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# Cuts, Flames and Other Counterpoints: Revisiting Monuments in Five Latin American Cases

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**Abstract**

This article brings together five projects at the intersection of visual arts and activism across Latin America, offering an overview of the historical revisionism surrounding controversial public monuments and the assertion of narratives marginalised or suppressed by colonial and social violence. Drawing on analyses of a sculpture by Paraguayan artist Carlos Colombino; a pamphlet and a fresco by Brazilian artist Yhuri Cruz; performances by Brazilian artist Diambe and Peruvian artist Daniela Ortiz; and an urban intervention organised by Mexican activists, the article examines how the intersections between art and protest can generate material, contextual and historical resonances through the interplay between aesthetics and politics. The study draws on the work of authors including Mbembe (2020), Le Goff (1988/1990), Longo Bahia (2010), Ribeiro (2020) and Sontag (2003/2025).

**Keywords**
monuments, Latin American art, activism, historical revisionism

# Cortes, Labaredas e Outras Contraposições: Revisão de Monumentos em Cinco Casos Latino-Americanos

**Resumo**

Neste artigo são reunidos cinco projetos situados no campo das artes visuais e do ativismo, em diferentes contextos latino-americanos, de forma a apresentar um recorte do revisionismo histórico que tem sido realizado em torno dos monumentos públicos controversos e da reivindicação de narrativas marginalizadas ou sublimadas pelas violências coloniais e sociais. A partir das análises apresentadas sobre uma escultura do artista paraguaio Carlos Colombino; de um panfleto e afresco realizados pelo artista brasileiro Yhuri Cruz; de performances realizadas pela brasileira Diambe e pela peruana Daniela Ortiz; e por uma intervenção urbana instituída por ativistas mexicanos, proponho que as articulações entre arte e protesto podem promover ressonâncias materiais, contextuais e históricas das relações entre o estético e o político. Para fundamentar este estudo, recorro a proposições de autores como Mbembe (2020), Le Goff (1988/1990), Longo Bahia (2010), Ribeiro (2020) e Sontag (2003/2025).

**Palavras-chave**
monumentos, arte latino-americana, ativismo, revisionismo histórico

## Introduction

While this historical moment has been characterised by farcical repetition, with so many authoritarian and ultranationalist governments around the world, there is also no shortage of acts of resistance, whose central aim seems to be to prevent fascism, as a widespread *modus operandi*, from becoming the *status quo*. These initiatives include political demonstrations, urban intervention projects, and artistic actions that use memory as a tool of struggle, treating history as material open to revision. In these contexts, protesters and artists can challenge the homogenisation of narratives, the perpetuation of symbols and the neutralisation of atrocities. Two aspects are therefore particularly salient: reassessing controversial public monuments and asserting histories long suppressed and marginalised. In this essay, I analyse how these two forms of opposition are articulated in five artistic and activist works: Paraguayan artist Carlos Colombino; Brazilian artist Diambe; the Mexican project *La Ruta de los Antimonumentos* (The Anti-Monuments Route); Brazilian artist Yhuri Cruz; and Peruvian artist Daniela Ortiz. Before examining each work's specific features, it is necessary to outline some considerations regarding the key issue that connects these examples: the concept of "monument".

The French historian Jacques Le Goff (1988/1990) argues that monuments constitute one form of "application" of *collective memory* in "its scientific form, history" (p. 535). Broadly speaking, a "monument is anything that can evoke the past and perpetuate remembrance" (p. 535). Since ancient Rome, when an architectural and sculptural tradition emerged that spread throughout the world through processes of colonisation, monuments have assumed two forms: (a) "a commemorative work" (namely arches, porticoes, obelisks, etc.); and (b) a "funerary" form, intended to preserve the memory of someone "in the domain in which memory is particularly valued: death" (Le Goff, 1988/1990, p. 535). From the outset, this raises a problem that is not merely semantic but also pragmatic: whose death is deemed worthy of remembrance? Which lives are selected to impose a portrait of an era on the future? After all, monuments, through their combination of verticality, scale, symmetry, and imposing presence, create seemingly stable, ostensibly consensual images. However, as the North American philosopher Susan Sontag (2003/2025) points out,

> there is no such thing as collective memory — part of the same family of spurious notions as collective guilt. But there is collective instruction ( ... ). What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. (p. 73)

We may therefore consider that public monuments often embody a form of *collective instruction* imposed by those who, by virtue of their power, author historical accounts. The Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2020) states that "for domination to endure, it must be inscribed not only on the bodies of its subjects, but also leave marks on the space they inhabit, as well as indelible traces in their imaginary" (para. 6). Combined with street names, plaques and other forms of urban orientation that transform names

and numbers into historical and linguistic tools of annihilation, most statues erected in public spaces preserve oppressive narratives, symbolically petrifying the bloodshed inflicted on a multitude of invisible victims: the oppressed, the subalternised and the disappeared. Their sculptural function is thus precisely to "make those dead who, in life, tormented others reappear on the stage of the present" (Mbembe, 2020, para. 11).

