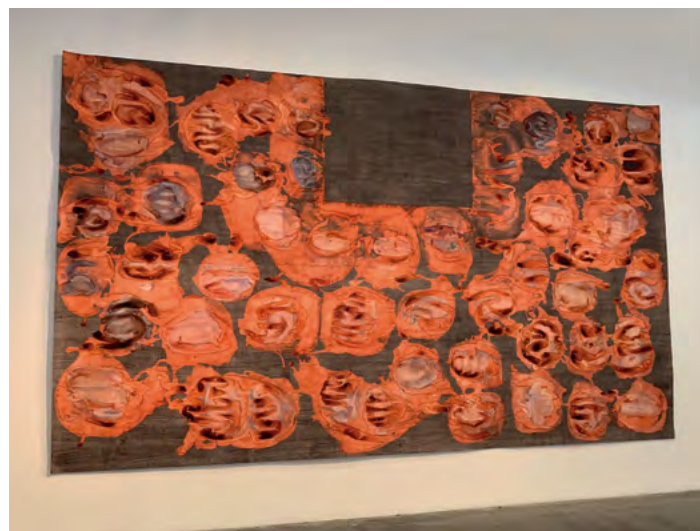


CARMEN ARGOTE

ME AT MARKET



Carmen Argote, *Patio con Cítricos / Patio with Citrus*, 2019. Cochineal and lemon on watercolor paper. 197×116 in. (500×294 cm). Photo: Laura Gutiérrez.



Carmen Argote, *Manéjese con Cuidado*, 2019. Public action: PAOS GDL, the Museo Taller José Clemente Orozco, Guadalajara, Mexico. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles. Photo: Itzel Hernández Gómez.

Resonating Drips in Carmen Argote's Pockets

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Walking into the New Museum in New York City a few months back to visit Carmen Argote's first solo show, *As Above, So Below*, I was immediately drawn to *Patio con Cítricos / Patio with Citrus* (2019), a large-scale painting hanging on the long wall of the gallery. Measuring 4.8 × 2.9 meters, from afar *Patio con cítricos* resembled a large *huipil*—an article of clothing worn by indigenous women from regions of Mexico and Central America. Its rectangular shape, and an opening at the top, tipped me off to the notion that the work might be a re-interpretation of this traditional garment. As with most *huipiles*, which are adorned by figures and shapes in vibrant hues, it was *Patio con Cítricos'* colors that pulled me closer. Once in front of the work, I lingered on the visual texture of the varied, asymmetrical shapes, captivating with their myriad tones of orange, red, pink, and brown. I felt physically absorbed into the space of the canvas, and for a brief moment had the sensation that I had entered a portal into the work. When I was able to pull myself away and redirect my attention to the handout with the titles for the works on display, I realized I was before a “patio with citrus,” and not a *huipil*. No wonder I felt like I had entered into a space.

Patio con Cítricos was originally created during Argote's residency in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, where the artist was born. Working between two spaces there—the Taller Los Guayabos and the José Clemente Orozco Workshop—she was able to investigate not only notions of home and the physical spaces of the house—the patio, the garden—but also natural materials from the area, especially those she could use to paint. For this particular piece, Argote mixed cochineal, a traditional dyeing material derived from tiny insects that live on *nopales* (cacti), with citrus juice. This ‘paint’ was then applied to thick oil paper to achieve the results seen in *Patio con Cítricos*. Hung vertically at the New Museum, along with other works developed during the Guadalajara residency in early 2019, the piece was later shown at PAOS, a gallery in the same Jalisco city, displayed horizontally on the floor in a show entitled *Mánéjese con Cuidado Amor / Handle with Love Care*.

This variation in the display of the same work, combined with my initial reading of the piece as an article of clothing—which brief moments later became a typical space in a Mexican home—signaled a productive confusion for me. By this, I mean that, regardless of

the intent of the curators of each exhibition and of the artist herself, this movement between regional garment and architectural space perfectly aligns with the most prevalent concepts in Argote's work: home and the body. And these two concepts also come together in the project Argote has produced for the Visual Arts Center (VAC).

