

An abstract charcoal or pencil drawing on a piece of paper that is layered over another. The drawing features dark, expressive, and somewhat chaotic lines that suggest a figure or a complex, intertwined form. The lines are dense in some areas and more sparse in others, creating a sense of movement and depth. The paper has a slightly textured, handmade appearance.

Curriculum Guide on Performance & Installation

by Roxana Barba
& Daniel Arturo Almeida

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Introduction

This curriculum guide is the result of a three-month co-mentorship between artists Roxana Barba and Daniel Arturo Almeida's as part of the US Latinx Forum (USLAF). During their mentorship Barba and Almeida shared knowledge, research and sensibilities around installation conceptualization and design, and the incorporation of movement and choreography.

You can view the archive of their research containing footage and related articles on their dedicated project-page at <https://www.are.na/roxana-barba/uslaf-mentorship-almeida-barba>

Miami, Florida, 2023.

Roxana Barba

Roxana Barba (Lima, Peru) is a Miami-based artist, whose research-driven practice incorporates interdisciplinary uses of performance, video and installation. Her recent body of work originates from research into ancestral indigenous cosmology from Peru, and decolonial observation of the past and future. Developed in close collaboration with multidisciplinary teams of artists, her performances layer multi-sensory storytelling, using video, sound and installation. Her films and video works take the form of intimate offerings, gesturing towards personal and cosmic paradigms.

Roxana's works have been presented by Koubek Center-Miami Dade College, Perez Art Museum Cucalorus Film Festival and Alianza Francesa Cultural de Lima (Peru), among others, receiving support from Knight Foundation, and South Arts.

She is one of six 2022 Knight New Work winners with 'In my center, a cyborg seed', a live audiovisual performance set to premiere in 2024.

Roxana received her BFA in Dance from New World School of the Arts (Miami, Florida).



Image courtesy the artist.

Daniel Arturo Almeida

Daniel Arturo Almeida (b. 1992. Caracas, Venezuela) is a cultural producer and artist working through photography, installation, archiving, and public engagement. His practice chronicles intimate and collective stories that shape belief systems and hierarchies of power in the Americas. The product of generational migrations, Almeida researches images, music, anecdotes, and documents portraying national pride, nostalgia, and collective amnesia. He has exhibited in The U.S.A in various institutions, galleries, and festivals, including A.I.R. Gallery, Tiger Strikes Asteroids, La Salita Project, Columbia Teachers College, Satellite Art Show, and the SVA Chelsea Galleries, among others. Almeida's work has been reviewed in Hyperallergic and The Daily Lazy.

Almeida holds an MFA in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts (2020) and a BFA in Art and Art History from Florida International University (2017). He currently lives and works in Miami, FL.

He is the Young Artists Initiative instructor at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami.



Image courtesy the artist.



Lesson I

*Critical Thinking
and Embodiment in
Performance-making*



Apuntes Americanos, Performance, 2022, Alianza Cultural Francesa de Miraflores, Lima, Peru. Photo by Paulo Cezar Alves

Apuntes Americanos investigates the origins of Eurocentric views of ancestral Peru, focusing on accounts by French explorers from the 19th century and archaeology as a symbolic process of the study of cultural processes. Utilizing performance and virtual landscapes to embody ancestral cosmovision and iconography, apuntes americanos seeks to unearth and study the material remains of this period of cultural extraction with the objective of exploring time, territoriality and decolonization.



Apuntes Americanos, Performance, 2022, Alianza Cultural Francesa de Miraflores, Lima, Peru. Photo by Paulo Cezar Alves

Overview

Even though I received formal training as a dancer and choreographer, I often alternate and mix the use of performance, video, installation and collage. My recent body of work originates from artistic and bibliographical research into ancestral cosmology from Peru and decolonial observation of my heritage's past, present and future. I am also concerned with drawing connections between healing rituals and delicate atmospheres to disarm power structures.

In this lesson I will share the creative process behind my choreographic and performative process, which can be used by interdisciplinary artists as a road map to explore incorporating performance into their work.

Critical Thinking and Embodiment in Performance-making

My performances are presented on stage, in film, as part of installations and at times, as a result of collaborative processes with other artists' works. The foundation of my recent on stage performances have included long and extensive research periods involving selected reading, conversations with historians and artistic residencies, followed by exploratory phases with interdisciplinary teams of artists. This framework grew out of the need to absorb thematic knowledge, to question and think critically through the body and through performance.

