Title
History, Locality, and Art Worlds: A Case Study of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín Etla (CASA), Oaxaca, México

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

History, Locality, and Art Worlds:
A Case Study of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín Etla (CASA),
Oaxaca, México

by

María del Carmen Cebreros Urzaiz
Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance
University of California, Los Angeles, 2019
Professor David Delgado Shorter, Chair

This interdisciplinary case study portrays the Center for the Arts at San Agustín Etla (CASA). CASA constitutes a micro-universe—a system in scale—dedicated to art production, art education and professionalization, art display, and development of audiences. Established in the restored building of a Porfírian textile industry, in a semi-rural municipality in the central valleys of Oaxaca in Southern México, the center inaugurated in 2006. CASA results from private and public efforts galvanized by the artist Francisco Toledo (1940-2019), who campaigned to recuperate and restore the mill for public uses. In this center, negotiations of cultural, symbolic, artistic, and aesthetic values happen regularly. Such deliberations engage national and international cultural producers, artistic forms, and traditions, as well as the local population, the environment, and the history of the site.
This dissertation argues that the dynamism stimulated by the foundation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín plays an active mediating function in the configuration of a heterogeneous culture in which divergent lifeways coincide and coalesce without attempting to resolve or be reduced to a singular one. Art learning, art production, and art dissemination lay at the core of such dynamism. This case study examines how an arts center intercedes in the symbolic and material relationships between individuals, distinct communities, social institutions, and the territory. My investigation draws from thirty months of fieldwork at San Agustín Etla, extensive interviews with stakeholders, artists, and community members, along with archival research of institutional documents, public records, publications produced at CASA, exhibitions, as well as media and press coverage.

Each of the four chapters comprised in this study offers a distinct vantage point from which considering the Center for the Arts at San Agustín while also contextualizing it regarding broader historical, social, and cultural phenomena. The first chapter focuses on the cultural history of the site where CASA currently exists, and the process of conversion of a nineteen-century textile mill into an artistic and cultural institution. CASA’s case offers a framework to further ponder the global phenomenon of the revitalization of abandoned manufacturing centers and its adaptation as infrastructures for the cultural and creative industries. Chapter Two positions CASA in relation to other cultural institutions founded by the Juchitecan artist, activist, and philanthropist Francisco Toledo. The chapter links the goals of this arts center with the political, aesthetic, and epistemic concerns and convictions of his founder. The third chapter elaborates on the social and political organization of San Agustín, and the responses of Sanagustinians to the foundation of CASA. The fourth chapter features the voices of artists that
migrated to San Agustín and decided to establish their studios in this locale. The testimonies of these creators delineate the contours of local art worlds in San Agustín and Oaxaca.

This research demonstrates that, in order to understand an artistic institution, scholars need to analyze the surrounding spheres touched or disputed by those organizations that intend to expand public participation.
The dissertation of María del Carmen Cebreros Urzaiz is approved.

Anurima Banerji

Saloni Mathur

Nancy Marie Mithlo

David Delgado Shorter, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019
Para Jaime, por tu ilimitada confianza en mí

y por contagiarme, con tu trabajo, la curiosidad por el arte;

y para Cristina, mi madre, por tu gran sabiduría

y tu enorme deseo de conocimiento.

Dedico esta investigación al amor y admiración que siento por ustedes.
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(*) All the images by Carmen Cebreros Urzaiz unless otherwise stated.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASA</td>
<td>Center for the Arts at San Agustín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENART</td>
<td>National Center for the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENCROPAM</td>
<td>National Center of Conservation and Registrar of the Movable Artistic Patrimony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFE</td>
<td>Federal Commission of Electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFMAB</td>
<td>Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDI</td>
<td>Center of Research in Industrial Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COCEI</td>
<td>Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONACULTA</td>
<td>National Council for Culture and Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONACYT</td>
<td>National Council of Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGCS</td>
<td>General Direction of Social Communication of the National Autonomous University of México</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENAH</td>
<td>National School of Anthropology and History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAD</td>
<td>School of Fine Arts and Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FODEIM</td>
<td>Fund for the Development of Municipal Coordination for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FONCA</td>
<td>National Fund for Culture and Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FONATUR</td>
<td>National Fund for Tourism Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMOs</td>
<td>Genetically Modified Organisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAGO</td>
<td>Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INBA</td>
<td>National Institute of the Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INEGI</td>
<td>National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Informatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MACO</td>
<td>Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUAC</td>
<td>National University Museum of Contemporary Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUPO</td>
<td>Museum of Oaxacan Painters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO-OAX</td>
<td>Board Pro-Defense and Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Oaxaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAPEC</td>
<td>Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PADID</td>
<td>Program of Support for Teaching, Research, and Dissemination in the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Revolutionary Institutional Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEP</td>
<td>Federal Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UABJO</td>
<td>Autonomous University of Oaxaca “Benito Juárez”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCSS</td>
<td>Union of Scientists Committed with the Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAM</td>
<td>National Autonomous University of México</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
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May Your Eyes Stay Open 2017
Solo-show by Claudia López Terroso. Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca.

Sonora (Guest State) at the 4th Salón ACME 2016

The Endless Cycle of Idea and Action 2012
Group-show featuring ten Mexican emerging artists awarded the fellowship for artistic research and production of the Program for Contemporary Artists, BBVA Bancomer Foundation-Carrillo Gil Art Museum. Carrillo Gil Art Museum, México City; Ciudad Juárez Art Museum, Chihuahua; Nogales Art Museum, Sonora, México.

Curatorial Coordinator 2010-2012

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

EDITORIALLY REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS (Selection)


“Un recorrido por la XV Bienal Rufino Tamayo.” In Catálogo de la XV Bienal de Pintura Rufino Tamayo, México: Museo Rufino Tamayo-INBA.


CONFERENCES AND ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS (Selection)

“Criticism, Curating, and Research.” Diploma in Art Criticism (Monitoreo) at Cine Tonalá, Tijuana, Baja California, April 27.


“Barriers, Interpreters, and More.” Presentation of artwork by Mariana Tirado Martin. XXV Colloquium “Art and ‘Disability’: From the Norm to the Name,” Biblioteca Vasconcelos, CDMX, June 30.

“Three Features Portraying the Contemporary Artist’s Subjecthood.” 3rd Conference of Art and Education, Department of Fine Arts, Autonomous University of Baja California, Tijuana, México, April 24th.


“The Devotional Gaze and the Secular Gaze: Looking at Shiva as The Lord of Dance.” Symposium New Scholars, New Perspectives: Encounters with the Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, March 17.


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Category: Design and implementation of innovative programs of education in the arts to conduct the project Curating Summer Workshop 2018 at the Center for the Arts at San Agustín (CASA), Oaxaca, México.

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University of California Institute for México and the United States

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Fulbright-García Robles Scholarship 2012-15
INTRODUCTION

“But what do we really mean when we speak about ‘the town’?” Francisco Toledo rebutted while standing in front of the ex-factory’s iron chimney, *la caldera*, a vestige transformed into one of the icons of *CASA*, La Soledad Factory, and San Agustín Etla. He had just visited William Kentridge’s massive video-installation, “More Sweetly Play the Dance,” inaugurated at the center’s second-floor gallery only a few days before. I knew our conversation would be very brief, and his responses short. Toledo loathed speeches and explanations, and this encounter would not be an interview in the broad sense of the word. Pressed to choose one question encapsulating all the possible ones, I ask him, “Could you speak about your relationship with this town?” As he refuses my use of the term “town,” Toledo discusses his concerns about the controversies between San Agustín Etla’s municipal authorities and its Commission of Communal Goods. He mentions the negotiations of a private company with *SEMARNAT* (the Mexican Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources) to reactivate and expand the hydro-electric plant located a few miles up in the mountains. Apparently, this company is the same trying to construct another hydro-electric plant in the Chatino and Mixteca region, a project that violates the water rights of the native communities. Furthermore, among all these concerns, he addresses the arts center as a frail venture if the plans for the hydro-electric progress. The conversation happens while the Chinese photographer and artist in residency, Gao Bo, stands behind me all the time, shooting his camera in search of a portrait of the artist and activist. Toledo resists discussing in retrospect. Nevertheless, he does not waste more than a minute to immediately point to the environmental and territorial hazards and negotiations happening around as we spoke [Figure 1].

1 This conversation with Francisco Toledo happened on November 6th, 2018 (ten months before the artist passed on September 5th, 2019).
I arrived in San Agustín in April 2016 to study the conditions of professionalization, education, and training for artists that the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, CASA, offered. I found this case as a paradigm of an artistic institution situated in a non-metropolitan location that, through its programs and placement, resisted modes of centralization and dependency in the artistic field. The influence of one artist in particular, Francisco Toledo, and the artistic community he has brought together and involved in the shaping and activities of the arts center promised potential routes with applicability in peer institutions. However, the case and the history proved to be unique and more complex than my premises, and the six months I initially expected to spend at this place extended to thirty months. As my study of the center and my life as a resident of San Agustín advanced, it became clear that considering the artistic institution merely as something that happens within its walls was limited. Therefore, a methodological approach to understand the significance and identity of this institution required looking at it through the lenses of individuals, groups, and collective entities.

The scene presented in the first paragraph condenses multiple layers that shape the history and identity of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. Different actors and forces define the center’s uses, significance, and evolution. As Toledo pointed, “the town” is a sum of local and national political forces, as well as a population with bonds to the territory. The factory’s remnants of a nineteen-century industrial revolution in the Oaxacan context remain as referents of the expired national project of progress and prosperity of the Porfiriato. Nevertheless,

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2 The Porfiriato is the thirty-year period during which Porfirio Díaz (born in Oaxaca City in 1830) occupied the Presidency of México. His last period spanned from 1884 to 1911, when the Mexican Revolution had erupted against his government. He was also the Governor of the State of Oaxaca in four different periods (1863-64, 1866, 1880-81, 1882-83) as well as Minister of Development (1884) during the presidency of Manuel González (when Díaz was the de facto president manipulating the following elections). Diaz promoted the capitalist modernization of México through infrastructural and industrial development, facilitating foreign investors to establish industries with minimum fiscal compromise.
contemporary economic aspirations seem to haunt landscapes like the Sanagustinian in which water, natural resources, and life abound. Exploitation for the sake of accumulation, and the opportunism and corruption behind those schemes deeply worried Toledo, who used his public persona and the places he founded to sustain a permanent campaign against corporate privatization and devastation. Artists, who are enfranchised individuals, have the potential, skills, and responsibility to establish bridges between disparate spheres and positions. CASA—its architecture, its programs, and its everyday operations—stands now as a potential utopia in which to rehearse creation, imagination, and just relationships with other living entities.

Its institutional versatility, enhanced by the place where it is situated, make the Center for the Arts at San Agustín an organization and system worthy of attention. This arts center spearheaded the incorporation of environmental care and improvement of the region in which it is situated in its foundational statutes—an unprecedented initiative in the field of cultural and artistic organizations (Gobierno del Estado Poder Ejecutivo 2011). In this locale, diverse cultural, creative, and artistic communities intersect. The particularities of this setting stimulate the practice of vicinity despite career levels and backgrounds. CASA’s plethora of artistic, educational, and leisure-related activities are free of cost and generally unrestricted to pre-requisites. Since the center launched its programs, new demographic groups interested in the arts visit frequently or decide to establish permanently in San Agustín Etlá. The activation of local economies associated with the audiences and constituencies of the arts center, the center as the workplace of some Sanagustinians, and the promotion of the town as an artistic node have returned part of the prosperity lost after San Agustín’s industrial decline.

While a number of industries prospered during his government, the living conditions of the working classes decreased to points of extreme exploitation that lead to the Mexican Civil War.
In this dissertation, I claim that the dynamism stimulated by the foundation of CASA plays an active mediating function in the configuration of a heterogeneous culture in which disparate lifeways coincide and coalesce without attempting to resolve or be reduced to a singular one; art learning, art production, and art dissemination lay at the core of such dynamism. Beyond analyzing its role as a cultural and artistic institution, in this case study, I examine how an arts center intercedes in the symbolic and material relationships between individuals, diverse communities, social institutions, and the territory. While exposing multiple perceptions about the process of revitalization of San Agustín and its impact on the lives of different groups, the bottom-line of my argument is that CASA has become an agent of resistance against neoliberal developmental agendas. This research aims to capture cultural values associated with this arts center by different parties, while it avoids adopting a singular standpoint that upholds art in and of itself.

To assess this cultural initiative and its impact, we must consider the context in which it emerged. The anthropologist Jorge Hernández-Díaz describes,

Oaxaca incorporates one-fifth of the municipalities of the country. A low number of inhabitants characterizes its 570 municipalities (out of the total national of 2433). The dispersion of the population provoked by the orography, mainly mountainous, its multiethnic composition, and the varied forms of social and political organization, make of Oaxacan municipalities an inexhaustible source of cultural wealth, as well as of social and political complexity (2007, 37).

Eighteen indigenous groups live in Oaxaca (out of the sixty-five that live in México). More than one-third of the state’s population is indigenous, which makes Oaxaca the state with the most significant number of indigenous inhabitants (Servicio Internacional para la Paz). Despite its natural and cultural wealth, Oaxaca is one of the poorest states in México, contributing only 1.6% of the GDP, despite the fact that 3.3% of the country’s population resides in this state, and its territory represents 4.78% of the national surface (INEGI, “Cuéntame”). Its biodiversity, its
pluriethnic and pluricultural demographic composite, long human history (the first human groups settled in the central valleys around 1600 years BC), rooted traditions, and conflicting modernizing projects, all coalesce. As museum scholar Selma Holo states, the cultural density of Oaxaca’s management of memory and negotiation of change is tangible in every aspect of the arts, “the contemporary, the colonial heritage, the urban environment, patronage, the pluriethnic heritage, the archaeology—even the commercial gallery scene” (2004, 13). Some of the most capitalist and neoliberal schemes operate in this state. At the same time, in this territory, the most complex and rooted forms of communal organization and thought coexist.

During the almost two decades of CASA’s planning and existence, a predatory political agenda in the state and the country has permitted (and promoted) brutal extractivism by transnational companies, which replicates across Oaxacan regions. In the Tehuantepec Isthmus, the eolic energy industry has installed an unprecedented number of turbines, forcing the displacement of communities (Gil Olmos 2019). In the central valleys of Oaxaca, transnational mining companies have monopolized aquifers. Communities have demanded to ban this industry because it has dramatically increased the pollution of air, lands, and waters, which is causing diseases in workers and populations (Altamirano 2018). Inhabitants of the central valleys have also complaint about these companies’ discrimination against workers who speak in their native

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3 In 2018, the organization Fundar (Center for Analysis and Research) published a Yearbook of Extracting Activities in México, which documents that in between 2000 and 2018, in the Mexican territory, transnational mining companies have extracted five times the amount of gold that the Crown of Spain extracted in three hundred years of colony (Olivares Alonso 2019). The report also presents that instead of representing progress and wellbeing, the indicators of poverty have particularly accentuated in the municipalities where companies are exploiting mines, especially silver mines (Ibid.). In 2018, only two mines in Oaxaca produced 7.5% of the national production of silver (Reynoso Arreola 2018, 44). The increase in the production has not impacted the growth of the gross domestic product in these locations but instead has impoverished them (“Extractivismo en México,” Fundar 2018).
languages (Ibid.). The struggles for the territory, the natural resources, and the preservation of livable ecosystems have increased as have threats against environmental activists.

San Agustín Etla is a semi-rural municipality of fewer than four thousand inhabitants, located in the central valleys of Oaxaca, sixteen kilometers far from Oaxaca de Juárez, the capital city of the state. At an altitude of 1,700 meters over the sea level, its territory is part of the Sierra Juárez mountain range. The dense rain forest of temperate semi-humid climate covers sixty percent of San Agustín lands. The town owns and manages the natural resources of this forest through a communal organization. San Agustín provides ten to thirty percent of the drinking water to the capital city. For its natural springs, falls, and rivers, and its continuous rains, this geography represented a strategical setting for the installation of water-powered industries by the end of the nineteen-century. Two textile mills (San José and La Soledad Vista Hermosa) and two hydro-electric plants transformed the location into an industrial spot during the first years of the twentieth century. However, in less than a century, this infrastructure became obsolete, and the factories and plants fell into disuse. After the Mexican Revolution (1910) and as recorded in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, the lands were distributed as shared lands (ejidos and tierras comunales) to the rural communities for usufruct. An amendment to the Constitution in 1992 authorized communities to sell their plots to privates as part of the President Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s agenda based on free trade (Warman 2003). After the decline of the textile mills, San Agustín’s population maintained an agrarian self-supply economy, while also commuting to neighboring towns in search of employment. Given the importance of the forest’s biosphere for the water distribution to the capital city, any large industry has settled in this area. However, by having such essential sources of water, San Agustín faces the risk of becoming a target of extractive schemes.
The adaptation of La Soledad Vista Hermosa textile mill to operate as an arts center has transformed the landscape and culture of this town. An ecological hazard, a fire at San Agustín forest around 1996, turned to be the indirect trigger in the re-functionalization of La Soledad. The Association Pro-Defense and Conservation of the Cultural and Natural Heritage of Oaxaca (PRO-OAX), of which Francisco Toledo was the principal advocate and voice, provided equipment to Sanagustinians to extinguish the fire. The event led to a continued relationship between the conservation organization, the artist, and the community of San Agustín. On one of their trips to the town, Francisco Toledo, Graciela Cervantes, and María Claudina López Morales, also members of PRO-OAX, found the abandoned industrial nave of La Soledad Vista Hermosa advertised for purchase. The artist galvanized private and public efforts in a campaign to recuperate the mill’s building and to refurbish it for public uses. The combined funding of Toledo, the National Council for Culture and Arts (CONACULTA), the Government of Oaxaca, and the Alfredo Harp Helú Private Foundation permitted the acquisition and renovation of this landmark. After six years of restoration, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, CASA, officially inaugurated on March 21st, 2006.

In 2011, the Governor of Oaxaca, Gabino Cué Monteagudo, issued a decree with which CASA became a decentralized organism. This document grants legal status and attributes to the center, as well as its own patrimony and autonomy to develop its programs. The decree emphasizes the interinstitutional condition of the center, in which local and federal entities

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4 The acquisition, restoration, and equipment necessary for the creation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín involved combined funding sources (public and private, federal and local). Francisco Toledo (via the Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca) and the Alfredo Harp Helú Foundation represent the private arm in this collaboration. The public offices that participated are the Government of the State of Oaxaca (local) and the National Council for Culture and Arts (currently Ministry of Culture, a federal institution).
participate in its governing board and as patrons. The Government of Oaxaca (through the State’s Ministry of Culture and Arts), the director of CASA, the general director and the academic director of the National Center for the Arts, and the director of the Oaxacan Institute of Public Education constitute the governing board of the center. CASA receives subsidy from the Government of the State of Oaxaca and the Mexican federal government (through the Ministry of Culture and the National Center for the Arts, and via specific agreements of collaboration with the National Fund for Culture and Arts). CASA employs the subvention received as a sectorized entity of the Oaxaca State Administration in facilities’ maintenance, bills, and permanent staff salaries. For the development of programs, guest instructors’ fees, and improvements, CASA depends on other sources like annually contested funds from the Federation, CENART’s programs for the states, donations, and in-kind contributions of other public, private, national, and international entities. The most important patron of the center has been its founder, Francisco Toledo, who ensured with his financial support that all the programs developed at CASA—from exhibitions, performances, workshops, seminars, and artistic residencies—were free of cost and open to the public.

A thriving commercial success, as well as an incessant and multifarious artistic career, paved the path of Toledo’s philanthropic endeavors. The family of this artist, middle-class merchants from Juchitán, acknowledged the drawing skills of the young Francisco and supported him to travel and study art. The artist had his first solo-shows at the age of nineteen in México City and Forth-Worth, Texas (Theroux 2019). A cohort of intellectuals headed by Octavio Paz, two programs of the National Fund for Culture and Arts (FONCA) have been relevant in the participation of instructors and lecturers at CASA—the National System of Creators and the Program of Retribution. Artists from across the country, who are fellow recipients of this system, participate pro bono as instructors as part of their retribution duties.
Rufino Tamayo, and André Pieyre de Mandiargues introduced him to Parisian cultural circles in the sixties. Toledo’s iconography inhabited by the Isthmus’ creatures combined with a modern formal style matured in a critical moment of Western art history—the tail of Surrealism and the peak of abstraction, which brought him enormous and consistent success.

Toledo returned to México as an internationally established artist, who could set his own rules in the artistic and cultural field. In Mexican art history, Toledo’s trajectory of more than sixty years places him in between the “great masters” (like Rufino Tamayo, José Clemente Orozco, and Frida Kahlo), the moderns (along with Manuel Felguérez and Lilia Carrillo), and the contemporaries (artists like Gabriel Orozco have received the support of Toledo). Numerous galleries in México and abroad represent him and his work (Latin American Masters and Mixografía in Los Angeles, Natalie Seroussi and Patrice Trigano in Paris, La Caja Negra in Madrid, Arvil and López Quiroga in México City, and Quetzalli in Oaxaca are only a few examples) (Artfacts 2019). Major museums in México and across the globe have incorporated Toledo’s artworks into their collections. However, according to the dramaturgist, writer, and friend of the artist, Sabina Berman, the artist was not conformed with his accomplishment as a painter, and he wanted to leave the canvasses and reach out to the people who could not afford his artworks (Berman 2019). For Toledo, creating artistic venues and opening them to be used by everyone was the middle point to reconcile the contradictions of the capitalism in which the art market flourishes and the Oaxacan realities.

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6 For example, the Tamayo Museum, the University Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Modern Art in México City, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Blanton Museum of Art in Texas, Tate Gallery in London, among many others.
Francisco Toledo envisioned a utopian site, similar to the Bauhaus or the Black Mountain College type of artistic learning environment in a retreat and countryside setting instead of an urban one. Through extracurricular and self-taught processes, and by making tools, facilities, communities of peers, and creators with solid trajectories accessible, this “school” would foster interdisciplinarity in the arts. Such a place would also reflect the modes of visual and material cultural production in Oaxaca, aiming to dismantle epistemic hierarchies between indigenous visual, artistic, and symbolic practices, craft making, direct-fabrication procedures, and contemporary practices in the realm of fine arts (Jiménez and López Morales 2008, 332; personal conversation López 2018). Toledo was convinced of the potency of art and its embodiments to reconfigure cultural, social, and symbolic relationships. CASA crystallizes Francisco Toledo’s artistic, environmental, and altruistic action [Figure 2].

With increasing vigor over the last three decades, Toledo embodied organized Mexican civil society, the hope of social empowerment, and collective agency. This timeframe coincides with the aggravation of violence, organized crime, state authoritarianism, disappearances, and grief across the country, which have shattered the voice of civilians. The artistic and cultural enterprises promoted by Toledo represent social revitalization, i.e., the opposite to those oppressing and threatening realities. The spaces that the artist opened and the campaigns he endorsed constituted efforts to preserve the possibility to freely circulate and occupy public spaces, spending free time learning and imagining with others, and collectively caring about the natural and built environments. Additionally, Toledo and the organizations he presided over have operated independently of partisan politics and refused any kind of political manipulation or coercion; this posture granted him a reputation in some communitarian, intellectual, artistic, and academic circles in which autonomy and freedom are the basis for an ethical conduction.
Considering this context, my study underscores the agency that art fosters in upholding the dignity, worth, and significance of human lives.

This dissertation analyses the history, controversies, and significance of the creation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín in the lives of different groups and individuals. I developed this investigation as a *bricoleur*, combining different qualitative methods for the collection of data (Kincheloe et al. 2011, 168). Close readings of internal institutional documents, publications produced by CASA, municipal plans and reports, and media and press coverage served as crucial resources to execute an analysis of discourses and also to historicize the center’s events, activities, and positions around them. I conducted interviews and extended conversations with CASA’s stakeholders, directors, instructors, and participants, as well as artists based in San Agustín. Thirty months, between April 2016 and October 2019, residing in this town and participating in inaugurations, exhibitions, presentations, and lectures allowed me to get involved with San Agustín neighbors, as well as the communities of visitants and audiences of the Center. I also attended to openings and events at the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca, the Photographic Center Manuel Álvarez Bravo, as well as other museums, cultural, and artistic spaces in Oaxaca City, which offered an ampler perspective of Oaxacan cultural and artistic life. Between 2017 and 2018, I had the opportunity to teach five different workshops and seminars at CASA, directed to artists and cultural producers. This experience enriched my analysis and gave a more profound dimension to my perspectives.

**Research Questions, Theoretical, and Methodological Foundations**

The questions motivating this research are: *What are the consolidation trajectories of an art system in México that exists away from the metropolises that concentrate infrastructure,*
economies and markets, information, and networks? What agents and through what specific actions intervened in that consolidation? How does the Center for the Arts at San Agustín dispute the values of a centralized/urban artistic system? What does this rearrangement contribute not only to art but also to culture, society, and democracy in México? What social, cultural, symbolic, and material transformations does an artistic institution provoke beyond its directed actions, programs, and goals? How can scholars and art programmers identify and analyze the broader and culturally specific impacts of institutional agents?

To understand in-depth the systemic functioning of an artistic institution, CASA, I envisioned that the case study model was the most advantageous interpretive structure for my dissertation. The proximity to the studied context, the continuous interaction with subjects and stakeholders, the multiple events experienced on-site, and the numerous opinions, versions, and accounts gathered while conducting fieldwork and living at San Agustín resulted in an abundance of data. The combined singularities that CASA embodied (its history, site-specificity, and evolution) required the application of methods of observation, data collection, and analysis from historical, social, ethnographic, and aesthetic disciplines. The geographer and champion of the use of the case study as a strategy of inquiry and as a narrative rationale, Bent Flyvbjerg, asserts that, “true expertise is based on intimate experience with thousands of individual cases and on the ability to discriminate between situations, with all their nuances of difference, without distilling them into formulas” (2011, 312). Case studies like this emerge from practices and everyday situations. The configuration of a case study demands the elaboration of interdisciplinary connections, which imply the mobilization of theories and concepts from their original fields.7 This search for patterns in everyday behaviors does not have to be anti-
intellectual. To take such risks proves worthy in opening avenues for considering overseen cultural dynamics and pointing unidentified phenomena. In the following paragraphs, I will present the disciplines and authors that informed my research.

A body of literature that debates and problematizes the concepts of heritage and patrimony as a series of actions in the construction of national cultures, cultural industries and economies, or more diverse and less turbulent “global imagined communities” influence my discussions. In these debates, authors illustrate how such abstract and charged notions materialize and translate into specific practices. The Mexican anthropologist, Bolfy Cottom, stresses that since its Independence from Spain, governments in México have invested in the creation of museums, libraries, archives, conservatories, and schools to safeguard and disseminate items that became national symbols immediately after the end of the war of Independence in México (2014). For the historiographer Luis Gerardo Morales Moreno, the years between 1887 and 1964 witnessed the development of an ideological apparatus utilizing museums as secular temples—a phenomenon typified by the author as “Museopatria”—conditioning a devotional vision of the national symbols, in combination with a rhetoric of a glorious past embodied in the archeological collections (2007). Although this centralist, centralized, and hierarchical model of museum and institution sedimented a specific concept of heritage, and therefore its policies, these authors critique the “civilizatory” function that these institutions have performed.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) and Michael Di Giovine (2009, 2010) deliberate upon a global and late-twentieth-century understanding of heritage, which is defined in the authenticity to develop an iconographic typology in painting; or drawing notions regarding social modes to sanction a culture’s heritage to discuss issues of privatization, activism, and the social dynamics around it.
World Heritage List endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organization. Examining the sanctioning mechanisms that allow, for example, an architectonic
compound, an entire town, or a performance to enter the list, these scholars expose the
undeniable link that exists between this artifact, the list, and the tourism and cultural industries.
While being featured implies, for the listed sites, the dynamization of economic investment and
their preservation, the stakes for local populations performing historical and cultural authenticity
for touristic consumption pose a conundrum. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s question, “Once habitus
becomes heritage, to whom does it belong?” (2006, 161) guides my analysis.

Interdisciplinary cultural and social-history studies that situate notions of ethnicity, class,
independent law, and communitarian organization in Oaxaca are essential in the recognition of
performances of heritage, identity, and belonging. Authors like Francie Chassen-López, Mark
Overmeyer-Velázquez, and Jorge Hernández-Díaz deliberate on the role that the communities
based in this territory have played in national schemes. While these scholars address conflicting
modernizing programs throughout Mexican history that have disdained the role of indigenous
people and Southern communities, their work traces the significance that labor, land tenure, and
exploitation of natural resources in this region has had in the same histories. Their research is
pivotal for an examination of value systems and the linking between social, cultural, and
religious structures in urban and rural Oaxacan societies.

Recent essays dedicated to visual and artistic culture in Oaxaca, like museum scholar
Selma Holo’s (2004), and sociologists Edward J. McCaughan’s (2012) and Abraham Nahón’s
scholarship (2017) constitute crucial sources. In these volumes, the authors discuss the efficacy
of images in the negotiation of memory, collective identity, political unrest, and social
mobilization. In situating the dynamics of production and distribution of visuality, these scholars
demonstrate that Oaxaca is a fruitful context to deconstruct Western distinctions between fine arts, crafts, popular culture, and media. Additionally, these specialists consider some of the museums and cultural spaces analyzed in this investigation, as well as the contexts of their emergence.

Social theories and essays about artistic circuits, particularly non-mainstream and non-urban ones, have informed my observations, conversations with participants, and the prose in this investigation. Howard Becker’s comprehension of “art worlds” as collaborative structures (1982), Pascal Gielen’s interpretation of the “artistic multitude” (drawing from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Paolo Virno) that works as an active social subject communicating and collaborating despite individual differences (2015) and Gregory Sholette’s recognition of mainstream values’ dependency on the foundation of larger communities of artists (2017) uphold the importance of theorizing and historicizing the artistic life in overlooked settings. Other works additionally identify variables that affect artistic production and have been a valuable resource to pose questions about labor and sustenance, peer communities, and professional trajectories in non-urban contexts. Per Mangset’s “The Artist in Metropolis: Centralization Processes and Decentralization in the Artistic Field” (1998), Ann Markusen’s “Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class: Evidence from a Study of Artists” (2006), and Sarah Lowndes’ *Contemporary Artists Working Outside the City: Creative Retreat* (2018) stand out as examples of this type of analysis.

Finally, numerous authors offering ethnographic and case study-based approaches to the study of art systems, the role of artistic institutions, the influence of national culture politics, and traditional techniques in the visual arts have strongly influenced this dissertation. To understand the debates between the traditional and the contemporary character of the miniature painting
genre, art historian, Virginia Whiles, enrolled at the National College of Arts in Lahore; her book, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan* (2010) analyzes the miniature painting technique, the stylistic schools and instructors associated with them, and state support and its cultural institutions.

Sociologist Robert Valerio’s *Atardecer en la maquiladora de utopías* (1999) presents the voices of ten Oaxacan painters (all men) who debate the category of Oaxacan School of Painting. This essay represents a recurrent reference in the discussion of the Oaxacan art market.

Anthropologist Jessica Winegar examines artistic careers, employment, upward mobility, artistic education, notions of cultural authenticity, generational differences and nationalism, public and private cultural industries in Egypt, and private art collecting in times of upheaval (2006).

Sociologist Norma Iglesias offers an exceptional account of Tijuana’s artistic community by the turn of the millennium, and the role of the Centro Cultural Tijuana. *Emergencias II: Las artes visuales en Tijuana* (2008) compiles the voices of artists, directors, staff members, and scholars in border studies while comprising an invaluable visual archive produced in the making of the investigation. These volumes constitute prized sources for my fieldwork observations, as well as defining the narrative structure of my research, which I will address in the following section.

**Chapter Outline**

Four chapters compose this dissertation. Each one of them offers a distinct vantage point from which considering the Center for the Arts at San Agustín while also contextualizing it in regards to broader historical, social, and cultural phenomena. Concurring with what the scholar Bent Flyvbjerg proposes, I have chosen “to tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes-conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told researchers” (2011, 311-12). The first chapter focuses on the building that harbors
CASA, and its transformation in parallel to the configuration of the center’s “institutional personality.” Chapter Two contextualizes the arts center in relation to other cultural institutions founded by the artist Francisco Toledo. The third chapter elaborates on the place and the cultural community that lived in the neighboring territory before the existence of CASA. The last chapter features the voices of new neighbors who, in addition, are artists. In the following paragraphs, I will summarize the core contents, arguments, and theories of each chapter.

The first chapter, “History, Heritage, and Regeneration of La Soledad Vista Hermosa Textile Mill, and the Creation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín (CASA),” contextualizes in time and space the spot analyzed in this study. The chapter establishes a chronology and historical account of the conversion of the factory into an artistic center. In this historical revision, the environmentally conscientious essence of the activities conducted at this center, its symbolic transformation from factory to cultural center, and its combined institutional status (public and private, local and federal) converge. I situate the process of acquisition of the building, its architectonic improvement, and its dedication to providing cultural services as part of a Oaxacan *zeitgeist* at the turn of the millennium, triggered by the incorporation of Oaxaca City into UNESCO’s World Heritage List. I expose that UNESCO’s inclusion resulted in discrepant initiatives to activate the sites: one promoting the development of private and elitist touristic venues as a source of revenue, another pursuing that historical sites functioned as public spaces of social encounter for Oaxacans. 8 I draw from concepts proposed by Michael Di Giovine and

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8 According to UNESCO’s website, the organizations that have officially contributed to fund preservation, maintenance, investigation, and education are the Emergent Fund of the World Heritage (UNESCO), World Monuments Fund, Ambassadors Fund, Alfredo Harp Helú Foundation, Tequio cultural por Monte Albán: Francisco Toledo and Rodolfo Morales, Government of Japan, National Park Service, Sister Program: Mesa Verde, Paquime, Monte Albán, State Government of Oaxaca, General Government Secretariat, Mexican Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) and Oaxacan Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (SEDAF) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Historic Centre of Oaxaca and Archaeological Site of Monte Albán”).
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett associated with UNESCO’s placemaking strategy that interrogates the concept of “heritage,” and the valorization processes and actions that this strategy prompts (Di Giovine 2009, 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). I interweave symbolic and material aspects in the shaping of the Center for the Arts. I trace how the environmental and sustainability considerations in the architectonic adaptations, and the definition of objectives and structure of the institution under construction advanced hand in hand. Additionally, I present discussions from the field of industrial archeology, and I offer related examples to situate the creation of CASA as part of a global phenomenon consisting of the substitution of a manufacturing economy by a creative-related economy.

The second chapter, “Francisco Toledo’s Philanthropy and Activism through Cultural Institutions,” expands the discussion about heritage and patrimony from Chapter One, by providing an ample account of Francisco Toledo’s trajectory creating and maintaining museological and artistic institutions during the second half of his life. In this chapter, I outline events in Toledo’s life that offer the reader a profile of his political and social views. Toledo activated a particular type of museological institution in Oaxaca City, represented by his open houses in which he shared (and bequeathed) his personal collections of artworks and books, to create the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) and the Photographic Center Manuel Álvarez Bravo (CFMAB). I claim that CASA epitomizes Francisco Toledo’s humanistic and environmental vision and the agency of public cultural patrimony. In this chapter, I trace a lineage between Toledo’s artistic institutions and his activist agenda to demonstrate the importance of those cultural sites in fostering civic and communitarian cohesion. I recuperate Elaine Scarry’s arguments on behalf of the experience of beauty as a conveyor of justice and dignity, and its potential in defense of human and living-beings’ rights (Medina 2019; Scarry
Francisco Toledo’s attention to beauty, expressed not only in his art but also in his collections and the spaces he procured (especially the institutions he promoted), disseminated a sense of care as opposed to abandonment and indifference. Due to Toledo’s passing on September 5th, 2019, the last part of this chapter aims to point at those institutions and collective entities in which Toledo trusted to give continuity to his legacy and activism against exploitation and extinction.

“San Agustín Etxa Cultural History and the Transformations Brought by the Center for the Arts at San Agustín,” the third chapter, examines the cultural specificity of the site where CASA was established. In this chapter, I employ the theories of scholars specialized in indigenous normative systems (usos y costumbres), particularly the anthropologist Jorge Hernández-Díaz, to discuss the differentiated conceptions of citizenship in urban and rural contexts in México and Oaxaca (Curiel 2015; Durand Ponte 2007; Hernández-Díaz 2007, 2015; López Caballero 2017; Stephen 2005; Zenno 2007). By describing the social institutions of San Agustín Etxa’s community, I identify tensions and resistances to the establishment of the arts center in this municipality and to the increasing flow of individuals that are not native to San Agustín’s community. I claim in this chapter that the settlement of CASA has encouraged a demographic reconfiguration of San Agustín. I also identify everyday interactions between neighbors, in which the differentiated notions of citizenship become tangible. Through an examination of revitalization schemes, the urban-planning scholar, Lorenzo Vicario, proposes the notion of “psychological recovery of civic pride” (2017). In the last part of this chapter, I pinpoint discourses and performances that evidence the recognition, valorization, and re-signification of the Center for the Arts by the community of San Agustín.
Chapter Four, “Avecindadas/os and Artists. Implications, Advantages, and Challenges of Artistic Practices in and from San Agustín,” tackles the fact that the cultural and geographic environment of San Agustín has attracted artists who have decided to move in and establish their studios in this town. This relocation experience has impacted their practice and life in ways analyzed in this chapter while they also have become actors in a growing non-urban artistic ecosystem with distinctive qualities. The chapter unfolds after extended conversations with four artists who experienced the conversion of the disused factory into an artistic venue. Through their first-person testimonies, I thread a collective account of San Agustín’s cultural and social transformation. Howard Becker’s sociological study of art serves to outline the configuration of San Agustín and Oaxaca’s “art worlds” (Becker 1982). Based on Becker’s focus on networks of cooperation that conduct to the production and appreciation of artworks, I identify agents, relationships, and systems of support that have allowed these individuals to pursue an artistic career. I also examine the implications that working and living in San Agustín have in the dynamics of production, exhibition, and commercialization of art.

This dissertation expands the understanding of the politics of representation at stake in museological, artistic, and cultural institutions in México. Although the topic generates heated informal debates, the scholarship remains scarce. The state of this field in México has advanced the studies of audiences, the historiography of exhibitions in modern México, and the broad analysis of cultural policies in general (of which museums, cultural centers, and art schools are only components). Posing the question “how do artistic institutions contribute to the exercise of democracy in México?” requires a broader examination than only considering what institutions plan and produce. Scholars in the field must pose our attention in the everyday practices and
interactions happening in those places, the contingencies, the contradictions, and the trajectories that these exchanges trace. My study proposes and executes this kind of contextual analysis.

By drawing from numerous fields (history, heritage studies, tourism studies, urban planning, industrial archaeology, studies on sustainability and restoration, art history, anthropology, performance studies, and sociology of art), my goal is to portray an ample picture of the cultural, social, and environmental site-specificity of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín and San Agustín Etla. In doing so, I reject a metonymic representation and refuse the possibility of a universalized understanding of what democracy means. Hegemonic art worlds and their production of value heavily rely on the replication of habitus based on the universalization of particulars. Responding to ontologizing questions like “Who is an artist?” “What is art?” “Why are they important?” also becomes a matter of habitus.

With this investigation, I propose an analysis against the grain based on parallel decentering operations. First, this study contest metropolises as the sole context of legitimate and current artistic practices. Second, instead of considering the trajectories of artists as the sum of their climatic expressions, I emphasize the resilience and tactics that allow them to continue despite obstacles and detours. Third, this investigation does not depart from a priori consideration of art as righteousness and a defendable cause by any means. By describing a context in which art occurs and conflicts with other realms of human action and significance, I propose shifting the episteme from “what art and artists are” to “what can art and artists transform, not in isolation but in relation to others.”
CHAPTER 1.

HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND REGENERATION OF LA SOLEDAD VISTA HERMOSA TEXTILE MILL, AND THE CREATION OF THE CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT SAN AGUSTÍN (CASA)

Located in the San Felipe Sierra in the central valleys of Oaxaca, and surrounded by waterfalls, streams, and springs, the county of San Agustín Etla evolved because of the establishment of a textile mill. La Soledad exemplified the progress and technological advancement of the Industrial Revolution brought to México during the Porfiriato. Automated processes in which water power reduced the need for human and animal force, shifted the role of workers who had to master the mechanisms of machinery and the behavior of source-matters. Workers from other parts of Oaxaca, as well as trained recruits from the south of México (mostly Veracruz and Puebla), arrived in San Agustín in search of employment, transforming a predominantly agricultural town into an industrial one (Velasco 2011, 350). Unlike many towns in Oaxaca, San Agustín’s inhabitants do not speak an indigenous language; Spanish predominates in its oral landscape. People coming from nearby places converged at San Agustín by the turn of the nineteenth century and coalesced because of their participation in the productive activities of this factory [Figure 3].

This chapter establishes a timeline that spans from the foundation of the Factory of Threading and Weaving “La Soledad Vista Hermosa” (Fábrica de Hilados y Tejidos “La Soledad Vista Hermosa”) in 1884 to the inauguration of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín (CASA) in 2006. The first part, “Foundation and Decline of ‘La Soledad Vista Hermosa’ Textile Mill,” contextualizes the social and economic conditions that lead to the summit and decline of this Porfirian textile factory—the largest of its kind in this state—until its definitive closure in 1989. In 1999, the Government of the State of Oaxaca and the civil association “Friends of the
Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca” (headed by the Oaxacan artist Francisco Toledo) engaged in negotiations with the union of workers that owned the mill, until they finally purchased it in 2001. I also analyze the cultural climate that favored the valorization and incorporation of this site into the Oaxacan patrimony. In the following section, “Process of Public Acquisition of La Soledad Vista Hermosa,” I examine the official documents and meeting notes of the earliest discussions between political and cultural authorities to define the mission, values, and purpose of the acquired estate. From these texts, I trace the process that granted organizational and operational structure to an asset transformed into a cultural center.

The third section, “From Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa to CASA: The Amending Agreement of 2002,” identifies the pedagogical and environmental objectives of this institution expressed in one of its foundational documents (the “Convenio Modificatorio de 2002”). These aspects became materialized in the restoration of the ex-factory, particularly in the choice of materials employed, the distribution of spaces, and the ecological technologies implemented in the facilities. Committed to the preservation of the environment, particularly the prevention of aquifers’ pollution and guaranteeing a moderate use of water, the transformation took shape. La Soledad ceased operating and remained abandoned for more than a decade, thus requiring an ambitious renovation to be useful again. The fourth part, “La Soledad Estate: Facilities and Restoration,” provides a description and breakdown of this process that started in 2002. On March 21st of 2006, the President of México at the time, Vicente Fox, accompanied by the most important authorities of Oaxaca State and the country inaugurated the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. The last phase of the construction works was completed in 2017.

In this dissertation, CASA serves as a case study while it reflects a global phenomenon of recuperation of abandoned industrial buildings and their conversion into infrastructures of the
cultural and creative industries. Unsustainability, extreme pollution, and increased automation processes resulted in the abandonment of these factories worldwide. These architectonic compounds (operating in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) ceased by the turn of the millennium. Meanwhile, the expansion and economic growth of cultural and creative sectors favored the valorization and revitalization of recent “ruins” (Lopes Cordeiro 2013, 51; Vicario 2017). These sites not only were adopted for art making, learning, and exhibiting purposes but they also became landmarks. The last segment of this chapter discusses these transformations while presenting examples of museums, cultural centers, and artistic institutions across Europe, the United States, Latin America, as well as others in México.

**FOUNDATION AND DECLINE OF THE “FÁBRICA DE HILADOS Y TEJIDOS ‘LA SOLEDAD VISTA HERMOSA’” (LA SOLEDAD VISTA HERMOSA TEXTILE MILL)**

Clusters of concrete, scattered warehouses, and small hotels intermingle with bucolic countryside nature across the International Highway (Carretera Internacional). Nowadays, this long avenue, rather than a highway, connects the City of Oaxaca with northern peri-urban municipalities like Los Etlas. As we enter a tunnel of naturally weaved branches of Jacaranda trees reaching from both sides of the pathway, we know we are on the road that will guide us to San Agustín Etlá. Land plots and corn sown fields, one-floor adobe houses, brick houses, and half-built concrete houses intermingle with small businesses. What distinguishes a convenience store from a dwelling are the overlapping adverts of Marinela, Bimbo, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, and Corona displayed in the façades. Tulips, Delonix regia, morning glories, bougainvilleas, and more jacarandas flourish in the front gardens of Sanagustinians. The mountains remain still at the back: immense and close, consistently and bluntly bordering the horizon.
After climbing this road of many curves and bumps, the hill opens showing the bell tower of a church on the left side of the street, which gets diverted by a fenced plaza, paved in red stone with a large reflective pool in its center. Only a few steps from there, the white façade of the temple surfaces. On the left, we find a green quarry fountain and, above it, two rows of stairs constructed with stones of the same kind and outlined by oxidized art deco smithery. These stairs conduct to a hexagonal kiosk with ogival doors on each side: the chalet. Slim metallic pillars hold its roofing finished with what looks like a metallic lace. Its pattern, on closer inspection, is made out of paper-cut like tiny bodies holding hands and delineating—in negative—the silhouettes of phalluses. I learned that this pattern was part of an experimental phase of construction manufactured with the metallic laser-cut of artist Francisco Toledo, in which he applied one of his designs to decorate the area that accommodates the director’s office, the shop, and one of the galleries of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín.⁹

Many trees—bougainvilleas, Joshuas, loquats, poinsettias, and two large and old bays—conceal a yellow two-floor building, characterized by its numerous semicircular arches and windows. Time clashes when seeing a nineteen-century architectonic design enclosed by the Oaxacan sierras and springs. As we walk around this construction, the symmetry and extension of its main façade—only accessible from the sides but not frontally—excel [Figures 4 and 5]. The green quarry employed in the inner square, the main stairs, and the atrium of the ex-factory contrasts with the magenta of the stepped fountain on both sides of the stairs, as well as with the plaster colored in stained oxide yellow on all the external walls of the building. The inscription “SOLEDAD VISTA HERMOSA” over the central balcony, and below it, the name “JOSE ZORRILLA TRAPAGA” emblazons the site. Below these texts, a stone medallion indicates

⁹ See section “La Soledad Estate: Facilities and Restoration” of this chapter.
“1883.” This year marks the beginning of the construction of this Victorian-like textile mill designed by the architect Guillermo Desmonth and owned by the Spanish entrepreneur José Zorrilla Trápaga (Velasco 2011, 327) [Figure 6].

The Textile Factory of La Soledad Vista Hermosa began processing cotton fibers and transforming them into threads and coarse cloth in 1884. It operated with iron machinery imported from England that traveled the sierras in wagons and the backs of mules in an epoch when the railroad had not reached this site yet (Sánchez 2003, 74). Nevertheless, all these complications did not seem significant compared with the excellent hydrologic characteristics of San Agustín, which proved to be optimal to settle a water-powered factory. La Soledad was built in the highlands of Vista Hermosa (1,800 meters above the sea level), right by the slope of the San Agustín peak, in a mountain range rich in water resources. This cotton mill was one of three established in Oaxaca. Its peer factories, founded earlier in 1875, were the Xia Factory in Ixtepeji (founded in by the English engineer Thomas Grandison), and the San José Factory in San Agustín Etla (owned by Zorrilla’s uncle, the Spanish merchant Juan Saénz Trápaga) (Chassen-López 2004, 220-221).

Industrial transformation favored the growth of San Agustín as a center of labor. This growth led to the presence of more workers and electricians, the immigration of trained workers from other states, as well as the increase of the local population. By the turn of the century, it had become the largest textile industry in the state of Oaxaca with two hundred looms, six thousand spindles, four hundred workers, and three working shifts, which kept the factory’s activity

10 José Zorrilla Trápaga (1829-1897) had arrived in México at the age of seventeen invited by his uncle Juan Sáenz to assist him in his diverse enterprises.

11 The constructions began in 1883, and the full operations of the factory started in 1884.

12 Vista Hermosa could be translated as “beautiful view.”
twenty-four hours a day (Sánchez 2003, 74). La Soledad reflected industrial prosperity and productivity.

Like their relatives who had also migrated to México, Zorrilla joined a group privileged by the national and local governments of that time, as most European and North American impresarios were. Juan Saénz Trápaga, a pioneer of the textile industry in the region of Etna, invited his nephew, José Zorrilla Trápaga, to travel from Santander to México to join his enterprise. These men had the opportunity to expand their business, increase their wealth, and even participate in Mexican politics with all kinds of benefits. The contract signed the same year of the foundation of La Soledad Vista Hermosa represents an example of such favorable conditions. Zorrilla Trápaga succeeded in escalating his social reputation and political relations to the point of becoming vice-consul of Spain in México (Sánchez 2003, 86). His businesses encompassed not only this particular field but also banking and agriculture, which kept growing in the years to come.

San Agustín became a town pioneering the development of the hydroelectric industry due to the Zorrilla family initiatives favored by their social and political conditions. The government of the State of Oaxaca exempted Zorrilla Trápaga from paying taxes and rights for the building, machinery, raw materials, and products of his cotton business, as well as for the use of natural resources, i.e., the water, for a ten-year period. In exchange, he promised to develop a network of hydroelectric power plants in San Agustín, which would provide electricity not only to this town but also to the city of Oaxaca (Sánchez 2003, 79), while also training and employing the necessary human workforce for his factory. In January of 1903, his son and heir, Federico

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13 Zorrilla Trápaga could not hold to the first part of the contract (Sánchez 2003, 80); however, one of his sons, Federico Zorrilla Tejada, completed the task and introduced electric power to the capital city of the State by 1903 (Medina 2004, 139).
Zorrilla, in association with Juan Baigts, “the richest miner and hacendado in the state” (Chassen-López 2004, 250), founded the partnership “Sociedad en Comandita” with the purpose of providing electricity to the city of Oaxaca. Through this partnership he sought to increase the productivity of the hydroelectric plants localized in San Agustín that he owned. His company supplied the energy for the streetlight system of Oaxaca city and the Etla valleys, electricity for the private homes in this town, as well as maintenance for this infrastructure for thirty years (Medina 2004, 139). Although the founder’s successor sold his part of the textile factory in Vista Hermosa to concentrate on the electric energy business, he left an electrified textile mill that worked twenty-four hours a day, distributed in three working shifts. Energy and railroads accelerated textile production in the region which, according to Durand, reached its peak in México between 1895 and 1905 (1986, 157).

The Porfiriato cultivated a perception of permanent insufficiency of capital, entrepreneurship, and technology in México. It aggravated an already classist and racist culture in which being a foreigner meant being inherently civilized, whereas being local equaled to the irredeemable need of modernization (i.e., of becoming civilized). Francie Chassen-López asserts, “Those French, English, Spanish, and North American citizens contributed ‘decisively’ to the creation of a capitalist mentality in México” (2004, 253-254). This economic and social climate allowed the emergence of a particularly wealthy class in the central valleys of Oaxaca, baptized as vallistocracia (named after the locale where it evolved).14 Authors Francie Chassen-López and Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez have described and analyzed this particular group as mostly male migrants—at first Spaniards and Frenches, and later British, Germans and North Americans—

14 Víctor de la Cruz (“Razones de Juchitán”) coined the term “vallistocracia,” which Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez elaborated in depth (Chassen-López 2004, 248).
who enjoyed great social mobility in this state. Young men from Europe, previously trained as technicians and engineers, arrived in Oaxaca (since 1830) and found extremely convenient conditions (financial concessions, cheap and abundant workforce, and a clientele already in place) to develop an industry or join those already in progress: haciendas, mining, coffee, textiles, beer brewing, grana cochinilla, commerce, and banking. Most of them married Mexican women of the most affluent families to consolidate their status. Very soon they could get involved in different businesses at the same time, while also gaining political power and key positions in the local government (with direct ties to President Díaz). The vallistocracia “stayed, intermarried, and emerged as fundamental factors in the development of the Mexican bourgeoisie” (Chassen-López 2004, 254).

By the turn of the nineteen-century, the vallistocracia became the oligarchy of one of the most rural and indigenous areas of México. Chassen-López finds in the Zorrilla family a perfect example of the kind of wealth, social position, and power that this group of immigrants achieved in one or two generations:

By 1897, when José [Zorrilla Trápaga] died, José Zorrilla y Cía. owned various haciendas, the Vista Hermosa textile factory, and import-export firm that dealt in coffee, leather, and tobacco, and was also agent of the Banco Nacional de México. His son, José Zorrilla, inherited the factory, was president of the Bank of Oaxaca, a member of the executive board of the Cía. Cervecería de Oaxaca, stockholder in the Cía. Ferrocarril Agrícola y Urbano de Oaxaca, and served as both federal and local deputy on various occasions. In 1904 he was elected mayor of the city of Oaxaca” (Chassen-López 2004, 249).

The modernizing program of the vallistocracia also required discarding the contemporary traditions of local populations, the working classes, and the indigenous groups, while simultaneously praising and capitalizing from the ancient autochthonous and the forgotten race that built Monte Albán two thousand years earlier (Overmyer-Velazquez 273). Throwing lavish parties and dinners featuring the best of European cuisine, attending baseball games or opera
plays, and engaging in tourism became the favorite activities for reasserting their aristocratic attitudes. For example, Zorrilla Trápaga commissioned the construction of the French chalet next to La Soledad factory, which served as his countryside house in Etla, and to host field trips and picnics for his vallistocratic friends (Sánchez 2003, 81). Coincident with all this opulence, the foremen of La Soledad factory withheld part of the workers’ wages as mandatory contributions for religious and artistic activities (Chassen-López 2004, 271-272; Sánchez 2003, 86). These arbitrary demands caused the earliest labor-related conflicts at the factory in San Agustín in 1907.

Throughout the twentieth century, La Soledad changed hands continuously while the production of the factory progressively decreased. First, the capitalist advantages granted by the Díaz regime lead to generalized strikes across the country. La Soledad and San José were no exception. They remained paralyzed for nearly a decade (in between 1913 and 1921) until new investors appeared. In 1939, a group of workers (popularly known as Los separados), demanding reduced working hours and collective contracts, tried to form a union, which caused their firing. They approached the association of unions in México (named at the time “Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana”) and, after three years, they recovered their jobs, and received unpaid wages, and social security benefits. In 1958, Manuel Gómez Portillo proposed to the employees to sacrifice their annual raise in exchange for getting new technology, but the workers rejected the proposal. Gómez Portillo sold La Soledad to its last owner, Baltazar Cruz, in 1959. A coffee-grower and farm owner, this last titleholder delegated the administration of the factory to his son Cuauhtémoc Cruz (Personal conversation Lescas 2018). Cruz neglected his role; he stopped paying salaries and production bonuses, acquiring source materials, and paying social

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15 An orchestra, theater performances, and catechism groups.
security fees. A lawsuit against Baltazar Cruz nearly caused the factory’s ceasing around 1964 (Lescas 2018). Organized as a cooperative represented by Agustín Lescas, in 1981, the unionized workers who endured the trial—that lasted for almost two decades—became proprietors of the factory (including the land, the building, and the machinery) after winning the case. La Soledad continued operating with austere resources, at the workers’ expense, and with minimum investment. Meanwhile, the laborers’ sustenance depended on their farming plots (Yanes Rizo 2016; personal conversation Lescas 2018) and milpas, possible only due to the fertility of San Agustín soil.

La Soledad reflects the transformed conditions of the textile industry in México. First, the sustained use of machinery and technology—in some cases for more than fifty years. Many proprietors did not reinvest in upgrading their facilities and equipment. Second, the collective contracts and rights won by the workers after the Mexican Revolution compelled owners to invest more capital in salaries, benefits for the workers, and taxes; thus, many investors dismissed the renovation of the equipment. Third, the Second World War brought success to the Mexican textile industry (particularly after the high demand of tarpaulin, a byproduct of cotton fibers). However, after the end of the war synthetic fibers that replaced the cotton industry became popular and more profitable (Durand 1987, 74-76). In between 1980 and 1984, the industry of synthetic fibers was growing 5.2% per year in México. The technological renewal of the seventies involved automation, the employment of mechanical controls, and increased speed in the production line (Durand, 77).

After years of progressive abandonment, the factory shut definitely in 1989, one hundred and five years after its foundation. It remained as a vestige of the Porfiriato’s industrial pinnacle. Although La Soledad resisted the national and global changes longer than most textile factories
in México—that had shut during the sixties and seventies or had moved to synthetics worldwide—its decline was inevitable. The machines, threads, and half-done fabrics remained there for fourteen years until 1998, when workers sold the machinery as pure metal (seventy tons to be molten). Surrounded by semi-derelict gates, this factory became a well-known destination for the locals as well as for visitors from other towns (like Villa de Etla and Oaxaca City), who completed their Sunday outings to the public pools of Vista Hermosa with a furtive visit to the deserted facilities.

The site embodies three different histories at once. The first history stands as an evidence of power, vallistocratic social dynamics, and civilizing forces in place by the end of the nineteenth century not only in Oaxaca but in México. The second one marks the perseverance of a union of workers who overthrew their “superiors” and became owners of their means of production; nevertheless, the changes caused by global capitalism, in addition to the internal conflicts of the cooperative determined their inability to revitalize the factory all by themselves. The third history of this site begins with a succession of circumstances that shaped its conversion, initially unplanned, into an arts center opened to the public. This transition occurs in a moment in which the preservation of local heritage became a mode of resistance, as well as a political agenda for different cultural agents in Oaxaca, analyzed in the following section. In it, I will detail the process of acquisition and shaping of the new identity and uses of La Soledad factory, while discussing the mode of activism that compelled this development.
In 1987, UNESCO incorporated the city center of Oaxaca and the nearby archaeological site of Monte Albán (separated by seven kilometers) to its World Heritage List. As authors like Michael Di Giovine and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett have discussed, this UNESCO’s placemaking strategy seeks to foster peace through the incentive of multi-cultural contact, exchange, and understanding of the diversity that historical and “universal” heritage supposes. Furthermore, this scheme encourages the creation of mechanisms of preservation and valorization of material and immaterial culture through “socially coercive power” (Di Giovine 2009, 7). For Di Giovine, UNESCO’s list compels communities and governments to guarantee the means to take care of their (listed) universal heritage. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes, “heritage is created through metacultural operations that extend museological values and methods (collection, documentation, preservation, presentation, evaluation, and interpretation) to living persons, their knowledge, practices, artifacts, social worlds, and life spaces” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, 161). The de facto hands-on agents involved in the preservationist actions (civil and non-profit organizations, local and federal governments, private profit-making entities, international funding organs, policymakers, and other cultural forces) define the ways in which such heritage will “belong to humanity”: as public spaces, touristic industries, or profitable privatized businesses. Michael Di Giovine coined the term “heritage-scape” to dissect the effects of UNESCO’s placemaking strategy, understanding it as a “real social structure which creates real material effects on a globally distributed population in accordance with UNESCO’s long-term

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16 For example, transnational hotel chains, mall developers, or lessors of venues for events, film sets, etc.
goals” (Di Giovine 2009, 6). This section contextualizes the cultural climate, organizations, and initiatives to preserve historical assets that constituted the “heritage-scape” of Oaxaca in which the acquisition of La Soledad intersects.

Two ex-convents in Oaxaca’s City Center, Santo Domingo de Guzmán (converted into Santo Domingo Cultural Center) and Santa Catarina de Siena (currently the Hotel Quinta Real), exemplify two divergent modes of heritage management by the late nineties in this city and state.\(^\text{17}\) Troops and army battalions occupied the Ex-Convent of Santo Domingo\(^\text{18}\) from the years of the war of Independence until 1993. The convent’s facilities did not receive maintenance and eventually deteriorated (Solís 2001). In 1994, monumental works of restoration began and extended for four years. The federal government, the state government, the Ministry of Social Development, Fomento Social Banamex (the most prominent bank foundation in México back then), and the NGO PRO-OAX, Board Pro Defense and Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Oaxaca (Patronato Pro-Defensa y Conservación del Patrimonio Natural y Cultural del Estado de Oaxaca) financed this restoration. The demands around these works responded to previous plans to convert this damaged colonial architectonic compound (of more than forty-two thousand square meters) into a convention center, golf club, and parking lot—all these emblazoned with a crystal pyramid, emulating the Louvre’s public square (Abelleyra 1998). Amidst critiques of the final restoration choices, omissions, and replacements, this ex-convent became a cultural center that encompasses the Museum of Cultures of Oaxaca, the Burgoa Public Library (that preserves colonial books and documents rescued from the convents of the region),

\(^\text{17}\) After the expropriation of the Catholic church assets resulting from the Laws of Reform (1855-1859) promulgated during Benito Juárez Government, many colonial and religious buildings and complexes adopted secular functions like prisons, hospitals, schools, army quarters, and government offices.

\(^\text{18}\) Where constructions began in 1608.
the Ethnobotanical Garden, and the original baroque temple (where religious services continue to this day).

The second example, the Ex-Convent of Santa Catarina de Siena (dated 1568), had historically been used as a prison, town hall, and courts. According to the investigation presented in a press conference by José Márquez, President of PRO-OAX, the Mexican president Luis Echeverría promulgated a decree in 1974 in which he licensed Nacional Hotelera, a State’s enterprise, to conduct restoration works and to transform this federal property for touristic purposes while preserving its historic features. In 1988, president Miguel de la Madrid abrogated the decree, and transferred the operation of this building to another organ of the federal government, the National Fund for Tourism Development (FONATUR). FONATUR licensed this ex-convent to the Círculo Real Group (a private chain of luxury hotels) to function as a grand-class hotel, Quinta Real Oaxaca. Currently, only registered hosts can access this historic edifice. In 2014, the Mexican Congress granted public funds to conduct improvements in this building. However, what lawfully qualified as “improvements” was ambiguous. Improvements could include renovation works in rooms, equipment, or publicity that might not relate to its historical preservation. In a conference on November 30, 2014 the members of the PRO-OAX Board exposed these irregularities. The Board presented an official inquire to FONATUR, asking about the conditions of the license granted to this private hotel chain, the destination of the public funds granted, as well as the use of the profits that the federal government should receive (in exchange for this concession). Legally, the hotel must return profits to the state government for their future investment into social projects in Oaxaca (Márquez 2014). Over the last twenty-five years, the Association PRO-OAX has become a vocal claimant exerting what Di Giovine identifies as a “socially coercive power” (2009, 7). This organization has advocated for an understanding
of public and collective heritage in opposition to privatizing and corporative initiatives over the last twenty-five years.

The examples of Santo Domingo and Santa Catalina de Siena convents helps us identify “metacultural operations” activated by the categorization of the site as a World Heritage location. In the first case, the operations at stake include the formation of an association, the renovation of a group of colonial buildings, the creation of a cultural center, the design of public programs to grant access to the public, and the design of strategies for its future conservation having in consideration its uses. In the second case, the colonial convent serves as a setting of a luxurious and comfortable holiday experience with a “touch” of the past. Metacultural (new) artifacts—like civil associations, classification and access systems, libraries, museums, exhibitions, botanical gardens, or hotels for that matter—mediate new relationships (or at least other than the historical ones) between valuing subjects and their tangible heritage. Santo Domingo and Santa Catarina will never function as colonial monasteries again, and the hypothetical re-enactment of monastic life will not sustain their value in the present. However, the promotion of these sites, as public spaces (a library, a museum, a botanical garden, a temple, etc.) or as private grand-class hotels, defines specific ways to relate to them and to perform their heritage attributes in the present.

The functions and uses of historical buildings define the notion of “heritage” for a specific society. UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention compels member states to adopt measures to “give this heritage a function in the day-to-day life of the community” (UNESCO The World Heritage Convention, n.d.). These specific actions become determinant of the kind of

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19 A private hotel maintained with public funds or a private hotel whose success and profit serves to fund cultural initiatives that are not profitable in and of itself. The perversion in Santa Catarina case resides in the double-logic that PRO-OAX pointed and questioned. The entity managing this estate applied for public funds on behalf of its public heritage category; meanwhile, those funds might be employed not for
subjects included in such performances. PRO-OAX, also a metacultural artifact with an activist agenda against privatization and profitability, has played a fundamental role in pursuing an inclusive performance, pleasure, and pride in heritage values, instead of the privatization for exclusive and elitist touristic purposes.

A group of environmental activists, academics, and artists lead by the artist Francisco Toledo founded PRO-OAX in 1993. What began as the confrontation with a project of engineering to build a freeway that would cross the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca (which required the devastation of a broad area of this reserve biosphere) transformed into an NGO. PRO-OAX is devoted to safeguarding the biodiversity, heritage, and culture of Oaxaca—an enterprise that would invariably involve the reversion and resistance to the advances of neoliberalism and privatization in this state (Nahón 2017, 125). Other initiatives that PRO-OAX has opposed and prevented include the infamous attempt to establish a McDonald’s restaurant in the main square of Oaxaca City (in 2002) and the construction of a convention center at Cerro del Fortín, another ecological reserve zone in the outskirts of the city (in 2015). This organization also raised 400,000 Mexican pesos through sales of editions of prints and photographs to finance improvements at the Ethnobotanical Garden of Oaxaca (Camacho 2005). Summoning the participation, voices, presence, and works of artists, academics, and intellectuals in México, PRO-OAX and Francisco Toledo—its principal advocate—managed to draw attention towards threats to tangible, natural, and intangible legacy and assets.

The process of conversion of the Ex-Convent of Santo Domingo into a cultural center exposed the fragility of historical sites and artifacts. Like many other aged buildings that have preservation, restoration, or maintenance purposes but rather as a business investment for private profit purposes.
served for civilian and government purposes in Oaxaca, their multiple users have left them in deplorable conditions and hard to restore. In 1994, when the Archive of the State of Oaxaca transferred its storage and management facilities, its abandonment and disorganization became tangible. A similar case was the Public Library of the State of Oaxaca donated to the Autonomous University of Oaxaca “Benito Juárez” (UABJO) that possessed incunabula, colonial, and conventual books, which had survived unclassified, deteriorating, and stored in cardboard boxes in facilities with leaks and rats (like the Archive of the State) (Toledo 2014,145-146).

Concerned by these conditions, a group of librarians and archivists, historians, and visual artists headed by Toledo himself, and the specialist in ancient books, Dr. Isabel Porrúa Grañén, constituted another “metacultural artifact” in 1995: Amigos de los Archivos y las Bibliotecas del Estado de Oaxaca A.C. (Civil Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca).

While the efforts of these individuals to rescue the historical collections from destruction increased, the necessity of more substantial infrastructure for its conservation and access became evident.

Francisco Toledo’s involvement in several cultural projects intensified over the last years of the nineties. The restoration of Santo Domingo, the deliberation about the future of the archives and conventual collections recovered, and the encounter of the abandoned factory of La Soledad Vista Hermosa happened in a short period of time. Francisco Toledo and the PRO-OAX

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20 According to this Association’s statement published in Acervos, their periodical bulletin: “This Association promotes the research on libraries and archives; supports the solution of archiving problematics in the context of the State and its municipalities; it contributes to strengthening the archival and librarianship culture, through lectures, courses, exhibitions, publications, and other activities. The Association supports the works conducted in the different libraries and archives throughout the State of Oaxaca” (Acervos 1996, 24; my translation).
association became involved with San Agustín in 1996. In interview, the artist narrates his encounter and beginnings of his relationship with the town as an oblique coincidence,

Twenty years ago, a massive fire happened in this town, which I had never visited back then. Our association, PRO-OAX, helped the municipality with tools, wheelbarrows, and water to extinguish the fire. However, the authorities did not make good use of these materials. The inhabitants fought and removed the authorities because of this situation. I came to the town for this reason. I visited the damaged areas, and I began to know the place. Curiously, I never saw this site because I was always down there at the paper mill.

This coincided with the visit of two Finnish artists who wanted a place to live and to spend a period in Oaxaca. They had a project for producing paper with natural fibers. They proposed their plan to the director of the Rufino Tamayo Workshop, Juan Alcázar, who accepted it. But he did not succeed. He asked for my help, and I called the INBA. The Finnish artists settled and started teaching papermaking techniques, but they needed to buy and import a Hollander beater from Finland. Some artists donated artworks for purchase and fund the acquisition of the beater. Back then, the idea was to establish the paper mill workshop in Oaxaca City (at the Rufino Tamayo Workshop) and not in San Agustín. The organizers could not afford the import fees. I called INBA once more, and they helped us with customs in Veracruz so we could bring the beater to Oaxaca. The Tamayo Workshop did not have the facilities nor the water required. Thus, a guy near Monte Albán, Mr. Bustamante, lent us a henhouse to install the paper mill initially. When the restoration of the hydroelectric building was completed, the paper mill moved here, where it has been functioning for twenty years. The workshop depended on the INBA at first. They provided support to pay for materials. Nowadays, it operates as a cooperative. The rationale was that it was better not to depend on an institution so they could make a profit from their work, and they could self-organize. However, little by little people have been deserting; from the ten to fifteen people that started the cooperative, currently, only six or seven people manage the workshop.

That building was part of a group of hydroelectric plants. There is another hydroelectric plant far down, and a large water tank is up to the hill. When INBA decided to establish the workshop here, they went to the Federal Commission of Electricity that owned all this group of buildings and facilities. The commission wanted to donate the building to our Association, PRO-OAX; but we thought it was better to bequeath it to the municipality because it is theirs. It currently belongs to the municipality.

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21 This workshop opened in the city of Oaxaca in 1975, after the intervention of the artist Rufino Tamayo. Tamayo requested to the National Institute of Fine Arts a space for Roberto Donís’ printmaking workshop. Donís began teaching free printing workshops at the School of Fine Arts of the Autonomous University of Oaxaca “Benito Juárez” (UABJO); albeit, professional rivalries with director of the school he was pressed to suspend the open workshops and to leave the university. With Tamayo’s help, Donís opened this printmaking—and currently also plastic arts—open and non-academic workshop (Nahón 2017, 55, 102). This workshop has established in Oaxaca with a spirit of learning as the outcome of hands-on experience and experimentation. The Ministry of Cultures of Oaxaca currently funds this workshop. Classes are free of cost, and no curricular experience is required.
One day we looked up, and we saw a huge building—laughs—and it was there. We wondered “what is that.” We came up here, and we saw an amazing abandoned construction that was a textile mill in the past.” (Personal conversation Toledo 2018).

Toledo acted as a mediator and proxy in the import of equipment for the workshop’s facilities, asking the National Council for Culture and Arts (CONACULTA) for support; soon after, he also participated in seeking a permanent location for the papermill project.

Taller Arte Papel became the seed of a project that Francisco Toledo envisioned for years: an arts and crafts school in which traditional and contemporary art would fuse technically and conceptually (Jiménez and López Morales 2008, 332). After helping the local population to combat the fire, Francisco Toledo, San Agustín representatives, and CONACULTA’s authorities petitioned to the Federal Commission of Electricity (CFE) for the donation of one of their disused stations. The CFE owned a hydroelectric power plant in San Agustín, the same that one century earlier Zorrilla Tejeda—Zorrilla Trápaga’s son—built to electrify Oaxaca City. When this commission donated the building, the workshop settled there. The first artistic center created by Toledo, the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) in association with PRO-OAX managed, funded, and coordinated its operations for a few years (Brena and Santos 2018, 1-4).22 According to María Claudina López Morales, Toledo “intended to stir up young people’s crave to see things without needing to travel abroad” (2018).

The acquisition of the ex-factory of La Soledad exemplifies the kind of “patrimonialización” (heritage preservation) against tourism and extractivist agendas, occurring in the late nineties in Oaxaca.23 The factory of La Soledad, adjacent to the hydroelectric plants,

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22 In 2000, the papermill separated from IAGO, and took the name Taller Arte Papel de Oaxaca. By 2008, it became a cooperative of local workers, independent of any public or private art institution, as it remains to this day. The estate became a public asset of San Agustín municipality.

23 According to Francisco Toledo these cultural changes responded to the return of a number of Oaxacan artists like Rodolfo Morales, Luis Zárate, Sergio Hernández and himself, who had spent years living
only a few meters up the hill, had remained paralyzed since 1989. In a personal conversation, María Claudina López Morales, the architect who directed the restoration of the former factory, describes how the idea of rehabilitating it emerged,

My business associate at Quetzalli Gallery and I visited the place by chance. We found strike flags and “For Sale” signs. One person showed us the site, and we noticed it was absolutely abandoned. I have been visiting the place for decades because it was a field trip destination, and back then some machines were still functioning. In this visit with my partner, everything had stopped. The light filtering into the machine room through the windows was beautiful. You could find some houses of workers where the square, the reflective pool, and the current street are now. Small constructions, trees, and firewood were spread all over the place, really neglected and destroyed. Our guide told us the price of the estate. We discussed our findings with Maestro Toledo. At first, he said “what for?” but the idea nested in his mind (as it happens with him). Soon after, we visited the factory together. An association of former workers were selling it. He proposed buying the estate with the contribution of the Government of Oaxaca. He paid 2 million (Mexican pesos) of the overall prize of 5 million (Personal conversation López Morales 2018).

The building was purchased without a clear purpose in mind but with the anticipation of the possibility that this facility would transform into a spa or a resort while facing recurring initiatives of unsustainable tourism. High-class businesses would dramatically transform the town, turning the population of farmers and laborers into waiters, janitors, and room attendants of transnational and “boutique” hotels, while expelling schools, small businesses, services, and the local population altogether. Upper-income tourism also constitutes a highly water-consuming

abroad. They collaborated in the foundation of different institutions at the same time, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca. Rodolfo Morales developed his own foundation dedicated to rescuing the architectonic and cultural heritage of the central valleys of Oaxaca (he donated part of his earnings as an artist to the restoration of historical buildings) (Toledo 2014, 148).

24 Her business partner was Graciela Cervantes Bravo, the president of this gallery situated in the center of Oaxaca.

25 In conversation, Maria Claudia López mentioned that the architect Hugo D’Acosta, who had been touring the site with his students, had a client who wanted to install a spa; however, the project never formalized (Personal conversation López Morales 2018).
industry that would modify the uses, flow, and deployment of such a valued resource. The Government of Oaxaca State together with the Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries purchased the ex-factory. When Francisco Toledo got on board in the acquisition of this site to endow it for public uses, the immediate option suggested that it should house the historically neglected General Archive of the State of Oaxaca. Although the gesture intended to acknowledge the historical value of these records and documents, this shelter materialized many years later in an entirely different form, while La Soledad fulfilled another destiny.26

In October of 1982, the transference of the property of La Soledad estate between its last owner and the union of workers, Union of Textile Workers “Eucario León L.” of La Soledad Vista Hermosa Threading and Weaving Mill, concluded after years of legal dispute. By August 24 of 1999, the union of workers of La Soledad Vista Hermosa (legally represented by Agustín Lescas Santiago),27 the Free and Sovereign State of Oaxaca (legally represented by Sergio Hampshire Santibañez Franco, District Attorney), and the Civil Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca (with Luis Castañeda Guzmán and Francisco Toledo as its representatives) signed an Agreement of Promise to Purchase and Sale (Contrato de promesa de compra-venta, 1999). The compromised prize of the estate declared in this contract was five million Mexican pesos—the buyers advanced two million on that date, and they compromised to pay the remaining three million in the following six months. The final purchase and sale, as well as the signing of the title of ownership, did not happen until August 1st, 2001 (almost two years

26 The construction of a building designed ex profeso to house the General Archive of the State materialized until 2017 at the Parque Ciudad de las Canteras in Oaxaca City designed by Ignacio Mendaro Corsini and sponsored by The Alfredo Harp Helú Foundation.

27 The ex-workers and heirs represented by Agustín Lescas Santiago were Felipe Gómez Ramos, Luis Gallardo López, Fernando Morales Rodríguez, Paula González Vda. De Domínguez, José Pérez Rodríguez, David Lescas Sánchez, Julián Robles Ruiz, and Silvestre Domínguez Juárez.
later) (Contrato de compra-venta 2001). According to the notarized title of the property, the land acquired has an extension of 13,723.10 square meters. Two legal entities assumed the acquisition of this real estate: The State of Oaxaca, which contributed with three million of Mexican pesos, allocated by the legislative powers of the State of Oaxaca to the Oaxacan Institute of Cultures, and the Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca, which paid two million Mexican pesos. Their contributions represent the current percentage of ownership of each entity (60% and 40% respectively).

The intention of adapting this building for archival purposes proved inadequate very soon. First, the necessary modifications to implement conservation standards were more than challenging and costly for a building situated in the humid forest. Second, the state employees that had managed this documentary collection refused to commute a distance of sixteen kilometers away from the capital city. The first reason also prevented the ex-factory from harboring a textile museum.28

Lucina Jiménez, Sub-Director of the National Center for the Arts (in México City) at the time, played a fundamental role first as an advisor and later as the ideologist of the institutional structures of this art center in progress. Jiménez had been coordinating different programs of decentralization, survey, and scrutiny of cultural and artistic infrastructure throughout México for more than a decade. Francisco Toledo invited her to visit the site before starting any redevelopment. Jiménez had launched a program of institutional consultancy at CENART to promote the creation and operation of centers of specialized artistic production in the states. This consultancy involved helping them to develop tailor-made structures and programs according to

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28 The Alfredo Harp Helú Foundation ensured the continuity of the project for the Textile Museum of Oaxaca and the Oaxaca State Archives; their facilities are in Oaxaca City.
their location, means, the local communities of active artists, and the audiences. It also offered support in raising public funds for the restoration and construction of facilities. Jiménez suggested that transforming the ex-factory of La Soledad into a center for the arts would require lower investment while filling a gap in arts education and professionalization in the state (Personal conversation Jiménez, 2017). She did not fully participate in this project until two years later.

After the parties involved had decided that this site would house a school of arts and crafts a trust was signed on July 14, 2000. This trust presents the Government of the State of Oaxaca, the artist Francisco Toledo as trustors, the National Council for Culture and Arts as donor, and Fomento Social Banamex as trustee. While outlining the goals, regulations, responsibilities, accountability forms, and systematization of procedures, this contract also allowed the association to start raising funds for the regeneration works. According to the document, the goals of the Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa (Vista Hermosa School and Workshop) were,

La adquisición de dicho inmueble tiene como objetivo la de <sic> convertirse en la sede de la Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa, cuya función principal consiste en fortalecer e innovar la rica tradición mexicana de las artes gráficas, el diseño, los textiles, la cerámica, la restauración y la creación musical, entre otras actividades artísticas, así como la de funcionar como un espacio abierto para la creación, formación, experimentación y producción artística, a través de programas de talleres artísticos impartidos en la Escuela Taller, iniciando una primera etapa con talleres de fotografía, grabado, litografía, serigrafía y xilografía.

The purpose of the acquisition of this estate is to convert it into the Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa. Its primary function entails strengthening and innovating the rich Mexican tradition of graphic arts, design, textiles, ceramics, restoration, and musical activities.

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29 Instead of the State Archives or a Textile Museum, which was another proposal on the plate, discarded for the same conservation issues.

30 An NGO and the social fund and charity of the, back then, National Bank of México, currently merged with Citibank, and renamed Citibanamex.
creation, among other artistic activities; it will also function as a space opened to creation, education, experimentation, and artistic production through a program of artistic workshops taught at the Escuela Taller. In its first stage, the school will begin offering workshops of photography, engraving, lithography, silk-screen printing, and xylography (Contrato de Fideicomiso Número 14511-2, Section “Antecedentes”, Number 2, 2000, 1).

The document begins stressing that the Escuela Taller is an initiative of Francisco Toledo. It also details the financial contributions of each party and their allocation for the expenses that launching the Escuela Taller would require (works of construction, expansion, and improvements). It also calls for the constitution of a technical committee and states the possibility of receiving additional donations. Its technical committee would conduct meetings every three months to discuss and oversee the restoration works and the development of the public programs. One representative of CONACULTA, one representative of the Ministry of Finances of the Government of the State of Oaxaca, and one representative of Francisco Toledo would constitute the technical committee. This committee would have one president and one secretary rotating these positions every six months. The contract also grants authority to the Government of Oaxaca and CONACULTA to audit and oversee the use of the trust’s funds.

However, who was the beneficiary of this trust was not explicit, since the Escuela Taller lacked a legal status the first two years of its life.

