LAB: I have always been very interested in religious iconography and the ways in which it has been used to communicate the values and interests of religion. Growing up in Mexico, a predominantly Catholic country, I was surrounded by these images and from early on I found them to be both intriguing and disturbing. I felt there were many contradictions, and as a child I was both attracted to the majesty of religious ceremonies and tormented by their blatant display and use of symbols of wealth. The discourse did not match what I was seeing or hearing. Extreme poverty surrounded us in our everyday lives; the messages communicated were about generosity and helping those in need but the contrasts in seeing luxuriously robed priests standing high above us in front of gold altars while old women in tattered clothes and children were begging at the door of the church was and is very problematic.

Laura Anderson Barbata, *I am not worthy of you to come to me, but a word of yours will suffice to heal my soul*, from "In the Order of Chaos", 1996
In the body of work resulting from my experiences in the Amazon of Venezuela (series such as *In The Order of Chaos* and *Terra Incognita*, for example) I was interested in taking a critical position on how religious iconography has been (and still is) utilized in conversion methods, and the impact it has on cultural narratives. Today, as I work with traditional stilt dancers, it is important for me to respect the symbolism and values that are embedded into this practice. Traditional Moko Jumbies are spiritual beings whose purpose in West African communities is to protect their villages against evil or misfortune. We cannot look passed the social role of the Moko Jumbie stilt dancer, and the metaphor is quite clear: to see the world from an elevated perspective. For me it is very important to always honor the historical function and cultural importance of a Moko Jum bie and to integrate that purpose into the work. So yes, in this way, my work continues to have spiritual concerns.

**TF:** Social practice as an accepted form of art making is common now, but, as you know, one of my research interests is to trace its historical roots in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. How do you define social practice? When did you become aware of the possibility of social practice as a “medium”?

**LAB:** I mentioned how in 1992 I asked the Ye´Kuana community of the Venezulean Amazon to teach me to build a canoe. The collaborative process made a very strong impression on me. As my work evolved and the scope of my projects grew to encompass stilt dancing communities of Trinidad and Tobago, West Africa, Brooklyn and Mexico, I began to work in public spaces, combining performance, procession, dance, carnival arts, music, costuming, movement and protest, maintaining the same principles of reciprocity, exchange and collaboration.

**TF:** Is teaching for you a form of social practice? What is your approach to teaching?
LAB: One of the key tenets of my practice is reciprocity. My methodology combines an intuitive exploratory approach with a strong focus on listening. This means that I want to receive information through all my senses as well as intellectually and to find ways in which we can establish relationships built on the principles of reciprocity. So it is important for me to integrate conversations with collaborators and participants in every step of the process. In teaching, these principles for me are central. The students and I are in a reciprocal relationship of exchange of knowledge: each one empowered by their own perspective is enriched by sharing it with the group, and collectively we initiate an interactive learning process that involves research, exploration, and listening. I do believe it is a form of social practice, for I believe that this methodology is also a responsible way to approach our life, our communities, our environment, and our role in bringing forward shared objectives.

TF: It seems to me that your work and social practice more broadly redefines “representation” in relation to art. How would you define “representation” as it relates to your projects? Do you consider your art political?

LAB: Representation can be approached from different angles, for one, as you can see in my work, projects involve other people and artists who bring with them diverse ways of knowing and understanding. The materialization of an idea is directly related to representation, but also on a cultural level I am working with representation, or re-presentation.

My work is political, and because I am a woman, everything I do is political. In the Yanomami Owë Mamotima project, for example, we took paper trash generated by the missions and converted it into cards with images produced by the Yanomami participants and then sold them back to the missions. The gesture is both overtly political and environmental. Traditionally, the local communities produce no trash, and the relatively recent presence of the missions that produce trash is an environmental problem (which can also be seen as a metaphor of the impact they have on the communities where they are stationed). As the local community makes these products and creates revenue for themselves, they are also instructing the missions on the proper approach to the environment and the responsibility with which they should respond to their impact.