My exploratory process can be broken down in chapters that don't follow a particular order: bibliographic and artistic research, improvisation, collage, writing, voice notes and exchanges with other artists.

- Bibliographic and Artistic Research

I select books and essays that I find relevant to what I am interested in exploring. I may start with one or two and may end up with tenths of material sources. I draw specific quotes, pieces of information and images that ring with me, either causing interest, awe, sadness, curiosity, contradiction, etc. This collection of images and texts may prompt me into script writing, moving in the studio, testing ideas on other dancers, etc.

- Improvisation

Improvising is key for me. It may take a long time to arrive at the actual performance material but the body of improvisations always build complex, multidimensional and meaningful movement and choreography. Even if I am working with a team of dancers, I find it important to improvise by myself with the materials we are developing. To generate movement, I may use prompts, sound, text and/or movement patterns and gestures that may come up during rehearsals. Working with dancers who enjoy improvisation is key for me.

- Collage

For a recent performance, for which I was studying iconography, I tasked myself with collaging to find new iconography. I used magazine cut-outs on paper, as well as digital composting. This brought about not only a new body of work but also materialized two-dimensional works that advanced my artistic research. I also use collaging to bring together narratives, images, sounds, feelings and spiritual connections onto the rehearsal studio.

Critical Thinking and Embodiment in Performance-making

- Writing

I keep Google docs with notes about images I would like to explore, script ideas, reflections, quotes from reading materials, pre and post rehearsal notes, dreams, etc. These evolve quickly in many different directions and are very messy. As I move towards the completion of the work, I find I need them less but at the beginning and middle phases, they are crucial to me.

- Voice notes

I find voice notes useful. I go on walks and record ideas and images that come to mind. I have recorded lines that have ended up in the text of particular works and I have also arrived at important conclusions that justify choreographic choices.

- Exchanges with artists

Either through improvisations with dancers or image explorations with other artists, certain realizations or aha moments happen that would not take place without the interaction with them.

The images are of my performance *Apuntes Americanos*. *Apuntes Americanos* investigates the origins of Eurocentric views of ancestral Peru, focusing on accounts by French explorers from the 19th century and archaeology as a symbolic process of the study of cultural processes.

Utilizing performance and virtual landscapes to embody ancestral cosmovision and iconography, *apuntes americanos* seeks to unearth and study the material remains of this period of cultural extraction with the objective of exploring time, territoriality and decolonization.

In the images, dancer Brianna Mendez performs a duet with a vase that symbolizes what a 'huaco' evokes in me. A 'huaco' is an ancestral artifact. This solo was about fighting, reconciling, nurturing, devaluing and healing her identity.



Apuntes Americanos, Performance, 2022, Alianza Cultural Francesa de Miraflores, Lima, Peru. Photo by Paulo Cezar Alves

Vocabulary

Improvisation:

Dance improvisation is the process of spontaneously creating movement. Improv prompts can be used to warm-up, generate specific movement, resolutions or anything at all. Improvisations allow you to internalize sensations, information, feelings and images that you then can use in a number of ways. Later comes the editing and the shaping of the material generated through improvisation.

Motif:

A distinctive and reoccurring gesture or movement used to provide a theme and unify ideas.

Movement phrase:

A brief sequence of related movements that have a sense of continuity and artistic or rhythmic completion.

Artists References

- Yvonne Rainer
- Trisha Brown
- Steve Paxton

Activity I

When exploring movement vocabulary that you would like to incorporate in a work about any theme, idea or issue such as 'X', you can define prompts to create gestures that speak to 'X'. For the sake of this example, X is the idea of chaos.

- Move as if there is a world of chaos around you, and you represent stillness
- Use your upper body, head, shoulders, rib cage and arms in chaotic ways while sitting down on the floor and keeping the rest of your body still
- Make hand movements that tell a story about the the end of chaos

Record yourself and/or others doing all of the above and think of possible ways of incorporating the video or the actions into the work.