The section of “Antecedents” in this text also emphasizes what the Escuela Taller should “pursue at all times,”

- Desarrollar un proyecto académico, no escolarizado, que ampliará las opciones de formación y producción de las artes gráficas a nivel nacional e internacional.
- Apoyar el aprendizaje, la creación y la experimentación [illegible] en el campo de la gráfica, a fin de procurar un alto nivel de calidad artística.

31 The contributors and amounts registered in this contract are: Estado Libre y Soberano de Oaxaca (2,000,000 MXN), Francisco Benjamín López Toledo (2,000,000 MXN), CONACULTA (2,000,000 MXN), Fomento Social Banamex, A.C. (1,000,000 MXN), and Amigos de Oaxaca (1,000,000 MXN).
Professionalizar el trabajo de los artistas y técnicos interesados en las artes gráficas, a partir de la interacción creativa y la transmisión de conocimientos y experiencias de maestros altamente reconocidos.
· Vincular la especialización de alto nivel con la producción artística.
· Promover y difundir las obras que resulten de los ciclos de formación y producción de la Escuela Taller.

· Developing a non-curricular academic project that will multiply the alternatives of education and production of the graphic arts, nationally and internationally.
· Supporting learning, creation, and experimentation [illegible] in the field of graphics to support top artistic quality.
· Professionalizing the work of artists and technicians interested in the graphic arts through creative interaction, and transmission of knowledges and experiences of prestigious teachers.
· Connecting advanced specialization with artistic production.
· Promoting and disseminating the artworks resulting from the training and the production series at the Escuela Taller (Contrato de Fideicomiso Número 14511-2, Section “Antecedentes,” Number 3, 1-2).

In these points, we could identify an agenda of extra-curricular forms of learning, emphasizing specialized and sophisticated techniques instructed by experts and international practitioners devoted to technically reproducible media. Technical specialization figures at the core of this project. Teaching structures favor direct and intensive but short courses or programs (non-curricular), all of which encompass practice-based and expedite training rather than the pursuit of academic degrees.

The “Annex ‘A’” of this document records the operational and functional bases of the Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa. The Escuela Taller would have one director and one coordinator of programs appointed by Francisco Toledo. The director of the Escuela Taller along with CONACULTA (through the CENART) was responsible of the design of an annual program of activities (including in it the requirements, equipment, calendar, international guests, and marketing strategies to commercialize the artworks produced in these workshops) and presentation to the technical committee for approval. The activities conducted should be reported to and evaluated by CONACULTA and CENART.
Since its early constitution and planning, the aforementioned federal entities participated in the conceptual configuration of the Escuela Taller and also in its assessment. These cultural organs oversaw the physical constitution, mission delineation, and planning for the future of this artistic center in progress. The economic participation of the federal government (in the establishment of the trust with which the center began operations at the site but not in the acquisition of the estate) entitled it to keep track of the advancements of this initiative. At the same time, after the creation of CONACULTA, the National Center for the Arts became the leading institution in matters of art education in the country, particularly its dissemination throughout the states. In the following section, I will describe how the first obstacles in the restoration works evidenced the legal, financial, and institutional needs that resulted in the signing of a second trust: the “Convenio Modificatorio” (Amending Agreement) signed in 2002.

FROM ESCUELA TALLER DE VISTA HERMOSA TO CASA: THE AMENDING AGREEMENT (“CONVENIO MODIFICATORIO”) OF 2002

The “Amending Agreement of 2002” (Convenio modificatorio al contrato de Fideicomiso 14511-2) performed three functions. It emphasized the ecological compromise as a core goal and commitment of the center. The document also established institutional bonds with federal cultural entities and with the government of the State of Oaxaca, thus inserting CASA into an institutional network. This agreement strived to develop a more coherent and cohesive academic programming of extracurricular yet professionalizing education in the arts. This addendum to the Trust of 2000, shaped the preliminary legal operation of the center’s trust and funding. This document also recorded the center’s compromise with the preservation of the environment and the practice of less-polluting artistic techniques. The restoration and adaptations of the building
responded to this environmental and artistic agenda, but also to a limited budget that was assigned at irregular intervals. Here, I consider ambiguities like the center’s lack of legal status, which evidenced the need of more explicit institutional foundations that conducted to signing this contract. I will also identify the environmental, artistic, and pedagogic scope of this art school in transition to a State Center for the Arts.

The restoration works at La Soledad started in 2000. Architect Alejandro D’Acosta was appointed in August 2000 to direct these works. This architect and professor of the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM) used to tour and scrutinize La Soledad remains with students of the Architecture Department at UNAM. María Claudina López Morales (member of PRO-OAX) and Esteban Sanjuan (Secretary of The Rodolfo Morales Foundation) from Oaxaca oversaw the restoration advancements, along with Agustín Salgado (CONACULTA’s Director of Monuments and Sites). The first phase of the works involved humidity control, renovation of the front façade and windows, electric installation of some interior rooms, ventilation of the second floor of the central nave, and adaptation of spaces for the printmaking and photography studios. At this stage, the chief architect had the responsibility of designing facilities for the management of sewage and chemical residues, the protection of underground aquifers, and the refurbishment of the water recovery plant (Acta de la primera reunión ordinaria del Comité Técnico del Fideicomiso “Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa,” August 25, 2000). This schedule and works did not evolve on time as María Claudina López Morales declared, “D’Acosta began minor repairs here and there; however, he had not a formal plan” (López 2018). The supervisors did not approve D’Acosta’s proposal, who “abandoned his responsibility” at the end (Acta de la cuarta reunión ordinaria del Comité Técnico de la Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa, 2001; personal
The architect María Claudina López Morales commented,

The Maestro Toledo told me “I want you to be my advisor and oversee the restoration works.” D’Acosta and Toledo had broken their relationship, and Toledo repaid D’Acosta’s time with an artwork. The Maestro suggested I should lead the renovation, but I was not very sure about it—this was such a huge building with so much to be fixed… I asked for the building plans and could not get them. We needed to re-make the “as built” drawings entirely” (Personal conversation López Morales, 2018).

The restoration works resumed until May 2001, directed by the architect María Claudina López Morales who assumed the responsibility and worked pro bono throughout the entire renovation and expansion (which ended until 2017). However, at this point, the Escuela Taller did not have clear institutional or legal attributes to apply the funds of the trust (or any other funds for that matter), neither to hire personnel or construction workers nor to respond in case of an accident.

The architectonic compound for restoration was enormous. The printmaking and photography studios represented only a minor part of the potential of the site. At the same time, the planners proposed to invite international instructors to teach specialized techniques. A dedicated area for artistic residencies in situ became another element that needed space and design.32

The improvised and irregular conditions in which the renovation had evolved up to this point proved the necessity to have a broader plan and vision for the future use of the facilities, and furthermore for the accountability of what, so far, was the sum of good intentions without legal faculties nor responsibilities. The Technical Committee of the Escuela Taller invited Lucina Jiménez, once again, to participate in their meeting convened on September 2001, this time as Director of the National Center for the Arts (the federal institution guiding matters of artistic education, professionalization, and decentralization). Jiménez had launched a program of

32 Graphic and visual artist Jan Hendrix, and photographers Cecilia Salcedo and Antonio Turok served as advisors in the design of these studios.
institutional consultancy at CENART to promote the creation and operation of centers of specialized artistic production in the provinces. Lucina Jiménez inquired about the operational conditions, the management of financial resources and contractual relationships with contractors and workers. She humorously recalled that Francisco Toledo claimed that he had personally opened a checking account as trustor in a bank branch in the city center, on behalf of the Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa, without needing to prove any institutional constitution or affiliation (Personal conversation Jiménez 2017). Jiménez recommended outlining a new agreement, documenting the functions and attributions of each part involved in this project, since the Trust of 2000 did not establish with full clarity the operations of the center.

In response to this notable lack of legal statutes, Lucina Jiménez also mobilized the definition of operational guidelines and the ecological ethos of the center. In January of 2002, Lucina Jiménez presented a working program draft, which included the substitution of the name “Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa” for “Centro de las Artes de San Agustín (CASA).” Jiménez’s proposal responded to previous conversations held with Francisco Toledo, in which she suggested integrating this center to the network that CENART constituted in 1996. In these conversations, Toledo emphasized the importance to prioritize the town’s communal care of natural resources—particularly the water. This premise should not be neglected nor subjected to any governmental or institutional hierarchy. In a conversation Jimenez declared,

We decided to dedicate the center to the visual arts. However, Toledo established one condition. He said, “Look; if you make sure that the center will not pollute, I support you. However, you have to guarantee to me that it will not contaminate because etching residues are contaminating and photography contaminates too. This place produces forty percent of the water that Oaxaca City receives. Thus, you have to guarantee that to me, and I support you in the development of the arts center, which—in fact—is necessary.”

33 The name did not change in the official documentation until 2005 (Acta de la octava reunión ordinaria del Comité Técnico del Fideicomiso “Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa,” June 8th, 2005).
I named it CASA (the acronym for Centro de las Artes de San Agustín), and its motto was “Art, Community, and Environment,” inspired by Toledo’s demands (Personal conversation Jiménez 2017).

As a result of such negotiations and exchange, in November of 2002, the trust signed in 2000 underwent a few modifications recorded in the “Convenio Modificatorio al Contrato de Fideicomiso Banamex Número 14511-2” (Amending Agreement) signed by the participants and representatives of the instances involved. The foundational statement partially changed, and the updated version states,

La adquisición de dicho inmueble tiene como objetivo la de <sic> convertirse en la sede del “Centro de las Artes de San Agustín,” cuya función principal consiste en fortalecer la creación, producción, y educación artísticas, funcionando como un espacio abierto para la creación, formación, experimentación y producción artística, a través de programas académicos especializados en el Centro de las Artes de San Agustín, que iniciarán, en una primera etapa, con talleres de gráfica digital, grabado, fotografía, diseño textil y diseño artesanal; abarcando en una segunda etapa, las artes escénicas y la pedagogía de las artes.

The purpose of the acquisition of this estate is to convert it into the “Center for the Arts at San Agustín.” Its main function entails strengthening artistic creation, production, and education; it will also function as a space opened to creation, education, experimentation, and artistic production through specialized academic programs at the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. In its first stage, it will begin offering workshops of digital graphics, printmaking, photography, textile design, craft design. A second stage will incorporate performing arts and pedagogy in the arts (Convenio Modificatorio al Contrato de Fideicomiso Banamex Número 14511-2, Section “Antecedentes,” Number 2, 2002, 2).

This updated document exposes a more precise language and a more focused scope of activities. For example, “innovating the rich Mexican tradition” and the fields of ceramics, restoration, and musical creation disappeared. “Specialized academic programs” replaced the phrase “artistic workshops.” Additionally, two stages integrating different activities evidence that the restoration and adaptation of the facilities were more advanced and outlined by 2002. As Lucina Jiménez stated, the design of policies applied to artistic institutions in México does not respond to well-structured anticipated plans but rather to circumstances: processes of diagnosing, discovery,
possibilities, alliances, opportunities, visions, intuitions, and abrupt decisions that might or might not occur (Personal conversation Jiménez 2017).

This addendum reflects further changes. The Director of the Oaxacan Institute of Cultures\(^{34}\) (Emanuel Roberto Toledo) and the Minister of Government of Oaxaca figure here as trustors. Concerning the original trust, signed by the representatives of the government’s entities appointed for legal matters in general (the attorney general), in the agreement of 2002 the representatives of culture and governability participated. This involvement of distinct representatives denotes the institutional transition of the center from being only a piece of real estate co-owned by the Government of Oaxaca to, two years later, having become into a site of cultural exchange and artistic programming. Throughout the document, the clauses that previously expressed the intention of the signatories to “contributing with financial resources to cover the expenses” was rephrased in all cases with the more concrete and stronger verb “to finance.” This rephrasing clarifies the compromise of the different parts to participate until completion of the center’s restoration, rather than only in its initial phase. The fourth clause became less ambiguous and more detailed, stating that the purpose of the trust was,

\[\text{(…)} \text{la creación de un patrimonio que permitirá a las partes contribuir al financiamiento para la restauración, construcción, adecuación, equipamiento, instalación, mantenimiento, operación, administración y funcionamiento del Centro de las artes de san Agustín, el cual funcionará bajo las condiciones requeridas para constituirse como un Centro de las Artes Ecológico, es decir un Centro de formación, producción y difusión artísticas, limpio, no contaminante, que preserve el cuidado del medio ambiente (…)}\].

\[\text{(…)} \text{The creation of a patrimony that will allow the trustors and donors to contribute in financing the restoration, construction, adaptation, equipment, installation, maintenance, operation, administration, and functioning of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. This center will function according to the conditions necessary for it to become established as an Ecological Center for the Arts; it means a center of education, production, and dissemination of the arts that is clean, non-polluting, and which preserves the}\]

\(^{34}\text{This institute became the Ministry of Cultures and Arts of Oaxaca in 2004.}\]
Considering the ambition of the project, this clause anticipates the continuous need to find other partners to contribute financially or in kind in the material consolidation of the center.

The modifications to the section of “Antecedentes” clearly highlighted the environmentally conscientious profile adopted by the center after having developed installations and facilities according to this core goal. The first two clauses state what the Center for the Arts at San Agustín should “pursue at all times,”

- Desarrollar un proyecto de formación, actualización, capacitación, experimentación, investigación y producción artísticas, a nivel regional, nacional e internacional, bajo una perspectiva de cuidado y protección al medio ambiente en la región de San Agustín Etla.
- Apoyar la formación, actualización, profesionalización, capacitación y experimentación de artistas, maestros, artesanos, investigadores y técnicos interesados en las artes, a partir de modelos académicos que procuren la interacción creativa y la transmisión de conocimientos y experiencias de maestros altamente reconocidos, a fin de procurar un alto nivel de calidad en la creación, educación, producción y difusión artísticas.

- Developing a project of artistic education, upgrading, training, experimentation, research, and production, regionally, nationally and internationally, to render a position of care and protection of the environment in the region of San Agustín Etla.
- Supporting learning, upgrading, professionalization, training, and experimentation of artists, teachers, craft-makers, researchers, and technicians interested in the arts, through academic models, which will favor the creative interactions and transmission of knowledge and experiences of highly renowned instructors. These models will also foster a high level in the creation, education, production, and dissemination of the arts (Convenio Modificatorio 2002, 2).

These statements encapsulate the combined duty adopted by the center, which encompasses the environmental premise applicable to any artistic form to be practiced, as well as the high profile of its instructors.

The document defines the “objectives” of this Center for the Arts in eight points. The first (a) declares its constitution as the first ecological center for the arts, rendering a position of care

35 My emphasis.
and improvement of the environment. Point (e) conveys the commitment to develop programs of experimentation and research that connect the ecology and the arts, with the intention of creating new artistic techniques, materials, and media that neither pollute nor threaten life. The last point (h) asserts the integration of this center to the Network for the Arts, which is the instance at CENART’s devoted to distance learning (“Convenio Modificatorio al Contrato de Fideicomiso 14511-2,” Cláusula Primera, 3-4).

Simultaneously, the renovation works incorporated the environmentalist essence of the center. María Claudina López Morales received guidance from the National Institute of Fine Arts in developing a plan of sustainable restoration. Her proposal included recycling useful materials in place, the employment of non-polluting materials, the reactivation of a system of water recycling and recovery (which was part of the original design of the textile mill), and the acquisition of wood from communities that advocate for the sustainability and care of forests (Jiménez and López Morales 2008, 332). In the following section, I will examine the results of the adaptation of the remnants of the factory to serve such purposes and the current physical setting in which all these activities occur.

**La Soledad Estate: Facilities and Restoration**

In this section, I outline the architectonic distribution and characteristics of the different spaces when the building operated as a factory and throughout its later conversion into an arts center (2001-2017). I will describe its general structure and the different sections in the factory’s original design (meant to function as a production assembly line) while also comparing them to the new uses of the redistributed rooms and areas of this estate. This section summarizes the works of refurbishment started in 2001 and the physical modifications required for these spaces
to receive their new functions and forms of occupation. I will distinguish the ecological adaptations and designs applied to the laboratories and workshops as well as other infrastructures and constructions added to the site while observing their purposes. Additionally, I will identify some materials employed and how do they cohere with the environmental ethos of the center.

CASA’s history proves that no *a priori* plans can be applied in the configuration of an institution before observing, analyzing, and negotiating with the local constituencies—although they might or might not be users of the center in the immediate future. By 2001, when the technical committee of the center had outlined its objectives and accepted a preliminary program and organizational structure, the spatial and infrastructural needs of the center became clearer. For the architect Maria Claudina López, it required optimizing an austere budget under an uncertain schedule, evidenced in the time frame that constructions endured from 2001 to 2017. By describing the architecture of CASA, I will highlight the multiple uses and habitability of the center stated in its motto, “Art-Community-Environment.” CASA’s facilities serve for multifarious activities: for education, exhibition, performances, artistic production, and accommodation of residents, while granting poetic visibility to water (recognized as the primary resource of this town, as Francisco Toledo demanded). Architect and theorist, Juhani Pallasmaa asserts, “Architecture is a mode of existential and metaphysical philosophy through the means of space, matter, gravity, scale and light” (Pallasmaa 2001, 28). These spaces planned for supporting heavy machinery and synchronizing many working bodies had to be efficiently adapted for new and distinct purposes: artistic research, production, celebration of performances, contemplation, and personal enhancement. Describing the architecture allows us to understand how occupants live and embody space on an everyday basis. In this case, this depiction also provides evidence to assess how plans and projections translated into a physical reality.
In the original design of the main building in this estate, the architect Guillermo Desmonth adopted a Victorian industrial factory hall characterized by symmetry, high ceilings, and large windows in all flanks. This style evolved in northern places in which the days are shorter, and the light is limited. These elements permitted the maximum entrance of daylight, necessary for workers meticulous labor and maximum visibility (of the threads and machinery parts). In CASA, these windows remain unmodified until this day, even though this textile mill began employing electric power early in the twentieth century. According to the archaeologist Michael Stratton, the adoption of these architectures “provides dramatic exhibition spaces” (Stratton 2000, 36). La Soledad was no exception since these “clean lines and expansive volumes” became galleries and performance halls (Berens 2011, 21). The floor plan of this two-story construction has the form of an “H” letter, in which the horizontal line corresponds to the main assembly nave. The preparation of raw cotton and the refinement of fabric happened in the adjacent sections. In both floors, the different quarters and spaces interconnect through numerous entrances. Plentiful physically defiant stairs and steps of different heights and lengths lead to such thresholds. Architect Carol Berens highlights that a practical issue, fire prevention, prescribed the shape of this kind of mills. In general, they neither show external ornament, nor interior covering of walls, while stairs are localized outside of the building (Berens, 22-23). These accesses reflect the uninterrupted dynamism and the articulated and systematic circulation of bodies and supplies throughout the factory. If looking at the floor plan of the first-floor nave, the area on the left-bottom served as storage of raw cotton, which was cleaned and brushed in the right-bottom quarters. In the central nave, a grid of forty-six steel columns, characteristic of this type of textile mill, sustained the thick wood beams of the floorboard and the heavy machinery of the second level. According to the scholar in textile engineering and development in Oaxaca,
Griselle Velasco, the owner imported from Europe the bricks and steel beams employed here, as well as the metallic deco staircase connecting both levels in the atrium (2011, 316). The first floor housed the heaviest machinery, used for carding, straightening, and twisting the cotton fibers, and converting them into the threads. A series of pulleys facilitated the movement of the cotton threads and yarns across the lower floor, and they ascended to the upper section via the “cordoneros,” two shafts located in the left and right upper corners of the naves. In the second floor, the weaving process evolved, as well as the ironing, folding, pressing, and packing of the fabrics produced (Velasco 2011, 333-334). The sounds that inhabited these halls remain silent now, yet the smell of oiled wood prompts us to imagine the unstoppable activity of the machinery (now absent). Other clusters detached from the main building include the chalet (on the left of the plot), the cauldron and the houses of workers (behind the central nave), and the engine room and the main gear (to its right). The renovation plans respected each of these sections that adopted the new functions accordingly to their original characteristics and disposition [Figures 7a, 7b, and 8].

The first phase of restoration (2002-2006) was the refurbishment of the nave. Divided by forty-six dark columns, the first floor of the central nave currently functions as the main exhibition space. On the sides of this same floor we could find, to the left, the printmaking and etching workshop, and to the right, the graphic design, laser-cut, and digital production area. The basements under these two sections currently function as storage for artworks in transit and exhibition furniture, and as maintenance workshops. If we exit the main gallery through the back, embedded in the slope of the hill, we find the public restrooms (constructed from scratch). Their construction required the removal of tons of soil of the mountain. These gravity flush toilets operate with recycled water of the center's treatment plant. On the sides of the restrooms
are two small rooms: the digital photography lab (left) and the textile design workshop (right). Bordered on one side by a slimed wall (in which water slides) and a discrete metallic handrail on the other, two mirroring stairs conduct to the upper floor. The second floor of the nave is split into two sections. On one side, we could find a low large wooden platform; in it dance workshops and performances take place. In the opposite side, a large scenario stands, used for music concerts and performances involving large ensembles. Accessing through this zone, we find the photography laboratory and dark rooms. Contiguous to the dance area, behind the nave and accessed through the external part of the building we find a large hall sheltering the offices of the center. Next to this hall (but still attached to it) is the teleaula (distance learning lecture room) the largest classroom of the center. In the two sections on the second floor above the workshops for printmaking (left) and graphic design and laser-cut (right), on the façade side, two ample terraces allow visitors to contemplate the mountainous landscape and its astonishing sunsets.

The center expands towards satellite constructions that correspond to the latest phases of the restoration process. The chalet, built as the countryside house of the owners is the first building found when arriving in this site, currently serves as a small gallery. Located at the

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36 During the two years that I visited CASA regularly, this room never seemed in use; however electric knitters and other equipment were employed in the past and still stored there.

37 This room served as a distance learning lecture room linked to the Education Channel of the National Center for the Arts but not functioning as such nowadays. It was also used as a library but it did not have enough users. The bookshelves remain there but the collection of books was sent to the two locations of the Library of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca in the center of the city.

38 The construction of residencies and classrooms started in 2003. However, the latest residencies for students and the kitchen were completed until 2017 when additional funds were addressed to it.

39 If we disregard the church which is part of La Soledad complex but it is not part of the current Center for the Arts at San Agustín.
back of it are the gift shop, the director’s office, and other restrooms. If we climb the terracotta cubic stairs—which reminds us of Sol Lewitt’s geometric permutation designs—we arrive to a garden of endemic pochotes (the local name for ceibas) planted by Francisco Toledo himself. This garden conducts us to the residencies for artists and lecturers—ample rooms with independent showers, and the most privileged view to the valley of San Agustín and San José, and the sierra. Below the residency-rooms are the classrooms and dormitories for students (built on the grounds of what were the houses of factory workers). The rooms for students extend one more floor below and have shared showers and one shared kitchen for all. Finally, to the right of the main building at the first-floor level separated by a corridor and a block of stairs is an ample multipurpose room (regularly used for lectures and projections that require darkening the space). Only separated by a wall, to the right of this room, the felt and naturally-colored textile workshop operates. These two sections occupy the main gear and engine room that generated the power in the past. In front of them, at the ground level, we find a loading/unloading area, a parking area, and the generator.

The rationale of this restoration responded to the compromise to preserve water and to avoid the pollution of aquifers, while also inviting users to become aware of the relationship between the center and its ecosystem. For this reason, CASA adopted a series of technologies. Two workshops were explicitly designed to revert the polluting effects of traditional forms of printmaking and photographic printing. Artists collaborated in the technical investigations of physical responses and qualities of these tools.40 In the first case, instead of employing acids to fixate the graphic interventions on the metallic sheets (to be later printed and reproduced on paper), CASA’s printmaking workshop is equipped with an electrolysis chamber that serves for

40 Like Jan Hendrix and Gerardo Montiel Klint.
the same purpose, without generating contaminating residues. The photo-lab has a silver-
recovery system integrated, which prevents this metal from leaking in the drainage. Also, at this
lab, participants learn analog photo-printing methods that involve the substitution of
hydroquinone—a toxic substance—with ascorbic acid. To control the high temperatures of the
second floor of the nave, a system of two pipes located on the vertex of the gable roof use cool
water descending from the mountains; the same principle of the mills, the pressure of water
falling controlled by manifold valves, activates this system. The system functions early in the
morning when water temperatures are the lowest; it chills the metallic sheets of the roof. The
exhibition space on the first floor does not employ artificial climate control; it means that some
conservators might not approve exhibiting works from their collections here, but it also implies
that CASA saves power. A water treatment plant was built underground; the water recovered
feeds the gravity flushed bathrooms and the gardens of the center. All these technical initiatives
have guaranteed that the re-functionalization of the building did not result in an invasion of the
ecosystem, while fostering a culture of respect for water’s vitality.

Another sign of the green and minimally disruptive agenda behind this restoration
includes the re-utilization of materials. In a conversation, María Claudina López Morales
explained her choices as coordinator of the restoration,

We tried to save as much money as possible, which is why we recycled most materials.
For example, we painted the façade with diluted oxide obtained from the oxidized metal
of some of the machines. We refused to develop an architectonic signature because we
aimed to rescue the original building. We began removing some improvised constructions
and rooms spread all over the site. We also eliminated the cement so the color of the
quarry would be more prominent. Most of the wooden beams that separate the two floors
of the nave are the original ones, and they had been here since the factory was first built
(those whose color is lighter are the new ones). We only replaced the rotten ones. The
task seemed like assembling a puzzle. The oil of the machines, adhered to the wooden
beams, produce that characteristic smell. This wood was preserved by this oil, which is
why it has such a dark color. The metal-sheets of the roof are the original ones. We only
welded the damaged spots. Excepting for a few leaks, the sheets were in excellent
condition. The factory was built with high-quality materials. We refused to modify the roof or use sheetrock to make cubicles as some functionaries at CONACULTA suggested (Personal conversation López Morales 2018).

These descriptions illustrate the tactics to reduce unnecessary expenses in this project by extending the use of every piece of material found in good conditions. They also prove the architect’s intention of returning its original aspect to the site.

CASA’s renovated architecture not only applies these principles in practice but also aesthetically and symbolically. Reflective pools and fountains emerge throughout the complex, reminding visitors of the prominence of this liquid and its vital force. Visitors will find them at the entrance plaza, on the second floor behind the main façade (in between the offices and the classrooms), below one of the terraces on the second floor, outside of the chalet, on the side of the main façade stairs, at the fishpond on the left side of the central building. As Maria Claudina López declared, “The water bodies in the site divert the liquid that comes from the mountains rerouting and reincorporating it to the historic canals. We are not wasting the water; we are just ‘taking it for a ride.’ All these elements embody an architectonic homage to the water because it moved all the machines of the factory” (Personal conversation López Morales 2018). They prompt again and again that this substance, resource, and force that enlivens and powers this entire (eco)system [Figures 9 and 10].

CASA’s restoration equally entailed a minimal material intervention but an enormous sensibility and human effort.41 As heritage experts Judith Alfrey and Tim Putnam have argued, introducing new functions while maintaining the character of an industrial building entails a

41 Caterina Pires distinguishes three modes of rehabilitation of art and exhibition spaces that were formerly industrial buildings: minimal intervention, conversion into museums that address the history of the site while exhibiting contemporary art, and occupation (which means keeping all marks of dereliction intact, while exploiting its aesthetical characteristics as signs) (Pires 2016).
tremendous challenge (2003, 18). Critic Caterina Pires helps us to further understand what is at stake in this challenge. She states that in rehabilitated buildings,

Presences and absences, material and immaterial traces can coexist. These spaces have a load (material and semiotic). To exhibit and occupy these spaces is also to work with this load. It is necessary to establish a dialogue with stories, old and new, with concepts, space, containers, and found objects (Pires 2016).

In architectonic and material terms, CASA successfully allows for these coexisting times and their signs to remain visible in the present. The signs of its past were not concealed by demolishing segments or radically transforming its structure and façade. The materials employed to enhance the dignity of the building make it highly appealing as a landmark, but they also maintain a dialogue with the surrounding constructions of the town. Nevertheless, its scale and monumentality are undeniable if compared to any other buildings in this village.

Accomplishing this project required an investment of fifty millions of Mexican pesos (López 2018). By 2005, once the most significant part of the architectonic works had finalized, equipping these spaces became the priority. On March 21st 2006, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín opened to the public after an inaugural ceremony headed by the President of México, Vicente Fox, accompanied by other authorities including the Governor of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruiz, the President of the National Council for Culture and Arts, Sari Bermúdez, as well as the primary advocate, philanthropist, and visionary pushing this enterprise forward: the artist Francisco Toledo. Since then, material and intellectual efforts have not ceased.

**RESTORATION AND REUTILIZATION OF INDUSTRIAL RUINS FOR CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC USES AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The transformation of La Soledad into the Center for the Arts at San Agustín exemplifies a global phenomenon occurring at the turn of the millennium: abandoned buildings with an
industrial past became revitalized (in multiple ways and by different types of advocates) to serve as cultural, artistic, and museological institutions. Although deindustrialization scenarios might have responded to specific and dissimilar causes locally and regionally (if we compare Oaxaca to Manchester or Boston), the pattern of redundancy of buildings and complexes dedicated to manufacturing repeated worldwide by the second half of the past century.

Specialists in industrial archaeology ascribe this phenomenon to unsustainability, pollution, and displacement of industries. According to industrial archaeologist, Michael Stratton, the Oil Crisis of 1973, “marked the end of the postwar boom,” revealing an increasing environmental degradation and pollution (2000, 10). The development of an environmental agenda and policies of sustainability were the outcome along with *en masse* migration of technologically renovated industries to places with fewer regulations and cheaper labor, i.e., to the Global South (Alfrey and Putnam 2003, 61; Berens 2011, 19). Abandoning outdated and unsustainable facilities was easier than replacing their infrastructures in place. Also, the scarcity of oil impacted the industrial sector worldwide. As Berens emphasizes, “buildings represent a large percentage of energy use, consuming natural resources and contributing a significant percentage of carbon dioxide emissions” (Berens, 122). The construction industry, then, suffered changes in its dynamics of renewal.

After the elimination of a substantial number of jobs that this deindustrialization left, new economies had to compensate to prevent an economic crash. The tertiary sector, the service

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42 Frank Bösch and Rüdiger Graf summarize this crisis: “What we commonly describe as the first ‘oil crisis’ consisted of two interconnected processes: the oil price rises implemented by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which quadrupled the price of oil within a few months, and the coinciding oil embargo and production cuts organized by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) in order to force Western nations and Japan to assume a more pro-Arab stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict that had turned violent with the Yom Kippur War in October 1973” (2014, 8).
economy (of which cultural and creative industries are part of) grew enormously. New professional fields emerged and incorporated into the labor market. Heritage preservationist, museum caretakers, curators, and artists represent only a few examples of the “careers”—related to the subject of this investigation—which are shapes of labor that proliferated by the last decade of the twentieth century. These professional fields substituted the role of laborers in the assembly line. Some individuals occupy in the present the spaces that their descendants occupied one or two centuries before.

Art, artists, and cultural agents had also played a vital role in economic development. Perhaps the loft phenomenon in New York City’s SoHo radically exemplifies artists’ input (and capitalization by third parties) in value generation, in this case of the real estate economy. As Aaron Shkuda points out, artists were “both victims and agents of gentrification” (2016, 9). In the late fifties, through manual labor, artists adapted industrial spaces and warehouses constructed one century before to house department stores (Shkuda 2016). This semi-derelict but spacious floors adopted multiple functions: lodging, workshops, storage of artistic tools and materials, showrooms, and spaces for performances. With modest budgets and improvisational, artistic, and recycling abilities, New York artists fixed and refurbished these floors to make them inhabitable and useful again. The availability of such a large amount of space for working and living became critical in the kind of art produced by this generation of artists: multidisciplinary, combining objects and performative uses of the space, employing industrial materials and large formats in sculpture and painting.

Currently, new occupants adapt post-industrial sites as studios, museums, or memorials and their new occupations inscribe interpretations over the past. Artists’ vision, artists’ labor, and artists’ investment can transform scrapheap and ruins not only into valuable real estate but also
into heritage. What certain people and groups perceive as failed or paralyzed productivity or as a wasted occupation of land, artists find sound structures and ample halls with a patina, as well as the potential of stimulating curiosity, triggering intellectual labor, and restituting modes of commonality. Michael Stratton considers that preserving industrial archaeology constitutes an agentic mode to praise technological and engineering advancements to recognize the role of the workforce of a place. As an extension of it, the reactivation of industrial spaces aims to help to overcome trauma—either if it is caused by war destruction, industrial decline, or by economic and social consequences—by “bringing back into use the energy and materials invested in them” (Stratton 2000, 21-23).

However, restoring and revitalizing “redundant mill buildings which were once the centerpiece of social and economic life” does not signify reestablishing the living conditions of the past in and of itself (Alfrey and Putnam 2003, 61). Its effects could become disruptive and controversial. Stratton acknowledges that museums and centers created after the restoration of industrial facilities do not serve the same population that formerly sustained from their labor there (Stratton 2000, 9). The actual users of these spaces might end up being tourists, citizens investing their leisure time, groups of children in visits organized by their schools, students in the arts and humanities trying to join networks of the cultural field, or inquisitive neighbors. As Alfrey and Putnam recognized, “constituencies need to be created” (2003, 87-133).

Derelict foundries, train stations, wharves, power stations, textile mills, and windmills (past icons of progress, modernity, and mechanized speed applied to production and distribution of goods) now shelter collections and programs that link the past and the contemporary world. Some of these sites pay homage to labor and technological advancements while memorializing the historical activities that enlivened those places before being ceased. Ironbridge Gorge, a site
advertised as “The Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution,” is also the pioneer of conversion of industrial facilities into museums. Located in Telford, Shropshire, England, UNESCO integrated Ironbridge Gorge to its World Heritage List in 1986. Now this site includes a cluster of “total environment museums” like the Jackfield Tile Museum, Coalport China Museum, Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron, Museum of the Gorge, and Darby Houses (Alfrey and Putnam 2003, 33). In these museums, visitors can experience collections of artifacts, workshops that recreate antique technologies, and houses where actors reenact Victorian life. This initiative that local people started as the recuperation of archives and documents evolved into a Museum Trust in 1967. It currently keeps the economy and activity of the entire town of Ironbridge and attracts local tourism. The Ironbridge Gorge Museums also provide advice in matters of cultural heritage (“Sector Support,” Ironbridge Gorge Museums 2019).

The old cotton mill named Strykjärnet in Norrköping, Sweden harbors the “Arbetets Museum” (The Museum of Work). This site also exemplifies the transition from manufacturing to cultural production. The museum dedicates its exhibitions to the history of labor, the city, and individual employees that worked at the site. A joint foundation of workers’ associations supported by the Swedish government runs this museum. The organizations that integrate this foundation are the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees, the Workers’ Educational Association, the Swedish Cooperative Union, and the Sensus Study Association (Arbetets Museum website, n.d.). Places like the Arbetets

43 “The world’s first iron bridge was erected over the River Severn at Coalbrookdale in 1779” (The Iron Bridge 2019). Shropshire, a town currently dedicated to the “Ironbridge Gorge Museums,” was a coalmine area that saw the earliest forms of serialized production at workshops and small factories of potters, glassmakers, blacksmiths, pipework, etc. while also distributing their coal throughout Britain (Alfrey and Putnam, 33).
Museum play a role in a (self)reflection of the working class through their archaeological pieces of evidence and traces.

The histories, resources, and agents reactivating manufacturing sites vary but their social and economic impact stands out. The list of examples is immense. The Salts Mill Saltaire in West Yorkshire is relevant to this discussion because of the extraordinaire resemblance between restored areas of CASA and the Salts Mill “1853 Gallery” (“1853 Gallery,” Salts Mill n.d.). This colossal architectonic compound includes a permanent collection of works by David Hockney, galleries, a music school, stores (of books, art materials, bikes, design, jewelry, etc.), diners, and a permanent exhibition about the textile mill’s history and the town’s inhabitants.

A younger building but the most paradigmatic case of an artistic institution that ramified into a series of profitable enterprises is, without a doubt, Tate Modern. The Bankside Power Station in London, originally designed by Giles Gilbert Scott and constructed in the decade of the fifties, houses since 2000 a museum of modern and contemporary art that receives more than five million visitors per year (Findlay 2017-18, 138-139). The Tate (an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport of the Government of the United Kingdom) purchased and restored the building with funds granted by the Millennium Commission from lottery funds, the English Partnership, the government’s urban regeneration agency, and the Arts Council of England, also from lottery funds (Fer 2001, 44).

44 The Technical Committee of the Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa paired museums in Bilbao, Barcelona, Valencia, and Sevilla, where deindustrialization had been faced by developing cultural projects (Acta de la décima primera reunión ordinaria del Comité Técnico del Fideicomiso “Escuela Taller de Vista Hermosa,” 2007).

45 This mill opened in 1853 and ceased in 1986. In 1987 a gallery fully dedicated to the artist David Hockney opened. After that subsequent spaces of the building were rented for commercial and cultural uses. In 2001 UNESCO listed the town of Saltaire—that this mill is the heart of—as World Heritage by in 2001.
3). In this ambitious project, conducted from 1995 to 2000, the architectonic office Herzog and De Meuron preserved signs of the industrial past of the site: “unfinished brick walls and exposed steel construction beams” (“Look behind the art at Tate Modern,” Tate 2016), as well as its monumental chimney. This renovation expanded from 2009 to 2016 when the Tate Modern Project incorporated additional areas like the tanks and the switch house, where an entirely new building designed by the same firm exists now (Ibid.).

Workers of the Metallurgical and Plastic Industries of Argentina (IMPA), an aluminum plant in Buenos Aires, took over this factory (1998-2000) when owners shut it during the hardest economic crisis of Argentina. They transformed it into a self-managed and independent cultural co-op without government’s support. “IMPA/La Fábrica Ciudad Cultural” integrates labor and participatory artistic activities (performing arts and crafts workshops) involving workers, neighbors, and students (Rohter 2003). In 2012, IMPA received a subsidy via the Buenos Aires University to organize and open to the public the “IMPA Museum of Labor: Social Memories of the Working Identity” (IMPA website, 2012).

The network of State Centers for the Arts in México aims to activate the potential of cultural communities but also of infrastructures in place. Rehabilitating neglected buildings is one of the actions to do it. Half of these centers have occupied and re-funcionalized historical buildings (colonial, nineteen-century, and early twentieth-century) formerly used as monasteries, prisons, hospitals, barracks, lodges, haciendas, and large houses. Along with the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, the Center for the Arts in Monterrey, in the Ex-Foundry of Iron and Steel of

46 In the “Round Table: Tate Modern,” Julian Stallabrass associates a phenomenon of self-organization of exhibitions with a zeitgeist in which Tate inserts: “If you went to so-called alternative exhibitions of British art in the 1990s, they were often housed in industrial ruins. Many were unrenovated, and bore clear traces of their past use, signs admonishing workers, or sinks and other fittings. The feeling of a ghost of a workplace was still very much present” (Fer 2001, 122).
Monterrey (operating from 1900 to 1986) and the Center of Education and Production in Visual Arts “La Arrocera,” a former grain warehouse in Campeche City, are all examples of industrial facilities that have adopted new functions related to artistic and cultural production (Peralta 2017).

**CONCLUSIONS**

The emergence, decline, and process of recuperation of an abandoned textile mill dynamized the life of the town of San Agustín. The vision, perseverance, and investment of individuals who persuaded the Oaxaca State’s and federal authorities to contribute to this venture proved to be essential for the accomplishment and fruition of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. Foundational documents, particularly the trust signed in 2000 and its addendum of 2002, record crucial moments in the shaping of this Center for the Arts. The versatile activities performed at this institution encompass an art school, specialized artistic production workshops, exhibition galleries, a venue for performing arts, residencies for artists, and a community center at once. A fundamental characteristic of this center is the ecological care that translates into environmentally sustainable systems and the practice of less-polluting artistic techniques. I have described CASA’s estate, facilities, and its surrounding landscape. I also identified how its goals, uses, and environmental ethos cohered through the materialization of the site’s renovation.