Another aspect that is political is the fact that missions teach the local communities how to read and write. They are open to having researchers live in the communities and document their traditions, history and customs, who then publish books on said communities. Yet they have neglected to teach the local community how to respond to outsiders writing their history and have made them dependent on books for their schools and for conversion
purposes. All books for use in the community are written by outsiders and produced outside. As the Yanomami Owë Mamotima project leaders organized to create their own books, utilizing the resources available: fibers, adapted traditional technology and iconography, they involve the elders, the shaman, the youth who have learned to write, skilled artists, women and men, to contribute to creating a book that is entirely made by the project. This is a powerful political stance on self-representation and cultural reaffirmation. It does not deny the value in academic research, but balances the dialogue, and in doing so, generates an exchange of knowledge where all parts are important contributors. To have reached this point, where the community now is able to publish for themselves, required that the project from the start involve regular community meetings in which the work and process was shared, where we set goals collectively, shared and distributed tasks. We collectively evaluated findings, reviewed goals, and set objectives.

The first book produced by the Yanomami Owë Mamotima project, as you know, received the award for Best Book of the Year and this recognition help to bring greater visibility to the community and also to the individuals working in the project. This project is many things, including political and also approaches the question you ask concerning representation.

TF: What are your current projects?

LAB: I am working on a number of projects. I designed and produced the costumes for the opera Florencia en el Amazonas, by Daniel Catán, which just premiered in Mexico. One very exciting project is with TBA21 The Current, coordinated by Thyssen-Bornemisza Contemporary Art, in which scientists and artists are brought together to address the urgent issues of climate change and the oceans. This project is in its first year and my involvement will be for three years. I will be creating new works in the form of performances and wearable sculptures which are still in progress. My recent project in Jamaica What-Lives-Beneath, mentioned earlier, was part of this initiative.

I am also continuing my work on the Julia Pastrana project (pgs. 31-36). Julia Pastrana was an indigenous woman from Mexico who was born in 1834. She was a mezzo-soprano singer and a dancer. She had a condition called hypertrichosis lanuguinosa and hyperplasia gingival, which means that her face and body were covered with hair and her jaw was overdeveloped. Because of her condition, she was exhibited as kind of side-show attraction during her life. She married her manager and became pregnant. She tragically died in childbirth. After her death
she was embalmed along with her infant son, who suffered the same condition as his mother and died 36 hours after he was born. The commerce, exploitation and exhibition of Pastrana´s body continued after her death for over 130 years, and I fought for a decade for her body to be removed from the Scheiner Collection in Oslo so that she could be repatriated to Mexico and buried. My interest was to also to change the language utilized around her, so that she could regain her dignity and the rights she had been denied during her lifetime and after her death. You may read more about this project at: www.lauraandersonbarbata.com/work/mx-lab/julia-pastrana/1.php. Now, I am working further on the topics related to her story: the injustices that she lived and how these are still relevant today. I am working on a performance piece presented as a work-in-progress that is continually evolving that now includes the collaboration with artist Fem Appeal and on a series of zines (pgs. 32-33) created in collaboration with artist Erik Tlaseca that address different topics related to Julia Pastrana such as: repatriation of human remains, museum ethics, exhibition practices, the objectification of people and women, human trafficking, beauty and the commercialization of women’s bodies, feminism, animal rights, love, circus arts, etc. I am also working on an illustrated art book with contributions from scientists, scholars and art historians that address the subject of Julia Pastrana from different perspectives. Among the authors are Grant Kester, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Bess Lovejoy and Nicholas Marquez-Grant.