Between the *perpetuation* of so-called "heroes" and the suppression of the *torments* they caused, at the heart of the concept of the "monument" lies, as Brazilian artist, researcher and lecturer Dora Longo Bahia (2010) explains, its aspiration to stability, since it freezes the preservation of the social order and the equilibrium of institutions in time as a point of reference. According to the author, since the modern era, the monument has signalled an urban paradox: on the one hand, it expresses the supposed values of a given community or society; on the other, it also undergoes decay — and it is precisely this process of ageing that confers value upon it. Decay can be understood here in two ways: as the action of the elements, which gives monuments a "historical appearance"; and as the result of interventions by those who identify symbolic incongruities with contemporary ideologies and aspirations. This is clear in the efforts of artists who, at least since the 1960s[1], have drawn attention to the fragility of historic buildings and stone sculptures, arguing that their true collective function emerges precisely when they are debated, intervened upon, or, ultimately, destroyed.

The obsolescence of monuments is therefore not *naturally* programmed; "it is a goal and only comes about through considerable collective effort" (Ribeiro, 2020, p. 149). This condition finds fertile ground in contemporary social dynamics, where population heterogeneity and information flows cause public space to contract. In this fragmentation, "the idea of a cohesive nation is replaced by fields of conflict and ideological differences. The monument, stripped of its meaning, loses much of its reason for being" (Longo Bahia, 2010, p. 239). In other words, monuments are inherently time-bound, precisely because their project of massification — unity and cohesion — becomes visible whenever a political protest or artistic intervention calls for an anamnesis of their historical configurations.

Discussing political protest in the 2020s necessarily involves addressing controversial monuments. Building on the mass demonstrations of the 2010s, the issue became a global concern following the murder of George Floyd, a Black American man, on 25 May 2020. The brutal scene of the White police officer kneeling on Floyd's neck and suffocating him to death went viral and triggered a new wave of protests, this time centred on an anti-racist agenda, which transformed his plea, "I can't breathe", into a rallying cry. The mobilisations, initially led by the Black Lives Matter movement (https://blacklivesmatter.com/), spread outwards from the United States and raised global awareness of the continued presence of monuments to enslavers.

[1] The author's main reference is the essay "Entropy and the New Monuments" by American artist Robert Smithson (Flam, 1996). In Brazil in the 1970s, an artistic intervention also anticipated today's prominent reflections on monuments: *Ensacamento* (Bagging; 1979), by the collective 3NÓS3. One night, under cover of darkness, the trio partially covered numerous sculptures and busts throughout São Paulo. Although the action's central purpose was to denounce the mechanisms of torture employed by the military dictatorship, the group's gesture clearly reveals monuments' political function: to reflect society, its spatiotemporal dynamics, and its contextual reality, precisely because monuments are public objects (see Ramiro, 2017).

In analysing the reverberations of these demonstrations, which were marked by the toppling of numerous statues — acts that prompted municipal authorities, museums and other institutions, particularly in the Global North, namely Europe and the United States, to reconsider where these historical artefacts should be placed — the Brazilian artist and researcher Felipe Ribeiro (2020) comments on how the anti-racist struggle became intertwined with decolonial politics, "given the interwoven genealogy of both causes" (pp. 143–144). The dismantling of these monuments, most of which had been erected in tribute to "Christopher Columbus and other figures who were glorified despite their involvement in slavery", brought about a veritable "aesthetic turn[2] in the function of statues" (Ribeiro, 2020, p. 144). Moreover, "the destruction of images that represent something is the destruction of a hierarchy that is no longer accepted" (Canetti, 1960/1983, p. 17).

Although anti-racist movements in the Global North revived and popularised this de-hierarchisation of historical memory through the public visibility of monuments, the issue had already been central to debates in South America. During Chile's Estallido Social[3], protesters challenged the legitimacy of these architectural landmarks, and as a result "between October 2019 and February 2020, more than 1,300 monuments were damaged" (Andrade et al., 2025, p. 12). In this context, a photograph that became one of the defining images of the Chilean popular uprising (Carmo, 2019) prompted a global reassessment of monuments. The image shows the equestrian statue honouring General Baquedano, a 10.4 m high bronze monument, occupied by a crowd that spray-paints it, climbs onto it, raises its fists, and waves flags. At the very top, a protester raises the flag of the Mapuche Indigenous people, whose population was subjected to extensive killings in attacks led by the aforementioned military commander in the 19th century (Giovanaz, 2021).

Unwilling to submit to the equestrian allegory, which traditionally reserves the glorious mount for military commanders, torturers and similar figures, imposing on the public a passive contemplation of history from beneath the horses' hooves and horseshoes, Chilean protesters covered the monument with an assembly of shouts, chants, graphic marks and pennants that made visible the absences concealed by the statue: historical reparation, social justice and full democracy. This approach has recurred in different Latin American contexts over recent decades, whether through the wholesale re-signification of statues, ephemeral interventions or the creation of "anti-monuments".

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[2] Commenting on the decision taken by some government authorities in 2020 to relocate to museums statues that had been intervened upon by protesters, including actions such as dismembering them and throwing ropes around them, Ribeiro (2020) advocates a "musealisation of the fall". In his view, by taking in these objects, museums re-signify the long-standing question of the "dematerialisation of the work of art" because, this time, "the rejection of figurative representation and its subjection to action are racially implicated" (p. 149). In short, "what must be strengthened is the shift from the heroic individual to the power of the crowd", a collective gesture that compels museums to focus "more on the fall than on the statues" (Ribeiro, 2020, p. 149).

