

COLONIA DIGNIDAD: DYSTOPIC UTOPIA

MARIA VERONICA SAN MARTIN

Media: Installation with Kinetic metal sculpture/Artists' Book and metal box (30 x 30 inches extended), 4 channel audio piece using oral history archives from a member of Colonia Dignidad, 13.5 minutes, (translated into English and Spanish), 3 hour endurance performance (at the opening), 3 hour video of endurance performance, research documentation composed of: drawings, notes, photographs, prints, and xeroxes).

Colonia Dignidad (1961-1997) was an infamous yet 'secret' commune in southern Chile that was operated as a torture center by former German Nazi military officers and the Chilean DINA (National Intelligence Directorate) of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) and with the knowledge and collaboration of American intelligence agencies and government officials. Members and leadership of the Colonia Dignidad committed multiple crimes against humanity, including torture, execution, and child abuse. Today the various criminal cases remain primarily unprosecuted and unresolved, due to the lack of political will, unresolved issues of legal jurisdiction, statute of limitations, the death of most of the principal offenders and the questionable legal status of the Colonia Dignidad which had been recently re-incorporated as an autonomous agricultural production center and renamed Villa Baviera.

This sculpture, which I call a political abstraction, refers to this history through my performance of physically deconstructing and reconstructing symbols of power such as the swastika (originally an indigenous symbol of peace in both the Americas and Asia) the cross, and the double lightning strike letterform logo of the German Nazi party Schutzstaffel more commonly know by its initials the "SS".

All of these symbols are merged under the chakana symbol signifying the Andes cultures of the South Cone region. Spaces of segregation and repression can be spatially and conceptually reimaged through the architecture of bunkers during the Colonia Dignidad period. The physical morphing of the sculpture into various 'symbolic architectures' manifests both the intersectionality of history and ongoing relevance and resonance of the ideologies evoked by these symbols. This work is further activated through an immersive audio composition based on an archived oral recording made inside Colonia Dignidad in 1978, and found four years ago by the ex-colono Winfried Hempel. This composition includes discussions that range from religious practices to internal conversations, and from banal language to code language between agents in Peru, Germany, and Chile.

This project is supported by the Association of Memory and Human Rights of Colonia Dignidad (President- Margarita Romero), and is dedicated to the testimony of the ex-Colono and current lawyer of the case, Winfried Hempel.

Music: Diego Las Heras. **Transcription of archive audio to English:** Elisa Linn. **Translation to Spanish:** Lluís Alexandre Casanovas Blanco. **Sculpture fabrication:** Joshua Heintze. **Photography:** Catalina Riutort. **Video:** Marshall Weber. **Artwork & Performance:** Maria Veronica San Martin. © All rights reserved.

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