The return of Julia Pastrana to her native country for her burial sought to restore her human dignity in its totality so she may occupy her due place in history and in the collective memory of Mexico. Paradoxically, the body of Julia Pastrana, that for so long was nothing more than an exhibition object, returned to her homeland as the vehicle through which we can remember and look to the past so as to deconstruct Western political, social, and historical beliefs that nurtured previous worldviews. Through this exercise of memory, we can visualize what is possible and the actions needed for social transformation. Her return to Mexico dignifies all life, all people who are afflicted with conditions that society has unjustly separated from the rest, all of humanity. As a woman and artist, I consider it my duty to address injustice and promote the ethical treatment of all people, and especially women. We can do this in our everyday lives and also through our work. I think that this book will further that conversation while allowing us to explore how we can collectively work to correct injustices that as a society we are still carrying from the past.

Laura Anderson Barbata, La Extraordinaria Historia de Julia Pastrana, 2017, Performance in collaboration with Fem Appeal
ARTIST STATEMENT

I am a transdisciplinary artist born in Mexico (based in New York from 1993) working primarily in socially engaged projects since 1992. My practice began in the studio where I created works on paper that addressed the environment as a subject and a metaphor of the inner self. These concerns pushed me outside of the studio to work directly with others and my environment. It was at this time that I began working in the Amazon Rainforest. I wanted to integrate into my practice communal work methodologies activated by an exchange of knowledge that benefits all parts and developed the core of my working methodology: reciprocity, which is the balanced exchange of knowledge as the foundation for sustainable collaborative art-centered projects.

My work includes projects in the Amazon that repurpose traditional technology to produce hand-made paper and books with illustrated content guided by the shaman involving all genders and generations; collaborations with artisans and traditional stilt dancers from the West Indies, New York and Mexico that blend performance, procession, costuming, dance, craft, carnival and protest for artistic interventions; to a project that centers on activating restorative memory and dignity. For this transnational project I enlisted the collaboration of universities, government institutions, forensic anthropologists, social psychologists, scholars, activists, and artists and was successful in repatriating Julia Pastrana from Norway to Mexico for a dignified burial after 153 years of being exhibited (while she was alive and after her death in an embalmed state). Additional works related address feminism, objectification, human trafficking, gender, indigenous rights and the body, through animation, artist books, works on paper, and performance.

Currently my work seeks to further the expectations of socially-engaged art by moving across disciplines by involving unlikely collaborators (archives, scientists, activists, rock stars, burlesque performers, street dancers, theater companies, storytellers, artisans), developing works such as an evolving multidisciplinary
performance with various performers, animation, a collection of zine publications with artist contributions, works on paper, photography and sculptural works that directly address issues of human rights and feminism by integrating critical voices from popular culture, burlesque, and performance to insert itself both inside and outside the art world.

While my projects are socially engaged, they also integrate a strong studio practice for their execution. My challenge-and joy-is to activate collectively the shared objectives of the project and to materialize its ideals through art.

Laura Anderson Barbata, 2017
Julia Pastrana, (1834-1860) was an Indigenous woman born in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico. She died at the age of 26, and was a gifted singer who performed in English, Spanish and French. Julia had a mezzo-soprano voice, played the guitar and was a graceful dancer. She was known to love people and to give generously to charity. She performed for audiences all over Europe and the United States. Julia Pastrana suffered from one of the most extreme cases of congenital generalized hypertrichosis lanuginosa on record and from severe gingival hyperplasia. Due to her condition, her face and body were covered with thick hair and her jaw was disproportionately large. After her death, her body was embalmed and was exhibited extensively throughout Europe and the United States for over 100 years and later kept at the Schreiner Collection in the University of Oslo, Norway.

“In response to Julia Pastrana, I initiated research, correspondence with University Scholars and The National Committee for Ethical Evaluation of Research on Human Remains in Oslo, Norway to present the case of Julia Pastrana before the committee for re-evaluation, with the objective of having her body be returned to Mexico for burial. After nearly 10 years of efforts, in February 2013, at the University of Olso, Norway, custody of Julia Pastrana was transferred to Mexican officials; I represented Mexico. Julia Pastrana’s burial took place on the 12th of February in Sinaloa de Leyva, Mexico.”
- Laura Anderson Barbata

Additional projects are in the development stages to commemorate, explore and address the issues related to her story. Among the projects are a documentary, a book and a series of transdisciplinary works in collaboration with international musicians and artists.