[3] Literally translated as "social explosion", the movement took place between October 2019 and March 2020 and was marked by the popular occupation of Chilean public thoroughfares in a broad struggle for dignity, encompassing a range of demands: protests against corruption and economic abuses, calls for greater visibility for groups such as the Mapuche Indigenous people, demands for a new constitution, and other claims. The movement was brutally repressed by the Chilean State, with violations including arbitrary arrests, torture, killings and dozens of people blinded by the police's repeated practice of shooting protesters in the eyes (*Polícia Chilena Deve Ser Investigada por Uso Excessivo da Força em Protestos, Diz Anistia Internacional*, 2020).

## Carlos Colombino: *Entierro de un (Otro) Monumento*

*Entierro de un (Otro) Monumento* (Burial of [Another] Monument; 1995), a public sculpture by Paraguayan artist Carlos Colombino (1937–2013), is one of the most emblematic works in the re-signification of controversial monuments[4]. It is based on an existing statue depicting the dictator Alfredo Stroessner, who ruled Paraguay from 1954 to 1989, making his regime the longest-running dictatorship in Latin America.

In the early 1980s, as his power began to wane, Stroessner commissioned a tribute to himself: to be immortalised at the centre of the Monument to Victorious Peace (see Grupo de Estudio sobre Arte Público en Latinoamérica, n.d.). The dictator commissioned this ostentatious, opulent sculptural ensemble from Spanish architect Juan de Ávalos y García Taborda (1911–2006) to symbolise the dictatorship's triumph. The codename Stroessner chose as its title was intended to establish it in the collective imaginary as a period that had guaranteed stability, progress and peace. The dictator's desire reflects the idea of "the monument being the outcome of the obsession of the living to perpetuate themselves after death" (Taussig, 1997/2015, p. 180). Responsible for widespread torture, political imprisonment, forced exile, disappearances and other atrocities, Stroessner had his whims indulged: he was represented at approximately 5 m tall at the centre of the monument, surrounded by other national "heroes".

Two years after Stroessner's overthrow in 1989, popular pressure demanded the removal of his statue, while various supporters of the dictatorship unsuccessfully attempted to acquire it. In 1991, social movements emerged victorious when authorities removed the statue from public space, invoking "Law 27190/90, which prohibited monuments to living honourees" (Martínez, 2019, as cited in Andrade et al., 2025, p. 17). This struggle over the statue's ownership and fate exemplifies how monuments can generate dissonance, reflecting that memory is a historical process subject to continuous, open contestation. In this struggle, Carlos Colombino, one of the country's most celebrated artists, acquired the work and transformed it into public heritage, though it was not inaugurated until 1996 (https://www.asuncion.gov.py/intendencia/este-martes-28-se-inaugura-la-restauracion-de-una-obra-iconica-de-carlos-colombino-en-la-plaza-de-los-desaparecidos; https://ea.net.py/instan-a-respetar-la-plaza-de-los-desaparecidos/).

Colombino dismembered, fragmented and desacralised not only the statue but also the narrative it represented. Preserving part of the face and the left hand, which freeze a gesture characteristic of the dictator and thus ensure his identification, the artist compressed the figure between two blocks of concrete, confining it within the public's gaze as onlookers stand before it and subject it to a crushing process on a continuous loop. This monumental reinvention, and, consequently, the reinvention of historical narrative, is made all the more evident by the work's location: the square of the Disappeared, opposite the presidential palace. Like a corpse eternally awaiting funeral rites and a criminal

[4] Carlos Colombino's work undoubtedly places Paraguay at the forefront of debates surrounding controversial monuments. Claudia Andrade et al. (2025) make the same argument in their detailed study of the construction of the Monument to Victorious Peace and the re-signification process undertaken by Carlos Colombino. Moreover, the sculpture is becoming an increasingly important point of reference in discussions that are gaining momentum across Latin America amid the rise of fascist discourse and threats of imperialism from the Global North.

perpetually awaiting trial, the new Stroessner, tormented by the multitude he made disappear, affirms not only a democratic triumph but also the potential of public monuments for sculptural, critical and political renewal.

In other words, by "shifting the viewer's gaze towards absence, ruin and the scar" (Andrade et al., 2025, p. 20), Carlos Colombino not only performed a public service in preserving memory, inscribing into the urban landscape a lesson about the fate dictators should meet, but also issued a warning to present-day rulers, who work just a few metres away, about the shameful historical pits reserved for oppressors. The artist had already signalled these premises in the work's title: the *burial* is intended for the *other* Stroessner, the allegorically unperturbed one. The new figure, with his mouth sealed in concrete and his eyes wide open, stands as an infamous witness to the fact that the political desire for re-signification necessarily entails working with memory. For, as Brazilian artist and researcher Renan Marcondes (2024) suggests, "there is no future without a reconfiguration of the past. Therefore, there is no revolutionary force without reassembling the bonds of affiliation, without bringing the entirety of prior history back into view" (p. 271).