The artist and activist, Francisco Toledo, was the prime advocate and connecting-thread of this endeavor. This chapter featured the integration of La Soledad into the assets of the State of Oaxaca, co-owned by the Civil Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca, presided by the artist. I considered here the financial and organizational participation of the National Council for Culture and Arts, also compelled by Toledo. The creation of this center
echoes affiliated initiatives to guarantee public access to historic sites and collections as a means of social encounter for Oaxacans. The profile of CASA bolsters environmental commitment, and the composite of artistic and cultural activities developed at the center amplifies and complements the complexity, scale, and goals of peer institutions also promoted and supported by Francisco Toledo.

In the following chapter, I outline Francisco Toledo’s biography as activist, philanthropist, and defender of the natural and cultural Oaxacan wealth. Examining the liaisons that he established, the organizations that he founded, and the mechanisms that he pursued offer the reader an understanding of Toledo as a public figure, as well as a broader view of the local problematics and the social movements in which he sought to intervene. Here, I also emphasize the kinship relations between CASA and its programs, and other cultural and artistic centers founded by the Juchitecan artist. By exposing this genealogy, I will contextualize localized notions of patrimony, publicness, and activism in contemporary Oaxaca.
CHAPTER 2.
FRANCISCO TOLEDO’S PHILANTHROPY AND ACTIVISM THROUGH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Translating the word from Spanish, “patrimonio,” to the word “heritage” in English removes and adds something to the meaning of these terms making the conversion task inaccurate. The concept “heritage” emphasizes the past. Once this word gets performatively attached to a particular material or immaterial cultural entity, it frames a collective and, therefore, valuable past. The word “patrimonio,” instead, propels its meaning as a matter of the present. Discussing Francisco Toledo’s legacy and philanthropic action proves the difficulty entailed in this translation. His altruism was uncommon. This artist profoundly repudiated celebrity and distinction. Through his actions and contributions materialized as artistic collections, cultural institutions, civil organizations, and campaigns of environmental and cultural preservation, and in defense of human rights, Toledo sought, first and foremost, a social transformation. He was deeply convinced about the agency of the institutions he founded, promoted, and sustained to shape and improve human relationships in the present. In this chapter, I argue that, viewed through the lens of Francisco Toledo’s social action, the notions of “philanthropy” and “patrimonio” gain a specific weight and meaning in Oaxaca and México.

I have divided this chapter into four parts. The first section, “Francisco Toledo’s Life before his Relocation in Oaxaca City,” provides some biographical facts relevant to understand the basis of his artistic, social, and political perspectives. “Francisco Toledo’s Legacy and the Oaxacan Landscape of his Cultural Institutions,” the second part, contextualizes the earliest artistic collections and institutions founded in Oaxaca by the artist. By presenting the ample range of programs they offer, I seek to outline the kind of public life they foster; I also establish their lineage as “ancestors” of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. The third part, “Francisco
Toledo’s Campaigns and the Use of his Presence Publicly,” provides a panoramic view of the causes that Toledo endorsed, while I analyze the relevance of his attendance as a trigger of mobilization, as well as the aesthetic resources he employed to convey sharp messages. Despite his unambiguous and explicit positions regarding the political agendas of governors, presidents, and private organs in Oaxaca and México, Toledo systematically refused to be linked to any political or governmental faction. Toledo was a man of action that tactically knew how to persuade others to collaborate with him. In the fourth and last part of this chapter, “The Institutionalization of Francisco Toledo’s Legacy,” I examine specific partnerships established between the centers founded by Toledo and prominent institutions that integrate the cultural and educational apparatus in México (i.e., The National Center for the Arts and the National Council for Culture and Arts, now Ministry of Culture; the National Institute of Fine Arts; and the National Autonomous University of México). In this fourth part, I demonstrate that, to the same extent that Toledo mobilized individuals, these institutional associations aim to guarantee that the initiatives he started and sustained for decades had a life in the future.

**FRANCISCO TOLEDO’S LIFE BEFORE HIS RELOCATION IN OAXACA CITY**

Born into a family from Ixtepec, in the Isthmus region of Oaxaca, Francisco Toledo (July 17th, 1940 – September 5th, 2019) reluctantly mentioned in interviews that, by chance, he was born in México City. He preferred to identify as Juchitecan. His parents were middle-class merchants who traveled and lived in different locations in Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the capital city. Francisco Benjamín López Toledo, the youngest of his family, spent his earliest childhood in

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47 The Tehuantepec Isthmus is the narrow belt of the Mexican territory with the closest distance between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of México; it includes part of Oaxaca and Veracruz States.
Minatitlán, Veracruz, and his teenage years in the city of Oaxaca (Abelleyra 2001, 16-17). At the age of seventeen, he moved to México City, where he enrolled in the School of Design and Crafts of the National Institute of Fine Arts (Molina 2017, 18). As a teenager, he traveled to Rome, and soon after, at the age of twenty, he moved to Paris to learn about the European avant-garde. Toledo chose Juchitán as the *loci* that condensed his most praised memories and familial histories. He decided to make it his place of return(s) from Europe, in the same way that, as an adult, he pursued learning the Zapotec language of his parents, who did not thoroughly teach it to him as a child (Molina, 24). A young man who had traveled and lived in different places and cultures, Toledo strived to emphasize a part of his identity rooted in an indigenous and Oaxacan origin.

Paris allowed Toledo to blend with intellectuals and artists while gaining commercial success in an international art market. Recommended by the gallerist Antonio Souza, Octavio Paz and Rufino Tamayo—a poet and a painter, two highly reputed Mexican intellectuals in Paris at the time—became his mentors and godfather-like figures. Both of them materially supported him while introducing Toledo to key international figures that marked him as a cosmopolitan Oaxacan in Europe, despite the ungainly, ascetic, and shy persona that he projected since his youth. His six-month trip in 1960 extended for five years (Abelleyra 2001, 43). Like Juchitán, this other city also became a place of continual return for the artist.

Self-instruction, hands-on learning, and a distancing from formal education recurrently appear as topics in Toledo’s interviews and biographical essays (Abelleyra 2001; Brena 2017; Molina 2017). When I approached the artist requesting him to comment on his view of CASA’s pedagogical scope, with a sardonic gesture, he inquired back “PEDAGOGICAL?”, revealing his reserve to speak about educational agendas. Although, as a young man, he kept close to different
universities and employed their facilities and services, he was never formally enrolled or pursuing a degree.\(^48\) The groundings of his education include his constant visits to the Autonomous University of Oaxaca “Benito Juárez” Library (Abelleymra 2001, 36) and the free use of workshops at “La Ciudadela” School of Design and Crafts of the National Institute of Fine Arts (Brena 2017, 2). These settings allowed him to develop his own methods, consisting of unapologetically grabbing the implements and making mistakes. As he declared, “I was not scared of using the tools” (Ibid.). Initiated in lithography, printmaking, and painting, the discovery of new media kept Toledo’s artistic energy moving as it happened later with ceramics, needle felting, laser cutting design, and even a knitting machine that reproduced digital designs in socks.\(^49\) Toledo’s self-taught principle encompassed his access to literature, history, and art books, the use of working spaces, availability of a wide variety of instruments, and a persistent and curious gaze for images, artworks, and beauty. His material and intellectual legacy in Oaxaca aimed to foster in others a free-spirited way to learn and to become makers in the same fashion as this artist did. He achieved that by founding public organizations, taking care of them, and ensuring its continuity through institutional links.

According to the prominent intellectual and Mexican cultural analyst Carlos Monsivais, Toledo inaugurated a modality of the cultural left in México that encompasses the defense of

\(^{48}\) The School of Fine Arts of the Autonomous University of Oaxaca “Benito Juárez” (UABJO), the School of Design and Crafts of the National Institute of Fine Arts (School of “La Ciudadela”), and the House of México of the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (Abelleymra 2001, 27-28; Brena 2017, 4; Molina 2017, 18).

\(^{49}\) Since the foundation of CASA, Toledo has experimented with these techniques. This arts center allocates the workshops of felt needling with naturally dyed fibers, the laser cutter, and the sock knitting machine. As I review in chapter three, he has also worked at ceramics workshops established in San Agustín (Taller Los Alacranes and Taller Canela). The exhibitions Diseño Toledo/CASA (Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca, February 2018) and Toledo Ve (Museum of Popular Cultures, México City, June 2019) emphasize the versatile, curious, and persistently experimental personality of Francisco Toledo.
heritage and natural resources, and the creation of public institutions (Medina and Ortega 2000). When Toledo decided to relocate to Juchitán, early in the seventies, the organized movement of the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) was becoming more prominent. An organization of lower class Zapotecs from Juchitán, COCEI fought for municipal autonomy. It represented a political opposition against the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), the political party that dominates, to these days, the State of Oaxaca. Along with Víctor de la Cruz, Macario Matus, and Elisa Ramírez, Francisco Toledo became involved with COCEI’s cultural arm. Thanks to the flourishing market of his artwork, he was able to found and fund the Juchitán’s House of Culture (Casa de Cultura de Juchitán) in 1972 and the magazine Guchachi’Reza, a medium of communication of COCEI’s ideas and imagery. Juchitán’s House of Culture was the first cultural center that Toledo envisioned as an instrument to strengthen and give visibility to a social movement and group. He acquired books to constitute a public library. He equipped a graphic arts workshop for local artists to produce reproductible propaganda and political imagery for the movement. He acquired graphic artworks for exhibitions. And he also summoned artists across México to participate in exhibitions and events while calling the attention of the country’s center toward the social mobilization happening in Juchitán (Álvarez 2009, 27:40-27:50; McCaughan 2012, 148-149). His involvement ended in 1983, when PRI  

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50 Whereas the PRI government upheld nationalist ideals, capitalist economic development, and industrialization, coceistas sought to have political autonomy, control over the lands, and preserve their resources, culture, and language (Campbell and Tappan 1989, 253). For Campbell and Tappan, four elements characterize COCEI’s movement: their defense of a Zapotec identity, which entails the rejection of other groups such as the Lebanese influence in the isthmus, the vallistos (inhabitants of the central valleys), and North Americans; a social organization based in committees of neighbors; the participation of women, evidenced by their embodied risk-taking in protests; and the relevance of Zapotec language, culture, and imagery to communicate political ideals (Campbell and Tappan, 252-263).

51 Toledo organized exhibitions, produced artworks, and commissioned participations in Guchachi’Reza to reclaim the enquiry about the disappearances of several activists and militants from the isthmus (Abelleyra 2001, 255-256).
members chased and nearly lynched him (Abelleyra 2001, 255; Álvarez 28:40-30:45), leading to his decision of detaching from the movement. Despite of this abrupt distancing, the Juchitán’s House of Culture and Guchachi’Reza marked Toledo’s political drive and cultural tactics against the grain of political affiliation.

Simultaneous to his inexhaustible and prolific artistic production, Toledo also played a critical role as an activist beyond Oaxaca. He advocated for public and free education, the preservation of biospheres, the custody of heritage, the dissemination of indigenous languages, and against the incursion of genetically modified corn and corporate agriculture. Along with other activists, artists, environmentalists, and experts, the artist has constituted associations and organizations for such purposes (like PRO-OAX and the Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca, as I reviewed in Chapter One) of which Toledo was the chief representative. Often, the press pursued him in search of his opinion on every matter of public interest in México, because he became a referent in the advocacy of human rights and dignity. He represents a model of a contemporary public intellectual that masters the use of art and aesthetics for activist purposes and to give visibility to the social causes.

Toledo, “El Maestro,” as he is identified in Oaxaca, not only in art circuits but in street businesses and workshops, subverted and took advantage of gendered structures altogether. He bore the title based on artistic and social merits, as well as the already-in-place distinctions of what being a “maestro” means. A “maestro” is first and foremost a patriarchal figure, someone highly regarded, publicly assumed to possess knowledge, craft, and experience (a title granted to

52 On December 1st, 2019, the day that Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office, Francisco Toledo sent him a letter supported by numerous members of the scientific, cultural, and artistic community. In it, the artist requested him to conduct a consultation with the indigenous communities that would be affected and displaced by the Mayan Train development advocated by the new Mexican Government (Pérez-Alfonso and Mateos 2019).
men more frequently than to women). He employed his wealth and recognition as an established international artist to invest in new infrastructures and channels of distribution to make them available to a broader community of makers. Some remarkable examples were the award of the Golden Medal of the National Arts Prize and the Emeritus Fellowship of the National System of Creators. Toledo melted the golden medal to make jewelry with his designs and use the profit in addition to the fellowship’s stipend to restore the houses in the center of Oaxaca City that currently shelter the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) and the Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center (CFMAB) (Abelleyra 2001, 262, 272).

At the beginning of the eighties, the artist relocated to Oaxaca City, although he expressed on multiple occasions his hesitation and intention to move to a different place because Oaxaca distracted him from his artwork. Individuals and groups practically chased him everywhere he went, asking him to give voice to their causes. As he stayed, his role of benefactor and chief spokesperson intensified, and many cultural and educational spaces counted on him, his mediation, his opinion, and his funding. In the following section, I will describe a selection of artistic institutions, centers, and collections initiated in Oaxaca by Toledo, while I will also analyze their relationship with the Center for the Arts at San Agustín.
# List and Timeline of Institutions Founded, Sponsored, and Co-Sponsored by Francisco Toledo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juchitán’s House of Culture</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO)</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca (MACO)</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board Pro-Defense and Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Oaxaca (PRO-OAX)</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burgoa Library (Centro Cultural Santo Domingo)</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center (CFMAB)</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library for Blinds “Jorge Luis Borges”</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music Library “Eduardo Mata”</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Association of Friends of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca and the Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film Club “El Pochote”</td>
<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop “Arte Papel Vista Hermosa”</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnobotanical Garden</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for the Arts at San Agustín (CASA)</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CASA Annual Awards of Literature in Indigenous Languages (Huave, Mixe, Triqui, Mixtec, and Zapotec)</strong></td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A collaboration between the artist Francisco Toledo, the Ministry of Culture, through the National Fund for Culture and Arts, the National Center for the Arts, the State of Oaxaca Government, through the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, Calamus Publishers, and the Association of Friends of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca and the Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communitarian kitchens for the Tehuantepec Isthmus earthquake’s affected victims</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Photographic Contest of the Reserved Biosphere Tehuacán-Cuicatlán</strong></td>
<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>- In collaboration with the Foundation for the Reserved Biosphere Tehuacán-Cuicatlán, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, and the Botanical Garden at the National Autonomous University of México</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Library “Francisco Toledo” at the Santa María Ixcotel Penitentiary Center</td>
<td>2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communitarian Distance Learning High School #84</td>
<td>2019</td>
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FRANCISCO TOLEDO’S LEGACY AND THE OAXACAN LANDSCAPE OF HIS CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

In this section, I will review the landscape of cultural institutions and public spaces configured by Francisco Toledo in Oaxaca. These sites, houses formerly inhabited by the artist and converted into cultural and artistic centers that later received a formal institutional status, embody two main qualities: civic-mindedness and beauty. These qualities shape, in practice, the significance of “making public” in Toledo’s terms, which I will define and exemplify in this section. The public character of these sites means open to all, free of cost, free of social hierarchies, and welcoming. Their beauty resides in the dignity of reconditioning the habitability of spaces that are part of the city’s landscape (instead of building new ones). The relationship of houses with open doors, lintels announcing the blooming vegetation of the patios, where people conduct multiple activities, correspond with the forms of the public and communal life of Oaxacan towns. Toledo opened his houses as it happens when a neighbor or a family is hosting a celebration or a commemoration. Although these institutions perform all the activities of a museum, they exist as “open houses,” whose hospitality prompt the intersection of communal life and artistic experience.

Toledo rejected the museumification of Oaxaca City and its conversion into an area dedicated to providing services and experiences to tourists while expelling the local inhabitants from the site and the culture (Valdés Bautista 2014). The touristic rationale represents the contradiction of praising a supposed history and traditions, and presuming a lineage whilst creating the conditions of margination for the people related to that valuable and profitable “heritage.” According to the Mexican historiographer and museums’ scholar, Gerardo Morales Moreno, this logic of representation has characterized the Mexican national culture throughout its almost two centuries (2007, 35-37). Toledo rejected the city transforming into a scenery for
the privileged, where non-privileged Oaxacans became subalterns, whose options to make a living would become restricted to quasi-colonial relationships. His efforts instead served to guarantee city spaces for Oaxacans to live, relate, and proudly enjoy. His consistent initiatives (to form and take care of these cultural centers) aimed to counterbalance the policies favoring international tourism, a result of Oaxaca City’s inclusion in UNESCO’s World’s Heritage List in 1987.

In Chapter One, I presented Michel Di Giovine’s concept “heritage-scape” to contextualize the implications and consequences of UNESCO’s place-making strategy. Di Giovine defines his concept in the following terms,

UNESCO’s World Heritage program reappropriates these sites for their own global placemaking endeavor, creating a worldwide imagined community that I call the heritage-scape. Positing in its constitution that people’s identities are problematically based on traditional territorial conceptions that are constructed and diffused through these emotionally charged monuments, UNESCO’s goal of creating lasting peace includes a fundamental reworking of the geopolitical system not through conquest, but by reordering individuals’ sense of place. By simultaneously celebrating the differences that create conflict, tourists consuming the World Heritage narrative can celebrate and internalize diversity (2010, 8-9).

Di Giovine analyzes UNESCO’s strategy in hindsight when he diagnoses that a “conflict-free globe” exists only in the gaze and mind of tourists visiting the listed sites. To neatly dissect and divide to what extent renovating, opening to the public, and beautifying sites serves tourism is a complicated task. In Chapter One, I also argued that this strategy mobilized agents and organizations in Oaxaca in two different directions. The first kind of initiative sought profit and privatization of historical assets to put them to the service of an upper-income tourism sector, anticipating its potential economic gains. The second, represented by Toledo and the Association PRO-OAX, sought the preservation and recuperation of public spaces. Toledo responded and
reacted to the tourism charge, aiming to guarantee a sense of the commons for Oaxacans in multiple and persistent ways, as we will review next.

In the following paragraphs, I present two artistic centers that, along with the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, crystallize Toledo’s pursue and the rising configuration of a parallel cultural system in Oaxaca: The Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) and the Photographic Center Manuel Álvarez Bravo (CFMAB). I briefly contextualize the conditions of their creation, given Toledo’s prime motivations for such undertakings. I also provide a summary of the activities and audiences that currently participate and enjoy these sites. My goal here is to show the interinstitutional complexity of such an alternate system, and its translation into a “Toledoan” understanding of philanthropy as a means to produce civic relationships and commonality, i.e., situations to share spaces with peers.

The Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca represents the seed for all the other institutions and initiatives promoted and sustained by Toledo. After his “political exile” from Juchitán, the artist relocated to an old house in the Center of Oaxaca. According to curator and writer Fernando Gálvez, to persuade Rufino Tamayo of donating his collection of archaeological pieces to the city, Toledo offered him this house in Macedonio Alcalá as a venue (2000, 47). Toledo’s eagerness to begin the most arduous and decided task of his life, a network of institutions that would convert Oaxaca into a capital of the arts in its own right, could not wait for Tamayo’s response. Toledo decided to adapt this house to open his library and artistic collection (mostly composed of drawings, prints, and etchings) to the public. The Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) opened on November 28, 1988, and continues evolving to this day [Figure 11].

An interview with the artist in 1997 records his core motivations to develop an alternate and non-governmental cultural infrastructure. The journalist Myriam Audifred paraphrases
Toledo, who declared he was tired of the country’s centralization, translated as the saturation of services and collections in México City, at the expense of the abandonment of the provinces. He claimed, “It is time to return part of the patrimony to its places of origin and to create new cultural options for their inhabitants” (Audifred 1997). The journalist summarizes that, for Toledo, the fundamental elements for a local cultural transformation required study centers, where audiences could learn about “estate of the art” debates but also about technical quality and sharpness, as well as traditional media and materials. For him, public universities were a hostage of political (i.e., partisan) agendas. Therefore, the autonomy of such an alternative educational system proved necessary to prevent students from becoming political hostages too or from wasting their time, instead of genuinely learning (Ibid.). These qualities will reiterate throughout Toledo’s actions.

IAGO’s life gravitates around Toledo’s collection of books and artworks. The library, iconic for its beauty, spans in three rooms where replete bookshelves cover the walls from floor to ceiling. The three rooms adjacent to the streets of Macedonio Alcalá and the Plazuela del Carmen Alto serve as galleries. Another hall allocates La Maquinucha, a publishing workshop where a Risographic printer reproduces limited editions made at the workshops and courses of the institute. Toledo’s artistic collection (now a collection of the people of Oaxaca and México, watched over by the National Institute of Fine Arts, an issue that I will discuss in the last section of this chapter) includes nearly 25,000 items. This comprehensive collection of prints encompasses many epochs and provenances, from Utamaro Kitagawa and Albrecht Durer to Leopoldo Méndez but also includes drawings, paintings, sculptures, textiles, and posters. The uninterrupted acquisition of books required an additional venue to open, also at another house of Toledo in Juárez Street. The collection of 50,000 books is now divided—the Alcalá site contains
the items specialized in fine arts, and the Juárez site keeps the philosophy, humanities, and literature selection, in addition to a media collection combining the “Eduardo Mata” compendium of phonograms, and the Film Club “El Pochote” collection of films, and videos that together sum more than 6,000 items. The Alcalá branch also has a museum shop and a café in its large patio [Figures 12 and 13].

In addition to all these resources, through its free activities conducted in the heart of the city, IAGO gathers numerous groups of people, particularly youngsters. Some programs have lasted for decades and have become a referent for the population. For example, the permanent drawing workshop offers one of the essential cognitive, psychomotor, observational, and representational skills at the basis of education in the fine arts. A weekly film club presenting awarded, classical, and experimental films, and expanding the options of the limited commercial billboard, is the direct descent of the Film Club “El Pochote.” Book presentations, their signature “nano-concerts” (short concerts), and the literary circles gravitating around the authors in the library’s collection have also endured for years; this consistent and continued programming guarantees that practically every evening and weekend, if people eavesdrop, they will find something going on. All the national and international artists conducting production residencies at CASA are guest speakers at IAGO, which gives even more vitality to the place. Before 2015, when Francisco Toledo donated the IAGO to the Oaxacan and Mexican people through the National Institute of Fine Arts (I will discuss this issue in the last part of this chapter), the institute was entirely financed by the Institute’s Association of Friends. The Association of Friends receives funds primarily from Francisco Toledo and secondarily from art auctions, for which other artists donate their artworks. Now INBA supports the maintenance of facilities, staff
salaries, and conservation of artworks, while the Association of Friends still funds the programs and acquisitions.

A document recently produced to celebrate IAGO’s Anniversary in 2017 serves as a barometer to better understand the impact of this artistic and cultural site for Oaxacans (IAGO 2017). This video presents the commentaries of the institute’s staff—librarians, gallery hosts, and the coordinators of education, museography, and communication—who appear as an incidental yet representative focus group of Oaxacan youth. These individuals, all of them in their twenties and a majority graduated in the Humanities and Arts from UABJO, assert that, since their childhood and teenage years, this place was a source of curiosity, a study place, or a site where they participated in extracurricular activities. The document projects the group as a generation that grew visiting this site that is now their workplace.

The Photographic Center Manuel Álvarez Bravo emerged after a complimentary agenda for Toledo and the Oaxacan community of visual producers. Since the years at the Juchitán’s House of Culture, Toledo began constituting a photographic collection with the works presented there and some documentation of COCEI’s movement. The collection was named after José F. Gómez to recognize this leader that fought for the autonomy in the Tehuantepec Isthmus, who was assassinated in 1911. Manuel Álvarez Bravo, the Mexican photographer renowned in the Surrealists circles, attended one of Toledo’s openings and expressed his desire to acquire one of his pieces. Toledo instead proposed an exchange of artworks, which reactivated his interest in comprising a comprehensive collection.

As it happened with IAGO, Toledo’s desire to advance this impetus while sharing it planted the seed of another institution: The Photographic Center Manuel Álvarez Bravo (CFMAB). Knowing Toledo’s intentions to inaugurate a photographic center, the collective of
photographers “Luz 96” sent him a written proposal with goals and tasks, requesting to participate in the plans and activities of this new space (Nahon 253).53 The CFMAB inaugurated in September 1996. To this day, the collection comprises almost 100,000 items; 70,000 donated to Toledo by Roberto Donis, and more than 10,000 coming from the estate of the photographer from Nochixtlán, Ignacio Zanabria (Castellanos 2016). The rest of the collection includes a broad spectrum of pictures by authors like Josef Koudelka, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Tina Modotti, Maya Goded, Sebastião Salgado, the anthropologist Frederick Starr, and Oaxacan collectives like the Taller Fotográfico de Guelatao. In 2005, the CFMAB moved to another big house in the center of Oaxaca City, located in the corner of M. Bravo and M. García Vigil Streets, also donated and previously inhabited and restored by Toledo [Figure 14].

The activities, specialized in the field of photography, organized by the CFMAB, complement those of IAGO, dedicated to the field of graphic arts. In its eight galleries, the Photographic Center has presented the work of emblematic authors like Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo, Mary Ellen Mark, Joan Liftin, Graciela Iturbide, Joan Fontcuberta, and Gerardo Nigenda (the pioneer of blind photography in México), among many others. This institution plays a crucial role in the continuation and study of pinhole photography. In collaboration with CASA, these partner entities dedicate an annual week to the exhibition, discussion, and technical training of this traditional medium. Since 2014, the CFMAB hosts the Biennial of Oaxacan Photography (Fotoax) in conjunction with the Ministry of Cultures of this state, summoning the participation of international visual producers.54 As IAGO does for the field of drawing and

53 Cecilia Salcedo, Jesús Salvador Márquez, Domingo Valdivieso, Javier Cruz Morales, Jaime García, Juan Carlos Reyes, and Jorge Acevedo integrated the Collective “Luz 96.”

54 The format of this biennial privileges selecting a comprehensive range of works of the selected photographers, which allows for a closer knowledge of the scope of the visual inquire of the candidates to this award. The Ministry of Culture of Oaxaca contributes to the monetary prize, in this case.
printmaking, this center offers permanent workshops and courses of essential digital and analog photography, photographic camps in Oaxacan communities that do not have an infrastructure dedicated to artistic education, activities of initiation for children and teenagers employing the center’s ongoing exhibitions, as well as a reputed theoretical and practical diploma in photojournalism. Artists-exhibitors curate cycles of film that, in their eyes, contextualize or expand the aspects they explore in their images. From collecting, exhibiting, educating, and disseminating, the activities of the CFMAB have amplified the visual culture in Oaxaca.

Additionally, the center launched the program *Colección En Vivo* (Collection Live) in 2015. The visual studies scholar, Alejandro Castellanos, coordinates this initiative with resources of the Program of Support for Teaching, Research, and Dissemination of the National Center for the Arts (PADID-CENART, a program that depends on the Ministry of Culture). *Colección En Vivo* seeks to train a generation of visual and photographic researchers to study, register, document, develop curatorial projects and exhibitions, and write analytical texts regarding the images and authors in this collection. Two exhibitions have emerged after this initiative in which the first cohort of researchers participated: *Photographies in the Collection INBA/Toledo. Forty Authors y Two Groups*, inaugurated in August 2016 at the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, and *The Universe in the South*, opened in September 2016 at the CFMAB. This program seeks the collection to reach larger audiences while evidencing the relevance and value of this Oaxacan treasures.

To allocate and raise funds to support and maintain these institutions, Toledo established a private civil association, Amigos del IAGO y el CFMAB (Friends of IAGO and CFMAB) in 1997. In January 2015, Francisco Toledo signed the donation of IAGO collections, as well as the two buildings housing this Institute to the INBA. (I will analyze this transition in the section “The
Institutionalization of Francisco Toledo’s Legacy” of this chapter). Nevertheless, the Association of Friends covers the costs of a majority of their programs (including here some organized and celebrated at CASA), the maintenance of the centers, the acquisitions of books and artworks, and the salaries of the staff. Thanks to Toledo’s unstoppable attention and continued sustenance, these institutions have grown, become more intricate, included more audiences, and extended their cultural action.

As I analyzed in Chapter One, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín represents an augmented task of transformation into a public art center according to the artist’s vision and the specialized advice of distinct experts. CASA had the two institutions formerly described, IAGO and CFMAB, as its direct referent, but its scope and challenges were more extensive than those of its predecessors. I will summarize them in the following points. First, CASA assumed an ecological commitment in response to its setting and the concerns of the San Agustín Etla’s community of neighbors. Second, this commitment entailed the invention and development of non-polluting and less-polluting techniques in the visual arts, as well as the architectonic adaptations during the restoration to materially guarantee the care of water. Third, through its program of residencies and the specialized workshops offered by the guest residents, practitioners (like Toledo himself) enact the dissolution of the distinction of traditional versus contemporary artforms, and the separation of crafts versus fine arts. Fourth, the scope of CASA has exceeded that of a fine arts school because it offers extracurricular education, training, and professionalization in all the artistic fields (some of them highly specialized and spearhead). Five, in its core programs, artistic creation and preservation of natural and cultural forms go hand in hand; therefore, art and creation represent a means of agency. Although the community of artists, creators, cultural producers, and agents involved in the everyday operations of these institutions has widely spread
out, each of these points represents a politic or aesthetic concern and conviction in Toledo’s history and mindset that we could trace back to his activism.

For Francisco Toledo beauty conveyed dignity, and dignity was the basis of social justice. Toledo’s obituary-essay wrote by the Mexican Art Historian, Cuauhtémoc Medina, captures this relationship,

Even at the cost of cutting his productivity as a painter during the 1990s, Toledo dedicated himself to turning each of these institutions into a small utopia, not only in terms of their content, but also in terms of the incomparable beauty of these spaces, which served the public at large. This gesture was a true act of political-cultural alchemy; Toledo rejected the banality of occupying the predestined throne of artist-king of the nation, and instead redefined the role of the activist to include securing access to culture, defending native heritage, and raising awareness of nature’s fragility. Toledo also became the touchstone of so-called “civil society” in México: that hybrid group of recognizable figures and everyday citizens who mobilize as a last resort whenever the government of unbridled capitalism commits an act of aggression against nature, destroys the residue of memory, or condemns to extinction this or that species, this or that cultural form, this or that important historical space (Medina 2019).

In these lines, Medina expresses the interconnection that made Toledo’s activity cohere. To explain Toledo’s relevance not only as an artist but as an activist, and better still to expose this integration, the arguments of Elaine Scarry in On Beauty and Being Just prove accurate here. Scarry, a scholar specialized in theories of representation, inquires first on the refusal of the category of beauty in contemporary thinking because it appears elusive and almost taboo to political analysis; in other terms, speaking of beauty seems frivolous. For Scarry, this problem is twofold. On one hand, many intellectuals presume that speaking about beauty constitutes a distraction from real urgent matters. On the other, thinkers argue that claiming beauty is a harmful reification, i.e., the act of imposing the beholder’s gaze (and ideology) onto something (2001, 39-42).

Scarry not only rejects these arguments, but she claims, “Beauty assists us in our attention to Justice” (2001, 58). Beauty performs two functions: “trans-forms” the abstract notion of what
is fair into actual events accessible to the senses and, in doing it, the beholder displaces from her center and become able to attend to otherness. The author elaborates,

beauty performs a special service because it is available to sensory perception in a way that justice (except in rare places like an assembly) normally is not, even though it is equally material and comes into being because of the fragility of the material world (75).

Scarry quotes the philosopher Simone Weil, who asserted that beauty requires us “to give up our imaginary position as the center” (1951, 159). Scarry further elaborates that beauty makes us “cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us” (2001, 77). This author names such state, “radical decenterdness,” which defines as “a created state of delight in [our] own lateralness” (79). What is this “incomparable beauty of these spaces” that Medina defends? The fountains and reflective pools that produce mirages of these architectures, the symmetries, the gardens and flourishing plants and leaves, the patios where the sky opens up, and patios covered by vines of bougainvillea. This unabandoned life that accompanies the people deliberating and attending to human creations or contributing to them. Scarry also affirms that beauty is begetting. I dare to say that Toledo was convinced of that too. These artistic centers, these environments, nourished and trimmed like gardens, through their beauty aimed to persuade those inhabiting them (though temporarily) about their right to dignity and the importance to preserve that dignity for others. In the following section, I will review the activist agenda of Francisco Toledo by analyzing a few examples of public demonstrations and campaigns that he configured and endorsed. I will also establish specific connections between Toledo’s social concerns and the aesthetics and media that he employed to communicate and summon other citizens.
FRANCISCO TOLEDO ACTIVIST, AND PRO-OAX’S CAMPAIGNS

In Chapter One, I argued that the constitution of associations and artistic institutions that aimed to preserve material culture in Oaxaca (from archives and libraries to an entire ex-factory) represented a form of resistance against the neoliberalism that characterized the late eighties and the nineties decade. Neoliberalism means here the progressive debilitation of the Mexican government and the delegation of a number of its former responsibilities to private and corporate entities with the excuse to speed up modernization and progress. In this transference of tasks, conflicts of interest, corruption schemes, and the discrentional distribution of concessions have become the norm. Additionally, extractivism, the devastation of nature, corporate doctrine, submission of indigenous communities, criminalization and assassination of environmental leaders, and the suppression of human rights and life describe the Mexican political atmosphere of the last quarter of a century.

On August 4th 1993, a group of citizens of Oaxaca constituted the civil association Patronato Pro-Defensa y Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural de Oaxaca/PRO-OAX (Board Pro-Defense and Conservation of the Cultural and Natural Heritage of Oaxaca) having the artist Francisco Toledo as its president. Since its foundation, this organization has been instrumental in resisting, documenting, and manifesting against a series of governmental initiatives and concessions, at first, related with poorly planned urban transformations in response to the inclusion of Monte Albán and Oaxaca City Center in the World Heritage List (1987), and soon after with a more significant governmental decline. The first of those plans was the development of an eighteen-kilometer freeway across the Northern Sierra, in the north of Oaxaca City, which would divert from the metropolitan areas those vehicles arriving from México City in route to the coast. Just a few months before launching the project, in November
1992, a decree declared this mountainous region an ecological reserve zone (Carrera Pineda 2018). Not only did this natural park play a critical role in providing water to the city, but also the setting represented a risk of landslides (Maya Alonso 2019). With this backdrop, very soon after, the organization PRO-OAX would expand the scope of their administrative inquires and campaigns to the defense of natural parks and areas of ecological reserve in this state.

An ingenious and celebratory tone to campaign against the transnationals’ appropriation of cultural, natural, and human wealth characterized PRO-OAX and Toledo’s approach to protest. In 2002, when the McDonalds chain of fast-food restaurants attempted to establish a branch in a locale at the arcades of the main square of Oaxaca City, PRO-OAX began campaigning against it. The establishment of this business represented the radical transformation of the historic square surrounded by Baroque buildings with green quarry façades, and the subsequent occupation of other global franchise-type of businesses. Symbolically, the placing of the brand’s marquee became indicative of a cultural war against food autonomy and in favor of dietary-related diseases.\footnote{Unfortunately, this war has been lost by the Mexican population, since free-trade was the governments’ solution to malnutrition and poverty. The first cause of death in México since 2000 is diabetes (Boletín UNAM-DGCS-759, 2018), and seventy percent is overweight one-third of the population is obese (ISSSTE n.d.).} Besides, the kind of industrialized food and beverages offered by this type of restaurant has proved to have an enormous environmental cost (Lira 2017; Olvera 2019). In order to communicate to the citizenry of these intentions and to collect signatures to present a motion against it to the Major of Oaxaca de Juárez, Gabino Cué, PRO-OAX sponsored a tamaliza (tamales take-away) for five hundred people at the site of controversy (Altamirano 2002). The organization collected more than ten thousand signatures, and by December of that year, the Major announced the cancellation of the project.
Francisco Toledo progressively limited his public appearances to his participation in events related to his agenda as an activist, to the point of not attending to the openings of his exhibitions. The journalist Edgar Hernández considers that Toledo’s awareness of his own presence and image made him decide to use it as a mediatic weapon of political pressure (Hernández 2019). Hernández, who was commissioned to covering the events at the time, remembers Toledo climbing a fence to hang a banner reclaiming the restitution of the area where the Oaxacan government conducted works to establish a convention center at the Fortín Hill (another ecological reserve) (Ibid.). According to the researcher of the Institute of Ecology at UNAM, Víctor L. Barradas, for its construction, the convention center required the deforestation of one of the biospheres adjacent to the city, necessary to avoid the increase of temperatures and pollution in the metropolitan area (Barradas 2015). The project represented one of the nodal projects for economic growth, competitiveness, and employment of the Governor Gabino Cué.

Moreover, the project represented a conflict of interest promoted by the Minister of Tourism, José Zorrilla de San Martín, who was also a partner at one of the hotels that would benefit from hosting the users of the new center (Matías 2017). In one of the many demonstrations organized by Oaxacan citizens, a group of hooded men broke into the peaceful protest and injured Francisco Toledo and other attendants (Jerónimo 2015). In October 2015, Zorrilla and Cué canceled their plans as the public attention and signed letters against the center at El Fortín proliferated. The next government, led by Governor Alejandro Murat, relocated the Center for Culture and Conventions in Santa Lucía del Camino neighborhood in Oaxaca City, which opened in September 2017.

Having PRO-OAX as a firm arm of civic organization, Toledo also prompted the use of the cultural institutions he created to serve as forums for the social debates and defense campaigns in
place. Food and nutrition autonomy gained a fundamental place for Toledo and an association of Mexican scientists, the Union of Scientists Committed with the Society (UCSS) that advocates against the advance of industrialized food, particularly genetically modified corn. The dismantling of sustainable agricultural environments in México, increased after NAFTA, has represented the abandonment of the milpa system and, instead, the territorial occupation of corporate farming.\textsuperscript{56} Not only have public programs in México (that relied on the free market as the solution) not eliminated the problem of malnutrition, but also obesity has become the most critical epidemics, and diabetes the first cause of death in the country (Ramírez 2013).

In 2016, IAGO and CASA held a series of events associated with an intense campaign to oppose the free introduction of GMOs. These events included the Second International Biennial of Posters organized by the IAGO, and the National Day for the Defense of Native Corn celebrated at CASA.\textsuperscript{57} The Biennial’s call for proposals established food autonomy as the theme for this edition. A selection of forty posters integrated an exhibition produced and presented by the institute, and three participants received monetary prizes. The posters became available for acquisition at IAGO’s store to raise funds to continue the campaign. CASA hosted a comprehensive “Day for the Defense of Native Corn,” on September 29. In this event, members of the Union of Scientists Committed to the Society gathered and presented lectures that explained in lay terms different studies conducted to understand the effects of GMOs in human nutrition and the

\textsuperscript{56} Milpas are a Mesoamerican-native symbiotic agricultural system developed after a corn plant. This system employs a minimum water supply, and it only requires human labor. Nutritious vegetables like beans, chili, zucchini, coriander, radish, broad beans, tomato, and greens called quelites grow thanks to the nutrients that corn gives to the soil. A family orchard allows for a regular supply of food (Boletín UNAM-DGCS–470, 2017).

\textsuperscript{57} Francisco Toledo created the International Biennial of Posters in 2014 after the disappearance of forty-three students in Iguala, Guerrero. The Second Biennial (2016) addressed food autonomy, and the Third Biennial had “repression” as its theme.
elimination of native species of corn. The event concluded with the performance *Ofrenda 4. Danza del Inframundo.* Due to the wealth of Oaxacan biodiversity of native corns, the endangered-yet-surviving domestic farming system of milpas, as well as the consistent attention drawn to this problematic by organized citizens, Oaxaca represents a sanctuary of living knowledge that, as some Mexican scientists have argued, might be the key of human preservation and food justice (Boletín UNAM-DGCS-470, 2017).