Proyecto apoyado por el el Sistema Nacional de Creadores, FONCA-CONACULTA, México
Julia Pastrana Fanzines, 2016
(Editions 1 and 2)
Julia Pastrana Fanzine, 2016
Edition 2 (detail)
Four Julias, 2016
Digital prints, 20 x 16 inches each
Lent and Julia, 2016
Digital print, 22 x 17 inches
Julia y Laura, 2013
Digital print, 17 x 22.5 inches
Julia Pastrana. 152 años, 2010
Recycled textiles on wood,
96 x 44 x 37 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group

Julia Pastrana pensando en Daphne, 2010
Recycled textiles and silk,
93 x 28 x 24 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group
IMAGES ▪ Lenticular Prints

**Batimamselle**, 2007
24-layer lenticular print on aluminum, 29 x 29 inches
Collaborator: Stefan Falke
*Cheeseball Queen*, 2007
24-layer lenticular print on aluminum, 26 x 40 inches
Collaborator: Stefan Falke
Ria as Scarlet Ibis Escarlata, 2007
24-layer lenticular print on aluminum, 27 x 39.5 inches
Collaborator: Stefan Falke
IMAGES • Publication and Video

Transcommunality
Interventions and Collaborations in Stilt Dancing Communities
© Turner, 2012

Artist Interview, 2014
Excerpt-8:07 minutes
©BK Live - Bric House Studios
Intervention: Wall Street was conceived as a response to the dire economic crisis that became most evident in 2008 which today afflicts not only Americans but has impacted 99% of the global population. Financial speculation and banking abuses by the largest and most powerful institutions on Wall Street have brought misery to individuals, institutions and to entire countries. In the public performance, Laura Anderson Barbata and the Brooklyn Jumbies brought to the Financial District of New York a world-wide practice to remind viewers of the global impact of this crisis and the urgent need to elevate and change the values and practices of the New York Financial Industry.

Intervention: Wall Street, 2011
Seven suits and metal bases, dimensions variable
Collaborator: Manuela Morales
Intervention: Wall Street, 2011
Video excerpt of performance with seven suits during Occupy Wall Street Protests in 2011, 2:19 minutes
Collaborators: Brooklyn Jumbies
Reina Nyame, 2005-07
Cotton fabric, wood, cane, glass, fiberglass rods, mesh, decorative trim, mirrors, papier-mâché, and paint, 123 x 82 inches
Collaborator: Ronald Guy James
MJ05 Osebo’s Drum, 2005
Video excerpt of performance with Reina Nyame sculpture during Carnival 2005 in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies, 2:34 minutes
Collaborators: Keylemanjahro School of Arts, Moko Jumbies
Intervention: Indigo was conceived as a response to the crisis impacting the lives of people of color living in this country. There is an obligation for a public call to action – one that draws attention to the urgent need to elevate and change the values and practices of the police and the systems that support these views. Indigo is one of the oldest natural plant based dyes, used all over the world and ritually embedded with symbolism and spirituality; power and nobility. A tradition of the Dogon people- cloths are dipped in dye vats repeatedly over a period of days or weeks, imbuing rich color. The color historically represents absolute truth, wisdom, justice, and responsibility.
The traditional function of the Moko Jumbie stilt dancers (portrayed by the Brooklyn Jumbies) is to serve and protect their communities. On the other side of the Atlantic, in Oaxaca, Mexico, the Zancudos (stilt dancers) perform annually to call upon the power of their saints to receive protection, blessings, and miracles. In this work these two groups of stilt dancers come together to perform during the San Pedro Festivities.