You can use similar prompts to ideas and issues that interest you. If movement is new to you, here is another suggestion:

- Explore falling without falling. Let your body almost fall but without hitting the ground. Repeat it many times, in slow motion, with heavy breaths, facing different directions and ultimately falling to the ground like a leaf carried by the wind.
- Record yourself and find moments that would like to further develop. You may think of what colors or textures you would like to wear to record yourself or if you would like to incorporate the use of an object, ie, a chair to lean on, a wall or a stick.
- Explore manipulating digital captures of these moments through video and/or projections
- Write text that can accompany these moments - the text can be coming from a narrator's voice, about a political event that has to do with 'falling' or any text that derives from the piece you are working on. The text can be written, projected or be the audio.



Lesson II

*Poetics of Installation:
Research and Planning*



Matriarcas (Lilo) from the installation series, Saludos a Nadie. Image courtesy the artist.

Overview

My installations function as “walking simulations*” featuring a collection of artworks montaged into thematic and theatrical sets evidencing personal and collective stories through myths and archival footage.

My research and decision making follows a set of parameters to ensure that the work is structured and define an editing criteria that helps me tune the piece to achieve my vision. In this lesson I share my approach for anyone interested in installation and structuring a layout of their own creative process.

*A walking simulator, often abbreviated as walking sim, is an adventure game focused mainly on movement and interacting with the environment. Typically lacking combat mechanics and traditional success or failure outcomes, these games may occasionally incorporate puzzle elements.



Saludos a Nadie. Image courtesy the artist.

Saludos A Nadie (Send Regards to No One) is a tabernacle for the digital afterlife of vanishing stories using found footage, experimental image editing processes, and two-dimensional sculptural artifacts. The project re-contextualizes traditions and photographs illustrating my family's parties, music, labor, official portraits, and leisure. By 1955, My maternal grandparents had fled to Caracas, Venezuela, from the Canary Islands during the onset of the Fascist Francoist regime. Six decades later, the next two generations emigrated to eight different latitudes as a result of the 2010's Venezuelan exodus under the Chavista totalitarian regime. Their collective stories portray the genesis of a cross-generational itinerant family and the spaces they created, inhabited, and ultimately abandoned.

Poetics of Installation: Research and Planning

My process is divided into seven stages:

1. Research
2. Conceptualization
3. Site Study
4. Material and medium experimentation
5. Re-conceptualization
6. Edition
7. Curation

◦ Research:

As a standard practice, I maintain a log encompassing various topics, phenomena, events, and material observations that serve as sources of inspiration or evoke interest, confusion, or humor. This log constitutes the foundation of my research. However, only a select few entries from this log progress into in-depth investigations. Once I identify a robust anchor for my research, I initiate the process of mapping a collection of concepts, interpretations, mythologies and dichotomies inspired by that theme.

◦ Conceptualization:

During this stage, the focus is on articulating the message and intentions behind the work. I define my intended audiences and consider the different levels of context and familiarity they might have with the subject matter and core ideas. It is crucial to start defining the desired experience and engagement for each audience. Additionally, I brainstorm the initial set of materials and mediums that will be employed.

◦ Material and Medium Experimentation:

The choice of materials and mediums plays a pivotal role in facilitating a dialogue among all elements within the installation. This phase provides an opportunity to use material specificity and metaphor to challenge forms and preconceived notions related to the subject. By generating poetic gestures, I expand the scope of my investigation, allowing the viewer to encounter ideas in a distinct and defamiliarized format. This exploration encourages me to "let the work talk back to me" and relinquish control to comprehend the work materially rather than theoretically.

Poetics of Installation: Research and Planning

- Re-conceptualization:

Following the evaluation of material experimentation results, a new set of questions and potential avenues emerge, prompting a reconsideration of the concept and intended viewer experience. This phase allows me to establish a strategy to realize my artistic vision.

- Edition:

Once concept and vision are refined, I revisit the components of the installation to understand what is working. This stage proves to be one of the most challenging, requiring a critical examination of the work to identify areas that are effective and those that need adjustment or exclusion. Opening up the studio space to others during this stage can be advantageous, as it prompts me to consider ideas beyond my own and contributes to a more comprehensive evaluation of the project.

- Curation:

I view curation as an elemental practice within installation, extending our decision-making process beyond the studio to stewarding the presentation of work in a public setting. Consequently, we bear the responsibility of considering how viewers will engage with the work and ensuring accessibility for individuals with different needs. This final stage of creation serves as the syntax of the installation, where lighting, sound, and spatial distribution are pivotal in presenting the piece in the most authentic manner possible.