If Toledo inexhaustibly acted and advocated for cultural, environmental, and food rights, the systematic infringement of the right to life in most Mexican towns deeply upset him. Perhaps one of the most spread images of Toledo is the one in which he appears running in Macedonio Alcalá Street outside of IAGO, while holding a kite with the face of a young boy printed in it. This poetic action was his response to the violence associated with the forced disappearance of forty-three students preparing to become bilingual rural teachers (involving the army and the local police in its execution), in Iguala Guerrero, as well as the infamous response of the federal authorities. Facing the impotence and the cynicism surrounding these unsolved State crimes, Francisco Toledo declared the purpose of this action, “Since they say they have looked for the Ayotzinapa students beneath the earth and under the water, we sent the kites to look for them in the skies” (Villarreal 2019). Again, he made sure that the circulation of his image and the image of each student stamped in the kites would serve as a reminder of the justice that their families await. Similar to the tactic of *siluetazo* employed during the Argentinian dictatorship consisting of outlining silhouettes in public spaces to mark the abduction of individuals, these kites remind us of the absences but they emphasize the identity and personhood of the students, and their interrupted future as educators.

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58 See Chapter Four, section “The Artists’ Relationship with CASA and Francisco Toledo.”
The impact of this particular event mobilized Toledo’s actions in several directions. Since his years of the formation of the Juchitán’s House of Culture and its magazine Guchachi ’Reza, the artist worked intensely for the dissemination of the Zapotec language and culture through printed media. However, the role of rural bilingual teachers gained prominence after the disappearance of the students of the “Raúl Isidro Burgos” Rural Normal School in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero (2014) and the conflict triggered by the federal initiative of an educational reform (2016). The Rural Normal Schools inherit the rights gained after the Mexican Revolution by fostering a holistic education in which students gain a strong sense of communitarian work, learn sustainable farming techniques, and receive formation to transmit knowledge in their native languages (Civera Cerecedo 2015). This boarding school system depends on the Federal Ministry of Education (SEP) that have fostered their decline and pauperization. The key aspect of the educational reform was the creation of a federal system of standardized evaluation of urban and rural teachers, totally disregarding the uneven conditions of schools and classrooms of public schools in México City or Garza García (the wealthiest municipality of the country), for example, and one in the Oaxacan Mixteca or the Tarahumara Sierra in Chihuahua. Under this climate, Toledo promoted a series of initiatives to support bilingual education and the preservation and continuity in the use of native languages in Oaxaca.

Three core endeavors developed at the Center for the Arts at San Agustín illustrate Toledo’s value of language as the seed of cultural continuity. His first initiative involved the production of bilingual didactic and ludic materials in Zapotec designed and published in CASA’s Production Workshop. A collection of puzzles, a wheel of colors, a Mexican Bingo game (in which characters and objects instead of numbers appear in the boards and cards), reproductions of Renaissance’s anatomy diagrams, and illustrated and translated editions of Aesop Fables are
part of this collection of resources. A series of workshops conducted at CASA in between July 2016 and May 2017 addressed for the students of the Normal Rural School of Tlacochahuaya were another endeavor. These workshops aimed to train students to produce the contents of their own bilingual publications, and reproduce them employing a Risograph printer. Additionally, artists (like Francisco Toledo himself, Jesusa Rodríguez, and Isabel Sánchez) introduced the participants to artistic fields like lithography, design of masks, and puppetry. The students from the Normal Rural School did a series of short residencies throughout the year.

The third program for the continuity and dissemination of Oaxacan indigenous languages are the literary prizes promoted by the artist and launched by the arts center in 2010. In its earliest editions, the award only included literary creations (poetry, narrative, short tale, song, children’s literature, and oral tradition) in Zapotec. For its seventh edition, the organizers included a prize for writers based in Los Angeles. The 2019 Call-for-Participants extended to the languages Huave, Mixe, Zoque, Mixtec, Triqui, as well as Zapotec in all the genres. These prizes sponsored by Toledo, who employed his own award as Emeritus Member of the National System of Creators are currently a joined collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, the National Fund for Culture and Arts, the National Center for the Arts, and the Government of the State of Oaxaca (Santa Cultura 2019).

One of the most prominent spheres of Toledo’s solidarity emerged after the earthquakes in Oaxaca of 2017. The Association of Friends of IAGO and CFMAB raised donations to equip kitchens and continue preparing food according to the local diet and costumes. The emergency logic fostered food drives and distribution of tons of industrialized products (cans of tuna, tomato sauce, and vegetables, and other nonperishable products with high levels of conservatives)

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59 See Chapter Four, section “The Artists’ Relationship with CASA and Francisco Toledo.”
coming from the major urban areas. For Toledo, the public kitchens guaranteed a healthier food supply as well as a space of commonality amidst the trauma. He also forecasted that the plans of reconstruction would promote poorly built houses, the use of non-resistant materials, and designs that would not consider the high temperatures of the region, while also transforming the landscape in the isthmus. Toledo advocated for the reconstruction of homes according to the vernacular designs and materials. One month after his passing (on September 5th 2019), the first family received their reconstructed house with the support of the Association of Friends of IAGO and CFMAB. Notwithstanding the overwhelming challenges brought by this disaster, Toledo did not skimp on his efforts to reduce the hardships for his fellow Juchitecans.

The grounds in which Toledo participated as an activist, the range of strategies he applied, and his personal investment is impossible to quantify or fully inventory. His immense solidarity and empathy are unquestionable. In the numerous obituaries and articles that followed Toledo’s departure, the commentaries about his unparalleled vitality as an artist, but even more as an activist proliferated. Not only did he tactically put his body in the front of the protests, but he also invested an enormous amount of material resources. Toledo represented an incessant voice and a moral compass for a country in which human, indigenous, and environmental rights have become increasingly violated. His figure of the artist, intellectual, sponsor, and advocate for social justice has no precedent in México. In the following section, I will return the discussion to the artistic and cultural centers promoted by the artist. I will discuss crucial interinstitutional agreements and collaborations between the organizations founded by Toledo and larger governmental and public organs to secure the future of his bequest.
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FRANCISCO TOLEDO’S LEGACY

Although Francisco Toledo maintained a close relationship and directly intervened in the organizations he founded, through their everyday programs, these entities developed a life of their own. In this fourth and last part, I will focus on specific alliances with public Mexican institutions in which Toledo relied upon for the continuity and formalization of his undertakings. The relationships that better exemplify an institutional consolidation are in chronological order: first, the incorporation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín (CASA) to the National Council for Culture and Arts (CONACULTA, transformed into the Ministry of Culture since 2015) and the Network of Centers in the States of the National Center for the Arts (CENART); second, the donation of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) collections and the houses where IAGO seats; and third, the professional diplomas conducted at CASA taught by faculty of the National University Autonomous of México (UNAM), and also certified by the university. Multiple individuals have contributed to the constitution of these inter-institutional associations. These partnerships represent a sign of evolution, continuity, and possibly also of transformation in their trajectories (particularly now that the artist will not be presently overseeing them). I show here how the reputation and legitimacy of Francisco Toledo compelled the representatives of the public organizations to contribute, endorse, and formalize cultural programs and actions that emerged from local initiatives.

Due to the complexity of CASA’s combined institutional vocation, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín crystallizes Francisco Toledo’s approach to art as a conduit for social relationships and social transformation. CASA’s operations privilege environmental care. The commitment with the values of the community and the territory is a priority. CASA’s artistic education agenda expresses both aspects, which cohere by dismantling the division between
traditional and contemporary media. This center for the arts encompasses now an open and free art school, a cluster of fine arts and crafts production labs and workshops, residencies for guest artists, galleries and exhibitions, spaces for performance and live events, as well as dedicated programs for local and regional communities. As I elaborated in Chapter One, after discarding different possible uses, the challenges in restoring La Soledad building, in addition to Toledo’s utopian desire to develop a Oaxacan Bauhaus or Black Mountain-like art school, marked the path of conversion for what is now CASA.

By 2000, when the uses of the building were in the process of definition, Francisco Toledo and the restoration advocates approached CONACULTA and CENART to design a route to make efficient and to enhance the facilities while also enriching its programs. Since 1994, CONACULTA (transformed in 2015 into the Ministry of Culture) was the governmental agency in charge of configuring the national cultural policies. Its role entailed the integration of the patrimony and overseeing its management (including here modalities of access for the citizenry), as well supporting cultural production through the design of academic and sponsorship programs. CENART, a sub-dependency of CONACULTA was the federal agency dedicated to defining the policies and model the programs of education, professionalization, and consolidation of communities in the arts nationwide. Approaching cultural authorities of the State of Oaxaca (which are more impermanent, often unexperienced, and coerced by political conflict) or private agencies would have shaped the project in a completely different way.

Because of the challenges of this project, the institutional articulation of various fields of expertise proved crucial, as the mediator of this process, Lucina Jiménez, has declared (Personal conversation Jiménez 2007). The physical condition and dimensions of the architectonic compound, the ambitious restoration it required, along with the “site-specific” and, apparently,
non-artistic considerations to analyze and integrate into the plans (i.e., the environmental care premise and the accountability to the local community of San Agustín) were the most important.

The constitution of this center (remember that the official opening took six years) not only required the knowledge of conservators, experts in heritage management, representatives of the Ministry for the Environment, educators, artists-researchers, etc., but also the assessment and balance of all their voices. For CENART, the multiplicity of solutions to an ample range of problems implied in the foundation and development of CASA also represented a precedent for its institutional evolution.60

Since 2006, being part of CENART’s Network of Centers for the Arts in the States allows the Center for the Arts at San Agustín to endorse specific projects to apply for the Program of Support for Teaching, Research, and Dissemination in the Arts (PADID, a program created in 1996). A committee grants funds to individual proposals annually. Unfortunately, the continuity of such projects remains uncertain. For the high quality, contribution, and results of the nominations endorsed by CASA, some of its programs have received continued support in recent years. Noted examples are Archivo Vivo, a series of activities that connect visual research with the photographic collection of the Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center lead by Alejandro Castellanos; the program of musical education for children, Model for the oral tradition music of Oaxaca, instructed by Patricia García and Rie Watanabe; the workshops associated to the Video-Dance Festival Agite y Sirva, organized by Paulina Ruiz Carballido and Ximena Monroy; and the Diploma in Dramaturgy, coordinated by Ximena Escalante. These programs respond to CASA’s context (i.e., the artists and students seeking specialization and peer-gathering opportunities) and its infrastructure (i.e., what the facilities and the location prompt for artistic creation). PADID

60 Sadly, no documentation of this process exists.
initially sought to foster artistic mobility and to increase the artistic offer in sites with less robust cultural infrastructure. Activities like those listed before are not in a trial and error face, but instead they fill a gap in artistic education and professionalization in the region.

Francisco Toledo’s donation of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca undoubtedly represents a personal gesture of transmission since he personally acquired and constituted these collections throughout his life. On January 20, 2015, in a public and very brief ceremony celebrated in the patio of IAGO, Francisco Toledo signed the official bequeath of this artistic center and collections to the Mexican people. The National Institute of Fine Arts, represented by its director, María Cristina García Cepeda, received its custody. This donation included the two houses (at Alcalá and Juárez Streets, where the exhibition galleries and library are located); one of the most comprehensive collections of graphic arts, described in the second section of this chapter, composed of twenty-thousand etchings, prints, and drawings (Matías 2015); about a thousand works of Francisco Toledo (Grupo Sipse 2015); the collection of films and videos of the Film Club “El Pochote”; the phonographic collection; and the library’s collection. The cataloging of the collection began in 2012 when the artist first expressed his intention to donate it. At the time, Toledo requested that these collections remained at the installations of the Institute, and that it never was dispersed or moved (Amador Tello 2012).

This donation passed the responsibility to the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA). This institute was the first organ dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of the country’s artistic legacy, and the implementation of national programs of artistic education. INBA implements and designs protocols for exhibition, conservation, and loan of artworks; it operates

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61 Created in 1946, before the National Council for Culture and Arts (created in 1988, which was converted into the Ministry of Culture in 2015).
the major public museums and collections in México. The National Center of Conservation and Registrar of the Movable Artistic Patrimony (CENCROPAM) is an INBA’s sub-organ dedicated to the management, preservation, and restoration of public collections and artworks. After the ceremony of donation, in interview Francisco Toledo responded to the question “Why did you decide to leave your collection to INBA?”,

Sí hay confianza (en el INBA), aunque a veces están faltos de dinero, pero qué le vamos a hacer, el acervo se tiene que guardar, hay que cuidarlo, tiene que ser conocido pero con un control. (…) Cuando empezó la Casa de la Cultura de Juchitán trabajamos con el INBA, pues no hay con quién más trabajar. Nosotros en ese entonces no teníamos las posibilidades de mantenerlo y ahora tampoco como una asociación familiar, siempre necesitamos del Estado que aporte, es su obligación.

There is confidence (in INBA), although they often do not have the money, but what can we do, the collection needs to be kept, it needs care, it needs to be known but also have it under control (…) When the Juchitán House of Culture started, we worked with INBA, because anybody else can do this work. Back then, we did not have the means to sustain it, and neither we have them now. As a family association, we always need the State to contribute, and it is the State’s duty (Matías 2015).

Francisco Toledo was aware of the vulnerable status in which this legacy would remain once he was not present. Nobody would take his unique place and continue this task. Only the national organization in charge of museums and collections, INBA, and the personal trust he had in its representatives at the time (particularly María Cristina García Cepeda) could assume the task of preserving his vision, keeping together the collection, while sustaining and giving continuity to the programs and activities of IAGO. In the ceremony, Francisco Toledo’s daughter, the poet Natalia Toledo, requested,

En nombre de la familia Toledo hacemos entrega del acervo del Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca del maestro Francisco Toledo al Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes para que lo guarden, lo cuiden y si es posible lo multipliquen.

On behalf of the Toledo family, we entrust the collection of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca of the maestro Francisco Toledo to the National Institute of Fine Arts to save it, take care of it, and, if possible, multiplying it (Pérez Alfonso and Mateos-Vega n2015).
As the spokesperson and representative of her father (who despised public protocols and speeches), with these words, she compelled the institution to fulfill this task. The gesture also expresses the family’s recognition that the significance of Toledo’s supervision in the configuration and functioning of this space was an exemplar institutional model too.

The National Autonomous University of México has become another decisive academic partner of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín. Throughout its thirteen years of activities, CASA has established partnerships with several organizations. However, in recent years, with Daniel Brena’s as CASA’s director, the collaboration and exchange with UNAM have intensified and formalized to guarantee its continuity. Two academic programs and one agreement are particularly representative of this liaison: The Diploma of Industrial Design of Objects, the Diploma in Traditional Procedures and Constructive Systems, and the Agreement Between the School of Fine Arts and Design (FAD) and CASA (signed by Francisco Toledo and Enrique Graue on July 2017).

The Diploma of Industrial Design of Objects is a tailor-made program that addresses the ample community of artisans of Oaxaca and the multiplicity of media, techniques, and materials vernacular to this state. Ana Elena Mallet, curator and historian of Mexican design, and Luis Equihua, industrial designer and design pedagogue, devised this program specifically for the arts center and the surrounding potential audiences. This intensive program, envisioned for individuals that already produce objects, comprises four units. In them participants propose and refine the design of a limited edition of their creation, produce prototypes, learn about the more efficient technical tools to develop a line of production, identify accurate selling points, plan marketing strategies, and learn to quantify costs and establish prizes for their products. The students conduct field trips to the Center of Research in Industrial Design (CIDI-UNAM) in
México City. The diversity of proposals developed in this diploma-course includes utensils, furniture, attire, and accessories, jewelry, toys, etc. As a result, the participants learn to get involved in the entire process of production and commercialization of their creations. The ultimate goal is to provide tools to artisans, artists, and designers that will help them to achieve fair trade conditions. This program has happened annually since 2015, engaging five cohorts so far.

The Diploma in Traditional Procedures and Constructive Systems was initiated in 2018. Concerned about the governmental solutions to reconstruct the destroyed houses across Oaxaca after the earthquakes of 2017, Francisco Toledo, as well as different groups of architects in México planned strategies for affordable, effective, and sustainable reconstruction. The implementation of this diploma emerges in this climate; not necessarily as a direct solution to the problem, but to give visibility and valorize the auto-constructive methods, the sustainability implied in the use of local materials, and the preservation of the aesthetics of the landscape as part of the Oaxacan cultural heritage. This program is a collaboration with the Laboratory of Traditional Procedures and Constructive Systems at UNAM’s School of Architecture and Design. Coordinated by the architects María de los Ángeles Vizcarra de los Reyes and Francisco Hernández, the Diploma is the result of the CASA-UNAM Exchange Agreement signed in 2018.

The artists Francisco Toledo and UNAM ‘s Dean, Enrique Graue, signed an Agreement of Collaboration between the School of Fine Arts and Design (FAD) and CASA at IAGO on July 3rd, 2017. According to Dean Graue, the purpose of this collaboration was to teach the experimental and less polluting techniques in the visual arts developed and studied at CASA at the School of Fine Arts, as well as promoting the exchange and mobility of students between Oaxaca and México City (Redacción Aristegui Noticias 2017). Additionally, on April 29, 2019, Dean Graue
instituted the “Francisco Toledo Extraordinary Chair,” between the School of Fine Arts, the University’s Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC), and CASA, with duration of four years (Gaceta UNAM 2019, 26-27). This program formalizes the objectives of the agreement, which include the exchange of lecturers of both institutions, the conduction of seminars associated to the Collection Toledo/INBA, the development of programs of conservation for that collection, the organization of conferences in the native languages of Oaxaca, and the design of educational materials in indigenous languages (Ibid.). In these objectives, we can trace the intention to sensitize and transfer the role and agenda of Francisco Toledo to future generations of visual artists.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I presented the artist Francisco Toledo as a philanthropist, activist, and advocate of human rights. Through biographical details, the reader could appreciate how art and culture cohered as part of a larger emancipatory social project in Toledo’s vision. I introduced his early cultural projects at the Juchitán’s House of Culture as the basis of his cultural agenda. I have examined Toledo’s conception of public centers as open houses, where he shared his best personal treasures, now bequeathed to the Mexican and Oaxacan people. I have argued that beauty, dignity, and human rights were interlinked agendas for Toledo therefore, for him, the role of art was directly connected to the defense of life and human rights.

For Toledo, preserving historical sites and biospheres constituted the foundation of social justice. Through the Board Pro-Defense and Conservation of the Cultural and Natural Heritage of Oaxaca, Francisco Toledo established continued actions against exploitation, extractivism, extermination, and violence: the pillars of the neoliberal program. I have pointed to the
institutions and public organs in which Toledo posed his trust for the material future of his legacy. His persistent struggle represents a call on behalf of the respect of biospheres, public space, native cultures, creative freedom, and sustainable ways of life, hopefully also for other advocates like him.

After having revised the importance of defending the Oaxacan ecosystems and the public life throughout Toledo’s time, as well as the measures and devices that he and his advocate-partners employed in doing it, the following chapter tackles how the local community of San Agustín uphold the same causes, although through different mechanisms. Chapter Three examines the communitarian institutions, authorities, and organization of San Agustín Etxa. I will analyze how the conversion of a former industrial site and place of labor into CASA has transformed the social dynamics and demographic composition of this town. Focusing on convergent and divergent trajectories between town members and communities of users of the arts center, I will inquire on the expectations and debates that the establishment of CASA has fostered in the local population. I will also discuss the negotiations between distinct social groups (particularly people with familial bonds with the town and newcomers who have relocated there), while identifying the process of acceptance and valorization of the center’s contribution to the current social and communitarian life of San Agustín Etxa.
CHAPTER 3.

SAN AGUSTÍN ETLA CULTURAL HISTORY AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS BROUGHT BY THE CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT SAN AGUSTÍN (CASA)

In the previous chapter, I examined the sustained actions of the artist and activist Francisco Toledo in relation to public access to cultural services as well as the artist’s conviction of the efficacy of art in social transformation. Through his direct donations of institutions and collections, his advocacy for the recuperation of sites, and the campaigns for the preservation of historic, cultural, and natural wealth, Toledo expressed a clear ethical standpoint. I have reviewed the different cultural and artistic initiatives that the artist undertook for decades. I argued that CASA represents Toledo’s most complex endeavor because of the diversity of agents and agendas intersecting in bringing the creation of the arts center to fruition.

This chapter aims to present the process of foundation and the development of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín from the perspective of San Agustín community. Projects like CASA bring a new life and economic activity to the places in which they are situated. However, we must keep in mind other effects that reactivation agendas bring. Restorations spawn expectations of labor opportunities for communities that have lost their working centers. These programs mobilize flows of populations and capitals in unforeseen ways. As industrial archaeologist Michael Stratton has remarked, the uses of these new cultural and artistic centers are distinct from those of the former industries, besides, they do not attend the same kind of constituencies that the factories served in the past (2000, 9).

The habilitation of the current Center for the Arts at San Agustín (from the acquisition of La Soledad real estate accomplished in 2001, its subsequent restoration and construction of new facilities, and its inauguration in 2006) gave a new shape to this locale. This purchase
represented a divergence from the communitarian assembly deliberation processes at San Agustín since negotiations involved only a few members of this community—the co-op affiliates and the heirs of those who had already passed. Furthermore, the transference of La Soledad ownership to the state government in partnership with the civil association Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca introduced new non-communitarian entities as land tenants of a town’s landmark. Some neighbors perceived this change as an imposition, some others as the occasion to reclaim rights as inheritors, and others as the potential return of labor opportunities for the town’s inhabitants. The center’s initiation of operations, resulting in the arrival of visitors, employees, and users, alien to the place, highlighted the void left by the factory while also granting a new presence to the site. These events also provoked nostalgia in those descents of workers that once were the protagonists of the town. Such changes provoked Sanagustinians’ fear of dispossession of their territory (and its symbolic load) and of withdrawal from the decisions over it. CASA and its new communities have become players in an in-progress history for this local community.

This chapter focuses on contrasting notions of citizenship and community membership. By considering the cultural transformations generated by the center, the new groups gravitating around it, as well as other emerging demographic groups circulating at San Agustín, I inquire how they destabilize communitarian norms. I argue that the establishment of CASA opened San Agustín to the intervention and interaction of actors that do not belong to its “closed community.” To understand the meaning of the term “closed community” in this context, the work of the anthropologists Jorge Hernández-Díaz and Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte proves

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62 When construction works to reactivate the site started, and specially once CASA was officially opened to visitors, a series of allegations by descents of past factory workers arose (Mac Masters 2007).
highly valuable. These authors claim that the notions of community, citizenship, and democracy gain a specific weight in the Oaxacan context. Communities are “closed” because their cohesion and territorial unity depend on cultural, social, and political operations of exclusion and denial of citizenship to actors that have not “earned” their place. Inhabitants born at San Agustín assert their citizenship because of birth, first, but also through cumulative merits and participation. Hernández-Díaz and Durand Ponte have historicized these normative systems as a sequel of the colonial separation of the Republicas de Indios (Republics of Indians). The Republics of Indians served as instruments of the Nueva España colonial regime to guarantee that native populations did not interfere with the colonial organization by cornering them in their local lives (Durand Ponte 2007, 18; Hernández-Díaz 2007, 41). More recently, the inclusion of internal normative systems in the written law represents the Mexican Government’s recognition of indigenous groups and pueblos’ rights and the slow shaping of their autonomy (Hernández-Díaz 2007, 53). In 1995, an unprecedented modification to the Constitution of the State of Oaxaca recognized usos y costumbres (habits and customs), a term that intended to encapsulate Oaxacan cultural diversity and modes of political organization in the local scope.

The term “usos y costumbres” has been contested by indigenous groups and more recently renamed indigenous normative systems or internal normative systems. This background allows us to contextualize San Agustín’s community concerning its traditional and prevalent means of local organization and understand the controversies at stake stirred by the introduction of an arts center. The reader should not be misguided here, these normative systems are neither static, atemporal, a priori consensual, nor faultless. My analysis does not answer if San Agustín traditional community has become disempowered or empowered since the foundation of CASA. This study examines factors of continuous negotiation of diversity that constitute the
contemporary culture and life of this place, thus, expanding, reshaping, and redefining its community(ies).

This chapter, divided in three parts, results from direct observations and experiences occurred during the thirty months of my fieldwork and residence at San Agustín. The first section of this chapter, “Local Institutions and Authorities, Decision Making, and the Purchase of La Soledad Ex-factory,” examines the potential destabilization at issue when La Soledad purchasers (non-communitarian governmental and private entities) became players in local matters. Here, I tackle aspects of decision-making, land tenure, and natural resources management in the local organization. In the second section, “Local Institutions of Reciprocity and the Arrival of Newcomers (Avecindadas/os),” I discuss cultural distinctions performed when locals sense the increasing arrival of people not born at San Agustín as a threat against their customs and social bonds. The attraction generated by CASA and its impact in the development of San Agustín have led to the migration and settlement of newcomers (avecindados). These individuals, unfamiliar with local cultural codes and rules, either do not participate, are banned from participation, or need to gain their right to participate (after years of permanent residence and once the local community has admitted them). In this part, I will discuss collapsing urban and vernacular conceptions of citizenship and participation that demand everyday concessions and adjustments on both parties.

I uphold that the analysis of mutual assimilation, efforts, and actions to concur between the arts center and the town’s inhabitants is as relevant as studying cultural differences. CASA’s advocates and directives have not remained indifferent to the center’s potential influence on town matters. According to my conversation with Lucina Jiménez, when the center’s planning and restoration was in the making, San Agustín authorities traveled to México City to participate
in meetings and deliberations addressing the future agenda of CASA (Personal conversation Jiménez 2017). Dialogue and inclusion of the cultural life of the town has constituted CASA’s operational and institutional ethos, as I discussed in Chapter One. Coordinators, directors, and neighbors have developed a series of programs for specific town audiences and groups at different stages of the center’s history. Sanagustinians, on the other hand, increasingly occupy and re-signify the site through their own ceremonies and celebrations. In the third part of this chapter, “Intersections between San Agustín Inhabitants and CASA,” I analyze concrete examples that evidence the integration of the arts center into the town’s everyday life, emblematic events, and the local imaginary.

Located 16 kilometers to the north of the capital city of the state, in the central valleys of Oaxaca, at an altitude of 1,700 meters over the sea level, San Agustín Etla presents a humid template climate for the most of the year [Figure 15]. High mountains surround it, and a humid forest covers sixty percent of the municipal territory, which is rich in aquifers, wood, and biodiversity (INEGI Prontuario n.d., 2). San Agustín is a municipal agency of Villa de Etla, the head municipality, where broader markets, financial services, and public offices are based. Its most significant demographic groups by age are five to nine year-old boys (5.1%) and ten to fourteen year-old girls (4.6%) (INEGI Banco de Indicadores 2015). By 2015, San Agustín Etla had 3,994 inhabitants of which only sixty people spoke an indigenous language (INEGI Conteo Intermedio 2015). Sanagustinians do not speak a native language nor a linguistic variation of Zapotec. More than 95% of homes here have drinking water, electricity, and drainage system, which situates San Agustín above the average level of poverty in the State of Oaxaca. Studies have quantified that approximately seventy percent of its population is Catholic (FODEIM 2011, 26). Religion constitutes a prominent cohesive factor and field of participation. In the recent past,
being Catholic was a requirement to hold public office in this municipality.\textsuperscript{63} Twenty percent of the people that live there were born somewhere else, primarily in México City, the United States, or Europe (FODEIM, 46). This information gives us a glimpse into San Agustín’s growing group of urban migrants constituted by self-employed individuals and retired foreigners, who have a second home here and travel during specific seasons. Avecindados negotiating their status as locals constitute this sector, which I will discuss in the second part of this chapter. Youngsters can receive education in local public schools up to junior high; after that, they need to travel to larger municipalities to study senior high school, and mainly to Oaxaca City for a college education. 24.5\% of the population (older than fifteen years) completed the higher education, and 21.8\% of this group finished junior high school (INEGI Conteo Intermedio 2015). Locals make their income managing small businesses (e.g. restaurants, convenience stores, laundries, garages, hardware stores, stationery shops, and bakeries), as taxi drivers, or selling orchard crops. More employments and educational opportunities exist in other larger cities, which is also causing temporary and permanent migrations of locals away from their community, especially those who pursue higher education. By 2018, 66.4\% of Oaxacan inhabitants lived in poverty, and a segment of 23.3\% of that population lived in extreme poverty (CONEVAL 2019, 49, 53).\textsuperscript{64} However, San

\textsuperscript{63} The “Catalog of Municipal Customary Laws San Agustín Etlá” (Catálogo Municipal de Usos y Costumbres 2003, Section “3. De los participantes en la asamblea,” 3) explicitly lists being Catholic as a requirement to participate at the town’s assembly and, therefore, to be elected for public office. By 2018, that clause was eliminated in the updated document “Ruling that identifies the election method according to the current Normative System of the Municipality of Agustín Etlá, Oaxaca” (Dictamen DESNI-IEEPCO-CAT-25/2018 por el que se identifica el método de elección conforme al Sistema Normativo vigente en el Municipio de San Agustín Etlá, Oaxaca, section VII, 6-7, and section XII, 8).

\textsuperscript{64} The Mexican National Council of Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) calculates poverty according to these indicators: income, educational backwardness, access to health services, access to social security, quality of households, access to household basic services, access to food, and social cohesion (CONEVAL 2019, 4).
Agustín has access to public services, water, and a clean environment, which grant better living conditions to its inhabitants if we compare it to other counties in the same state.

The people of San Agustín Etla are not indigenous in the sense of being bonded by a native language. Unlike many other towns in Oaxaca, Spanish dominates the oral landscape of this place. Although the títulos primordiales designating San Agustín Etla territory, as well as their temple dedicated to San Agustín Bishop date back to the sixteenth century, the town’s growth responds to more recent factors. It flourished due to the foundation of San José and La Soledad Vista Hermosa factories, which in the eighteenth century attracted labor-seekers (of diverse ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds) coming from other places. This town grew and evolved because of the Porfirian program of modernization which, as Chassen-López reminds us, represented an attempt for the de-indianization of the nation (2004, 291). Conceptions of social engineering permeated the identity formation of a place whose history evolved after a technocratic agenda. Yet, this town elects their local authorities and manage their resources

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65 Anthropologist and law scholar, Jorge Hernández-Díaz distinguishes several municipalities in Oaxaca that do not have the characteristics to define them as indigenous. Nevertheless, they apply indigenous normative systems to elect their local authorities of which San Agustín Etla is an example (2007, 85). As anthropologist Paula López Caballero examines, defining what constitutes an indigenous community has been a prerogative of the Mexican State (2017, 34-44). Hernández-Díaz also exposes that colonial rule forced indigenous people to operate politically only in the local scope, and therefore, the idea that a local community constitutes the minimum social and political unit of indigenous peoples became consolidated during the colonial period (2007, 41).

66 “Títulos primordiales” were descriptive documents developed by indigenous people for the Spanish Crown during the colonial period. In them, the territorial boundaries, as well as historical facts, were graphically recorded.

67 Artist Irak Morales discussed in a personal interview with the author a poignant image captured after his artistic research project for the Diploma in Visual Arts Production at CASA (see section “Local Institutions of Reciprocity and the Arrival of Newcomers (Avecindados)” of this chapter). This image illustrates the legacy of Porfirio Díaz positivism. The artist recounts testimonies of San Agustín’s neighbors: “The factory brought internal class divisions between peasants and factory workers: the operators of machinery worn boots, while the peasants wore sandals. This division separated families. Ever since people had engaged in quarrels because of that” (Personal conversation Morales 2017).
according to their internal normative system. Clashing discourses and values that include a technology-driven modernization process, the reclamation of rights to land and water, and the subscription to internal normative systems have shaped the composite identity of San Agustín.

Although very few individuals employed at the factories are still alive, a century of labor history has granted communitarian cohesion to San Agustín people. After the Mexican Revolution, communities gained the right to distribute lands to its offspring—i.e., town members and their descent that participated in the community’s obligations and life. Despite the progressive decay of the factory throughout the second half of the last century, land rights have kept Sanagustinians residing in their town. They have sought employment opportunities in nearby locations, they have engaged their lands in agrarian activities, and some have migrated to the United States while preserving ties to their territory. The town also holds the rights and autonomy to manage the natural resources of adjacent forests and aquifers, which has caused internal conflicts but also the need for a collective ability of determination. Hence, the history and ecosystem of San Agustín have led to its communitarian consolidation.

**Local Institutions and Authorities, Decision Making, and the Purchase of La Soledad Ex-factory**

Like a majority of towns in Oaxaca (418 out of 570 municipalities) San Agustín solves crucial matters according to their customary laws and institutions. As Durand Ponte asserts, in these contexts, citizenship is not only a political category but one in which social, religious, as well as civic aspects merge rather than being functionally differentiated (2007, 20). Additionally, citizenship requires cultivation and acquisition through communitarian forms of participation. Citizenship is not an individual’s condition, but one conceded according to familial histories.
Reasserting who are *hijos del pueblo* (town’s offspring), and excluding those who are not, has granted territorial and symbolic unity to this town.

Internal normative systems represent the Oaxaca State and federal law’s current recognition of the legitimacy—and autonomy, to some extent—of some municipalities. These normative systems enable communities to designate their authorities and representatives, as well as to distribute the tenure and custody of the communitarian lands. San Agustín Etla is one of the 417 municipalities that conducts their political and social life according to this sense of indigenous law although its community does not necessarily exist as an indigenous one. These norms also grant citizenship, i.e., the rights and obligations of members, and the distinction between members and non-members. They combine a hierarchy of governmental duties and civic services known as *Sistema de Cargos* (civil cargo system) with the territorial, political, and administrative structural unit of *ayuntamientos* (Durand Ponte 2007, 20). As a result of the Mexican Revolution, ayuntamientos became ratified as municipalities, following the logic of local units that connected altogether formed the Mexican Nation (Hernández-Díaz 2007, 38). In 1995, Oaxaca State legislature approved a modification to the State’s Constitution, recognizing the diversity of forms of representation and participation practiced in many towns and communities of Oaxaca, distinct of the nationally sanctioned system of political parties (Durand Ponte 2007, 18; Hernández-Díaz 2007, 52; Stephen 2005, 137). While Jorge Hernández-Díaz acknowledges legal voids and institutional ambiguity, he also asserts that Oaxacan communities have proved their ability to adjust their rules to solve internal differences and conflicts. The

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68 Although this initiative intended was to limit the intervention of non-communitarian authorities in local matters throughout Oaxaca, the Electoral Institute of this state determined which municipalities could or could not elect their mayors and authorities according to usos y costumbres. The code of electoral procedures of 1995 vaguely designated them as municipalities that have elected their local authorities through customary laws “since time immemorial or over the last three years” (Hernández-Díaz 2007, 52).
endurance of these cohesive organizational means has empowered Oaxacan localities to
determine how to manage biodiversity and natural resources, non-exclusively but mainly in
indigenous and rural contexts.

The mobilizations stirred by the Center for the Arts at San Agustín exposed local
traditional practices to accelerated transformation and assimilation of new neighbors. New agents
not involved or not related to communitarian organization share the space, services, and
resources of the town. Despite Francisco Toledo’s concern and attention to the town members
positions and priorities, the authority posited in the artist, as the chief advocate and sponsor of
CASA, challenged local rules determinant of who can mobilize changes and make decisions there.
Many locals received with resistance or frank refusal Toledo’s ability to summon political
powers, make decisions, and activate infrastructures. For those detractors, an individual who was
not native of this town with that power proved threatening. More newcomers arrive as visitors
every day, and more and more aspire to become permanent residents. The presence and actions
of all these agents molds the community. This town has redefined and modified its rules in order
to evolve and take advantage of those changes that result convenient for the community.

Citizenship requires consistent involvement in duties, representation and authority,
sharing and reciprocity. The main communitarian instances of participation include the
assamblea, sistema de cargos, tequio, mayordomías, as well as material contributions. Durand
Ponte itemizes the requirements for recognition as a community member: being part of the
town’s offspring (persons being born in the community, having grown up in a household that
participate of community institutions, and/or being an adult living in a household that
participates in community institutions); having performed a certain number of cargos; having
honored the tequio; having made contributions to the community; and having served as
mayordomo at least once (26). Thus, upholding the unity and territory of the community entails a series of operations of inclusion and exclusion based on these local institutional forms. In the following lines, I will describe specifically the sistema the cargos, the hierarchy of authorities, the asamblea, and the comisariados, in order to analyze how local organization and institutional organization overlap.

The sistema de cargos (civil cargo system) constitutes one of the pillars of the local normative system. This system is a hierarchy of mandatory and unpaid community services and positions of authority carried out for the common good. Predominantly, married men are expected to conduct these activities. The community considers them the family representatives, and their actions have repercussions for the rest of their nuclear family members. As a consequence of male migration and women’s advocacy, in San Agustín women also participate in this system of communitarian ranks, responsibilities, and assignments, and they have gained leadership and positions of authority but not the rank of town’s major yet.69 The distribution of these duties relates to the societal reputation of individuals and of their families, their marital status, and the history of patronage of public and religious festivities. Assuming a cargo implies a full-time commitment. The community expects the person in the cargo to leave their employment and other responsibilities, while they also make sure to provide for the families of those in the cargo. The progressive accomplishment of these duties allows community members to gain a more respected voice in town matters and advance in the hierarchy of authority.70

69 Since 1985, women in San Agustín Etla can attend and vote at the community assembly, and since 2003 they can also occupy positions of authority (IEEPCO 2018, 7).

70 Authors like Lourdes Morales Canales have pointed that distinct values are leading to the substitution of this logic, while recognizing a priori a higher status for specific community members (for example teachers), disregarding the escalation of cargos (156-158).
San Agustín inhabitants elect their local authorities at the communitarian assembly which is also the site of deliberation and resolutions of collective matters and conflicts. For these meetings, people gather at the municipal terrace in front of the town hall. For electing authorities, Sanagustinians have recently implemented the use of ballots. In the past, they used to record on a board the voiced votes of attendants. Local democracy takes shape at the assembly as an open process of negotiation, dissent, and cooperation.

When the real estate of the ex-factory of La Soledad Vista Hermosa ended up being the compensation for unpaid workers who had taken their case to the courts, this purchase became a significant case of making decisions otherwise in San Agustín. For years, this site remained as a relic and symbol, that connected this population to their elders, who ultimately were the working force that decades ago propelled the prosperity of this place. Yet, its actual significance as an employment spot vanished little by little. Whereas the laborers’ history belongs to most Sanagustinians, the property rights of the real estate remained in the hands of those workers that persisted and pursued throughout decades of a litigation process (and even this group was internally fractured). The factory was a private property since its creation in 1893 although, as a paralyzed asset the status of its owners—only a few hijos del pueblo—was not evident until they sold the estate. Perhaps, the negotiations undertaken by Francisco Toledo, also involving the Oaxacan Government, exposed communitarian organization and autonomy as vulnerable and relative, while bringing back memories of class distinctions and subalternity. On the other hand,

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71 The hierarchy of cargos and authority of San Agustín includes: 1) Municipal President; 2) Syndicate; 3) Workings Councilman; 4) Health and Ecology Councilman; 5) Education and Culture Councilman; 6) Police Councilman; 7) Mayoralty; 8) Municipal Secretary; 9) Municipal Treasurer; 10) Ronda o Tiquitlats.

72 When the restauration and construction works of CASA had finished, some individuals were campaigning against the arts center and reclaiming to be paid (Velázquez 2007).
members of the cooperative abruptly found themselves in a position of power above their neighbors and relatives. Ultimately a private matter, this covenant left an indelible impression over the arts center as a private and elitist venue (FODEIM 2011, 21-22; personal conversation Morales 2017; Velasco 2011, 463).73

The ruins of the factory, transformed only by the effects of the atmosphere stood as a token that supported a mythological construction related to the productivity and prosperity that became the identity of San Agustín’s inhabitants. For Pierre Nora, sites can embody the collective memory and, then, provide a sense of historical continuity. He identifies such places as lieux de mémoire (1989, 7). The replacement of the derelict view associated with this lieux de mémoire, and the appearance of a pristine surface left, instead, a temporary vacuum. Despite its repurposing as a public cultural center, the transference of this symbol has conveyed a new historical value to this place. This renewed image of the landscape might not speak or might speak in a different way to the memory of locals and ex-workers. At the same time, new embodiments of memory happen as the place gets experienced by other subjects.