**Performance for San Pedro Festivities, 2011**
(Zaachila, Oaxaca), Excerpt-2:29 minutes
Collaborators: Brooklyn Jumbies, Zancudos de Zaachila
IMAGES • Stilts

**Máscaras**, 2012
Carved and painted wood stilts, approx. 70 x 9 x 9 inches
Collaborator: Don José Mendoza

**Puerco espín**, 2012
Carved and painted wood stilts, approx. 70 x 9 x 9 inches
Collaborator: Don José Mendoza
**Velas de Concha**, 2012
Wax flowers and wood stilts, approx. 50 x 9 x 9 inches
Collaborator: Don José Mendoza

**Cactus**, 2012
Carved and painted wood stilts, approx. 70 x 9 x 9 inches
Collaborator: Don José Mendoza
La Reina de la Pita, 2013
Cotton, suede, agave fiber, thread, embroidery, and macramé, 82 x 43 x 43 inches
Collaborators: Miriam Campos, Abigail Mendoza, Ana Paula Fuentes, Martine Le Garrec

La Princesa de la Pita, 2013
Cotton, suede, agave fiber, thread embroidery, macramé, and palm leaf, 41 x 21 x 11 inches
Collaborators: Miriam Campos, Abigail Mendoza, Ana Paula Fuentes, Martine Le Garrec
Happy Suit, 2008
Recycled textiles and thread, 128 x 85 x 6 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group
**Young Woman**, 2008  
Recycled textiles, yarn, string, plastic market bag, wood, and nails, 84 x 26 x 16 inches  
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group

**Young Tree**, 2008  
Recycled textiles, glass fiber rods, and thread, 93 x 28 x 24 inches  
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group
**Bobo Oule**, 2006-07
Synthetic grass trim over mesh, fiberglass and aluminum rods, feathers, pants, and shoes, 120 x 32 x 32 inches

**Nasolo Leader**, 2006
Cotton, feathers, and sneakers, 77 x 32 x 17 inches
Collaborator: Ronald Guy James
**EXHIBITION CHECKLIST**

Images courtesy of the artist.

*The Repatriation of Julia Pastrana*
(ONGOING PROJECT)

*Julia Pastrana - In Memoriam*

*Julia Pastrana Fanzines*, 2016
(Editions 1 and 2)

*Four Julias*, 2016
Digital prints, 20 x 16 inches each

*Lent and Julia*, 2016
Digital print, 22 x 17 inches

*Julia y Laura*, 2013
Digital print, 17 x 22.5 inches

*Julia Pastrana.152 años*, 2010
Recycled textiles on wood, 96 x 44 x 37 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group

*Julia Pastrana pensando en Daphne*, 2010
Recycled textiles and silk, 93 x 28 x 24 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group

**Lenticular Prints**

*Batimamselle*, 2007
24-layer lenticular print on aluminum, 29 x 29 inches
Collaborator: Stefan Falke

*Cheeseball Queen*, 2007
24-layer lenticular print on aluminum, 26 x 40 inches
Collaborator: Stefan Falke

*Ria as Scarlet Ibis Escarlata*, 2007
24-layer lenticular print on aluminum, 27 x 39.5 inches
Collaborator: Stefan Falke

**Publication**

*Laura Anderson Barbata: Transcommunality - Interventions and Collaborations in Stilt Dancing Communities*
© Turner, 2012

**Video**

*Artist Interview*, 2014
Excerpt-8:07 minutes, ©BK Live - Bric House Studios
Images courtesy of the artist.