At the VAC, a massive linen piece with large pockets sewn onto the front hangs vertically on the tall south wall of the gallery. Argote has activated and transformed the textile by pouring a mixture of cochineal dye and lemon juice into the pockets, allowing the dye to flow somewhat haphazardly while creating vertical lines on the piece. During this process, a large stretch of oil paper was placed on the floor to catch the dye. The paper received the drips that extended beyond the textile, thus creating a sort of alchemical reaction. What is evident from this project at the VAC is that Argote is intent on thinking not only of the physical spaces of the building—the gallery and the courtyard, and what their relationship might signify—but also of symbolic representations of space. We may think about the cochineal dye as a mapping of sorts that leads to a particular line of questioning: where is cochineal harvested? Where and how is it used, and by whom?

Additionally, Argote turns our attention to the pockets that have been manually sewn onto the linen, encouraging us to think about the labor involved in the manufacturing of garments. She indirectly points to the fact that our clothes are produced through gendered and migrant labor. With a studio located in close proximity to the Los Angeles garment district and its sewing factories, it is no surprise that these issues inform Argote's artistic practice.

The productive confusion I found in *Patio con Cítricos* also appears here, at the VAC. The difference, however, may be that the project for the VAC is intentionally engaging (or tensing) opposing concepts or ideas: vertical and horizontal movements, as well as architectural and corporeal structures, are mobilized and mediated through the language of abstraction. This strategy of juxtaposing differences (including people of varying backgrounds) is rendered both through the familiar and the conceptual. There is a desire for a kind of resonance among those involved, from the collaborators who have assisted Argote in the production of the work, to those participating as witnesses to the pouring and the dripping, to the marking of the lines on the material, to the transformation of the material by the natural dyes. This feeling that we may experience in viewing Argote's installation at the VAC is a desire to resonate with the space through our bodies, and through the garments that adorn our bodies.

My first encounter with Argote's work was during a visit to fellow Angelino artist Rafa Esparza's exhibition *Tierra.Sangre.Oro*, the result of a long residency at Ballroom Marfa in Marfa, Texas. Esparza invited a handful of artists to join him for part of his residency in the far west Texas artist town (at least, that is how it is often discussed), and to contribute to his adobe sculptures. Argote was one of the artists who joined Esparza for this project in 2017.



ABOVE & FRONT COVER

Documentation of work in progress for *Me At Market*, Visual Arts Center, University of Texas at Austin, January 7, 2020.

Argote's participation in *Tierra.Sangre.Oro* is indicative of the work she has done and continues to do during her various residencies: coming into direct contact with people who live in the regions in which she finds herself, gathering material from those locations—fruits, vegetables, and other organic ingredients—to be transformed into natural dyes, and creating resonating experiences for the varying publics that attend her exhibitions. For *Tierra.Sangre.Oro*, Argote created two pieces in conversation with each other: *Oh Wow...the Marfa Sky* (2017) and *Hunting and Gathering* (2017).

As with the project at the Visual Arts Center, these two pieces considered not only the geography in which the project was situated, but the spatial qualities of the gallery in which the works were displayed. *Hunting and Gathering* incorporated a series of cardboard boxes that Argote collected as she traversed Marfa by bike. She painted homes, or pieces of home, on a large swath of linen, thus creating an alternate cartographical rendering of Marfa—one that was brown, created largely with the help of Mexican and/or working-class residents of a town that has become a conceptual art destination. Hung vertically on one large wall, *Hunting and Gathering* faced *Oh Wow...the Marfa Sky*. The second work consisted of two garments—loose ponchos—which emulated the blue skies and white puffy clouds of Marfa. The ponchos were hung on clothing hangers, and gallery attendants were encouraged to activate the pieces by wearing them—even walking outside to the courtyard donning the garments. Again, these opposing relationships—between outside and inside, up and down, vertical and horizontal—are abstracted and tensed in Argote's work. As above, so below.

Born in Guadalajara, Mexico and a migrant to Los Angeles, Argote's personal and familiar history of geographical movement informs her work. There is an ongoing and deep desire to conceptually press on these themes through her practice. This is less about resolving the tensions she investigates, but about having us occupy the space in-between these opposing forces, as that is where we are best able to corporeally receive the visual resonances present in her work. It is work that is tactile; even without touching it, we can sense its textures and, at times, its tastes and smells, too. With the textile at the Visual Arts Center, and its 219 pockets, Argote has created both a large-scale map to locate us geographically, but also a garment to hold us—all of us, each one of us—in those pockets, almost as if to protect us and keep us from getting lost. In her constant interrogation of home and what it means to her—and to those in her networks, her family, her migrant communities—Argote may have constructed a 'home,' however temporarily, for us here in Austin.