A local sub-organ and authority functions as the custodian of communal assets: the Comisariado de Bienes Comunales (Commission of Communal Goods). Due to the climate and

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73 The document “Diagnóstico de género en San Agustín Etla,” refers to CASA as an asset that is property of a foundation PRO-OAX but it does not consign the co-ownership of the Oaxaca State Government (21-22). In interview, artist Irak Morales spoke about his conversations with town neighbors who expressed their impression that the arts center was attended tourists, which excluded them from their audience (the reader will find more information about Morales’ artistic project at San Agustín in the next part). In her book Capitalismo y modernización en Oaxaca: la industria textil durante la Reforma y el Porfiriato, Griselle Velasco inaccurately mentions that CASA was left in hands and property of Francisco Toledo when the State Government did not fulfill its part of the bargain. On chapter one, I explained that the facilities hosting this institution are shared property of the Oaxaca State and the Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca (of which Francisco Toledo is an honorary member, and the individual who contributed the funds in this purchase). What is relevant of this footnote is that this author, who conducted extensive research, specifies the “elitist character” of the arts center (2011, 463). These dispersed allusions found in sources derived of ethnographic investigation let the reader notice recurrent opinions that expose a distance with the arts center and its transference of ownership.
vegetation of the surrounding mountains that guarantee constant rains throughout the year, authors have characterized San Agustín as a “water factory” (Jiménez and López Morales 2008, 330). Since the development of hydraulic infrastructures in the first decades of the twentieth century, the two main aquifers in this municipality, Mano de León and Cárcamo, supplies 10% of the drinking water of the capital of the state (Altamirano 2019). San Agustín inhabitants have continuously had to reclaim their rights to water supply versus private industries established in the area, and against the City of Oaxaca (Cfr. Topete Pozas 2015, 177-192). If the built environment of the former factory reminisces a cohesive past and a legacy in dispute, the management and custody of natural resources proves to be a priority in Sanagustinians agenda.

The coordinators of the restoration of La Soledad conducted additional negotiations with the Commission of Communal Goods throughout the process. Historically and in the present, the representatives of this entity are vocal to the steadiness of the center since they can contest CASA’s operations if they consider them as detrimental for the town’s best interest. The influence and leadership of this commission prove to be comparable to that of municipal authorities, yet they function separately. While municipal authorities supervise matters of governance, this body handles the natural wealth of the town: lands, waters, and forests. In broad terms, its essential tasks entail: a) the distribution of lands to the town’s offspring (hijos del pueblo), and the authorization of purchases to non-locals; b) the prevention of pollution of communal waters and waters that travel to Oaxaca City; c) the management of forests (controlled logging and reforestation), which preserves the ecosystem, humidity, and renovation of aquifers; and d) the

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74 Currently a piping system of 14 kilometers.

75 Griselle Velasco documented quarrels related to water use in this territory since colonial times, between native peasants and Spaniards that owned windmills; she asserts that until after the Independence, commoners demanded the control over this resource (2011, 313-315).
organization of assemblies to discuss related matters and to solve disputes (Cfr. Escuela Agraria de Oaxaca 2012, 7-9). This commission also administers and allocates special federal and state funds dedicated to environmental preservation and care. Its primary role concerning CASA has entailed ensuring that the center does not pollute aquifers, that it does not hoard water supplies, and that it does not expand its facilities over communal or alien lands.

CASA’s physical and symbolic location not only has been a challenge but also an opportunity for innovation, experimentation, and development of technologies and materials in the arts. Seeking the agreement, acceptation, and good faith of local authorities and populations turned out to define the ecological character of this institution. As a response to these local demands, awareness about human impact over the immediate environment became a constituent of CASA’s mission. Two of its core artistic programs of visual arts (the Diploma of Photographic Developing and Printing and the Diploma of Experimental Printmaking) directly reflect this vocation. Also, the drainage and water treatment systems rehabilitation as well as the post-restoration aesthetics that incorporated fountains and bodies of circulating water throughout the site project this consciousness. Against the assumption of cities being places of technical advancement, in this case, the semi-rural location and management of the commons of CASA’s surroundings have fostered and disseminated an urgent environmental conception of artistic practice and artistic ethos.

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76 Having the power to make decisions about the commons, this commission is imperfect, susceptible to corruption, and poorly represented by women. Their fairmindedness is far from being bullet-proof. The reader might not interpret an idealized and harmonic countryside life that was abruptly disturbed by imposing the installation of an arts center. As Hernández-Díaz points out, more pressing factors are fissuring communal organization. The application of the World Bank recommendations and their guidelines for the decentralization of economic resources to the local level have had a higher impact. Local authorities receiving funding to allocate for specific purposes are increasingly participating in corruption schemes (2007, 65).
Seen in hindsight, the rehabilitation of La Soledad represented its explicit end as a factory, and its conversion into something yet to be configured. Now, after thirteen years of CASA’s activities, San Agustín’s neighbors and authorities recognize its existence as advantageous for the life of the town. Nevertheless, the change in their perception is the result of the consistent attention to divergent positions and potential disagreement in great part procured by Francisco Toledo. CASA advocates, coordinators, and users must keep mindful and inventive of means to contribute to the preservation of communitarian bonds, i.e., the potential role of mediation that this center could play at the local level. In the following section, I will discuss tensions between locals and newcomers that have arrived and established themselves at San Agustín as a result of the cultural life generated by the arts center, as well as the benefits of living in a place where the cost of living is less, it is less polluted, and is more secure than many other places in the country.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS OF RECIPROCITY AND THE ARRIVAL OF NEWCOMERS (AVECINDADAS/OSS)

Over the last couple of decades, San Agustín has become a residential destination for Mexican and foreign middle-class individuals seeking to detach from dense metropolitan life. Its closeness to Oaxaca City, warm weather, cheaper cost of life (when compared to the rest of the country), and “condition-free” leasing increasingly attracts freelancers, artists, foreign snowbirds, retirees, and prospective entrepreneurs to this location. Furthermore, the existence of CASA has prompted the gravitation of cultural and creative producers, artists, and designers to it and around it. These people navigate the town in different capacities, as residents, audiences and

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77 See the section the last section of this chapter, “Intersections between San Agustin Inhabitants and CASA.”
students, intermittent visitors, tourists, and service providers. Creators have established artistic studios of ceramics, paper, and jewelry, also mobilizing and attracting more cultural producers and clienteles. Most Oaxacans, on their side, have internalized and reproduced official and marketing discourses of “authenticity” and ancient heritage. Such iterations serve to entice tourists and to profit from their experience while projecting this region as one of hospitality and embellishment. However, when non-native individuals want to settle more permanently and become residents of communities like San Agustín, local people express their resistance for legitimate reasons that I tackle in this section.

This analysis is the result of thirty months living in San Agustín and interacting with its inhabitants as an avecindada. The term “avecindada/o” is difficult to translate but it broadly means “becoming a neighbor” and expresses a condition. I assert that the habitus of aspiring new residents clash with those of the local community. For sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, habitus are tacit systems that regulate the behavior and give structure to the social relations of a group. The habitus does not depend on explicit actions of authority nor obedience for their continuity and transmission within that social group (Bourdieu 1972, 72). These invisible codes that command everyday practices are evident as discrepancies between local neighbors and newcomers arriving from urban contexts. This clash seems evident when newcomers reproduce dynamics and expectations characteristic of the city life in which subjects act as anonymous actors.

Additionally, different attitudes concerning the improvement of the inhabited places constitute

78 To clarify the meaning of the term “authenticity” in this context, I draw from Lovell and Bull categorization of this notion in relation to the experiences that tourism constructs. For these authors “objective authenticity” evoke the remains of an original past that stands in the present. “Real, reliable, trustworthy, original, firsthand, true in substance, prototypical” are synonyms of authenticity (2017, 9). The values I am referring here relate to the projection of a prototypical Mexican, Oaxacan, and indigenous legacy; one that bears the longest and most durable connections with the past, its fierce preservation, and its scrupulous repetition through certain traditions.
another expression of implicit codes of social behavior. Newcomers assume that these custodial tasks are delegated to public servants, whereas local neighbors directly participate in them.

Normative systems that ground the organization and collective action of communities in the local scope also serve for the distribution and recognition of authority. The community of locals distinguishes who is part of the town’s offspring (hijos del pueblo), first, according to birth, and second, based on the participation in social, political, religious, and ethical dynamics and codes. Members and families gain their position within their community through continuous merits and participation. Therefore, the status of avecindados is not that of local citizens.

Customary law encourages emphasized differences between locals (oriundos) and exogenous populations (avecindados).\(^79\) A literal translation of the term “avecindado” corresponds to “made into a neighbor.” It stands for those who were not born but arrived by choice making this town their permanent residence. Performing such distinctions characterize social life and continuous negotiations in everyday encounters.

We could trace back these distinctions and concerns stirred by urbanization and growth to the establishment of San José and Vista Hermosa factories. Griselle Velasco, a scholar in textile engineering and development in Oaxaca, documented historical complaints of San Agustín inhabitants that arose when employees of La Soledad tried to settle and build housing in the adjacent areas around 1888 (Velasco 2011, 315). Some native residents considered this an invasion of communal land. Others sold part of their lands to newcomers or to the owners of the factory (to develop housing for the workers). Others became employees of the factory while delegating agricultural tasks to hired peasants or other family members (Velasco, 314). For some Sanagustinians this industrialization meant disorganized occupation as a battle for communal

\(^79\) “Oriundo” means born and raised in the town, likewise their parents and grandparents.
rights claims raged against investors in the name of modernization and productivity. By the end of the nineteenth-century, San Agustín had more in situ services than most towns in the state, like public schools for workers’ children, town hall, churches, and cemetery (Ibid.). This dichotomy exposes proto-gentrification processes in these neighborhoods.

Recent surveys conducted at San Agustín expose locals’ concerns about the risk of dissolution of the institutions that keep their collective identity, public life, as well as economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights because of the arrival of newcomers (FODEIM 48). In the present, two systems of representation (customary law and partisan democracy) combine and coexist. Jorge Hernández-Díaz refers to them as “differentiated citizenships” to categorize such distinctions (2015, 120). Hernández-Díaz examines conflicts of former rural municipalities adjacent to the city of Oaxaca that have gradually joined the expansion of the urban area. In recent decades, these peri-urban areas have suffered increasing urbanization and migration of people trying to make a living in the capital city (but who cannot afford to live there). While locals demand the application of traditional communitarian rules, recently arrived groups plea for their constitutional rights (Ibid.). Although class differences do not correspond in the case that Hernández-Díaz presents and the contemporary migration phenomenon of San Agustín, we can draw from his analysis the antagonism that he exposes. Oriundos perceiveavecindados as a threat, arguing that the newcomers do not know the codes of communitarian tradition, or that they refuse to adopt them. The core communitarian values entail munificence and reciprocity, which avecindados lack or do not practice in the same way. Two prominent traditional institutions, mayordomías and tequio, are its most explicit expressions.

Mayordomías involve the sponsorship of religious festivities, celebrations, and communitarian improvements. Tequio implies the compliance with unpaid work that could entail
periodical cleaning and maintenance tasks (at schools and public offices, streets, roads, and the canal that carries water to the different neighborhoods of the town) to cyclical civil cargo obligations that include participating with the organizing committees of Catholic festivities. Giving away labor, cash or in-kind contributions, partaking of crops, food, or goods, and prioritizing communitarian tasks (over private or individual) summarize the collective ethos and attitudes of most San Agustín’s inhabitants. Meanwhile, neighbors and relatives assume their entitlement to comment and gossip about the lives and actions of community members, which represent another manifestation of the commons that everybody should be willing to share, including the avecindados aspiring to become part of the community. Becoming part of this society requires the renunciation to a private self, encapsulated by the city life for an avecindado residing here implies a permanent estrangement of the self as well as endured testing modes to internalize that publicness of everyday life. On the other hand, local vicinity fosters unique, strong bonds, solidarity, and support for avecindados too that the compartmentalization of urban life does not allow.

In this community, cooperation is the basis of the collective wellbeing, another aspect that clashes with the urban logic of individualism. Community members engage as agents in the procurement of wellness. The traditional institution of tequio captures this worldview. “Tequio” means organized, scheduled (generally short-term, i.e., one day or one morning), collective, and physical labor to improve the local infrastructure (schools, bridges, streets, forests maintenance, etc.). It also represents a time of coexistence and togetherness with neighbors (Zenno 2007, 355). Urban newcomers expect the municipality to provide maintenance services and they have to learn that, as neighbors, they are expected to contribute in those tasks (for example cleaning their street in preparation of a significant celebration or religious festivity). Decisions about the
immediate environment get voted at the assembly, which is also the place to get updates about
the town. Those choices can become immediately effective, and do not require notifying those
absent neighbors. Closing a street for six months, the primary access to someone’s house, is one
of many examples of these unexpected changes. Some improvements (like paving roads and
streets) depend on the municipality and others rely on neighbors’ sponsorship and tequio. The
duration of works could extend indeterminately, depending on how long does it take to collect
the contributions of all parts involved. A precision proves pertinent here. Not only ignorance,
indifference, and discrepancies with avecindados challenge the institution of tequio these days.
The pressures of contemporary life detach younger generations from their town too, when they
have to seek opportunities in more urbanized contexts, in some cases permanently.

Avecindados carry with them conceptions of urban citizenship and liberal democracies
that praise individual identity and private property over communalism. That form of citizenship
constitutes an a priori right rather than a status that must be achieved through collaboration. For
avecindados to gain candidacy to community membership, they need to maintain as residents and
participate in tequio for several years, while being subordinate to the collective acceptance,
which is frail. A disagreement between an avecindado and the community might end with a
violent expelling from the town. We could find an excellent example of this type of dis-
encounter in a testimony collected by the artist Irak Morales as part of his artistic-research
project conducted as part of CASA’s Diploma in Visual Arts Production. His proposal consisted
in living at San Agustín for nine months during which he established a small business selling

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80 In an interview, an avecindado stated that around the fifth year he was able to attend and speak at the
assembly, which equals to being admitted into the community.
home-made rice pudding door to door, and having conversations with his neighbors and
customers, as a method to know the place. Morales paraphrased one of his neighbors,

I heard some tough anecdotes, for example, that of one guy who bought a property and did
not allow an old man herding his animals to make a short-cut through his land. Although
the new owner was not affected in any way by the herd, he built a gate. A few days later a
group of people was at his door with machetes ready to expel him. The town authorities
told him it was better for him to leave permanently because the people did not like him.
Sanagustinians can be very tough or very united if you like (Personal conversation Morales
2017).

This anecdote portrays at once local conventions of free-transit (of humans and animals) and
townspeople taking justice in their own hands, as well as showing us a snapshot into the evolving
camaraderie of Morales and his neighbor. Additionally, the passage exposes that locals escalate
avecindados’ wrongdoings, and their disposition to arrive at an agreement seems reduced.

The rules to be accepted are not explicit thus, avecindados constantly break them
inadvertently. Local neighbors interpret the same actions in radically different ways depending if
a man or a woman performs them. Avecindadas (women) have to carry additional efforts and
accept additional criticism compared to men. Not assuming the role of caregivers, not having a
male partner, having a male partner but not being married, or not having children are tacit causes
for normalized forms of harassment, hostilities, and differentiated treatment. Equally potent as
the implicit local cohesion is the blatant machismo, reproduced by men and women, which cuts
across every aspect of the social life and the everyday. Despite the qualities of communal life—
collaboration, largesse, and solidarity in cases of need—other aspects like conservativism,
oppressive gender roles, and discriminatory attitudes towards women that do not conduct their
lives according to the traditional models, limit full integration into the community. From a
feminist standpoint, oppressive habitus inherent to customary practices demonstrate that some
aspects of internal normative systems are not infallible, and that the wellbeing of a society cannot depend on the repression and submission of a majority of its members.

In this section, I demonstrated the tension between San Agustín inhabitants, CASA’s advocates, and vecindados. I argued that those tensions emerged because of the changes brought by the refunctionalization of La Soledad ex-factory and its conversion into a center for the arts. I discussed how figures with power and authority associated to CASA and external to the town’s autonomous organization, have remodeled the life of the town. I have analyzed why the succession of changes, the arrival of new groups of visitors and tourists, and the reconstitution of San Agustín’s population represent threats to the traditional organization and identity of the town for some part of the local community. I established that, to integrate to this locale, new residents need to dismantle their assumptions about individuality, privacy, and property. I argued that all these agents require continual negotiations and concessions. In the following section, I will discuss actions that evidence reciprocal reception and incorporation between the town and CASA.

INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN SAN AGUSTÍN INHABITANTS AND CASA

In the previous section, I focused on controversial and discrepant relationships between actors transformed into neighbors at San Agustín. These agents are the families with a lineage of generations living in and rooted in this town, the emerging arts center, and middle-class migrants of diverse provenance seeking to establish in this place. In this last part, I will situate expressions that show that the existence and activity of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín represent positive effects and even pride. I will also stress that external affirmative valorization has fostered the incorporation of the arts center into the town’s contemporary identity and discourse.
Urban planning theorist, Lorenzo Vicario, has studied in depth the ripple effects that the revitalization through cultural industries generates. He has mainly focused in Bilbao City and the development fostered by the Guggenheim Museum. His research focuses on two distinct aspects. The first involves economic issues like investment, the substitution of a manufacturing economy for a leisure-related economy, the attraction of new sources of capital to this kind of towns and neighborhoods, and gentrification processes as a consequence, in some cases (Vicario and Martínez 2003, Vicario 2017). Although San Agustín’s case does not respond to an extensive plan of urbanization, the second aspect of Vicario’s analysis results of particular relevance for the scope of this section. This aspect is the symbolic assimilation and civic pride that results from this type of intervention (Vicario 2017). From an urbanist perspective, Vicario argues that a landmark—the museum, arts center, or cultural venue—transforms into a brand image of sorts for a place and its identifier. Though initially alien, these placemaking actions lead to a “psychological recovery of civic pride” for the community that has lived in the location before and after its revitalization (Ibid.). In this section, I will focus on examples that demonstrate the integration of CASA’s into the life of Sanagustinians as a valuable legacy for the town. I have divided these examples into two categories: image and discourse, and site and space.

**Image and Discourse**

Here, I will present two recent examples in which San Agustín authorities incorporate the identity of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín as an element of their discourse. The first example is an interview in 2017 with the President of the Committee of Communal Goods of San Agustín Etna, Erik Pérez Ruiz, for the web-portal and Youtube channel, *Oaxaca tiene Cultura.*
The second case is the *Plan of Municipal Development of 2017-19*, presented by San Agustín Etla Major, Isaac Cruz Cano. The interview aims to list and promote touristic attractions of San Agustín to visitors. The Plan of Development addresses San Agustín inhabitants as well as governmental instances that could fund some of the projects presented in the document. These inclusions demonstrate that these authorities consider the center as an entrenched site whose significance and contribution to the town is unquestionable.

The interview with the President of the Committee of Communal Goods of San Agustín Etla, Erik Pérez Ruiz, describes the diversity of touristic attractions that this town offers to national and international visitors, while he synthesizes the history of the town from its foundation to the present. This video-clip seeks to attract attendants to a series of religious ceremonies, as well as a musical and gastronomic festival in honor of the Virgin of El Rosario, the foundational figure of Catholicism for this town during colonial times. The interviewee mentions the most important religious festivities, the eco-touristic hikes, races in the forest, and the natural assets and natural spots of this municipality. The Center for the Arts at San Agustín receives particular attention at three different moments of the interview. In the first mention, Pérez Ruiz declares, “In terms of culture, we have the Center for the Arts at San Agustín situated where the textile mill in Vista Hermosa operated.” Right after he lists the prime congregation sites in the town, and includes the temples of San José, San Agustín, and La Soledad Virgin, and the Center for the Arts. Furthermore, the third time, as part of his closing remarks, he emphasizes that San Agustín has an “annual attendance of 60,000 visitors just considering *CASA*.” In these snippets, Pérez Ruiz grants the position of “culture” to *CASA*; he equals its relevance to that of the temples, and he acknowledges that the arts center conveys a continuous flow of visitors throughout the year that, along with the other attractions, represent an economy for the town.
The Plan of Municipal Development of 2017-19, a document of 204 pages, cites the Center for the Arts at San Agustín ten times (Cruz Cano 2017, 2, 19, 20, 29, 30, 35, 70, 72, 73, 183). The plan, presented by San Agustín Etna Major, Isaac Cruz Cano, exposes an agenda of five goals: inclusion and social development, modernity and transparency, safety, productivity and innovation, and sustainability. A photograph of the town hall illustrates the cover of the document, and the title page shows in its top point the black and white panorama picture of the front façade of CASA. The page stating the “Mission, Vision, and Values” of San Agustín municipality also presents a frontal photograph of the arts center building (Cruz Cano 2017, 2, 19). According to the last part of the mission statement of this municipality, its long-term objective entails “to present San Agustín Etna Municipality as the best place of touristic attraction in the context of the State [of Oaxaca], nationally, and internationally.” Here, the tourism-related agenda of this government is the most prominent aspect.

The section, “Economic Dynamic,” exposes the municipality’s need to increase productivity. It also points out that such growth depends on getting the category of “Touristic Municipality,” which San Agustín Etna has not received even though it has all the necessary qualities and elements, and due to poor promotion of them (Cruz Cano, 30). Immediately after these claims, and to prove the deserving of this category, the next two paragraphs describe the setting, ecological agenda, and artistic activities conducted at CASA (Ibid.). The last paragraph of this section anticipates the intention to apply to be listed as Pueblo Mágico (Magic Town), a program promoted by the Federal Ministry of Tourism.81 Although I will not assess here this

81 “Pueblos Mágicos” is a program of touristic development, value addition, and branding strategy promoted by the Federal Ministry of Tourism and created in 2001 during the government of Vicente Fox. Towns need to secure funding of the State Government via the Local House of Representatives to participate in a selection process. In addition to the many administrative and organizational requirements, these municipalities should also produce crafts, have a traditional celebration, local gastronomy, as well as historical, architectonic, and natural attractions. The Ministry of Tourism trains and evaluates local
specific initiative, the relevance of this example rests in the fact that the agenda of development and productivity of the current local administration has tourism as its basis. The document—and therefore, the signing authority—identifies the Center for the Arts at San Agustín as the most outstanding touristic asset in this locale.

Both examples expose the incorporation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín in promotion strategies, in which local authorities recognize it as representative of the town’s infrastructure. They display CASA as a resource that works with positive results and even pose their expectations on it. Although their mentions are ambiguous and standardized (they reproduce the connection to the former textile mill and the label of “the first ecological art center of Latin America,” while they match CASA with the Catholic temples), they assert the critical role of the center in the attraction of visitors on a regular basis. The cases also evidence a discourse of receptivity to incoming demographic groups. In the following section, I will analyze the current occupation dynamics at the squares constructed as part of the restoration of the ex-factory and the design of the Center for the Arts.

**Site and Space**

The most important public spaces, where San Agustín’s public events occur, are the townhall’s terrace, the kiosk in front of it, the baseball fields, and the churches. The inauguration of public works (for example, a recently paved street) or a ball after a religious festivity also happen in the outdoors. This center for the arts has consistently expanded their presence by staffs, and contribute with funding exclusively for cosmetic improvements to the touristic attractions, town centers, and public spaces. Specialists in Heritage and Culture have criticized this program because of its franchise-like operational guidelines that, in theory, seek the preservation of historical and cultural uniqueness, but, in reality, it fosters homogenization and exoticization (Hernández López 2009; Villela 2017).
designing and opening workshops and courses related to major local celebrations (for example, workshops to design masks for the *Muerteada*, a carnivalesque celebration of the Day of the Dead original of the Oaxacan central valleys) or addressing specific local audiences (like the annual summer course for children or the publishing workshop for youngsters to produce a fanzine about the town). Exhibitions, live performances, and concerts are free of cost and publicized via the town’s megaphone. However, to some extent, *CASA’s* indoors activities keep them as secretive and elusive for a majority of locals. The spatial dispositions of public life differ in these cases.

Nevertheless, performances prove that some open areas of *CASA’s* site, structured and designed as part of the renovation and adaptation works, allow locals to gather, occupy, and signify the place in their own terms. For their intricacy and choreographed participation and distribution of roles, the *Muerteada* of the Vista Hermosa neighborhood and the civic ceremony of the Mexican Independence Day epitomize such moments of signification happening yearly. In both events, the participation but also the differentiation of the three neighborhoods of San Agustín Municipality—Vista Hermosa, San Agustín, and San José—play a crucial role. These performances also highlight modes of communitarian recognition and organization. The site is not a backdrop in which inhabitants evoke their history. Instead, the restoration’s layout, which included two squares (the one in front of La Soledad temple where the reflective pool is, and the one in front of the main façade) allows for these congregations. Through performances, the participants update, actualize, and integrate the significance of the site to the present.

Most towns of the central valleys of Oaxaca—particularly the Etla’s region of which San Agustín is part of—organize, perform, and celebrate *Muerteadas* the night of November 1st. This event related to the Day of the Dead happens along with the rituals for the departed (food
preparation, altars, visits to the cemetery, etc.). However, Muerteadas date back to the laborers’ history of these towns in which haciendas and mills proliferated under the Porfirian regime. We can compare this celebration to the carnival day, which has historically served as social catharsis in which, through the performance, laborers could complain about exploitation at the workplace.

The three barrios (neighborhoods) of San Agustín Municipality—La Soledad Vista Hermosa, San Agustín, and San José—organize competing yet coordinated Muerteadas.82 Each neighborhood has a Catholic temple, saint, and plaza, in which bands, performers, and viewers gather. The members of each one of them claim authenticity: San José, site of the first textile factory; San Agustín/El Panteón, where the cemetery and town hall are located; and Vista Hermosa, harboring the most prosperous textile mill, and nowadays identified as the “snobbish” neighborhood. These towns divide their Muerteadas for men and for women, which take place on different dates. While men have had the prerogative of celebrating it on the Day of the Dead, women’s Muerteada happens on a close Saturday in November. It receives less attention than the men’s and it rarely coincides with that of the two other neighboring towns.83 This celebration epitomizes the most significant material and human investment of the year, as well as the largest simultaneous occupation of public spaces in the town (the homes of neighbors become part of this public and shared space). At the same time, the dynamics of differentiation (of neighborhood provenance, gender, and status as oriundo, vecindado, and/or tourist) intensify as components of the performance.

82 Each year, the tacit competition involves organizing the best setting, the best-selected brass band and spectacle, the best fireworks, so forth, and so on. Very often, this confrontation leads to violent interactions, which participants assume as part of the performance.

83 The gender division of this celebration and its implications deserve a study in and of itself. I will only describe here the men Muerteada.
The Muerteada incorporates peregrination, parade, costumes, music, a scripted play, and dance. Every year, volunteering neighbors contribute economically to cover the expenses (brass band fee, fireworks, light and sound system, mezcal for public distribution, etc.). Sponsoring the collective celebration constitutes an honor. It enhances the reputation of community members that assume that role, as well as guaranteeing their opinion to be highly regarded in matters of the town. Contributions secure a prominent space and visibility for donors within the assigned areas to perform for them to be seen dancing by attendees. The festivities initiate in the evening, when the brass band arrives at the town, with a caravan of organizers. Around 9 pm, people (more specifically all the donors, who have paid a fee to dance, and their families) start gathering in the house of one of the chief patrons, who offers food and mezcal to the participants while the band begins to play. By 10 pm, the flock displaces towards the main squares. In the neighborhood of Vista Hermosa, this site is the plaza surrounding the reflective pool, in front of La Soledad temple, and next to CASA. Throughout the night and until 10 in the morning of the next day, the band, patrons-dancers, and the followers will make stoppages at the houses of all other donors and meet the bands of San José and El Panteón at the other two squares. San Agustín Valley reverberates for more than twelve hours uninterruptedly. The costumes parading along San Agustín streets include traditional characters presented in the scripted play (demons, petateados,84 witches, etc.), unorthodoxly coexisting with bizarre Halloween-esque imagery absorbed from American movies, migration to the United States, and popular culture [Figure 16a].

Once the flock congregates at the square (around 11 pm), a cast of male-only actors interprets their annual rendition of El Informe. This scripted play exposes the deliberation of a

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84 “Petateado” means a dead man buried rolled inside a petate, which is a palm weaved tapestry.
group of characters (the dead man, the widow, the devils, the doctor, the priest, the nurse, the orphans, the herdsman) deciding if a wealthy man is actually dead or if he deserves to come back to life. When the drama is about to arrive at a solution, two players disclose gossips, conflicts, and remarkable events that happened since the last Muerteada. Historically, this report (the translation of the term “Informe”) served as a cathartic moment in which laborers could disclose the injustices of class divisions. A sense of permission to publicly state issues that would not be said otherwise characterizes this facet of the town’s public life. The drama ends when the fate of the dead man resolves. Immediately after, the brass band offers an eclectic repertoire that will endure for the next twelve hours or more. A group of volunteers in charge of maintaining the order during the Muerteada, the chicoteros, delimit an area right in front of the band with rope. This area is for the donors to dance. After an hour or so the crowd moves and encounters the other neighborhoods’ conglomerates [Figure 16b].

Given the relevance of this celebration, CASA has sought to adhere to its momentum and participate in it. The center offers workshops for children and youngsters to design the masks they will wear on November 1st, and to fabricate chicotes and make them sound (the chicote is a whip made out of weaved hemp employed to produce a characteristic sound and coordinate the direction in which the crowd must move during the peregrination and parade). The neighbors also have used the site, particularly the stairs of the main façade, as proscenium for micro-performances that serves to groups of schools and children to rehearse and prepare for the “big event.” CASA’s directors and programmers, as well as neighbors, make increasing efforts to link

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85 I attended this play once at Vista Hermosa and once at San Agustín. The play happens amidst a dense crowd. Since players disguise and wear masks, employ their peculiar Muerteada voice tone, use headsets (on the top of the mask), and poorly equalized speakers, understanding the actors’ lines becomes almost impossible. Attendees boo when the audio does not work correctly, contributing to the celebratory cacophony.
the dates relevant for the town, and updating the significance of the site beyond merely using it as a meeting point and historical signpost. Joining forces holds potential for the actualization of this relationship.

Analyzing a different kind of commemoration, one civic and patriotic, Mexican Independence Day, allows us to identify additional acts of signification and occupation of the plaza and reflective pool at the entrance of CASA. On the morning of September 16th, adorned floats displaying the Mexican flag and emblem parade. Groups of uniformed students, a brass band, school marching bands, parents, and teachers of schoolchildren follow them having the square in front of La Soledad church as their destination. The truck leading the procession transports a group of schoolgirls, selected because of their singing talent and their outstanding academic performance. Dressed in pristine and vaporous white outfits (imitating the model of Jorge González Camarena allegorical painting that appears in the cover of elementary-school textbooks) and identified as the Américas, this civic ceremony revolves around their rendition of patriotic chants, among them the national anthem. The ceremony constitutes an intricate and more elaborated version of Mondays’ Homage to the Flag, which happens every week during the academic year in all elementary schools across México. The structure of this performance involves the marching entrance and the formation of blocks of school groups in the square. Marching bands arrive first while playing martial rhythms that aim to choreograph the steps of schoolchildren. An escort of six children exposes and displays the flag across the square, making a stop in the middle of it for participants to chant the national anthem. Then the escort and the flag exit the plaza. The town’s mayor voices the “Vivas” of Miguel Hidalgo’s Cry of

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86 Junior high schools in San Agustín recruit performers for their marching bands. A month in advance, these bands rehearse every night for the September 16th ceremony. San Agustin valley reverberates as a sound chamber with the uncanny sounds of martial drums and trumpets.
Dolores (that announced the beginning of the war of Independence in 1810), ending with “¡Viva México!” After that, the school groups and, in the end, the marching bands leave in martial fashion [Figures 17a and 17b].

Three central aspects characterize this ceremony: the role of the Américas, the marching bands, and the site. Being selected the América or a member of her cohort offers girls public recognition, visibility, and familial and social pride. The marching bands of three different public junior high schools participate. Each one of them has a different martial repertoire interpreted simultaneously, interrupting the choreographing logic of marches. The result is a cacophony of desynchronized tones. Aside from choreographed standards and martial simulacra that this ceremony inherits from the national education system, the performance of neighborhood recognition and distinctiveness play a key role.

A relevant aspect here is how occupants reassert the importance of the site. The reflective pool functions as a grid for the formation and distribution of groups, whereas the temple’s stairs serve as an open-air stage. This square and reflective pool are a result of CASA’s restoration. Its spaciousness permits a gathering of a large number of people, unlike any of the local schoolyards. This renovated historic landmark embellishes the event with a halo of magnificence. The location coheres with the charge of values, symbols, and meanings of the commemoration.

In these few examples, the reader can identify organic processes of concurrence and encounter between Sanagustinians and CASA. If the arts center was alien to them, and they received it with reservation (and resistance) immediately after its inauguration, thirteen years after its official launching, the local authorities identify it as a site that attracts tourism. Thus, the center represents opportunities for developing sources of revenue and employment for the
municipality. Representatives of San Agustín currently employ the image, the identity, and the singularities of CASA to “brand” their town. These local leaders have incorporated in their political plans the promotion of tourism as their core strategy of development, which would not be possible without the arts center.

Through their occupations for performative and commemorative purposes, Sanagustinians appropriate outdoor areas surrounding this landmark, and employ them for public means that coincide with their expression of commonality and tradition. Specific elements of the current architectonic placement that did not exist before the site’s renovation, serve as platforms for these enactments that project essential values of the collective life of Sanagustinians. These occupations evidence modes of symbolic incorporation of the place to the current life of the town.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have exposed contrasting notions of citizenship, and community membership expressed through the differentiation performed by locals between oriundos (people born in the town and holding kinship relationships with it) and avezindados (exogenous individuals that were not born there). Drawing from Jorge Hernández-Díaz and Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte, I explained that this distinction serves to emphasize who is a member of the local closed community. These dynamics of differentiation ensure that the local modes of organization are respected and followed by newcomers, authorities, and cultural advocates. The application of internal normative systems constitutes the basis of local autonomy, free decision over the local natural resources, and a mean of prevention of forms of subjugation and dispossession of indigenous communities.
I have examined the purchase of La Soledad Vista Hermosa estate as a source of recurrent disagreement between different groups of Sanagustinians. The factory’s ruin seemed to belong to everybody and nobody at the same time. For this reason, when the members of La Soledad cooperative decided to sell the site, some people perceived the change as a threat against local norms. I have analyzed how the fluctuation of new groups of inhabitants and visitors, activities, and forms of interaction agitated by the foundation and operation of the arts center intensifies the sense of cultural peril.

The lack of unanimous approval of the arts center and the need for constant check-ups with town members and authorities represented opportunities to drive this institution, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín, in a genuinely democratic and inclusive route. I referred to the participation of San Agustín’s authorities in planning meetings and discussions at the National Center for the Arts in México City, where the future of the art center took shape. Additionally, the environmental care demanded by town members converted CASA into a site of artistic experimentation. Such an urgent agenda has defined the raison d'être and given foundations to this institution, which makes it a forefront example for other artistic, cultural, and museological organizations.

I have argued that distinctions of locals and avecindados as non-locals guarantee that newcomers understand, respect, and participate in the local organization and its institutions in which this location grounds vicinity relationships. Finally, I have situated examples that demonstrate the progressive construction of links between the arts center, the authorities, and the inhabitants. These bridges, expressed in discourses and performances, show civic approaches and valorization of the potential and significance of this artistic entity. In the following chapter, I will present and contextualize the testimonies of four visual artists that have relocated and established
their studios in San Agustín. Through their voices, I seek to offer a more representative picture of the contemporary relationships and culture configured in this town after the creation of CASA.
CHAPTER 4.

**Avecindadas/os and Artists, Implications, Advantages, and Challenges of Artistic Practices in and from San Agustín.**

Oaxaca, particularly the central valleys, has been a multicultural hub for centuries. The archaeological sites and colonial buildings have drawn the attention of international scholars (predominantly from the West), and many of them have moved permanently to the places they study. The same sites have become touristic destinations that host visitors from an ample economic spectrum. While this region shows severe polarization of classes, inequalities, exploitation, and extreme poverty, Oaxacan towns and cities also embody indigeneity, less commodified lifeways, and experiments on sustainability. These different factors configure opportunities for a growing sector of self-employed creatives, many of them migrating from other metropolises. Oaxaca constitutes a set of enhanced appreciation, circulation, and commercialization of cultural goods and aesthetic products (works of art, functional designs, crafts, as well as the knowledge associated with these practices). In this state, life-costs are cheaper. Additionally, traveling to and from México City by plane, automobile, and bus results relatively easy and affordable, which favors commuting to the capital city, as I will review in this chapter.

Here, I explore how the cultural and geographic environment of San Agustín has attracted artists who have decided to establish their studios there (and in most cases also their residencies). This migration experience has impacted their practices and lives in ways that I analyze in this chapter. Their arrival has also reshaped the identity of San Agustín, transforming it into a town populated by more and more artists, designers, architects, musicians, alternative therapists, and
other cultural producers and humanists since the foundation of the Center for the Arts at San Agustín.

The chapter evolves after extended conversations I shared with four visual artists—Cristina Luna, Adán Paredes, Isabel Sánchez, and Lorena Silva—who established their studios in San Agustín Etla. I intertwine, associate, and contrast fragments of their testimonies to provide a multivocal picture of San Agustín, CASA, and the cultural and artistic life in Oaxaca, including its challenges and complications. The artists participating in this study chose to leave México City, the metropolis, while this change represented an uncertain endeavor and a leap into a new phase to be constructed, instead of a specific opportunity drawing them to this particular place. They experienced the restoration of La Soledad textile mill and the emergence of the Center for the Arts, i.e., they moved to San Agustín before the inauguration of CASA (2006), and they have witnessed the progressive makeover of the town. These artists actively participate in exhibitions and cultural events in Oaxaca and México and combine their authorial production with other kinds of commissions, collaborations, or activities that constitute more solid or additional sources of income for them.

The patterns of migration and the choice to settle for these creators respond to a search of specific conditions connected to their artistic motivation and professional pursuit. All of them have had the possibility of making what the cultural economist, Ann Markusen, denominates “independent location decisions” (2006, 1925), which define the modes of occupation of the location of destiny, in this case, San Agustín Etla. For this group, the choice of detaching from the urban dynamics and city distractions has allowed them to focus and invest more time in their

87 Excepting Isabel Sánchez, who currently lives in Villa de Etxa, 3.5 miles far, all of them are also residents at San Agustín.
artistic work compared to their former urban lives. Contrary to Richard Florida’s optimist theories about the invigoration of urban economies prompted by the “creative class” by the turn of the millennium, megalopolitan life for an ample majority of artists poses the risk of precarity and marginality (Florida 2002). The artists in this study migrated very close in time to Florida’s claims and they exemplify a counter-urban mobilization. Through relocation, the participants in this study counter-effect the difficulty to continue as self-employed creatives while living in the city. They sought a less expensive locale to settle larger studio spaces, which are unaffordable in big cities. Procuring a cheaper cost of living has granted them more sustainable conditions to balance their income, expenses, paid labor, and creative practice.

Mobility and commute constitute an essential part of the professional life of these individuals. In many cases, their clienteles, collectors, and collaborators live somewhere else, and often, in metropolitan contexts. They are cosmopolitan individuals familiar with city rhythms while they have also adapted and adopted the local social dynamics of their rural dwellings. They are skilled at going back and forth between cultural contexts. Finally, the Oaxacan vernacular materials, techniques, and the exchange at local craft-workshops are fundamental to their artistic discourses and modes of production.

In these “first-person” accounts, this group of participants show their agency to the same extent as their resilience to shape their intellectual and affective activity as artists. All of them received college-level education, which they have combined with continued independent courses and workshops (in some cases taught at CASA). All four of them were born in México and have lived in this country all their lives. They belong to a middle class able to make the investment

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88 Foreign artists native from Belgium, France, Spain, Chile, the United States, among other places have also migrated and based in San Agustín. Their migrations represent an ampler phenomenon. For this chapter, I elected to narrow the focus of my study only to Mexican born and based creators.
required for a relocation, but we will also find that their labor (artistic or otherwise) constitutes their primary financial source. Through this compilation, I present diversified practices and the cultural contexts in which their careers have unfolded.