**Sculptures with Performance Videos**

*Intervention: Wall Street*, 2011
Seven suits and metal bases, dimensions variable
Collaborator: Manuela Morales

*Intervention: Wall Street*, 2011
Video excerpt of performance with seven suits during Occupy Wall Street Protests in 2011, 2:19 minutes
Collaborators: Brooklyn Jumbies

*Reina Nyame*, 2005-07
Cotton fabric, wood, cane, glass, fiberglass rods, mesh, decorative trim, mirrors, papier-mâché, and paint, 123 x 82 inches
Collaborator: Ronald Guy James

*MJ05 Osebo’s Drum*, 2005
Video excerpt of performance with *Reina Nyame* sculpture during Carnival 2005 in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies, 2:34 minutes
Collaborators: Keylemanjahro School of Arts, Moko Jumbies

**Performance Videos**

*Intervention: Indigo*, 2015
5:12 minutes
Collaborators: Brooklyn Jumbies, Chris Walker, Jarana Beat

*Performance for San Pedro Festivities*, 2011
(Zaachila, Oaxaca), Excerpt-2:29 minutes
Collaborators: Brooklyn Jumbies, Zancudos de Zaachila

**Stilts**
(Leader: Don José Mendoza)

*Máscaras*, 2012
Carved and painted wood stilts, approx. 70 x 9 x 9 inches

*Puerco espín*, 2012
Carved and painted wood stilts, approx. 70 x 9 x 9 inches

*Velas de Concha*, 2012
Wax flowers and wood stilts, approx. 50 x 9 x 9 inches

*Cactus*, 2012
Carved and painted wood stilts, approx. 70 x 9 x 9 inches
**EXHIBITION CHECKLIST** Continued
Images courtesy of the artist.

**Sculptures**

*La Reina de la Pita*, 2013
Cotton, suede, agave fiber, thread, embroidery, and macramé, 82 x 43 x 43 inches
Collaborators: Miriam Campos, Abigail Mendoza, Ana Paula Fuentes, Martine Le Garrec

*La Princesa de la Pita*, 2013
Cotton, suede, agave fiber, thread embroidery, macramé, and palm leaf, 41 x 21 x 11 inches
Collaborators: Miriam Campos, Abigail Mendoza, Ana Paula Fuentes, Martine Le Garrec

*Happy Suit*, 2008
Recycled textiles and thread, 128 x 85 x 6 inches
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Recycled textiles, yarn, string, plastic market bag, wood, and nails, 84 x 26 x 16 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group

*Young Tree*, 2008
Recycled textiles, glass fiber rods, and thread
93 x 28 x 24 inches
Textiles courtesy of Victor Group

*Bobo Oule*, 2006-07
Synthetic grass trim over mesh, fiberglass and aluminum rods, feathers, pants, and shoes
120 x 32 x 32 inches

*Nasolo Leader*, 2006
Cotton, feathers, and sneakers, 77 x 32 x 17 inches
Collaborator: Ronald Guy James
LAURA ANDERSON BARBATA • CV
lauraandersonbarbata.com

Born in Mexico City, Mexico. Lives and works in Mexico City and Brooklyn, New York.

SELECTED AWARDS, GRANTS, & HONORS

2015-18 Miembro del Sistema Nacional para Creadores, Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, CONACULTA, México
2016 Artist in Residence, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA
Women in the Arts Award, Celebrating the Genius of Women, Orlando, FL
2015 The Current Fellow, Thyssen-Bornemisza Contemporary Art, Vienna, Austria
Honorary Fellow, Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies (LACIS), University of Wisconsin, Madison
Arts Institute Interdisciplinary Artist in Residence, University of Wisconsin, Madison
2013 Segundo Concurso de Fotografía Contemporánea de México, Photography Award, Fundación Mexicana de Cine y Artes, A.C., México
Selection Committee, Visual Arts Grants, Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte, FONCA-CONACULTA, México
Advisory Board, Museos Vivos, México
2012 Residency, Interdisciplinary Arts Department and Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper, IL
2011 Advisory Council, Artistic Dreams International, New York, NY
2010-13 Miembro del Sistema Nacional para Creadores, Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, CONACULTA, MX
2010 Robin Fund Residency, Center for Book & Paper / Interdisciplinary Arts Dept., Columbia College, Chicago, IL