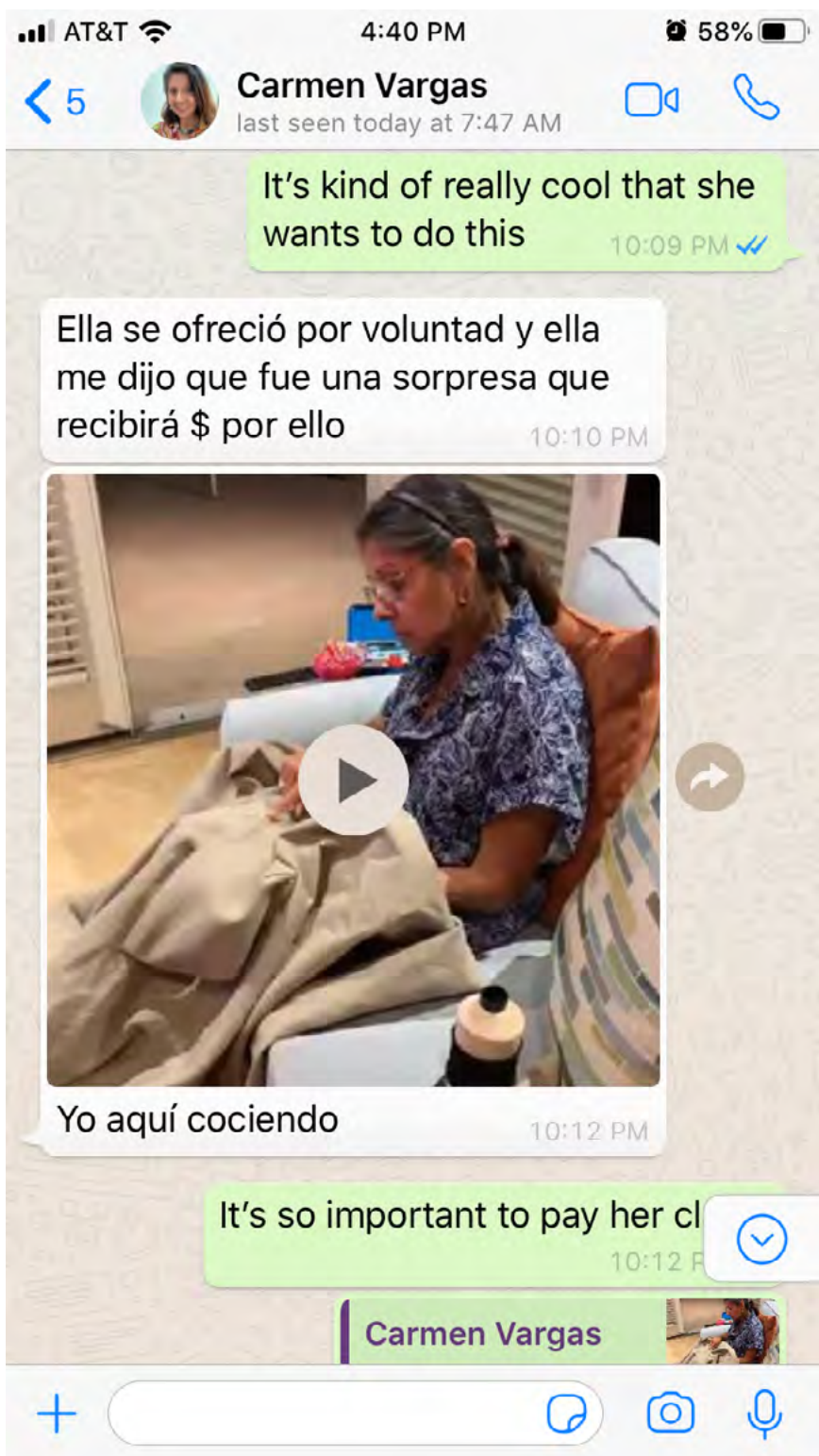


Tierra.Sangre.Oro, installation view, Ballroom Marfa, August 25, 2017 – March 18, 2018. Photo: Alex Marks.



Carmen Argote. *Oh Wow...the Marfa Sky*, 2017. Acrylic on wearable muslin. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles. Installation view, *Tierra.Sangre.Oro*, Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, Texas. Photo: Alex Marks.

Produced for the exhibition *Carmen Argote: Me At Market*, Visual Arts Center, University of Texas at Austin, January 24 – March 6, 2020.



MEAT MARKET

SPEED
LIMIT
25


10AM TO 12NOON
TUESDAY
STREET SWEEPING