Rather than structured interviews or questionnaires, in these ample conversations, the interlocutors freely commented on a series of topics and questions I proposed, sometimes returning or deviating. In broad terms, I asked them to summarize their trajectories as artists before San Agustín. The interviewed artists explained their reasons to move and settle their studios or residencies in San Agustín. They exposed their initial attraction to San Agustín and narrated their process to adapt to their new location. They discussed how their practice and artistic working processes have transformed by living in this rural town. The participants spoke about their involvement in the cultural and communitarian life of San Agustín. These artists exposed their relationship with CASA. In these comments, their association and collaborations with the artist Francisco Toledo, CASA’s chief advocate and sponsor, emerged. They also discussed their networks of support, financial strategies, and the market for their art, while analyzing the characteristics of the commercial sphere for creators in Oaxaca. Through the resonances and dissonances of their commentaries, I aim to provide a broader perspective and first-hand experience of the conditions, implications, and repercussions of being an artist in and from San Agustín in a post-CASA epoch. I additionally seek to exemplify modes in which these individuals act as subjects, neighbors, and cultural producers in this place. Ultimately, by exposing the specific conditions of life, production, and creative exchange for artists, I aim to offer a portrait of the incipient art system of San Agustín, Oaxaca City and Oaxaca State, of which I argue, the Center for the Arts at San Agustín constitutes a critical piece.
In the first section, “Artists Bios and Brief Background,” I introduce the participants by highlighting relevant biographical facts emphasizing their participation in the Oaxacan art world. The second part, “Relocation in San Agustín. Putting Down Roots and Establishing Relationships with the Place,” examines the artists’ choice to move to this town and the influence of the environment and the studio setting in their working dynamics and themes. “Avecindadas/os, Becoming into a Neighbor,” offers the reader experiences that illustrate the cultural differences between locals and newcomers analyzed in Chapter Three of this dissertation. The artists narrate here their processes of integration into San Agustín’s community. The fourth part, “The Artists’ Relationships with CASA and Francisco Toledo,” discusses personal links between the participants and the artist, colleague, and mentor. They comment on their approaches to CASA as learners, educators, and collaborators. “Artistic Practices and Relationships with the Art Worlds,” the last section, tackles issues of the art system at large; the commenters deliberate about the complexities of art commercialization vis-à-vis the sustenance of their practice, the relationship between art production and exhibition opportunities, as well as the significance of peers and supporters in the trajectories of these creators.

**ARTISTS BIOS AND BRIEF BACKGROUND**

_Cristina Luna_ (México City, 1963) obtained the Bachelor of Fine Arts at the National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking “La Esmeralda.” She moved from México City to San Agustín in 2001. In her most extensive body of work, she employs paintings, but she also works on ceramics and sculpture. After moving to Oaxaca, she began a series of canvases of endangered animal species and extinguished beings that lived on the planet before human history. In these works, a solid drawing brings to the foreground the bodies of animals, which
Luna limits her palette to give prominence to the motif—animal bodies isolated from any referential habitat. Before her career in the visual arts, Cristina conducted musical studies at the conservatory. She continues disseminating her musical knowledge as a private piano instructor. Her recent exhibitions in Oaxaca include Códice Tierra and El Sendero de los Epejos (Museum of Oaxacan Painters (MUPO), 2019), Entre lo Abstracto y la Naturaleza (Solo show at Hotel Casa Ántica, 2018), Sonata a Seis Manos (Galería Noel Cayetano, 2017), and El Infinito Arte Femenino (MUPO, 2017).

Adán Paredes Vera (México City, 1961) studied archaeology at the ENAH in the eighties. After finishing high school at the age of nineteen, he worked at the Department of Archaeological Salvaging as a “pick and hatchet workman” in excavations that happened simultaneously to the construction of the metro network in México City. Paredes highlights from this period his experience at a Tepaneca burial in Azcapozalco as well as a mammoth skeleton recuperation in Parque Vía. This background led him to pursue a bachelor’s degree in archeology. As a student, he collaborated as a photographer, drawer, and restorer of ceramic pieces. He wanted to learn in depth the process of high-temperature ceramics. Paredes joined an extracurricular course, taught by the ceramist Hugo Velázquez at CIPAC (Center of Permanent Invention Civil Association, a cultural center founded by the filmmaker Alfonso Arau in México City). The research and the theoretical aspects of archaeology were not of particular interest for him, instead he enjoyed the in situ works: the soil, the protocols of manipulation of objects, and the contact with materials. “It was clearly related to clay work,” Paredes asserts. While collaborating in the digging at the site of Cuetlajuchitlán in Huitzucu, Guerrero (discovered in 1991 during the construction of the Highway México-Acapulco), he employed his spare time in a
workshop producing ceramic floor tiles. After one year as student of archaeology, he decided he was not interested in pursuing the requirements to get the degree. Instead, he established a ceramics workshop at El Pedregal. Paredes later moved to the workshop of a friend and sculptor, until he finally founded his studio adjacent to his home at Santa Úrsula Coapa. He describes his earliest years of practice as “locked in and shot away from the art world, not visiting exhibitions, and skeptical about the galleries.” In retrospect, Paredes assesses this detachment positively because it allowed him to invest the dedication and patience that ceramics require. The artist recalls: “hours, and hours, and endless hours learning how to fire. Having a furnace and manipulating it is not an easy task. At first, you think you could control the material. However, after years, you realize that it is a communion and a dialogue that makes the task flow and happen.” Recently, Adán Paredes presented Espejo de Barro, reflejos de tiempo (solo show at San Pablo Cultural Center, Oaxaca, 2018), and Anhelos extraviados (Sonora Museum of Art, 2018; and Museum of the Oaxacan Painters, 2017).

Isabel Sánchez Salgado (Oaxaca, Oaxaca, 1982), the youngest in this group of interviewees, was born in Oaxaca City in 1982, and she spent her childhood and teenage years in Villa de Etla, the heading municipality and urban center of the Etla region. She moved to México City to get a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts at the National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking “La Esmeralda” at the age of seventeen. Despite that temporary migration, her intention was always returning to Oaxaca and applying the knowledge obtained in art school to the plethora of materials and techniques available and practiced in the different Oaxacan towns. Although she was introduced to ceramics at “La Esmeralda,” her training was superficial and brief there. Her introduction to Taller Canela at San Agustín Etla around 2008 became
foundational for her career as sculptor. In her work, animal and human statuettes embody a realm of fantasy, erotica, and childhood. These characters sometimes stand as individuals and sometimes are attached to chinaware and functional objects. The finesse and meticulousness of her modeling accomplish compelling gestures. The toy-like scale of Sánchez figures and the concupiscence of her symbols confront each other while her work mesmerizes the viewers. She had her first solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca in 2018 and she collaborated in the costume design of the dance and musical performance *Ofrenda 4. Danza del Inframundo* (Center for the Arts at San Agustín, 2017). Isabel represents a younger generation of artists born in the region, who decided to establish her studio in San Agustín because of the developing local artistic infrastructure.

**Lorena Silva**’s (México City, 1955) attraction to the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM) campus, as well as becoming a mother at a very young age determined her college education. Authoritative commentaries about the precarity associated with artists’ lives made her decline to pursue a degree in Fine Arts. She preferred to professionalize in a field that might bring more career prospects and allow her to sustain her young family. She followed her interests in plastic and manufacturing processes, as well as dance and embodiment. Lorena received the bachelor’s degree in Industrial Design. As a college student, she also participated on a regular basis in different open workshops at the National School of Painting, Sculpture and Printmaking “La Esmeralda.” Silva studied with Alberto Díaz de Cossio, an advocate of pottery cooperatives across México, who instructed ceramics at UNAM’s School of Architecture and Design. She continued learning the technical aspects of ceramics at Adán Paredes’ studio in Santa Úrsula in México City, where she also met by the end of the nineties another influential
figure based in San Agustín, Claudio Jerónimo López. Lorena has exhibited her work consistently in Oaxaca. Her more recent participations include *El Sendero de los Espejos. XV Anniversary of Colectivo Guenda* (Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, 2019) accompanied by a catalogue, as well as the ceramics exhibition *Códice Tierra* (MUPO, 2019).

**RELOCATION IN SAN AGUSTÍN. PUTTING DOWN ROOTS AND ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PLACE**

In this first section, I narrate the circumstances and conditions that drove my interlocutors to relocate in San Agustín Etla. The participants expose here their impressions and beneficial aspects that the place offered them. I also describe, through their voices, the relationships between the local landscape and their new residencies and working places. By exposing the practicalities that the artists initially faced, I introduce the next section tackling issues of cultural differences between them and their neighbors, as well as their process of adjustment.

Once Adán Pardes was fully devoted to his studio, he envisioned leaving México City and moving to a smaller place, like Mérida, Jalapa, or Oaxaca. In any case, he preferred to find a location in the outskirts or suburbs of these cities. Transporting clay, materials, and finished pieces in and from Mérida (the most remote location) proved to be extremely expensive, risky, and time consuming. Jalapa’s moist environment retards the drying of clay. When his friend, the curator Fernando Gálvez, brought him to San Agustín Etla, Paredes felt assured that this town was the place for him to settle and live. He established in San Agustín around 2000. He and his partner moved to an adobe house built in the nineteenth century, where “Hotel Casa María” is now located, just one block far from La Soledad temple and the entrance to the former factory. They were enchanted by it, and for a year, they kept trying to persuade its owner, who was not
planning to rent it. When the landlord finally accepted, his couple and also artistic associate, together with Paredes disassembled the studio in México City and transported in its entirety to San Agustín, including the ceramic furnace. Moving to this town represented a breakthrough. Whereas the ambition to grow his studio drove his practice in México City, once in Oaxaca, he “planted to work.” He asserts, “The most important event defining my trajectory was moving to San Agustín. My life twisted. I have a lot to thank this space. I do not see myself replicating this workshop anywhere else. I do not have the time, age, or energy to reinstall it. I wouldn’t even move the studio to another town in Oaxaca. Only here.”

For Lorena Silva, San Agustín has represented two transitional life stages. First, she migrated as a teammate of Taller Los Alacranes with Adán Paredes to find a new undertaking and venue for their ceramics workshop. The decision to leave México City and venturing to find a new place to live became imminent when Silva and her couple were asked to leave the house and studio they rented in México City. She acknowledges that the partnership, “the trust and believe that the effort to work together, having a common project, and succeed,” was determinant in taking that leap. She arrived in San Agustín in 2000. Her first home was Adriana Remus’ house, another vecindada, and sculptor from México City. Later, together with her partner and associate, they restored and moved to the old adobe house on Avenida Independencia. Silva recalls the many months that it took to win the heart of the owner, who responded to their persistence by finally accepting to lease his empty and derelict house. However, any improvements must be financed by them as tenants.

The ampleness of a nineteenth-century vernacular house proved to be spacious and easy to adapt to different needs, but it also implied for them a change in the dwelling dynamics. Examples of Oaxacan vernacular architecture like this privilege exterior spaces and not interior
ones; home life unfold in relation to the patio. Because of the warm weather, arcades and porches outside the bedrooms constitute the spaces where inhabitants spend most of the day. Lorena describes, “When you come from a city, it is complicated to adapt to the distribution of spaces. The toilet was outside the house. It was necessary to exit and enter to move across the different disconnected rooms. To enter the house, you had to cross a patio.” The multiple dormitories turned out to be useful for distinct purposes. Having ample courtyards proved useful to dry pieces of modelled clay. The landlord’s disengagement to make the place inhabitable also allowed them to tailor it to their domestic and studio-related needs.

Isabel Sánchez also established her first studio in San Agustín at a similar traditionally constructed house. Poor maintenance of rooms and porch became secondary, compared to the astonishing view of the mountains that this house offered. When this old construction collapsed, Isabel had to rush moving her items and tools to another place. A cluster of small rooms built with adobe on the outskirts of one of the mountains next to a creek and little waterfalls became her second working space.

Around 2008, Isabel arrived in San Agustín looking for Adán Paredes “Los Alacranes” Ceramics Studio at its initial location in Independence Avenue (what is now the Casa María Hotel) but, after fifteen years, the studio had moved to another location in De Hidalgo Street. The person that received Sánchez gave her wrong directions to get to the new address of Los Alacranes, pointing her to Claudio Jerónimo López’s “Taller Canela,” instead. Taller Canela was also a modest but fully equipped ceramics’ workshop at the time, yet Claudio had not the heavy workload and vast clientele of consecrated artists that nowadays commission their production to the studio.89 Isabel mentions that, currently, up to fifteen people could be working at the same

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89 Like Francisco Toledo and Sergio Hernández, who are the most established and commercially robust artists in Oaxaca.
time in the workplace. The studio became cramped with more and more users every day. As Isabel’s work evolved in more fragile and less portable pieces, she determined that a permanent modeling studio of her own was already necessary. The independent workplace permitted the organization of materials and tools, instead of the convention to re-arrange and clean the space daily, which takes a long time from the production process. Since having a furnace seemed ambitious, her choice was renting a space in San Agustín, closer to Taller Canela, that would admit her to continue firing the clay there. Isabel explains how she understood her needs and the requirements of her studio in progress,

Choosing San Agustín was very much related to my relationship with Claudio. I make the production here, and then I take it to Claudio’s furnace. I do not have a furnace. Until a year ago, I didn’t want one but now I do want more than one. The furnace is there, and other tools that I do not have are available there. In the beginning, I thought we only needed a table and a chair to model the clay. Little by little we acquired more things. I didn’t have a potter’s wheel, the instruments, the clothes, the bags. Although most of my work is at Claudio’s studio, day by day, I have extra equipment here. I can do all the modeling here now.

Isabel found in Taller Canela the infrastructure as well as the conditions to develop a specialized apprenticeship, which had led her to grow her practice in material terms. Although she expresses her desire to evolve towards a full set and independent workshop, we will find that, for Isabel, beyond the technical solutions she initially sought to resolve, Taller Canela has also represented mentorship, professional training, and space of socialization of her artwork throughout the years.

Cristina Luna’s move responded to affective demands. Before relocating, Luna resided for short intermittent periods in between México City and this town. A life-event, a relationship’s rupture, marked her need to separate also from the place where the bond emerged and broke. Her desire for a fresh start made San Agustín appear like an embracing place of emotional contention, less hostile, and calmer than the capital city. When a friend communicated the
availability of a house for rental there, the opportunity made Luna to adventure and transfer indefinitely to the Oaxacan town.

These mentioned sites offer a glimpse of the gradual growth of infrastructure, services associated with the arts, and housing conditions of in San Agustín over the last couple of decades. Taller Alacranes and Taller Canela are currently among the biggest and more prestigious ceramics workshops in San Agustín, Oaxaca, and México. When Adán Paredes had the chance to purchase a piece of land and redesign Taller Los Alacranes, he decided to separate his home from his studio. The owner of its former headquarters transformed his home in a hotel, Casa María, already mentioned. This hotel currently provides services to tourists and also to the arts center when its in-house residencies are insufficient for the guest lecturers.

Despite her separation of Los Alacranes, Lorena Silva has become grounded in this place. She has been designing and slowly building a house of her property in a lot adjacent to Taller Los Alacranes that she acquired after years of living in San Agustín. Since her professional partnership dissolved, she has focused on her personal practice as a sculptor, and she has developed a business as a lamp designer. She reflects, “As time passes, the certainty that time is what you lack the most and that it is not renewable becomes undeniable. I need to be very conscious of what to do with my time and with whom. I did not have that awareness before, but now I am a little bit more conscientious about it.” This acknowledgement made Lorena define San Agustín as her elected and adopted home, a place where she considers her lifetime better spent.

For these artists, working in San Agustín not only has had practical repercussions but also cognitive, affective, and spiritual. Shifting their awareness and relationship with their immediate environment translates into specific forms, motifs, and habits in their artistic production, as they
Adán Paredes remembers that nineteen years ago, only a few houses in San Agustín had telephonic landlines. Their house was one of a few that had a functional one working. Paredes stated,

*When you move away from the city, you get disconnected. The telephone was not ringing. I was sure that the phone was out of order. I used to check the speaker, and the line was indeed working. The telephone never rang. One week later, I was sure again that the phone was broken, but it wasn’t. Nobody was calling, and long-distance calls were not frequent. Then, time transforms into something else here.*

Lorena Silva poignantly declares,

*Speaking about learning how to live here: I felt, if not lacking root, ungrounded. Oaxaca gave me roots, perhaps because it is a place full of soil. The geography of the mountains is very prominent. This place has given me powerful states of introspection, which have made me understand that we do not have much time and that I cannot make a fool of myself. I feel that the softness and life quality I have here (which gets lost in the city), the attention to the change of seasons, the rain, the animals, the relationship with the strong nature around. All that does not allow me to get complacent. That is how I feel. In this place I am under persistent self-scrutiny, self-reflection. That is the energy I receive from Oaxaca. Since I arrived here, I have experienced many life-changes followed by reflection, learning, and constant reinvention of myself. How I lived in México City was not functioning for me anymore. I needed to find a different me, but I did not understand who. You have to release your resistance. Here, you have to assimilate the directness of the life around (nature, the changes, the weather, the winds, the skies, the mountains); if you do not, then you live fighting against that all.*

Hiking and walks next to the canal and up to the abandoned power station become a necessary experience and habit for many individuals residing or visiting San Agustín. In them, the astonishment caused by a landscape that abruptly opens at a different (and broader) scale reveal the mountains as living beings. They breathe and move as our human bodies do. Cristina Luna contextualizes her work from a phenomenal perspective,

*The mountains contain you. I moved to San Agustín when I started my painting series of endangered animal species. I began painting wales. My long walks to the abandoned power station inspired me. I knew I needed nature to develop this series, which is why I decided to move here permanently. I have been working on this planetary series ever since.*

Adán Paredes also details,
The owner of the house we rented, used to trim a poinsettia tree planted outside the window of my bedroom. So, I asked him, “why are you cutting it that much.” He replied, “you will see.” What “you will see” meant was that [in the winter] I would see day after day, how the plant would become more and more gigantic after a few weeks. I thought that it was impressive to have the chance of paying attention to that event that would pass utterly unnoticed if I were in the city. The color and light of the sunsets started to influence me. You walk to the mountains, and you realize that the hues of green change according to the time of the year: something shifts in your head. I was producing very abstract and geometrical work in México City. Then my work became very organic here until I finally accomplished a sort of synthesis of both styles.

The work of these four artists does not aim to describe or represent the place where they created it. However, the location, the environment, the pleasurable vis-à-vis with natural phenomena have influenced states of mind in these authors that drive them to continuously measure their time and existence concerning the life surrounding them. In the following section, artists discuss relevant interactions with native Sanagustinians, and they position themselves regarding the town’s community.

Avecindadas/os, Becoming into a Neighbor

In the section “Local Institutions of Reciprocity and the Arrival of Newcomers (Avecindadas/os)” in Chapter Three, I discussed the distinct habitus of locals and avecindados, and how those cultural differences result in disagreements and processes of conciliation. These processes also have solidarities, modes of integration, and genuine neighborhood relationships as an outcome. In this section, I identify specific circumstances and negotiations from the artists’ perspective. For these individuals becoming members of the San Agustín community has required years of voluntarily and intentionally developed relationships, while this fostered vicinity has a valuable significance for them.

Paredes considers that any outsider must make efforts to become involved with his neighbors. He remembers when he arrived at San Agustín on a large trailer moving his ceramics
studio and all his implements. The trailer’s arrival was an extraordinary event noticed by all the neighbors that immediately wondered who was bringing such a vehicle, and with what purpose. He states,

It took me some time to condition the house as a studio; it did not happen right away. At some point, I brought a thousand-liter gas tank for the furnace. When somebody saw it, people started wondering what was it for, and if it was dangerous or if it could explode. Once we have organized the studio, the municipal authorities arrived to ask who we were and what we were doing. I explained, “I am a ceramist. This is what I do... yada yada yada,” which allowed for a good start of a relationship with the town. Soon after, the authorities asked me if I would be willing to make something for the town. We made the mural for the municipality’s kiosk. We included motifs associated with the community. I observed the richness of San Agustín, its churches, and why is San Agustín such an important town: because of its river and its water. That is the wealth and one of the most important commons of this place. We selected those elements of importance for the mural to be a sort of codex of San Agustín’s history.

If you arrive on a trailer, people around glances over. Here, you stop being anonymous immediately. If I stand in the Zocalo of México City, I am entirely anonymous. Here, I am not. I have learned that, in this town, everybody knows what you did, what you said, if you made a mistake or not... We automatically became “the ones that arrived on the trailer,” “who are those foreigners,” “the American dude [gringo], and the American gal [gringa].”

Isabel Sánchez explains this assumed condition of foreigners in the perceptions of inhabitants of small towns all over Oaxaca. She states that, although she is Eteca (form the Etla’s region), “If you dedicate to the arts, you get identified as a foreigner right away.” Isabel categorizes people that have arrived to San Agustín decided to invest in staying for a period of time while taking the maximum advantage of CASA (by enrolling in as many courses as possible) as “entrepreneurial and determined people, who are not afraid to travel and leave another place because they are seeking something specific here.” Although Sanagustinians are friendly and hospitable with tourists, taking the role of the tourist and taking the role of a neighbor are two very different positions. Divisions and micro-segregation can easily become the kind of relationship fostered. Adán Paredes elaborates on how he refuses that dynamic,
I have avoided being the guy that is locked up in his house doing his stuff. I have tried to foster a relationship with the community. I made sure to clarify to the neighbors that the tank I had was not dangerous. If they would had clung to taking the issue to the assembly, I would not have been able to have the studio. These are usos y costumbres, and you have to understand, comprehend, and get involved.

Lorena Silva details how she has adopted a standpoint in relation to cultural differences while learning the communitarian values that foster for more solidary exchanges,

Little by little, you knit relationships here, but you have to dismantle your “city” system of interpretation... How can I put it?... We have to show great respect for certain forms that we did not grow into. For example, tequio, a practice that we are not used to following, seems fantastic to me. The philosophy of “Today it is you, tomorrow it is me,” is wonderful. When somebody does not have the resources, they all help each other. In that sense, as open as they could become, they could also become enclosed. They could speak badly of their neighbors, but when they need to be united, they close ranks, and they support each other. For me, this is the way to understand the world as a community instead of the individualism of the patriarchy and the capitalism that we have learned.

Adán Paredes’ memory illustrates a scenario in which Lorena’s observation becomes tangible,

Something I have learned of this population is that antagonistic groups can have active conflicts. Nevertheless, when a particular matter involves the commons, the entire town is there. I remember a fire in the forest. I drove my truck to help because they asked me. I was transporting water, hoses, food for three days. I realized how that collectiveness functions. It doesn’t matter which group they are part of because nobody wants the forest to burn.

Humorously, Cristina Luna’s anecdote exposes the ambiguities that lead to sudden dis-encounters and the need of newcomers to consciously cultivate their relationships as neighbors.

Cristina recalls that a few weeks after arriving in San Agustín,

I heard the announcement in the megaphone, “All the neighbors of San Agustín are invited next Sunday to attest how the screw-worm is destroying our forests.” The gathering point was at La Ferrería neighborhood, and I arrived on the date and time announced. I thought everybody living here was actually invited, so I went. I had no idea about that distinction between avecindados and locals at the time. A bus took us to the forest. I got one of those earliest cellular phones that resembled a shoe because there were no landlines available in San Agustín. During the trip to the forest, I received a call from my father. As I was answering him, I heard the representative of Communal Goods screaming while staring at me, “Enough with those avecindados who are taking up our spaces.” I noticed he was referring to me and I thought that maybe, after all, it was not such a good idea to join the excursion that day... hahaha.
For an urban dweller, the megaphone, a media of communication intermittently traversing the sonic spectrum of the town and alerting the people of the local news and issues to attend, restructures her listening habits. Cristina’s response to the utterance summoning “neighbors” represented an action to reassert her new condition as a San Agustín resident. The opportunities to participate in San Agustín’s communal life happen almost daily. However, those moments in which avecindados get publicly and verbally differentiated, and excluded from that drive to participate, provoke consternation. Becoming a neighbor there requires for avecindados to overcome the continual enunciation of this difference, which they would interpret in a metropolitan context as violent. In San Agustín (as in other Oaxacan towns), communitarian membership reassertion requires consistent and continual participation; likewise, these differentiations remark the continued action of “becoming into a neighbor.” The political dimension in this context means the response to proximity and daily interaction between neighbors reiterating their affiliation while deconstructing their notions of citizenship or nationality.

Some avecindados assume this restated distinction between locals and outsiders as a barrier and excuse to develop more secluded and private circles of peers. Adán Paredes contends the case,

Not everybody gets involved. I do not think there is a robust artistic community at San Agustín (robust in the sense of getting together and being concerned about the community of San Agustín). We are a bunch of splattered people who have arrived because here you can work at ease, but many are not genuinely concerned about making things for the town. I do not see that, and I have been around for quite some time. There had been isolated efforts of a few people. I blame it on the internal query, “I am not from here... Should I join?” The issue of usos y costumbres in these communities is complicated because, at times, they accept you and, at other times, they do not. “You come from some other place, I do not trust you, you might take advantage, you might want to screw me...” that position is based on the fact that some people actually arrive with that attitude: “I
come from this place, you have to do as I say, you have to follow my rules and forms.” Of course, that leads to a disagreement.

You have to compensate with a sort of tribute for being an outsider. I have come across newcomers with an attitude that I would call quasi-colonialist. Those people get angry or complain about, “Why didn’t the truck collect trash yesterday?” “Why do they want to raise water contributions.” Moreover, I used to think to myself, “Really? Have you ever introduced yourself to the community; have you wondered if you can collaborate somehow?”

Isabel Sánchez identifies tensions stirred up by the demographic movements partially caused by the foundation of CASA, “Initially, local people did not accept the center because it was attracting many foreigners. The people felt that their space was invaded and taken away from them. They did not frequent the courses. When I participated in the earliest workshops taught, nobody from San Agustín enrolled. It was very alien for them.” Disregarding the local habits to employ their leisure time, which was at first the cultural offer of the center, we could also interpret an equivalent detachment of locals from this “foreign” agent that, for the locals, CASA seemed to be initially.

A critical transition that Cristina noticed once the arts center began to operate was that an increasing number of artists from Oaxaca and México City moved to San Agustín. She mentions the painter Mauricio Cervantes, the photographer Antonio Turok, and the curator Marietta Bernstorff, among others. This intensified resettlement has caused changes in land use (from communal to private) and the property value. Property taxes in San Agustín are among the highest of the Etlas municipalities and the State of Oaxaca. These fundamental shifts triggered unconformity in the local population. She recalls that, to express their non-compliance, locals decided to require avencindados to pay, in one installment, a kind of non-resident fee of three thousand Mexican pesos for the consumption of water, while representatives reclaimed it from door to door. The problem was that the tariff was arbitrarily established, without previous notice, and its ultimate purpose was unclear. Lorena Silva gives voice to this punitive form of justice in
response to a generalized sense of invasion, “‘They [the avecindados] were not born here, so we should charge them for the use of water. They were not born here, and they do not deserve that privilege.’ Nevertheless, avecindados protested this tariff because it was a disproportionate increase.” To the same extent that locals consider to be foreigners those avecindados who are artists, as Isabel stated, they also believe they are wealthy, which most of the times is not the case. Well-off artists do not move to San Agustín. Foreign snowbirds that have country houses in Oaxaca, though, are more affluent compared to the average Sanagustinian. While some locals have expressed resistance to the repopulation trends in this town by advocating for the hardening of housing costs, others do not resist such changes but profit from them. As avecindados became a new demographic group with increasing presence, locals recognized them as a potential clientele. Adán Paredes claims, “Things have changed; that is true. In the past, finding a house used to be easier for newcomers because the availability was higher than the demand. Although nowadays, constructions appear all over the place, there are fewer households vacant to rent.” This trend alerts that Sanagustinians must keep in mind other factors beyond the profitability of lodging this group of people experimenting with their possibility to find a new residency. Luna observes an environmental decay at San Agustín since she moved. Cement has become the sign of urbanization and advancement; it covers the streets of the town, and it does not allow the soil to filter the water. Nowadays, a common practice of younger people that inherit land is to divide it and sell portions to avecindados and foreigners, arbitrarily pricing their plots. Land value at San Agustín has increased exponentially, which is a sign of gentrification that locals should anticipate. What seems advantageous and profitable now, can quickly become a self-inflicted reoccupation and the gradual repopulation of the place by wealthier individuals.
Another issue that gains prominence in this context of the proximity of relationships is machismo. Not only in San Agustín but in Oaxaca, normalized divisions and socially imposed gender roles excel. Women get identified and designated as “the woman of such (men)” instead of being addressed by their name. Lorena quotes the popular saying, “Small town. Great hell,” regarding the treatment that most local men give to their wives, and to how men close ranks when a woman tries to break free of an abusive marriage. Additionally, avecindadas (especially single women) that express opinions or suggestions that contradict mainstream local positions receive hostilities in return. She declares,

> You have to be very careful because, here, you learn to lose the anonymity of the city. In the city, you are completely anonymous. Here you are not. Everybody knows what you do, what you do not, and whom do you relate to. I do not seclude myself, but I try to enter and exit. I do not get fully involved in projects that give me much visibility locally, or that require expressing my opinions because it is a sensitive issue.

Despite those cautions in response to gender oppression, Lorena notices, “More and more single women are settling in San Agustín in search of alternative ways of living. If we could, as women, thread the same kind of support networks of tequio, it would empower us as a community.” Lorena and Cristina’s testimonies suggest that some avecindadas are playing an important role in offering more emancipatory perspectives to local women. Additionally, as Lorena proposes sorority can highly benefit of incorporating the values and forms of expression of solidarity of traditional communities. In the section that follows, these participants reflect on the impact of the Center for the Arts for San Agustín from a personal and local perspective.

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90 In relation to noise, the use of fireworks, the treatment to animals, the way that public works get managed, to mention only a few examples.
THE ARTISTS’ RELATIONSHIP WITH CASA AND FRANCISCO TOLEDO

During our conversations, I asked artists to discuss the changes they perceived in the landscape and culture of San Agustín before and after the foundation of CASA. In this section, I present their perspectives about how locals have gradually assimilated and taken advantage of this public space seeking to develop an inclusive agenda. The artists also related their direct involvement with the arts center in different capacities, which illustrate in a micro-scale the variety of activities and audiences of CASA. Given the relevance that this town had in Francisco Toledo’s life over the last twenty years of his life, as I examined in Chapter Two, these artists and members of the local and Oaxacan artistic community developed personal relationships with him. They also describe the collaborations and connections with the Maestro Toledo. These positionings function as a preamble to the discussion of individual artistic trajectories and the involvement of these artists with the Oaxacan artistic world and culture at large.

Adán Paredes finds tangible infrastructural contrasts over the last twenty years. When he arrived in this town, the highway connecting Oaxaca City with the Etla was a two-lane road (one in each direction). Driving at night was dangerous, which caused him to spend more time in San Agustín and avoiding traveling to the city, as much as possible. He knew La Soledad ex-factory as an abandoned ruin. The site had a gate, and rarely a watchman was around. Most times, no one would stop intruders from climbing the fence. Adán’s curiosity regarding archaeology made this place fascinating for him. He states, “The space had a charm of its own. This ruin of the nineteenth was left as if time had stopped. It seemed that the machines had been abruptly interrupted, and you could see a glass bottle of soda left behind next to them. It seemed like a moment frozen in time. It was fabulous.” The debris and the paralyzed machines gave the place a feeling of a secretive attraction park, as Isabel Sánchez remembers. For her, San Agustín
was a family outing destination of her childhood and a place to visit her parent’s friends, the pools of Vista Hermosa, and the abandoned mill on Sundays. Immersed in the derelict naves of the factory, the Sánchez siblings used to run and leapfrog from one solid wooden beam to the next, avoiding to fall in one of the many holes of the floor.

When the restoration works began, the circulation of dump trucks made inhabitants intrigued about the outcome of such changes. Adán Paredes declares,

*What happened when the restoration started? Rumors began to circulate. The population had been used to have an essential site of labor. At some point, everybody in the town had a relative employed at the factory. Then, they expected that prosperity to come back again. Seeing the works conducted to restore the factory, they imagined that many job opportunities would be the outcome; and that was not the case. Not that many members of San Agustin community work there. The arts center’s repercussions for the community have involved the ecological aspects and the development of workshops for children. I think it became disappointing for them because the jobs did not come. The neighbors came knocking to my door to ask if I knew what jobs would be available (as a driver, as this, or that). I used to think, “What can I answer them? Go ask the architect supervising the construction.” That did not happen. What happened is this other thing standing now. It is a rescued and a very dignified recuperation of a space that already existed.*

When I asked Lorena to describe the transformation, she focused on the town’s reception of the center and Toledo’s input,

*In the beginning, the people of the town were not participating at all. No link between the town and the center existed. When the intention to involve the town emerged, people received it with reticence. Some people at San Agustín loved Francisco Toledo, but others did not like him, and they even hung banners against him. The feelings were mixed.*

If locals seemed impervious to vecindados’ opinions, as the participants’ testimonies exposed in the last section, the mobilization generated by the restoration and the foundation of a new institution made the town alert of an external force acting over the place. Isabel Sánchez reflects upon more recent effects regarding local emerging economies and CASA as an actual employment site,

*Most people looking to purchase a property or a piece of land are not from Oaxaca. For the local people, selling part of their lands has become a source of income. More*
outsiders (foreigners and Mexicans) suddenly became interested in the place. The town got populated with creative people coming from places outside of Oaxaca. The local economy was shaken. When the center was hiring administrative, maintenance, and technical employees, Toledo insisted on giving preference to applicants based in San Agustín.

Even though the responses to Francisco Toledo’s initiative to reactivate the ex-factory were mixed, he always envisioned this project (and all the others he conducted at San Agustín) as a mode of restitution for the town.91

Aside from the discrepant points of view, the resistance, or the opportunities seized by locals in this new scenario, some community members and authorities appreciate artists and consider them as valuable contributors to San Agustín’s society. According to these conversations, a memorable example is the former school teacher, Maestro Mayolo Ruiz, who served as Mayor of San Agustín twice, between 1999 to 2001 and 2005 to 2007.92 He aimed for more integration between native Sanagustinians, the arts center, and the artists residing in the town. He promoted direct linking strategies like agricultural and cooperative training at the center, and he also approached artists to listen to their points of view that could lead to potential improvements locally. Cristina Luna remembers her participation in Mayor Ruiz’s meeting conducted at Lorena Silva and Adán Paredes’ home, more than a decade ago. Paredes also commented about his closeness to this mayor, “I co-hosted a meeting at my first house and studio with the authorities. They have come to me asking for advice. Previously, Antonio Turok and I helped write the speech of San Agustín’s Major Mayolo, for the inauguration of the Center

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91 The workshop of crafted paper and jewelry produced with natural fibers (Taller Arte Papel Vista Hermosa), the unaccomplished House of Mathematics (Casa de las Matemáticas) projected in collaboration with the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT), and the posthumously inaugurated Tele-Bachillerato (distance learning high school at San Agustín).

92 Mayor Mayolo Ruiz’s periods of service coincide with two crucial moments in the history of CASA: the period of purchase of the real estate and the year of the official inauguration of the arts center.
For these cultural producers, moving to San Agustín represents their intent to get renovated by changing the environment and social context in which they develop. The persistence of those who find ways to sustain their life in this locality speaks of their high respect and value of the place and its culture, and also of their explicit efforts to earn a position at San Agustín's community.

Isabel Sánchez offers opinions about the present state of affairs at San Agustín after more than a decade of CASA’s uninterrupted activities offered to a broad spectrum of audiences. She distinguishes two contributions of the center to the local life and economy of San Agustín. First, the center has offered multiple workshops in which participants learn a trade, which turns out to be, in many cases, a source of income for them. She considers that Sanagustinians have become more acquainted with the arts center, and more locals are participating in the workshops offered, for example, artisanal paper, jewelry, needle felting. Second, by providing services such as cheap temporary lodging, house rentals, small restaurants, shops, and street food vendors to CASA’s affiliates, the population increasingly finds sources of employment and income without the need to travel away from their locality. She contrasts,

If you go to a similar town like San Gabriel Etla that does not host a “CASA,” doesn’t have a magnificent Catholic temple (like Juquila), any important pyramid is located there, and it lacks other touristic attractions, its population will need to seek employment in Elektra, Oxxo, or any other of the worst places. These owners of local businesses can make a better living or, at least, an equivalent one here.

My former neighbor and Alberto Valenzuela [founder of Taller Papel Oaxaca] worked at the paper workshop [Arte Papel Vista Hermosa]. Both left and established their independent workshops. Nowadays, Arte Papel is a cooperative of San Agustín

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93 Photographer Antonio Turok, mentioned in chapter one of this dissertation, was also based in San Agustín, and he served as an advisor in the design of CASA’s photography labs.

94 Elektra (a chain of stores of electronic appliances and homeware) and Oxxo (a chain of convenience stores similar to Seven Eleven’s in the US) are amongst the largest Mexican corporations (Grupo Salinas and Grupo Femsa, respectively). They have also expanded their services towards the financial sector. These businesses proliferate in smaller cities and peri-urban areas across México.
Municipality, and all the members are from San Agustín. Toledo donated all the infrastructure to the town for the cooperative to become autonomous. The people employed at the wool needle-felting workshop are also local. They all have learned a trade, and many after a few years leave and establish their own workshop independently. But they all started at CASA. If you come to San Agustín looking for artisanal paper, you will find eight people that have their workshops and produce it.

Isabel also points out that the circulation of established international artists and experts in certain traditions and techniques represent another significant contribution of CASA. The flux of practitioners that arrive because of the reputation of the center and its unique location has benefitted artists and aspirants, not only from the region of the central valleys (included the capital city) and Oaxaca State but the Mexican art world at large. Their presence and the opportunity to join their courses free of cost would be unimaginable without CASA, according to Sánchez. Furthermore, this participant reckons that, nowadays, artists arrive in San Agustín not only to produce or learn at CASA but they are also attracted by many other independent studios and workshops of ceramics, sculpture, paper, etc. San Agustín is transforming into a hub for material experimentation in the arts and crafts.

As an artist who found in self-instruction and subject-oriented mentorship the accurate means to learn and to develop a practice, for Adán Paredes CASA constitutes a unique educational alternative in the fine arts. He formulates it as another contribution of the center,

A young man who worked in my studio asked for my advice because he was thinking about applying to the School of Fine Arts at UABJO. The university had many conflicts and strikes at the time. I do not think that knowledge is exclusively concentrated in universities. My advice was, “Check CASA. Check who will be coming to teach. Think about what courses might fit into your interests. And instead of studying the degree in fine arts, enroll in diploma courses and workshops for three years at CASA. It will be way more substantial.” We have to recognize that fabulous artists and instructors come to CASA because of the link with the National System of Creators. I am impressed by this place, and I am not quite sure if any other center for the arts offers activities of this top quality.
As these artists reflect, CASA has generated increasing gravitation of multifarious groups of individuals towards it, like those mentioned here: Sanagustinians who are employees, who have learned a trade there, or who offer services to the center’s visitors and users, young aspirants to artists seeking an education or technical improvement, individuals making art in their spare time, established artists who serve as instructors at the center, among others.

In addition to their perspectives about the transformations spawned by CASA, these creators have participated with this institution at different stages and in different capacities: as attendants to their programs, as instructors, or as collaborators. For Cristina Luna and Lorena Silva, the first contact with the arts center involved an invitation to participate in a fresco technique workshop, one of the first programs taught there. Other artists summoned included other consolidated figures like Guillermo Olguín and Fernando Aceves Humana. The earliest activities were by invitation only and, soon after, they became open to the public. Years later, Cristina Luna taught painting at the earliest editions of the summer course for children at the center, one of the initiatives that have gained more interest from the local families since its inception. Luna became acquainted with children that are now adults starting their own families and others that decided to move from the town. Another example of the response of the center’s coordinators to the petition of a group of neighbors was an amateur chorus of vecindados (not necessarily artists), of which Lorena was a member. For their rehearsals, they requested to use one of CASA’s classrooms one night a week. Javier Ballina, a historian also based at San Agustín, was the director of this vocal ensemble. Both Cristina and Lorena have approached different directors of the arts center in search of exhibition opportunities. However, if the institution has shown openness to change and incorporated numerous programs for local audiences, the specific community of artists based in the town has not gained a space there to socialize their artistic
practice with peers and neighbors. CASA’s agenda of exhibitions remains closed and exposes hierarchies between creators by showing only highly established and mainly mature artists in its galleries and rooms. This area represents an opportunity for CASA to expand and recognize the cultural transformations it has fostered, while also solidifying bonds between different groups sharing the territory.