The structure outlined above is not necessarily a recipe but a strategy that reflects my creative process and the coding of my work. Everyone approaches their work differently, and I believe it is key to find a structure that fits one's specific needs. When I established a structure for myself, it helped me understand what I should or shouldn't do at any given moment in the process.



Espejo Migrante (Migrant Mirror) from the installation series, Saludos a Nadie. Image courtesy the artist.

Vocabulary

Material Specificity:

Material specificity refers to the unique and inherent qualities of a material that contribute to the meaning and impact of a work of art or design. Artists and creators often choose materials with specific characteristics, textures, and properties to convey their intended message or evoke certain emotions.

Mythologies (Barthes Semiological Device):

"Mythologies" in the context of Roland Barthes refers to his collection of essays where he analyzes various aspects of contemporary culture and popular phenomena. Barthes uses semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, to uncover the hidden meanings and cultural significance behind everyday objects, practices, and media representations. The term highlights how certain elements in society become mythologized, acquiring symbolic meanings beyond their immediate, apparent functions.

Defamiliarize:

Is a concept often associated with Russian Formalist literary theory, involves presenting familiar things in an unfamiliar or strange way to encourage a fresh perspective and deeper understanding. This technique aims to challenge habitual perceptions and provoke intellectual engagement. By defamiliarizing elements of our daily experience, artists and writers seek to disrupt automatic recognition and prompt viewers or readers to reconsider the ordinary in a new light.

Walking Simulation:

A walking simulator, often abbreviated as walking sim, is an adventure game focused mainly on movement and interacting with the environment. Typically lacking combat mechanics and traditional success or failure outcomes, these games may occasionally incorporate puzzle elements.

Artists References

- Hugh Hayden
- Jennifer Wen Ma
- Guadalupe Maravilla
- Nari Ward

Activity II

This activity is meant to provide a template structure for artists who want to make installation artworks and would benefit from having prompts to aid in their experimentation and exploration with this medium:

- Identify a topic, theme, aesthetic concern or material you would like to explore through installation.
- Write a short paragraph stating the thesis of your research. This paragraph is only for you and it would help you in your decision making as you progress into the production of the work. Your thesis should make note of:
 - Your theme or subject matter.
 - Your intention making the work.
 - The intended audience of this work
 - The overall experience you want your audience to experience
- Describe the context of the site where your piece is going to be presented. Make sure to carry some of these questions as you describe the site:
 - Is it a private or a public venue?
 - What is your relation to this site and it's location?
 - Does the installation speak to the context and the community where the exhibition venue is located?
- Note the physical characteristics of the space:
 - How tall is the ceiling?
 - What is the composition of the walls and floors? Can they be drilled if needed?
 - How long is the work going to be displayed?
 - Is technology is important to your piece: Are there outlets? Where are they located?
 - Does your work need technological upkeep? What is your plan?
- Reference your thesis paragraph and site description to make a list of materials that both align with your vision and can be realistically accomplished in the exhibition space.
- Once you make the list, allow yourself time to explore and experiment in depth with your chosen materials and concept. Be observant of unexpected outcomes and your interpretation and response to such. Think of how these materials reverberate with your concept and how they can even enhance its meaning and create potential metaphors.
- Make note of what is working for you and what is not.
- Once exploration concludes, revisit your initial thesis and make any amendments necessary to reflect your current understanding of the work.

Activity II

- Edit your work by using your revisited thesis and site description. These questions can help you identify which element need to be adjusted:
 - Is the work conveying the ideas of your thesis?
 - Is the work speaking to your desired audience?
 - Is the work feasible to install on the site?
- Before you arrive in the space for install, it is ideal to have a clear understanding of how you want the work to be seen:
 - What type of illumination is required?
 - How are viewers going to encounter and traverse the work?
 - Is there sound? If so, how is it heard?
- Lastly, write a 250 words narrative paragraph describing the installation.

Credits

The culmination of our research and the development of this curriculum have been made possible through the invaluable support of the US Latinx Forum. Specifically, we extend our heartfelt appreciation for selecting our proposal as part of the Artist Mentorship Program in 2023. The expansive approach taken by the program allowed us to tailor the curriculum to the unique needs of our artistic practices, fostering a collaborative and enriching environment.