

take my blood and
write on the soil,
the people
must know that
we are being taken
prisoners

The artist

We invited the Peruvian artist Daniela Ortiz to realize a theater piece with us. Daniela is a visual artist whose work can be seen in many European art institutions, such as the Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Art Basel. Yet she has a quite controversial relationship with Europe. Before returning to Peru, she lived and studied in Barcelona for a long time. Almost all of her works—as colorful, accessible and humorous as they may be—are concerned with an anti-colonial gaze of exploitative world relations and the role of the Global North. Accordingly, her works also bear titles such as “THE ABC OF RACIST EUROPE” or “LET THE POOR EAT BREAD AND MAKE THE RICH EAT SHIT,” or “THE REBELLION OF THE ROOTS.”

She works with different forms and media: objects, paintings, ceramics, dolls and children’s books. And she almost always tells stories—funny, wicked, hopeful ones—often with a kind of poetic justice that also draws from magical realism: There, coconuts from palm trees locked in botanical gardens slay anti-migration interior ministers; violent policemen choke on an imported physalis; and the spirit of the Inca king’s son, Túpac Amaru, abducted to Europe, supports grassroots social movements from beyond the grave.

Daniela Ortiz often chooses “childlike” media and formats which is no coincidence. For two reasons: Firstly, the supposed harmlessness of puppetry or children’s books makes it possible to articulate brutal realities, but also anti-colonial fantasies of revenge. They are, as Daniela likes to say: humble forms for complex and ideological statements. And secondly, these media are very accessible and evoke a familiarity for people without elitist cultural practices. A central concern of the artist, who is as humorous and approachable as her works: To be understandable and to be understood, to reach people, even beyond the—often *white*—art institutions. In doing so, she consciously refrains from elitist codes. And she avowedly shuns neither political pedagogy nor propaganda. For all her love of art, her political concerns are always of greater urgency. Even more so since the repressive violence against demonstrators in Peru.

The piece

Thinking about a history of cotton led Daniela to the historic case of the Cromotex textile factory and thus to an impressive example of unionised resistance. Based on this, she developed her first play in four associatively linked images. She spins a loose thread through the fabric of the colonially shaped world: In the first image, a textile worker from the Global South confronts the audience with his rage. In the second, a Western politician, allegorical figure of “*white* feminism”, rants and raves. In the third, a choir of exploited plants that have joined the resistance sings: cotton, coca, rubber, sugar, tobacco and maize (the comrades coffee and cocoa are missing, the Swiss took them).

Their leader and patron saint: François Mackandal, a historical and mythical figure of the Haitian resistance, who affirms—with a poem by Vic’Adex—that revolutions do not end with the death of their protagonists: The fourth and final image shows political activity from its prosaic side: as organisation, as discipline, as work. The piece symbolically pays its reverence to the workers who paid for their struggle with their lives, as well as to the protesters who now follow their example on Peru’s streets. This follows the deeply rooted belief (not only) in Latin America that those who die for a good cause are not lost but “planted”—for generations to come. As it is written on posters in Puno, Juliaca, Cusco, Ayacucho or San Marcos University: “They wanted to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds.”

Cromotex Massacre 1979

Against the background of a general politicisation in Latin America and the revolutionary government of Valasco Alvarado in Peru, many trade unions turned beyond economic demands to greater political visions. This combined with an emerging, majority indigenous population, already experienced in self-organisation and having come from the countryside to the city for the improvement of their living conditions, hungry for change. A key tool was labour struggle. In the case of the Cromotex textile factory, this led to the closure of the factory and the exclusion of the workers by the owner Antonio Mussiris (under the pretext that the factory, which still exists today under the name Filamentos Industriales S.A., was not profitable). The workers, whose livelihood was acutely threatened, occupied the factory. Violent clashes with the police and the state followed. Six workers, Hemigidio Huertas, Marcelino Castro, Silvio Jiménez, Inocencio Paco, Máximo Montoya, Máximo Lara, were murdered. Their memory is still honoured today. In addition, the case was documented by comrades and relatives in a book, which is also used for political education.

Peru today: Repression and protest

Since the ousting of the left-wing, popular president Pedro Castillo by the right-wing majority of the Peruvian parliament and the installation of Dina Boluarte as his successor in December 2022, Peru has been in a state of political emergency: large sections of the indigenous, rural population have taken their protest and displeasure at the right-wing parliament, the new president and the corruption of the state to the streets. The demonstrators consider Boluarte an illegitimate president, in the service of the right-wing parliamentary majority and the hated economic elite of the capital Lima. Although the president, as the first woman to hold office, is trying to arouse the sympathy of the population and attributes her unpopularity to machismo, the severity with which the state police apparatus is acting against the demonstrators is considerable: over 55 demonstrators have already been murdered and over 900 injured. Despite this enormous repression, the protest movement never tires of loudly voicing its demands: The resignation of Boluarte, the dissolution of parliament, new elections as soon as possible and a constituent assembly. The protesters are not only demanding short-term improvements but are also fighting against the historical inequality between Lima and the rest of the country, and thus against the continuation of the colonial order, against the structural discrimination of indigenous and racialised groups and against the corruption of state institutions.

Glossary

Vic'Adex Nigerian poet & founder and curator of "60 Seconds poetry" (@60secondspoetry).

Salvador Allende Chilean physician, politician, and Chilean president from 1970–73, who died in a US/CIA-backed coup.

Túpac Amaru Peruvian Icon of the anti-colonialist freedom movement, publicly executed for resisting the Spanish in 1572.

Dina Assesina (Translated: "Dina Assassin"), battle cry and nickname of the demonstrators in Peru for Dina Boluarte.

Frantz Fanon French Politician, writer, psychiatrist, and important thinker on decolonization.

Hemigidio Huertas, Marcelino Castro, Silvio Jiménez, Inocencio Paco, Máximo Montoya, Máximo Lara Workers, murdered in the capture of the Cromotex factory.

Vladimir Lenin Important political and ideological reference for many anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist movements in the Global South. Regular guest at the Arbeitverein Eintracht, Neumarkt 5.

Patrice Lumumba Congolese independence hero, first prime minister of independent Congo.

François Mackandal Historical Haitian maroon leader and role model of the Haitian Revolution. Abducted from the African continent at the age of 12, he was highly educated and experienced in the medicinal use of plants, which helped him and his rebels to poison up to 6,000 colonizers, until he was apprehended and publicly executed. His myth lives on.

José Carlos Mariátegui Peruvian author, Marxist and intellectual.

Thomas Sankara First president of Burkina Faso, reformer, pan-African, anti-patriarchal critic of Western debt policies toward countries of the Global South, killed in a 1987 coup.

White feminism A Eurocentric feminism that focuses on *white* middle-class women and their interests and perpetuates structural racism.