In this case, Colombino's fold reveals that all prior history is always implicated in the present. Although Stroessner's place in the Monument to Victorious Peace remains vacant to this day, exposing a form of symbolic violence that was both imposed and overcome (Andrade et al., 2025), the country has been governed by Stroessner's party, the Colorado Party, since the rise of the dictatorship in the 1950s and even after his fall. One example is the current president, conservative economist Santiago Peña, elected in 2023, whose victory ran counter to the leftward shift then taking place across the continent (see the earlier election results in Brazil, Chile and Colombia; see *Eleição no Paraguai: Por que Vitória de Santiago Peña É Exceção Entre 'Ondas Políticas' da América Latina*, 2023). Thus, under a democratic regime led by a reactionary legacy, *Entierro de un (Otro) Monumento* remains a persistent pedagogical provocation, not lying in wait for power but exposing power as a whitewashed sepulchre.

Carlos Colombino achieved this re-signification within the State's legal framework, following standard procedures of authorisation, negotiation, and relocation, facilitated in part by his influential position in the history of Paraguayan art, which enabled a comprehensive intervention. Other artists, working with the reality within their immediate reach, carry out temporary interventions on controversial monuments, circumventing possible sanctions through discursive strategies that situate art within legal boundaries. One example is Diambe's performance series *Devolta* (Return; 2020).

## Diambe: *Devolta*

At Tiradentes square, the former site of the Polé pillory[5] in central Rio de Janeiro, Dom Pedro I, glorified by the Eurocentric official historical narrative as the figure who proclaimed Brazil's independence, stands atop an equestrian statue, with representations of Indigenous and Black heroes positioned beneath the hooves of his horse. The

[5] It was so called because it was a public site where enslaved people were flogged and other dissidents, including people regarded as criminals, were subjected to punishment (Biblioteca IBGE, n.d.).

monument is watched in the dead of night by almost 30 people dressed in black and white. Surrounded by an extensive iron railing designed to protect it from possible acts of protest, Brazil's first public sculpture (Wanderley, 2022) is encircled by an arrangement of clothes these people spread across the ground; next, one person dressed entirely in black and another in white pour petrol over the fabrics. After ensuring no one is near the railing and that the clothes surround only the statue, Diambe, the group's *choreographer*, sets them alight. As the flames consume the fabrics, the participants disperse, scattering in different directions and modes of transport, leaving behind only faint traces of organised authorship as they flee (Figure 1). From the collective act of looking to the moment the fire went out, the intervention lasted 30 minutes.



**Figure 1.** Devolta *performance (Diambe, 2020)*

*Credits*. Lorena Pazzanese (2020)

This is the step-by-step account of the *choreographic situation*[6] meticulously orchestrated by Diambe in *Devolta*, a performance staged three times around monuments associated with the Portuguese royal family. By understanding the action of fire as a

[6] In her master's dissertation, Diambe da Silva (2022) alternates between the terms "situation" and "choreography" to describe the work. The former, a term established in the history of Brazilian art by artists such as Artur Barrio, may refer to momentary interventions in public space that blur the boundaries between art and life, and between art and non-art. "Choreography", in turn, refers not only to the vocabulary of theorist André Lepecki (2011), who distinguishes between movements of control (public order) and dissent (artistic actions and protests, for example) in urban space, describing them respectively as "choreopolice" and "choreopolitics", but also to what the artist calls "waves of valorisation of Black art in the history of Brazilian art" (Silva, 2022, p. 8). She draws on the philosopher Renato Araújo, who describes "wave thinking" as repetition across movements and dissolutions.

temporary drawing[7] in public space, the choice of this element not only activates the urban grammar of protest — in a city where flames also represent the State's persistent violence in police operations and its neglect of public property, as exemplified by the fire at the National Museum[8] — but also establishes the scale of visual intervention available to the artist. By carefully calculating the amount of petrol used to soak the clothes, she ensured that the heritage structure would suffer no permanent damage, recognising that her "power of violence over it would always be less than the power of violence of that very sculpture [over her body]" (Silva, 2022, p. 36). In this way, she protected herself from the disproportionate violence that the State, in the image and likeness of the petrified Dom Pedro, can direct above all at Black and Indigenous bodies. In planning the work, Diambe also equipped herself legally: after consulting a lawyer, she memorised Municipal Law 5.429, which permits the free practice of art in public spaces without prior authorisation, provided that pedestrian circulation is not obstructed and public property is not damaged. She was thus prepared to present herself as a choreographer should her intervention be classified as an act of vandalism.

This is what happened when the work was performed in Copacabana. The fire surrounding the statue of Princess Isabel[9], which is considerably smaller than those of the kings and princes, spread more quickly, causing the flames to interfere with the light sensors on the streetlamps. As the pavement was plunged into darkness, the fire quickly attracted the attention of residents and police officers. At the police station, handcuffed and wearing a T-shirt bearing the inscription "ñ serei bicha presa por arte" ("I won't be a queer person imprisoned for art"), Diambe was asked whether she belonged to a political organisation. After hearing legal jargon such as the aforementioned law and "documento lavrado" (an official report being drawn up), and checking online that the artist was indeed a "choreographer", the police chief settled the matter by filing an internal report. The police authority, perhaps guided by different aesthetic criteria for defining art, had already classified the "offence" as an act of social movements.

