

vincent price ART MUSEUM

PRESS RELEASE

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Nao Bustamante: Soldadera

May 16 – August 1, 2015

Small Gallery

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 16, 4 to 6 p.m.

Vincent Price Art Museum presents *Soldadera*, a multi-media exhibition that marks artist Nao Bustamante's solo West Coast museum debut. *Soldadera* presents a variety of projects inspired by the women who fought during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). *Soldadera* is curated by Jennifer Doyle, Professor of English at the University of California Riverside. The exhibition *Soldadera* opens on May 16 and continues through August 1, 2015. The opening reception will take place on Saturday, May 16, 4:00–6:00 p.m., and is free to all.

This exhibition is a creative engagement with *soldaderas* (Spanish for "female soldiers") as imagined figures, and as actual women with their own histories. Today, we know the *soldadera* through a romantic tradition that idealizes her: in song and on the silver screen she is celebrated for traditionally feminine values (for her beauty, for example, or for supportive labor such as cooking and maintaining the camp). In this exhibition, Bustamante deploys a methodology she calls "speculative re-enactment." She asks: How can we reach across time to know the *soldadera's* experience of the past? How do we bring her into the here and now, to experience her future?

The artist's search for the *soldadera's* wisdom culminated in a unique pilgrimage: Bustamante traveled to Guadalajara, Mexico, to meet 127-year-old *Soldadera* Leandra Becerra Lumbreras, the last survivor of the Mexican Revolution, and notably the oldest person in the world. Their transformative meeting inspired work that will be featured in this exhibition, as well as an ongoing documentary project. Leandra, at times referred to as *La Abuela del Mundo*, passed over to the next life on March 19, 2015. We mourn her loss and are grateful for her contributions to the *Soldadera* project.

Bustamante creates hybrid works that hover over the line between fact and fiction, between the past and the future, and engage the *soldadera's* capacity, as a figure, to signify vulnerability and violence. The artist places women inside historical scenes from which they are normally elided, and also imagines the *soldadera* protected by contemporary combat materials. Bustamante's historically appropriate, period-specific dresses made from Kevlar® add a sculptural element to this exhibition. Kevlar® is a modern material used in personal protection products such as combat helmets and ballistic vests. The artist fired shots at one of her frocks using weapons and ammunition appropriate to the period of the Mexican Revolution. This "fighting costume" will be on view, displayed as an artifact of a fantastical battle. Finally, several of the dresses will be featured in a live performance during the opening of the exhibition.

Soldadera will also include the debut of a cinematic installation inspired by Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished film, *¡Que Viva México!* (1930–32). The only chapter of that work that Eisenstein never finished shooting is a lightly scripted segment called "*Soldadera*." This installation, in essence, "finishes" Eisenstein's project.

In Los Angeles, some family histories intersect with the narrative of the Mexican Revolution, and some revolutionaries lived in exile within the region. *Soldadera* is a unique engagement with this history. Bustamante invites the spirits of that past into contemporary conversations about gender, vulnerability, and the ongoing struggle for change. Through this regional specificity the exhibition also anticipates the theme of the Getty Foundation's upcoming 2017 research initiative, *Pacific Standard Time: Latin America/Los Angeles*.

About the artist:

Nao Bustamante studied New Genres at the San Francisco Art Institute where she earned her MFA in 2001. Currently, she holds the position of Associate Professor of New Media and Live Art at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. She has exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Sundance Festival, Utah; and the Kiasma Museum of Helsinki, Finland. Her movies have been shown at Outfest in Los Angeles; Mix in New York City; Sundance International Film Festival; among many other festivals. Bustamante was a Benson Research Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin in 2013.

Guest Curator:

The exhibition is guest curated by Jennifer Doyle, Professor of English at the University of California Riverside and author of *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. Doyle is also Managing Director of Human Resources Los Angeles, an all-volunteer experimental art space in Chinatown. *Soldadera* is supported by Queer Lab at UC Riverside, by the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts, and by KCET Artbound.

Public Programs:

- Saturday, May 16, 4 t o 6 p.m.

Opening reception with live performance

- Friday, May 22, 12 p.m.

Walkthrough with curator Jennifer Doyle

Jennifer Doyle will lead a conversational tour of the exhibition, and discuss the artist's work with UCR's special collections archive of materials pertaining to the Mexican Revolution. Participants will be encouraged to share their experiences of Bustamante's *Soldadera*.

- Saturday, June 20, 2 p.m.

Walkthrough with curator Jennifer Doyle

- Saturday, July 18, 1 to 3 p.m.

Conversations with the Soldadera

Join the artist, curator and area writers in a forum exploring the issues raised by Bustamante's exhibition. Throughout this exhibition, short essays about *Soldadera* will be published on KCET's website [Artbound](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/) (<http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/>). Join some of these writers for a forum exploring issues engaged by the artist: the history of women's participation in the Mexican Revolution, gender and forms of resistance, and how artists not only work-through traumatic histories but also help us to imagine the possibility of better worlds.

Contact:

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Hours: Tue. Wed. Fri. Sat. 12:00 – 4:00 p.m., Thu. 12:00 – 7:00 p.m.

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Admission and events are free and open to the public. Guided tours can be arranged by appointment.

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