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS & PERFORMANCES

2016 What-Lives-Beneath, TBA21 The Current Convening (performance in collaboration with Amina Blackwood-Meeks, Chris Walker, the Brooklyn Jumbies and the National Dance Company of Jamaica), Kingston, Jamaica
2016-12 Laura Anderson Barbata: Collaborations Beyond Borders (exhibition), Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series Galleries, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ; The Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Orlando, Florida; Helen Louise Textile Collection Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Madison; BRIC Art House, Brooklyn, New York; Centro de las Artes, Monterrey, NL; Museo de la Ciudad de México; Museo Textil de Oaxaca, Mexico
2015 *Intervention: Indigo* (public street performance in collaboration with Chris Walker, the Brooklyn Jumbies and Jarana Beat), Brooklyn, New York

2013 *Harlem Art Factory Festival* (public street performance in collaboration with the Brooklyn Jumbies), Harlem, New York

*La Repatriación de Julia Pastrana* (exhibition), Festival Internacional Cervantino, Museo Iconográfico del Quijote, Guanajuato

2012 *A Flower for Julia* (international call to send a flower to be placed on Julia’s grave the day of her burial in Mexico), Sinaloa de Leyva, México

2011 *Intervention: Wall Street* (public street performance in collaboration with the Brooklyn Jumbies), Financial District, New York

*Zancudos, Zanqueros en Zaachila* (public street performance in collaboration with the Brooklyn Jumbies and los Zancudos de Zaachila), Oaxaca, México

2010 *Among Tender Roots* (exhibition), Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts, IL

2009 *Jumbies Fort Worth!* (performance and outreach program in collaboration with the Brooklyn Jumbies and Amphibian Stage Productions), Fort Worth, TX

2008 *Jumbies!* (performance and outreach program in collaboration with the Brooklyn Jumbies and Amphibian Stage Productions), The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX

**SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

2016 *Day of the Dead* (concert in collaboration with Apparatjik, Concha Buika and Void), Bergen International Music Festival, Norway

*Ejercicios exploratorios II: Creadoras contemporáneas en la colección MACG*, Museo Alvar y Carrillo Gil, México City

2015 *The Quixotic Days and Errant Nights of the Knight Errant Don Quijote* (character design), Amphibian Stage Production, Fort Worth, TX

*Caribbean: Crossroads of the World*, Perez Art Museum, Miami, FL; El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY; Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY; Studio Museum Harlem, New York, NY

*Social Paper: Hand Papermaking in the Context of Socially Engaged Art*, Center for Book and Paper Arts, Columbia College Chicago, IL

*FOCO14*, Festival de las Artes ARC, Coquimbo, Chile
2012  
_X Bienal Monterrey, FEMSA_, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Monterrey, México  
_I invitational: Twenty Jurors_, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, Il  
_Second Generation_, Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, Il  

2011  
_Mujeres detrás de la lente: 100 años de creación fotográfica en México_, CECUT, Tijuana, México  

2010  
_AIO: Art in the Open Philadelphia_, Schuykill Banks Park, Philadelphia, PA  
_Ciudadanas_ (collaboration with the Museo de Mujeres Artistas Mexicanas), Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City  

2009  
_Hecho en casa: Una aproximación a las prácticas objetuales en el arte mexicano contemporáneo_, Museo de Arte Moderno. México City  
_The Muhheakantuk in Focus_, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY  
_The Art of Personal Adornment_, Inez and Milton Shaver Gallery, The Dahl Arts Center, Rapid City, SD  

2009-07  
_Cardinal Points (Puntos Cardinales): A Survey of Contemporary Latino and Latin American Art from the Sprint Nextel Art Collection_, Itinerant exhibition, USA  

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY  
Novozhenova, Sasha. _Art and Activism in Russia and Abroad_. Artchronika Contemporary Art, Moscow, 2012, pp. 87-94.  
Potter, Melissa. _Among Tender Roots: Laura Anderson Barbata_. Center for Book and Paper Arts at Columbia College Chicago, 2010.  