The artist's choice of the chromatic neutrality of black-and-white clothing for those acting also reveals an aesthetic strategy many street artists adopted, intended to distance their work from common assumptions about political and party affiliations and, consequently, to mitigate possible violent reactions (Figure 2). Once he was convinced that it was indeed art, the police chief's hostility subsided: "damn, I'm actually finding this interesting. Can we go a little easier on this?" (Silva, 2022, p. 47). The ambush of

[7] Diambe cites the artist Ronald Duarte as a direct influence on *Devolta*, specifically his work *Fogo Cruzado* (Crossfire; 2002), in which he set fire to the tram tracks in the Santa Teresa neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro (Prémio PIPA, 2025). A comparative reading could also be developed between Diambe's action and *Refazendo Mitos* (Remaking Myths) by artist Helô Sanvoy (2020), who, just a few weeks later in the same year, also set fire to a statue honouring the *bandeirante* Anhanguera on Avenida Paulista in São Paulo.

[8] Many observations can be made about the 2018 destruction of the National Museum (Museu Nacional, n.d.). Here, in light of the iconography of Indigenous people beneath the hooves of Dom Pedro I's horse in the sculpture *ambushed* by Diambe, it is important to emphasise the doubled glottocide perpetrated by the fire, in which unique records of the languages of Indigenous peoples who had been completely exterminated in Brazil were incinerated.

[9] For further information about this statue and the dynamics surrounding it in the Copacabana neighbourhood, see Diambe's own master's dissertation (Silva, 2022).

the statues is thus intertwined with linguistic traps, demonstrating how performance art, more generally, extends beyond the acts themselves to encompass prior arrangements and subsequent events.




**Figure 2.** Devolta *(Diambe, 2020), monument to Princess Isabel, in Copacabana*
*Credits*. Prémio PIPA (2020; https://www.premiopipa.com/diambe/)

Across the many choreographic and dialogical nuances it evokes, the political dimension of *Devolta* seems to reach its apogee in the element most closely connected to protest: the direct-action tactic of using fire, which "is the most powerful symbol there is for the crowd", since it constitutes a kind of mirrored combustion: "after all the destruction, fire, just like the crowd itself, is destined to be extinguished" (Canetti, 1960/1983, p. 18). In *Devolta*, the flames make visible the massification of figures rendered invisible by dominant historical narratives, such as the nameless Indigenous people allegorically placed beneath Dom Pedro I's boots, thereby exposing the parallel extinction enacted by this type of monument.

Other interventions avoid confrontation but, by mimicking monuments' formal syntax, counter their violent massification through the content they express. One example is the *La Ruta de los Antimonumentos*, established in Mexico City.

### *La Ruta de los Antimonumentos*

*La Ruta de los Antimonumentos* is a collection of sculptures, plaques and murals forming a corridor dedicated to truth, memory and justice in central Mexico City, running

along a key artery for the city's tourism, business and commerce: the Zócalo, Juárez avenue and Paseo de la Reforma. With diffuse, anonymous authorship, it is a joint initiative involving activist groups, relatives of disappeared persons, and others committed to these causes, sustained through self-funding and fundraising campaigns. The movement emerged in response to a context of more than 100,000 enforced disappearances (Agence France-Presse, 2024) and countless acts of violence that have escalated in the country since 2006, when a disastrous policy of war against drug cartels was established.

Through emblems, statistical data and other elements, these public works enact a play of appropriation and expropriation. Drawing on the visual conventions of monuments through features such as scale, colour and location, the anti-monuments take on an air of officialdom, leading passers-by and tourists to identify them as part of the urban landscape and institutional street furniture. The term "anti-monument", displayed on captions affixed beside each intervention, performs dissent. Coexisting with the city's official stone and sculptural representations, these works transform the idea of the monument into an artefact of resistance, rejecting the consensus of "remembrance or commemoration" and exposing violent events "as events that never cease to happen" (Alonso & Nienass, 2023, pp. 10–11). In this way, the public can develop a more critical perspective, being called upon to take a position on the fixed history monuments represent and the historical instability anti-monuments denounce.

Along the route, recent episodes, such as the mass murder of migrants by a cartel (https://experienciasparalamemoria.mx/antimonumento-72/) and the deaths of dozens of children in a nursery fire (https://experienciasparalamemoria.mx/antimonumento-abc/), are commemorated alongside events assimilated as "historical" because of their apparent temporal distance, such as the State-perpetrated massacre of students during the 1968 protests. Like a Via Crucis dedicated to the nameless and the bodiless in the midst of public thoroughfares, these anti-monuments connect "events of the past, demands of the present and possibilities for the future" (Alonso & Nienass, 2023, pp. 10–11). The materials are generally heavy, with cuts and chamfered edges suggesting artists' involvement in the movement. This makes the works difficult for public authorities to control or remove, not only because the collective promptly installs new pieces, but also because of the solidarity they embody. The anti-monuments become meeting points in the city and spaces for collective care, sometimes accompanied by community gardens. Through this mixture of persistence and simulacrum, they refuse the ephemeral status commonly imposed on protesters.