The field of ceramics was foundational and among CASA’s original goals, according to the Trust of 2000 and its Amendment of 2002. Despite these plans, the center does not have dedicated facilities for ceramics. The center has requested the collaboration of neighboring workshops like Taller Los Alacranes, Taller Canela, and Isabel Sánchez when they have offered programs related to this medium. Adán Paredes details his connection with CASA activities,

I have taught workshops. I was asked to help to install an exhibition that involved works on ceramics, in which I also participated. I have advised them, mainly as an external consultant: sometimes they ask me to provide clay for their activities, I have been asked to help the Maestro Toledo to find an obsidian stone for a piece he was elaborating. I have met all the different directors: Daniel [Brena], Lourdes [Baez], Maestro [Ernesto] Lumbreras. In this small place, we all end up falling in the same plate. If you are interested in getting involved, you do it. They had a group of fellows from Spain, and they brought them here to work to the studio. The last activity in which I got involved was the Diplomado Cuerpos en Tránsito coordinated by Claudia Lavista. I conducted a workshop of tri-dimensional drawing with clay, in which they had to connect their sense of spatiality to the manipulation of clay. I am convinced that one has to share their knowledge. I think we have to share what we know.

The existing working relationship between Toledo and this ceramist, as well as Paredes’ problem-solving skills, have placed him as a reputed associate. Furthermore, Paredes allusion to the immediacy and closeness between CASA and the creators that have resided in San Agustín for longer—translated in the expression “we end up falling in the same plate”—evidences the configuration of an art world in and of itself. In terms of the sociologist, Howard Becker, systemic interactions (roles and rules), patterns of collective activity, cooperative networks, and organized joined knowledge that result in the production, distribution, and appreciation of
artworks constitutes an “art world” (1982, x, 1). CASA and the artists are not isolated elements but agents integrating and shaping a field in which production, teaching, learning, and collaboration happens.

Of these group, Isabel Sánchez is the artist that has had a stronger involvement with CASA in recent times. Additionally, two of her sisters worked for a few years at the needle-felting workshop that is part of this center. Isabel’s sisters exemplify the case she made of individuals who learn a trade and then develop their own independent businesses or practices. Isabel Sánchez categorizes the spheres of her affiliation to CASA. Right after her return from México City around 2004, she began participating in courses taught at the arts center. Since then, Sánchez has completed half a dozen workshops taught there: jewelry, embroidery, textile design, Japanese dyeing techniques with natural pigments, and art toys. She became a workshop instructor, as well as a costume designer for one of CASA’s choreographic productions for the Day for the Defense of the Native Corn of 2016. Ofrenda 4. Danza del Inframundo was a performance presented on October 5th, 2016, for which Isabel designed and fabricated masks made out of artisanal paper produced with maize leaves. The artist recalls,

My sister Abril [who worked at the textile workshop at CASA] arrived in my studio with a woman. The woman said, “I am Jesusa, and Francisco told me to find you because you will solve my problem.” She was Jesusa Rodriguez, and the project she needed help with was the masks. She had already seen two proposals for the modeling of the masks in Guanajuato and México City, but she did not like them. We worked for a couple of months. Maestro Toledo showed up a couple of times to oversee the design of the masks. After that collaboration, an employee from CASA came to my studio asking if I could teach a workshop to design masks for a group of students of the Rural Bilingual School of Education at Tlacochahuaya. Maestro Toledo had recommended me. The workshop happened during their vacation period. It was part of a program proposed by the Maestro, designed for the future school teachers of the different indigenous communities. Its scope is to educate teachers with a wider humanistic and artistic

95 Jesusa Rodriguez is a director, actress, cabaret performer, and activist campaigning against GMOs. She currently is a senator.
The students were staying at CASA residencies for students, and they wanted to meet other places at San Agustín. We ended up doing the workshop in my studio.

Besides being a benefactor and chief advocate of the arts center, Francisco Toledo played a visionary role incorporating collaborators, like Isabel, that would contribute to its agenda of artistic dissemination [Figure 18].

The relationships that these artists established with Francisco Toledo have been clearly transformative and only possible because of San Agustín crossroads. Cristina’s relationship with Toledo was less close than that of the other three artists featured here. However, her comment offers a snapshot into the city of Oaxaca before Toledo became a crucial political and cultural figure. She states,

_The first time I heard about Toledo was when I first came to Oaxaca as a student of the music conservatory in 1984. I was visiting with a friend whose mother lived in Oaxaca Downtown. We stayed in her mother’s house. I heard about Toledo from her when we were walking by the house in Macedonio Alcalá that is now the IAGO. It was Toledo’s house then. And she told me, “In this house lives a Oaxacan painter that is like a native who lived in Paris. He is from Juchitán.” When Toledo decided to establish in Oaxaca, he arrived to change the city entirely._

Toledo had recently arrived, not anticipating he would spend the second half of his life invested in the artistic, cultural, environmental, and political transformation of this place through his everyday interactions with all sorts of people and causes. Lorena Silva confesses that Francisco Toledo amazed her, first and foremost, because of his ability to map and to keep informed about who was who in Oaxaca. She recounts the anecdote that led to her relationship with him. She remembers that a ceramist, who is now her friend, arrived at Taller Los Alacranes, asking for technical support to fix a ceramics furnace. This friend said that “Francisco” had recommended her to find the studio and ask for help to solve her boiler's issue. Francisco Toledo had told her to go to the Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca (in the City’s Downtown), where “un tal Paredes” (a guy whose last name was Paredes) was presenting an exhibition. They should be able
to give her his contact. She acquired it and tracked him at San Agustín. Adán Paredes (partner of Lorena back then) helped Toledo’s acquaintance and she ended up becoming friends with the couple. Soon after, Francisco Toledo arrived knocking at the door, also asking for “Paredes.”

Lorena states,

*He came in to stay for two years working from Monday to Sunday. We had to work in the living room because he occupied the entire studio space. He did not like others seen him while he was working. He let us look at the work once he had finished them. Nevertheless, he liked that “privacy,” which meant that we had to accommodate another area of the house to make our production. He was the Maestro and the myth.*

I remember once he asked for a coffee, but it had to be freshly ground. I told him I did not have a grinder, and the next day he brought one as a gift. My house was fully occupied by the production and there was no room for anything else. It was not a house anymore.

*It was really interesting to meet him as a person and not in the sense of “the artist.” I gave him many rides to Oaxaca in which we had conversations about the most mundane things. Something unique to Oaxaca, and that is not possible in México City, is that you have direct contact with luminaries like him, which you would not meet otherwise because, in the city, you are less visible; the society is highly segmented there.*

Toledo’s shyness and circumspection never stopped him from activating others to adhere to his agenda. Adán Paredes memory proves the unhesitant personality of the Maestro,

*Toledo’s reputation is an institution in and of itself that has pulled in many things. The center is propelling other happenings. The town has transformed, indeed. Clearly, more and more newcomers with similar interests have arrived (art-related, painters...).* 

Toledo worked in my studio for a couple of years. Once my studio was fully operating, Toledo arrived with Fernando Gálvez and Demián Flores because he wanted to work on ceramics. The first question he asked was, “Are you planning to stay in this town?” I replied, “Yes, my intention is to stay here until I die.” His only comment was, “Ahh, good...” You know how he is. A few days after, his driver arrived, asking to send clay for Toledo. The third time, Toledo knocked and said: “I want to come to work here with you.” I asked when. “Tomorrow,” he said. “Tomorrow” meant that he would work for the next two years, almost daily, making pieces. We made many pieces.

Toledo made the model and smaller ceramic elements of the largest public sculpture he ever produced, *La Lagartera*, inaugurated at Santa Lucía Square in Monterrey in 2008. Adán Paredes also introduced Francisco Toledo and Claudio López (of Taller Canela), who developed a very close collaborative and creative rapport. He recalls, “*Toledo met Claudio López in my studio. I*
met him years ago when I was doing that workshop [with Hugo Vázquez]. We worked together in México City. Claudio wanted to reach the Maestro, and I invited him to work with us since he was already living in Oaxaca.” Toledo produced the ceramic pieces for his exhibition Duelo at Claudio’s Taller Canela. Inaugurated at the Museum of Modern Art in México City in 2016, Toledo’s sculptures presented at Duelo reflected the crudeness of violence, disappearances, and State crimes in México from Iguala to Tlatlaya.

Isabel Sánchez and Francisco Toledo coincided at Taller Canela, where they produced ceramics since 2005. Both shared the working space at different moments, during which they have to set turns to use the furnace and to cook their clay pieces. Because of Isabel’s shyness, the exchange with the artist at the ceramics’ studio was minimal. However, on one occasion, when Toledo was clearing the furnace and found Isabel’s pieces, he expressed his interest in acquiring some of them. After that, he approached Sánchez, asking for help to make casts or to model small pieces to accompany his work. She declares,

*He wanted to support me. His requests kept me very active. He noticed the quality and fine details in my work. He told me once: “I want to propose you something. I want to make a piece in collaboration with you.” By the time he told me that, I have already produced many pieces and casts for him, some of them very challenging and nearly impossible to make. I feel he was testing me. I was working on a series of statues of little girls, and he had the figure of a bear as a motif. The artwork we made is part of IAGO’s collection. Our relationship was not precisely a friendship because he is not the most affectionate person, and he does not speak much. We both are very serious when we work. We understand each other at the workshop without employing many words.*

In these snippets, I outline Toledo’s challenging personality on the one hand, and on the other, his solidarity, generosity, and supportive character, especially towards younger artists and cultural producers from Oaxaca.96 He did not take a “no” for an answer, and probably, at the time

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96 A clear example of Toledo’s trust, support, and promotion of young cultural agents from Oaxaca was his designation of the directors of the three leading institutions he founded in recent years: Daniel Brena, director of CASA, a linguist and art historian; Hazam Jara, director of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO), a graphic designer who formerly was the sub-director of production at CASA, who
of these experiences, any individual involved in the arts in Oaxaca would say no to the possibility of participating in any of Toledo’s initiatives or artistic projects. He responded and pondered direct action with concise actions too. The next section addresses features related to production, exhibition, commercialization, and sustainability of the careers in the arts of the contributors in these conversations.

**ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ART WORLDS**

In this section, the artists discuss the factors that have favored the continuity of their practice. They expose their criticism to the dominant commercial scene at the local level, and their critique serves here as a lens to understand their working ethics and the values they attach to their artistic work and career. Material strategies and conditions for balancing the costs of life, artistic production expenses, and sources of income constituted leading topics in our dialog, and therefore, they gained a space in this chapter. Of particular relevance for this dissertation are the peculiarities of San Agustín that have shaped the artists’ dynamics of production. I emphasize the importance of mentors, supporters, and the networks of solidarity in the professional trajectories of these creators.

As a group of artists detached from a large metropolis concentrating collectors, galleries, and governmental support, they have procured their involvement with the Oaxacan art world. However, for them, these intents have often represented a confrontation between their working ethics and the cultural and commercial phenomena of Oaxaca. The kind of artworks distributed through the majority of local galleries merges collapsing rationales. On one hand, these local

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replaced its previous director, Inari Reséndiz, an artist graduated from UABJO; and Adriana Chávez, director of the Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center (CFMAB), also graduated in visual arts. All of them are Oaxacans in their thirties.

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galleries respond to a history of the transmission of traditional practices via imitation, repetition, craft, and mimesis. On the other, visual artists like Rufino Tamayo, Rodolfo Nieto, Francisco Toledo, and Sergio Hernández, deferentially attributed as “Maestros” and sanctioned by art history, figure as the most prominent and ubiquitous aspirational models.

Many visual and plastic producers develop their work through a modality of self-instruction consisting in the transference of the dynamics of craft workshops (technical imitation and repetition of models) and attending to the iconography of “Oaxacan authenticity.” Instead of pottery or alebrijes, this type of artist-as-manufacturer elaborates a different kind of object: digestible, decorative, and expeditiously accomplished versions of modern paintings in the fashion of those recognizable authors. An “Informalist” style of painting, misunderstood as a sign of “modern painting,” and materialized as arbitrarily added strokes and heavy textures constitutes another element of what is locally marketable. For the participants of this study, these formulaic assumptions (of what artmaking is) represent conflict instead of ambition. Nevertheless, this kind of work dominates the landscape locally, and it has forced these interlocutors to find other external niches for their work or other sources of income altogether.

Isabel Sánchez distinguishes a specific sector of producers that understand the artistic field as a local market. They pay attention to the kind of work that has commercial success in the galleries, and opportunistically make imitations, aiming to start selling promptly. In parallel, a wealthy uneducated group (for example, local politicians) buys that kind of work as a sign of status, power, and authenticity. This phenomenon, in which manufacturers of, apparently, artistic objects disregard art as meaning-making, is more and more frequent. They have followers that find their simplicity and literal stylistic imitation easy to digest and to collect. Together, they extend the understanding that art is equal to producing identifiable commodities, as well as the
expectation in youngsters that they can use this shortcut to make a profitable activity. The result is a proliferation of technically poor and conceptually inexistent imagery in paintings, graphics, sculptures, urban art, and public art inundating the visual environment. Isabel states,

*A very opportunistic sector exists and thinks, “If this is happening in Oaxaca, and you can make money in Oaxaca, I will also make art and paint,” without talent, without substance. And then, depending on who becomes the director of an X institution, they are mixing up this kind of artists and making up their way into museums and galleries.*

For her, many galleries in Oaxaca do not seek the personal vision of an artist. Instead, they hire manufacturers of stereotypical works that satisfy a touristic market: “tehuanas, baskets of flowers, bulls, and birds.” Adán Paredes concurs in his description,

*Let me be clear: I am not against commercial success. I just do not find a real and coherent discourse. And then, younger artists follow suit and begin painting in the fashion of “this” or “that.” I identify a group invested in color and fantastic zoology: animals, forms, and colors. Some of them have become very successful. They learn to repeat how to make small figures that look like animals or monsters and reproduce a smooth formula.*

*Then we find notably pathetic examples like Fernando Andriacci. He received much sponsorship from Governor Diódoro Carrasco (because they were both born in Cuicatlán). Moreover, he thought he could transfer the colorful little animals of his paintings to public sculptures placed all over Oaxaca City roundabouts, without showing any understanding of volume, urban landscape, or the aesthetics of the place. He shows no respect. He is one of many aberrant examples.*

Lorena interprets that the Oaxacan market responds to a very specific expectation of “Oaxacanness” that favors the incorporation of new “artists” who supply such market,

*People who want to buy Oaxacan art think, “I arrive in Oaxaca. I cannot buy a Toledo neither a Sergio Hernández because I do not have the money, but I can buy the work of*
this other artist that looks very much like Toledo or Hernández,” although it is obviously a copy. Other people comment, “My friends have an Andriacci. I am thinking about acquiring one of his works because these wealthy friends seem a good referent of taste.” Those comments make me wonder, what are the criteria for people in Oaxaca to buy art?

For Adán Paredes, all these factors foster the illusion of Oaxaca being a place to accelerate profit-making for creative producers. He disagrees with this idea,

 Locally, a bunch of people thinks that being an artist means, first and foremost, making a lot of money. Newcomer artists expect Oaxaca to be the trigger of creativity and sales. I have met many people that leave as fast as they have arrived. Some artists compromise to their work, and some others do not. Many artists are trapped in the bohemia, and partying, waiting to be discovered by “the curator,” “the collector,” or the talent scout that will change their lives. I never expected that.

Some emerging (and others non-emerging) producers compare their work to that of other artists and notice that their colleagues have purchased real estate, and they think “I can make money here. I can sell very quickly and make a good money” I get the impression that they do one or two strokes and think “let’s get paid.” They are not doing the right thing. There is a total lack of trade and a lack of commitment to their work.

Cristina Luna considers that the concept of invention and originality, taught at schools of fine arts, do not apply and are not shared by self-taught artists in Oaxaca. Transmission and repetition constitute the learning processes that characterize the crafts workshops. Strong resemblance to the work of another iconic Oaxacan artist (like Tamayo, Toledo, Hernández, or any other one becoming noticeable) does not constitute a flaw but a virtue by mastering and reproducing Oaxacan iconography and becoming part of that lineage. Deliberate imitation is not unethical for such kind of producers because copying constitutes the basis of transmission of knowledge in which traditions depend, and because they do not reject the production of commodities. The conflict belongs to artists like Luna, which she acknowledges, who learned that seeking a language of one’s own while distancing from imitation is the core of artistic identity and mentality.

The market of art in Oaxaca merges with the market of “curios,” souvenirs, and decorative artifacts, which are commodities consumed in the context of holidays as its
memorialization or memento. The galleries that benefit from this niche of opportunity, instead of artists, seek providers of imitations of Oaxacan famous painters. The role of these manufacturers consists of replicating and simplifying the motifs and style of their referents. To preserve the “artistic” status (and therefore, the price range) of these images, they should also be able to make variations per request. Since they serve to the specific demand of perpetuating “Oaxacan authenticity,” their work does not require analytical interpretations or conceptual inquire just formal skills. These businesses favor opportunism, i.e., the understanding that being a painter means to become wealthier by satisfying these proliferating stores. At this point, the participants do not find these “galleries” as a genuine companion that promotes artists in a holistic sense. They consider that galleries should help artists to evolve, not only commercially, but also in their role as public intellectuals and social agents.

Despite their abundance, galleries primarily rely on tourists and passersby as well as on intermittent commissions. The only gallery that shows more concerned about fostering the constitution of collections and the advancement of a group of represented artists is Quetzalli Gallery. Its trajectory dates back to 1986. Quetzalli represents Oaxacan artists like Francisco Toledo, Alejandro Santiago, José Villalobos, as well as other established artists based in México, like Francisco Castro Leñero, Irma Palacios, Manuela Generali, and Perla Krauze. Although Cristina, Adán, and Lorena have worked and exhibited their work in different galleries in Oaxaca (including Quetzalli), they exposed their criticism and the flaws they have found. Cristina has worked with two Oaxacan galleries: Quetzalli and Noel Cayetano. For her, nowadays, galleries do not seem a viable option for making an income. She argues that they prefer to exhibit a wider variety of artists instead of aiming to consolidate and follow-up the trajectories of a limited group. Their services now entail storage rather than promotion, and pursuing their delayed
payments is an exhausting and disempowering task. Cristina interprets that gallerists do not guarantee sales, they expect artists to refuse exhibition opportunities in hotels, cafes, and non-artistic venues since they categorize the artist’s status according to these unspoken rules. However, in Oaxaca, exhibiting artworks in these other spaces with a higher flow of viewers can easily result in more direct and effective sales. Similarly, Adán Paredes expressed,

_The role of galleries has been overflown. I questioned myself after working with a few galleries, particularly Quetzalli, “what am I doing here?” The role of galleries should change. In my case, my production takes time: clay is not a fast medium. I need to import a lot of materials or bring them from somewhere else. My works are voluminous and heavy; transporting them is expensive. If a gallery expects to retain a commission of fifty percent of the piece’s value, I say “no” because production costs are not shared fifty-fifty. Galleries do not understand about production costs. I pay them all… Really? It was not difficult to calculate that giving away fifty percent of commission to the gallery while covering all the production costs left me with almost nothing, and I could not survive. I said, “That is it. I will not work with galleries anymore.”_

In these examples, we can identify that galleries mediate commercial relations, but they do not invest in fostering other kinds of institutional relations. A comprehensive representation that would include promoting the artists’ presentation in museum exhibitions, lobbying for solo shows and special commissions, connecting them with critics, art historians, and curators, and/or conducting archival work for the artists (press coverage, ephemera compilation, biographical updates, web presence) are not services provided by these galleries. Because of the lack of a solid partnership, in this context, the business relationships between artists and galleries are intermittent and interrupted, which makes these creators opt-out for more autonomous conditions of work, even though it implies finding (or not) collectors on their own.

Through accounts about means of production, financial sustainability vicissitudes, and recognition in their field, these artists manifest their working ethics and values. For Isabel Sánchez, the development of skill, expertise, and personal imagery proves imperative. She asserts,
Most people that go to the studio [Taller Canela] are not interested in learning to make ceramics. They want to have a ceramics piece. The current trend for artists is to produce works on every media. Younger generations in art school have been exposed to different workshops and techniques (unlike previous generations that had to specialize in one medium only). For recent generations, delegating the technical steps required by ceramics is not relevant (if another person models or hollows out the clay). Nevertheless, that is not my case. The trade is one of the most substantial parts of artistic practice.

In her work, Isabel does not split conceptualization from fabrication. For her, being in full charge of the entire process represents artistic integrity and direction. The technical skills required in modeling the clay, and controlling the firing process (and learning to rectify) is as essential as making her sculpted characters evocative of a mythological realm that stirs the viewers curiosity.

Adán Paredes equally recognizes the accomplishment of aesthetic qualities in his work, the complexity and monumentality of some of his projects, and the ability to train and involve others in the development of the medium of ceramics. He discusses,

I do not have institutional sponsorship. I joke saying that I am my own foundation. I used to wonder, “How do they do it to be everywhere?” Many artists approach the Ministry of Culture of the State, and they receive funding, which is why they can sustain their studios and their own work. For example, Alejandro Santiago received funding from the Ministry of Culture and had La Telaraña Workshop. Even La Curtiduría of Demián Flores, who is a great artist, had the support of Harp Foundation and the Ministry of Culture. In those conditions, you can do more. However, if you are not lobbying in that fashion, every resource has to come from the income that we manage to make for the studio to evolve.

For me, to become part of it has been very good. Not only am I an artist doing my own work. I can say now that I am creating sources of income for some members of the community, who are learning a trade.

Seven employees work in the studio: two from San Agustín, one from Chiapas (who goes back and forth every few months), and three from Suchilquitongo.98 I teach them how to work on ceramics, and according to the different projects, they learn new things.

I have had two massive commissions in which I have involved people from the San Agustín community. A representative of a laboratory from Japan invited us to design a desk set of six elements for doctors to promote a drug for gastritis or something like that. We ended up making 12,000 handmade pieces. I did not want to work with casts. The project represented a job for twenty-four workers, even a temporary one. I reckon that this project represented a work opportunity that had a temporary impact on the community. The other was for the restaurant “El Chapulín” of Hotel Presidente

98 A town eleven miles North-west of San Agustín Etila.
He finds in entrepreneurship, financial sustainability, and developing an art-related business that generates jobs locally the most valuable aspect of his practice. Lorena Silva’s perspective is very different; for her, artistic work serves for healing and self-discovery. She states, “I have always searched with my artistic work a way to heal. For me, art is a form of healing.” The public relations implied, trying to have exhibitions, or to work with a gallery divert the process that she seeks. She explains her current position, “I gave myself a few years to be away from everything for personal reasons. Nowadays, now and then, I take a peek, and soon after I detach myself again. I am not fighting that fight of making a line to be part of the art world. I am not interested.” For Lorena, the multitude as a random audience does not represent an essential form of interaction; instead, participating in groups of artists and intellectual peers, particularly other women, has become the most significant aspect of being an artist. In this way, she finds an intermediate point between the solitary aspect of artmaking and the social aspect of art exhibiting.

The Oaxacan artistic scene is dominated by “Maestros,” as I have mentioned here. These revered men and assumed possessors of, what Linda Nochlin named, “the golden nugget of creativity” (1988, 156-157) monopolize the spaces in galleries and museums (especially in a highly imbalanced context like Oaxaca). This fact has pushed women artists like Lorena Silva and Cristina Luna to adopt alternative tactics to disseminate their work and to advance their practice. Both Luna and Silva have found in women’s collective cultural promotion, exhibition management, and peers critique a motor for creation and negotiation of spaces to show their artwork in Oaxaca. Lorena has been part of artists associations of women like Mamaz and
Guenda. Sorority and acting as a small community with shared interests and trajectories have procured them visibility and public spaces that, otherwise, would be dominated by the figure of the individual male genius, whose geniality is taken at face value because their work gets publicly displayed. This tactic, though, has been hardly criticized in art circuits because it often encapsulates art-making, first and foremost, as an expression of the quintessential feminine.

Luna and Silva question schemes of exhibitions at local museums that, as a compensatory quota, present the work of local women artists *en mase* (not in solo shows and not under an umbrella criterion other than gender). In their experience, the methods to “curate” these exhibitions entail hasty calls for whatever work is available and filling the galleries. Women artists participate just for the opportunity of visibility, in detriment of a caring and engaged frame for their work. The rationale of compensation impedes a critical position to deepen in the context and universe in which individual artworks emerge and in which artists conceptualize their work. Still, Cristina Luna asserts that, despite the flaws of exhibitions that have women participation rather than specific artistic concepts as their rationale, taking those spaces of visibility has a political value. She states, “*Participating in certain exhibitions is like being present in a protest. They are like ‘protest-exhibiting.’*” Luna cares less whether her work receives superficial responses and categorizations as “art made by women,” or ascribed to a “feminine aesthetic.” Taking spaces is her priority particularly in a dominant male society like the Oaxacan.

Adán Paredes distinguishes three facets of his work as a ceramist. The first involves the realization of commissions of utilitarian objects. He has produced the dinnerware of numerous restaurants in México; an outstanding example of it was the set that he designed and produced for the gastronomic tour of the Catalonian chefs, the Roca Brothers in 2014 (Animal Gourmet 2016). The second facet encompasses those commissions associated with architectonic projects,
more extensive works like murals and floors; for example, the terrace designed for the Highland Hall Residencies at Stanford University, developed by the Legorreta Architectural Firm (Domus 2016).

Paredes’ third and last facet corresponds to his authorial work, in which he reflects upon the subjects and issues related to contemporary society while issuing subjective and evocative commentaries. The “commercial” works that he produces allow him to produce more personal ones. Nevertheless, in terms of accomplishing an exhibition, he states,

For me producing an exhibition is not simple. My production is slow. To be able to comprise a body of work implies to suspend the production of commissioned works. I need to invest money because the artworks do not appear from the void. If I produce large pieces, when I make numbers, I need to ask, “how much would I need to invest, and how much will it cost me to stop producing?” Producing one exhibition costs a lot of money. And sometimes you sell nothing after an exhibition. The kind of artwork might not be attractive for people to have in their houses. Then, making an exhibition turns out to be a significant effort and a battle.

At this point in his career, he is at ease about this relationship between sides of his work. He is not concerned about pursuing financial success as an author exclusively.

Isabel Sánchez partially coincided with Adán Paredes when she commented on the difficulty of uniting a body of work that could configure an exhibition because most of her work gets sold in the studio. For both, either producing or keeping the work (instead of selling it), represent an immediate investment of labor, and putting aside what represents a regular source of income. However, we can identify that despite these costs and complication, for these artists, exhibitions offer a space of self-reflection and assessment of the significance of their work in broader terms. Coincidentally, both of them had solo shows soon after our conversations later in 2018: Adán Paredes at the Museum of Oaxacan Painters, and Isabel Sánchez at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Oaxaca.
To sustain their practice while upholding the values and meaning that these artists expressed, they have adopted tactics and developed networks in San Agustín, Oaxaca, México and abroad. Lorena Silva currently participates in exhibitions associated with the different collectives that she is part of like Guenda, and the community of friends and colleagues at San Agustín. She combines her practice with spiritual activities like the Tai chi circle at San Sebastián (a neighbor town), mainly composed of avecindado-cultural producers that organize activities together. For her, the social, spiritual, and sorority spheres are integrated. She has developed a line of lamps that she commercializes via web-sales and through design stores in Oaxaca. Cristina Luna combines the primary tasks of a painter and ceramist with conducting private lessons of music and plastic arts. She states,

In the past, I worked with Quetzalli Gallery, they did not exhibit my works, but they sold them. I have also sold my work through the Gallery Noel Cayetano, and I had a collector in México City. I also teach piano lessons. My collector began following my work a few years before I moved to San Agustín when she found it in an exhibition at the Siqueiros Cultural Polyforum (in México City). She bought most of the works in that exhibition, and now they are in a collection that they have on display in a clinic of immunology. Year after year, she bought some of my new works. She bought works on ceramics. She commissioned a folding screen to me. Early this year, when I had surgery, she helped me financially.

Cristina narrates how her friend and collector unexpectedly passed away only a few months before our meeting. Her sponsor paid monthly installments for the artworks that she acquired over the years. The conversation captured Luna in a transitional moment. Luna acknowledges the impact of her abrupt loss affectively and financially, but she expresses that other friends are mediating for a potential exhibition at the restaurant of a hotel at the center of Oaxaca, which represents a highly attractive spot with a history of commercial success for exhibitors.

99 Noel Cayetano is a gallery that predominantly exhibits the work of painters born in Oaxaca. This gallery has branches in Oaxaca City and San Miguel de Allende (another important touristic city in the center of the country in Guanajuato State).
Adán Paredes has developed a solid commercial micro-business, and he has employed local workers that expedite the distinct stages of the large projects in ceramics that he carries out. He summarizes his *modus operandi* in terms of sustainability,

*I realized that, as a sculptor, I had no market in Oaxaca. I sell almost nothing here. Now, I can sell works to people that come to the studio. In Oaxaca, people are looking for artists and workshops. They want to see them in their studios. They want to live that experience. The studio also creates new experiences. I receive many visitors that only come to see the studio. I could receive a phone call from an architect saying, “This friend or client is building a house in (Vallarta), and he is in Oaxaca this weekend.” They do not tell me explicitly if they want to buy. Nevertheless, that is the way to get word of mouth.*

*This experience compelled me or made me aware that if I wanted an exit for my artwork (that romantic side of exhibiting your artwork in museums, which is fine), I also had to go out and find another market. My market or niche became the architects; it was the natural leap. I developed a working relationship with the architect Ricardo Legorreta, whom I have met in Oaxaca. He saw one of my works. He liked it a lot, and he looked for me. We met, and we liked each other. So, he started inviting me to collaborate in prominent architectonic projects. That is how the studio began to grow. Our relationship was not of patronage. I would say that it was more like a godfather, who noticed my work, he believed in it, and he started inviting me to join his projects, which required much work in the studio. I began working with Ricardo Legorreta, and then other architects started contacting me, or I contacted other architects. That is how this studio has endured.*

*I see myself from the outside without institutional support activating this project that is this studio. I am my own foundation. Since I want to keep my studio here, I have to look for work in México City. I go back and forth more frequently each time. That is my job. If I wouldn’t look for the work, the studio wouldn’t function; and neither my employees nor I would have an income.*

The projects associated with architectonic design that Adán Paredes currently conducts are highly complex and specialized at multiple different stages: the aesthetic proposal, the fabrication of modular elements, the firing treatment, the pre-assembling, the transportation, and the permanent installation. The initial connection with the Legorreta Firm pushed him to become one of the most sophisticated ceramic artists in México.

Isabel Sánchez’s trajectory is highly versatile, although, in recent years she has been able to dedicate exclusively to her studio and to teach at college level. Before making the decision of
devoting full time to the ceramics production, Isabel and her husband tried to start different small businesses. They made and sold decorated gelatins (edible sculptures). They bought home-grown organic produce (maize, beans, eggs, vegetables) in the Etla region, and distributed it in their store in Villa de Etla. Isabel made jewelry and textile works and sold them at the Miku Meko cooperative in Oaxaca City. Miku Meko shop was the start-up of a group of participants at an embroidery workshop at CASA taught by Ornella Ridone. For Isabel it became very clear that artmaking was a necessity that she was confident could become profitable if she had the chance to focus and specialize technically. She recollects,

> My first sponsor, besides my mother, was Leo [her husband]. He was working for a bank in Oaxaca City when I started producing at Taller Canela. After a while, I told him that I needed my own studio, and asked him to support me for a few years.

> When I got pregnant with twins (in 2010), we faced the need to define the kind of life we expected to have. Leo was working at the bank and I was experimenting in the ceramic’s studio. Our conversations were totally disparate. Leo was concerned about the money, and I told him “I can only do this. I am useless at any other job. But I can make ceramics in very serious terms.” Leo told me he would sell his portfolio of clients, and join me on the business side of the studio. We decided to focus all our energy and efforts in my sculpture, and leave aside all the other small business and attempts. Leo said, “I promote, sell, and run the business.” But it was not easy. Sometimes we had good sales, but sometimes we sold nothing.

Since Isabel Sánchez began developing her practice as sculptor, her husband, Leonel Pérez, has assisted her in the studio and managed her sales. The manipulation of pieces at the shared working space of Taller Canela resulted in accidents and mistakes that Sánchez wanted to be fully able to control and identify. For this reason, she decided that she would only delegate tasks to Leonel, because he has learned the qualities and characteristics that Isabel seeks. Leonel Pérez manifested his total support to Isabel, because he was clear about her virtuosity and the qualities of her work. Isabel describes how she discovered she could get an income from her work,

> I accumulated my production for a long time. I never felt the confidence to try finding a gallery. What happened instead was that people visiting Taller Canela interested in Toledo’s or another artist work found my pieces in the corner (I almost hid them with hay
so nobody could see them). They began asking, “Whose work is that?” And that is how I began selling my work.

Over the last five years, Isabel and Leonel have made a living from their sales and commissions of the ceramic’s studio. Isabel is in charge of the production and Leonel manages the marketing and administrative issues. Isabel develops her authorial production but she also fabricates casts or transforms other artists’ drafts into a finished sculpture. She laughs, “I have made the sculptures of various ‘sculptors.’” Isabel has collaborated with other more established artists like Francisco Toledo, Dr. Lakra, Toño Camuñas, and designers like Jorge Alderete. She elaborates commissions of utilitarian ceramics for restaurants and also collectors of this type of work. Although the wages as lecturer do not represent a significant source of income, for years she also has had an appointment as part-time lecturer of the drawing concentration at the School of Fine Arts at the Autonomous University of Oaxaca “Benito Juárez.” Transmitting her values and sharing her knowledge with young students constitutes an agenda that she aims will help others compromise with their artistic practice in meaningful ways.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have framed and contextualized the perspectives of four artists avecindadas at San Agustín. Through their commentaries, I have exposed the various characteristics and requirements of their practice. In general, the artists need to commute to urban centers to commercialize their artwork while producing it in the semi-rural setting of San Agustín. This location has offered them a better quality of life, including studio space or access to others’ studios, for a modest cost. The artists emphasize how this location draws them to intensify the focus in their artwork, even if they all rely on secondary occupations or
collaborations. This cultural setting fosters technical and collaborative exchange between a community of peers.

CASA, as an artistic learning, producing, and exhibiting institution, along with the different artistic workshops of San Agustín, and the artists working there constitute an incipient art system characterized by the openness to peers and apprentices. Additionally, the independent workshops serve as showcases in which artists find clienteles and collectors. All these artists have participated as learners, educators, or production collaborators with CASA. CASA functions as a node that offers cultural agents and artists a learning site, a space of discussion, as well as collaboration, teaching, and employment opportunities, even though these chances are sporadic and impermanent.
Dissertation Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have exposed that the Center for the Arts at San Agustín represents an exercise of genuine democracy, in which individuals and groups with contrasting ideas, agendas, and world views intersect and attach meanings to the place. Authors Michel Di Giovine and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett compel us to inquire how the notion of heritage becomes “attached” to specific items of material culture, how this attachment translates into concrete actions in the present that safeguard material culture valued as heritage, and what is the agenda of those organizations and individuals conducting those actions. I have pointed out the relevance of distinguishing the notions of heritage and patrimony; as I argued, each term shifts the focus from the past to the present. The case of a paralyzed and decaying nineteen-century industrial building nestled in the mountains of the central valleys of Oaxaca have served here to problematize these issues.

I have historicized the process of revitalization of this building and site in the context of the actions of organizations like the Association of Friends of the Archives and Libraries of Oaxaca and the Board Pro-Defense of the Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Oaxaca, both led by the Juchitecan artist, Francisco Toledo. Since the last decade of the past century, these organizations, mobilized by Oaxacan citizens, not only have fostered initiatives to prevent the disappearance of historic buildings and collections, as well as territories in which the ecological balance depends, but they have also pursued that this wealth does not become privatized by the tourism and extraction industries. Through their campaigns, these organizations have defined modes in which the heritage and the patrimony belongs and benefits the Oaxacan citizenry.
I have discussed that the conversion of La Soledad textile mill into the Center for the Arts at San Agustín was not unanimously accepted, neither the transformations that the center has triggered. For Sanagustinians, this site embodies the labor history that grounds San Agustín oriundos (people born in the town and holding kinship relationships) in this soil. Additionally, this town authorizes land tenure and management of natural resources through communal organization and assembly (internal normative systems). The transference of the ownership of the mill from the co-op of workers to the State Government and a private association caused uncertainty and rejection in some town members. We revised that the arts center’s advocates and planners shaped the new uses of the building, its facilities, and the purposes of the institution attending to the demands, concerns, and opinions of town representatives.

I have demonstrated how the importance of water management in San Agustín, voiced by its town members and emphasized by Francisco Toledo, became the axis in the configuration of CASA. The challenges implied in shaping an institution devoted to the production, exhibition, and education in the arts with an environmental prerogative, rather than limitations, have represented chances for artistic imagination. The most notable examples are the techniques and facilities dedicated to less-polluting techniques in the visual arts, which are the product of comprehensive artistic research of materials. By adopting an ecological program, by being accountable to the locality, and by having artistic knowledge as its foundations, this arts center constitutes an exemplar model of institutionality: one that emerges in a semi-rural context and not in an urban one.

Francisco Toledo played a critical role in the creation, shaping, and sustenance of CASA. I have outlined how art-making, activism, and philanthropy cohered and traversed Toledo’s initiatives and life. The artistic and cultural institutions formed by Toledo, which I have
categorized as “open houses,” function as devices for learning, as gathering points for discussion and exposition of critical issues related to the environment and the cultural patrimony, as publishing houses, and as environments of beauty that compel others to care and be conscientious about broader social and planetary matters. Furthermore, these places assume all these roles in festive, celebratory, imaginative, poetic, and beautiful ways. I have claimed that due to the context in which it emerged, CASA represents Toledo’s most complex enterprise, which I have connected with the corpus of his artistic, activist, and philanthropist work.

As CASA has evolved, its presence has transformed symbolically and demographically the town of San Agustín. I have shown how San Agustín authorities and population grant value to the center because it is a dignified landmark, and it has helped to improve the local economy. Furthermore, Sanagustinians have gradually developed forms of occupation that cohere with their traditions and identity. CASA has also responded by creating programs dedicated to the local audiences.

I have argued that CASA serves as a node in the constitution of what Howard Becker denominates an “art world” in the local scope. An increasing number of artists and cultural producers coming from larger metropolises have moved and established their studios in San Agustín. The arts center has fostered collaborations with the artists and workshops located in the town. Additionally, artists based in the locality take advantage of learning, producing, and labor opportunities, although these are impermanent and sporadic. The visibility and reputation of the center also draw attention to the local studios and vice versa. Art apprentices, consolidated artists, cultural producers, tourists, travelers, local “Sunday” strollers, and Sanagustinians shape together the meaning of “being public” of this cultural institution. These combined factors show that San Agustín has become a site of remarkable artistic and cultural life.
This research demonstrates that, in order to understand an artistic institution, scholars need to analyze the surrounding spheres touched or conflicted by those institutions that intend to expand public participation. Museum and cultural studies can benefit from the study of the specific trajectories of institutions in becoming public. I have provided methodological alternatives to conduct that type of analysis. My ultimate goal is that the scholarship associated to art sustainability and its environmental connections, institutional sustainability, and studies about the viability and advantages of artistic practices and art communities developing in non-urban and non-metropolitan locations will continue growing after this dissertation.
FIGURES

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Photographer: Javier León Cuevas
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Figure 8. Nave first floor (area dedicated to exhibitions)
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Photographer: Javier León Cuevas
Figure 12. Library of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (Macedonio Alcalá)
Photographer: Javier León Cuevas
Figure 13. Library of the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (Benito Juárez)
Photographer: Claudia López Terroso
Figure 14. Manuel Álvarez Bravo Photographic Center (reflective pool)
Photographer: Javier León Cuevas
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