SELECTED TEACHING, LECTURES, & PANELS

2016
“Allies or Aliens: Collaborating Across Cultures,” Open Engagement, Oakland, CA
The Repatriation of Julia Pastrana: Transdisciplinary/Transnational Social Art Practice, Penn State University, University Park
Lo Común: ¿Empatía o Conflicto? Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado La Esmeralda, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, INBA, México City

2015
“Social Practice in and Around Latin America,” ASAP7: Arts and the Present, Greenville, SC
Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin, Madison

2012
Tutor and Juror, Jóvenes Creadores, FONCA, CONACULTA, Mexico
Community Art and Social Action, Teacher’s College at Columbia University, New York
Juror, Acquisition Awards, Premio Centenario, MACO, Fundación Cuervo, México City

2011
“Festival Ma(yo) en Oaxaca,” with los Zancudos de Zaachila y los Brooklyn Jumbies, Barrio de Jalatlaco, Secretaría de las Artes y Cultura del Estado de Oaxaca la Curtiduría Espacio Contemporáneo, Méx.
“Laura Anderson Barbata: Ética y Arte, Intercomunalidad y Refugiados. Jornadas de Reflexión en Torno al Día Mundial del Refugiado,” Coordinado por el Centro de Investigaciones de América Latina y el Caribe de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

2010-15
Associate Professor, Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado La Esmeralda, INBA, México City

2010
“Sin lo uno no hay lo otro,” TEDxDF, Teatro de la Ciudad, México City

2010
“In the Order of Chaos: XXI Century Living in the Amazon,” MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology-Fall 2010 Lecture Series: Give Me Shelter: Second Skin for Extreme Environments? Cambridge, MA
Art in the Social Realm, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY; Golden Auditorium, Columbia University, NY
Among Tender Roots, Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts, Chicago, IL
SELECTED ONGOING SOCIALLY ENGAGED PROJECTS

2009-2013  Art and Ethics, La Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado La Esmeralda, INBA
2005      The Repatriation of Julia Pastrana
2002      Moko Jumbies, Trinidad and Tobago, USA and Mexico
2002      Papeles Lacandones, Mexico
2001      GRAS, Grande Riviere, Trinidad, West Indies

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

American Express Company, México
Biblioteca Central Magna, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey, México
Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo, México, D.F.
Fundación Bozano-Simonsen, Río de Janeiro, Brazil
Fundación Cisneros, New York
Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, Oaxaca, México
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, México, D.F., México
Landesbank Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart, Germany
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Alvar Y Carmen T. Carillo Gil, México City
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Nuevo León, México
Museo de Arte Moderno, México City
Museo de Monterrey, Nuevo León, México
Museo de Arte Abstracto Manuel Felguerez, Zacatecas, México
Museo Jaureguía, Navarra, Spain
San Antonio Museum, San Antonio, TX
Sprint Nextel Art Collection, Overland Park, MO
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA
Universidad Autónoma de México, México D.F., México
CENTER FOR WOMEN IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

A university-wide unit reporting the Associate Vice President for Strategic Initiatives under the auspices of the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, and a consortium member of the Institute for Women’s Leadership, at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

The mission of the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities (CWAH) is to recognize, advance, and document the intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural contributions of diverse communities of women in the arts and humanities.

To accomplish this goal, CWAH engages in university and community partnerships to present exhibitions, classes, public programs, sponsored research, documentation and interdisciplinary projects encompassing the intersection of gender studies with the arts and humanities, and the creative and intellectual production of women in all arts and humanities fields across geographic, cultural, economic, and generational boundaries. CWAH serves university, local, national, and global audiences.

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Connie Tell, Curator and Administrative Director
Nicole Ianuzelli, Manager of Programs and Exhibitions
Leigh-Ayna Passamano, Program Coordinator and Web Administrator
Deborah Lee, Work-Study Assistant

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