This aesthetic impetus came primarily from the anti-monument *Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan* (Roundabout of the Women Who Fight; Figure 3). In 2020, following the removal of Christopher Columbus's statue amid global anti-racist demonstrations, a deadlock emerged between activists and government officials, who appeared intent on appropriating the situation by announcing, without public consultation, the installation of a statue representing Indigenous women (see Manetto, 2021). Feminist collectives occupied the space with the silhouette of a woman with a clenched fist raised, which remains on the plinth to this day. The groups also demanded, and secured, the retention of the government-installed hoardings to protect the former monument's structure from

further intervention. These hoardings had been covered with graffiti naming numerous women who had disappeared or been subjected to violence; these women are also represented in the lilac silhouette that continues to stand out in the cityscape among skyscrapers, domes and billboards[10].




**Figure 3.** Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan

*Credits.* Elilson Gomes do Nascimento (2026)

Alongside the *Glorieta*, one of the most widely referenced anti-monuments is *+43*, which commemorates the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa[11]. Occupying a central position between the lanes of Paseo de la Reforma, the Mexican capital's best-known and longest avenue, the number is rendered in a large red metal structure that inevitably draws the attention of passers-by. Completing this frame of mobilisation are a

[10] Cuban researcher Samuel Hernández Dominicis (2025) examines how the Mexican government neutralises protest by installing iron and wooden panels around buildings and monuments to protect them, particularly from feminist demonstrators. By absorbing graffiti and other interventions carried out during marches and retaining the hoardings bearing these inscriptions, the State diverts attention from the excessive care afforded to monuments at the expense of the social vulnerability revealed by high levels of violence against women. It also intensifies what Dominicis calls the "temporary bunkering" of public space.

[11] The case concerns the 43 student teachers from the Escuela Normal Rural "Raúl Isidro Burgos" in Ayotzinapa, who were brutally repressed and subjected to violence by State forces and parallel groups within civil society in the city of Iguala, in the state of Guerrero, between the night of 26 September and 27 September, 2014. At the time, they were gathering money to obtain a bus to travel to the Mexican capital, where they intended to participate in the events held on 2 October, the national day of remembrance for the massacre of students that took place in 1968 in the emblematic Tlatelolco neighbourhood of Mexico City. The whereabouts of the 43 bodies have remained unknown ever since, and the number "43" has become a global symbol of the struggle for reparation and justice (Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional, 2024).

stone-carved turtle, referring to the meaning of "Ayotzinapa" in Nahuatl, an Indigenous language: "the place of the turtles"; and the slogan of the marches for the 43: "if they took them alive, we want them back alive". This slogan derives from the protest chants of Argentine mothers, who began their struggle in the 1970s to recover the bodies of loved ones who had been abducted, a struggle that continues to this day. Both the phrase and the turtle symbolism signal the resonance of protests, which are not confined to oral memory and the urban imaginary of their local contexts but spread as shared visual and discursive markers. It is no coincidence that *+43* (Figure 4), the anti-monument with the greatest international reach, given the extensive coverage of the students' disappearance, also embodies a struggle over narratives that extends beyond government discourses of "urban landscaping". Having been subjected to acts of desecration, including arson, its unsettling presence creates a different kind of landmark, conveying the fundamental reminder that memory and justice must remain inseparable.




**Figure 4.** *Antimonumento +43*

*Credits.* Elilson Gomes do Nascimento (2026)

Amid the convergences, connotations, denotations and conflicts brought to the surface by these interventions along the route, the monument can "be understood as a living event ( ... ) whose defining ethical principle is the obligatory recognition of the *place of the other* [emphasis added]. An ethical-political monument replacing a cognitive-affective one" (Longo Bahia, 2010, pp. 240–241). This other-oriented *ethos* also runs through debates on monuments when artists, working within the field of historical revisionism and acts of resistance, bring monumental scale down to the human scale, concentrating their efforts on rewriting the histories of particular figures and bringing the urgent concerns of specific social groups to the fore, as can be seen in the work of artists Yhuri Cruz and Daniela Ortiz.

### Yhuri Cruz: *Monumento à Voz de Anastácia*

In *Monumento à Voz de Anastácia* (Monument to Anastácia's Voice; 2019), Yhuri Cruz (Brazil, 1991) reconstructs Anastácia's portrait *iconographically*. Anastácia was an enslaved woman born following the rape of her mother, who had been abducted from the Congo and brought to Brazil aboard a slave ship in the 18th century. For resisting the sexual violence perpetrated by the White men who held her as property, Anastácia was condemned to wear an iron muzzle until her death. A torture device comprising a collar and an iron gag, the iron mask became embedded in Brazil's collective imaginary through the image of Anastácia, who was elevated by popular belief to the status of a miracle-working saint, becoming one of the country's most powerful symbols of Black resistance (Pereira, 2023; Figure 5).




**Figure 5.** Monumento à Voz de Anastácia*, by Yhuri Cruz (2019). Double-sided print on a leaflet. 10 x 7 cm*

*Credits.* Yhuri Cruz (2019)

*Note*. Translation: "Prayer to Anastácia Livre. Celebration dates: 12 and 13 May. Commemorated on the 12th and 13th of every month. If you are facing a PROBLEM THAT IS DIFFICULT TO SOLVE and need URGENT HELP, ask Anastácia Livre for help. PRAYER: we see that some tormentor turned your life into a martyrdom, tyrannically violated your youth. We also see your gentle countenance, your soft, tranquil face, and the peace that suffering could not disturb. This means your struggle made you superior; you claimed your voice, so much so that God took you to the heavenly plains and granted you the power to heal, bless, and perform miracles for those who struggle for dignity. Anastácia, you are free. We ask you ... pray for us, protect us, envelop us in your mantle of grace, and, with your kind, firm, and penetrating gaze, keep the evils and ill-wishers of this world from us. *Monumento à Voz de Anastácia*, Yhuri Cruz, 2019".

In his work, Yhuri Cruz preserves this cultural repertoire by producing and distributing a "holy card" in the style of religious leaflets, which feature images and prayers to saints — both those officially recognised by the Catholic canon and the "pagan" figures of popular culture. His reinvention transforms the iron mask into a gold necklace, freeing Anastácia from colonial iconography by revealing her face and, in turn, giving her a voice. In fact, the artist collectivises this voice: members of the public who encounter his leaflets in the streets and museums, carry the image in their pockets, and recite the prayer share in the agency of fostering freedom. By signing the holy card with the work's

title and elevating the 10 × 7 cm leaflet to the status of a monument, Cruz signals that revising history is within our reach and within the range of our voices.

Thus, "the monumental is not that which defies human scale, but that which spreads and infects imaginaries" (Ribeiro, 2020, p. 156). In the case of *Monumento à Voz de Anastácia*, this contagion has been fostered not only by the artist but also by the image itself, which has circulated so widely that it is beginning to rival the long-established, official representation of Anastácia with her mouth gagged. Alongside the holy cards, frescoes (http://yhuricruz.com/2019/06/04/monumento-a-voz-de-anastacia-2019/) and paste-up posters (http://yhuricruz.com/2024/02/02/monumento-a-voz-de-anastacia-parede-gentil-carioca/), produced by Yhuri Cruz, *Anastácia Livre* (Anastácia Free) has appeared on T-shirts, television programmes (Furlan, 2022), in school textbooks, at processions (Cruz, n.d.) and in carnival parades (Cruz, 2025). In the frescoes paying tribute to Anastácia, Cruz paints the word "voice" on the corners of walls, spreading it in large letters like an echo of the stories that persist in the cracks (Figure 6). The voice, the very embodiment of orality, is not confined to sound production; rather, it is articulated through the full range of gestures and expressions that make up the body's sensory, perceptual, political, and spatial — and, why not, historical — map. In this movement, in which the voice serves as a vehicle for presence, the artist's leaflet-highlighted *struggle for dignity* extends across a multitudinous assemblage, contesting narratives and images until they are liberated from historical massification.




**Figure 6.** Monumento à Voz de Anastácia*, by Yhuri Cruz (2022). Frescoes, leaflets and framed prints*
*Credits.* Yhuri Cruz (2022)

While Yhuri Cruz, through *Anastácia Livre*, shines a spotlight on the need to re-signify symbols and reproduce images to combat one of Brazil's most endemic problems, structural racism, Daniela Ortiz (Peru, 1985) uses her own body as a means of contesting the perpetuation of colonial images, which are expressed not only through ethnoracial conflicts but also through migration policies.

## Daniela Ortiz: *Réplica*

In *Réplica* (Replica; 2014–2015; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bQz4pPGg9k), Daniela Ortiz walks through the streets of Barcelona amid the celebrations of 12 October, "Hispanic Day", which commemorates the date Christopher Columbus "arrived" in the Americas in 1492. She holds a photograph of one of the sculptures at the base of the monument dedicated to Columbus in Catalonia square: an Indigenous person kneeling

before Bernardo Boyl, a priest who accompanied the invader on his second expedition to the Americas.

As well as walking with the photograph in her hands, reducing the monumental distance that separates the sculpture from the naked eye, Ortiz kneels before people, reproducing the scene that, in the statue, freezes a narrative of the imposition of docility, domestication, false cordiality and, above all, the subalternity that the Spanish celebrate on 12 October. Her presence thus constitutes a performative act of dissent, momentarily transforming the march of colonial pride into an arena of protest and exposing the normalisation of coloniality, extractivism, genocide, racism and xenophobia embedded in that civic parade. This becomes apparent in the diversity of reactions: a woman, apparently interpreting the interaction as a request for alms, opens her purse; a couple reacts indignantly when Ortiz refuses to comply with the instruction to stand up; a man becomes enraged by her performance; families and groups of friends listen attentively to her explanation, their expressions ranging from doubt to embarrassment; young people mock her position, while children seem intrigued by the story they hear. Among the street scenes, the slogan "de todos" ("belonging to everyone"), printed on Spanish flags, signals the paradox of anti-immigration policies, which would only intensify over the decade following Ortiz's performance[12].

Even on her knees, the artist does not reiterate the submission of the Indigenous American figure depicted in the statue. By looking people in the eye, she turns the encounter into confrontation, reflecting not only the monument's present-day relevance but also its ongoing reactivation, expressed here through the vertical relationship between Spanish citizens and her body as a Latin American immigrant. This contrast captures the dual meaning of the title *Réplica*: her kneeling body, set apart from the profusion of flags draped over people's shoulders that distribute Columbus's supposed heroism among the Spanish, resembles an inverted *souvenir* and, through image and presence, offers a *counterpoint* to monumental coloniality. At the same time, it establishes a right of reply that extends beyond her protest against colonial narratives to address the Spanish themselves: after all, what can they do, and how should they position themselves in relation to symbols that continue to stigmatise peoples in the service of celebrating Eurocentrism?

## Concluding Remarks

The five cases examined here — Carlos Colombino's sculpture, Diambe's performance, *La Ruta de los Antimonumentos* in Mexico City, Yhuri Cruz's leaflet and Daniela

[12] Issues surrounding monuments and migration-related conflicts are central to Ortiz's artistic practice. Notable works include *Homenaje a los Caídos* (Homage to the Fallen; 2012), in which, on the same 12 October, she walked through the streets of Madrid holding a placard bearing a photograph of Samba Martine, a Congolese immigrant who died as a result of medical neglect after being detained for entering the country "illegally"; *Anti-Colonial Monuments* (2018), a series of six sculptures measuring 30 × 50 cm that propose replacements for monuments to Christopher Columbus; and *Europa Recibirá de Rodillas el Espíritu Anticolonial* (Europe Will Receive the Anti-Colonial Spirit on Its Knees; 2019; àngels barcelona, n.d.), a series of panels proposing alterations to stained-glass windows in a Belgian cathedral depicting glorifications of the monarchy. It is important to emphasise that Daniela Ortiz, combining her work as an artist and activist, has been a prominent international voice in debates about colonial monuments for at least a decade, thus anticipating the revisionist wave that would sweep through the visual arts at the turn of the 2010s and 2020s. Having taken part in numerous televised debates to raise awareness of the issue in Spain, the artist has frequently faced hostility from the press (see Ruzito, 2016).

Ortiz's *Réplica* — illustrate how disrupting the verticality and hierarchy of monuments, whether through cuts, transpositions, direct action, temporary interventions or permanent installations, unsettles the monopoly over memory, bringing aesthetics and politics together across Latin America. In this respect, the dialogue between art and protest, evident in the use of similar strategies in artistic practices and demonstrations, as seen in different ways in the projects analysed, reflects aesthetic practice as an expression of citizenship.

For the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (2011), citizenship "may begin with abstract definitions, applicable at any time and in any place, but to be valid it must be something that can be claimed" (p. 83). In this context, a citizen "is someone who takes part in the fact of governing and being governed. But another form of sharing precedes this taking part: the one that determines who takes part" (Rancière, 2000/2009, pp. 15–16). While Milton Santos (2011), for his part, characterises the citizen as a "multidimensional" agent, one who assumes many different roles in response to political urgencies and within the dynamics between the local and the global, the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Rancière (2000/2009) argues that the political order of society distributes opportunities for autonomy and visibility unevenly among people. This observation suggests that citizenship is exercised when citizens, negotiating the inherent duality between obeying common sense and performing dissent, claim their part in this *political order* by expressing themselves in the polis.

Through a dialogue between these two authors, we argue that artists, activists, demonstrators and other agents, by occupying public space and, in the presence of society, bringing together uses, positions, relationships and negotiations arising between the causes they defend, the discourses they articulate and the interventions they enact, proclaim civic practice as an aesthetic tool and aesthetic practice as a civic tool.

For example, Carlos Colombino transforms the historical narrative by dismantling Stroessner's statue and repositioning it in public to represent him as the fallen dictator he is; Diambe devises choreographies and incendiary drawings that expose the colonial dissonances perpetuated in and through imperial statues; Mexican activists draw on the visual structures of official monuments to mark out a *ruta* — a route of contestation over memory and resistance to the imposition of ephemerality on political protest; Yhuri Cruz encapsulates in a leaflet the need to liberate the iconographies of colonisation, placing the means of revising history in the hands and voices of those who encounter the different forms through which his work circulates; and Daniela Ortiz infiltrates the colonial procession, imbuing the image of her own body with a form of dissent that mirrors the resemblance between Spanish pride and its symbols of enslavement. In all these interventions, the elements employed intertwine gestures of contestation, circulation and awareness-raising which, within the aesthetic repertoires of the streets, become manifestations of citizenship exercised through art and protest.

At the intersection of citizenship and aesthetics, artistic practices, activist interventions, and protests disrupt everyday urban life by bringing other spatial and temporal relationships into being. They activate a perceptual process of imagination — interpretation, reading, deduction, and inference — which, in turn, is nourished by the codes, references, experiences, images, and memories that make up the social imaginary. In the context of actions addressing monument-related controversies, protests highlight the urgency

of these issues and prompt artists to explore them aesthetically. Artistic interventions also reverberate among demonstrators and in marches, feeding back into ongoing reassessments of colonial landmarks and discourses. This demonstrates how the interplay between art and protest can generate material, contextual, and historical resonances between aesthetics and politics.

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