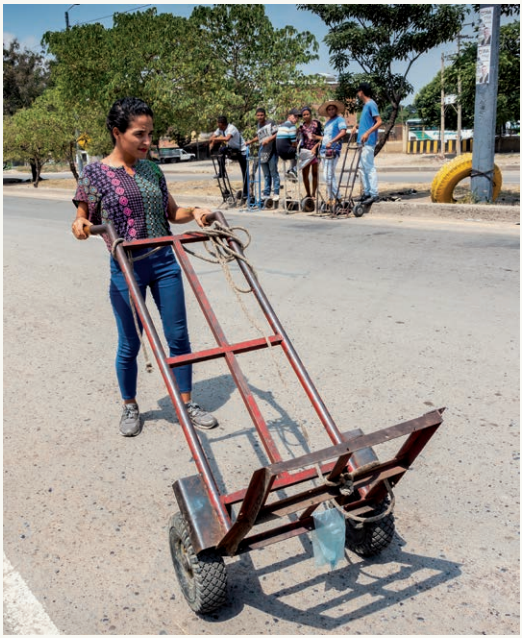
THE STONE



18.09.2020–28.03.2021

TERESA MARGOLLES

Teresa Margolles, *Carretillera sobre el Puente Internacional Simón Bolívar* [Woman handcart porter on the Simón Bolívar International Bridge], Colombia-Venezuela, 2018. Digital print on cotton paper, 180 × 140 cm. Edition: 5 + 2 A.P. Courtesy of the artist

TERESA MARGOLLES. SEMANTICS OF NEED

Imma Prieto

What does it mean to go from *carretillera*, a handcart porter, to *trochera*? Quite likely, many of us are unfamiliar with the meaning of the second word; yet it is not a question of rhetoric, it denotes resignation. The question strikes us when we approach the exhibition "The Stone"; it looms large when one lives in a context that is as "hot" as many of the border zones are today.

Cúcuta is a city on the border between Venezuela and Colombia. It is a territory that has turned into a symbol of contemporary evil; a suffocating place, in which to speak of human rights is to appeal to fiction. Teresa Margolles (Culiacán, Sinaloa, 1963) sheds light on many of the issues that plague contemporary international politics: class struggle, migration, gender, contraband… In short, a reality stained with blood.

Margolles began the project in Cúcuta in 2017, immediately before the humanitarian emergency that became manifest in 2019 began to unfold; this allowed her to follow and take into account the changes in the conditions of work and survival in La Parada (Colombia), the neighborhood that borders with San Antonio del Táchira (Venezuela). In the course of those two years, the artist travelled to the area five times; on each occasion, she was able to pinpoint the changes in the relationships between men and women, as well as between Venezuelans and Colombians. In these works, she puts into focus this period, in which the hostile conditions gained ground on life. As in all her projects, Margolles needs to become involved in the territory she is working on; to observe, to see, to understand. As the days go by, the first meetings occur, the first conversations spring up; new people to work with appear naturally,

never planned before arrival. Margolles lives together with the people who are not striving to live, but to survive.

Every city has its codes, some brought about by the mixture of history, politics, economics, identity and, let us not forget, need. Cúcuta has its own idiosyncrasy: the smoke and the heat, the thirst and the storms, the exhaustion and the constant state of alert, all determine what has turned into normal, everyday life. To speak about Cúcuta and its border zone, one must go to the Simón Bolívar International Bridge, located approximately four kilometres from the city. In cities built on national limits, borders are places of unwritten rules; of codes that reorder the space of constant threat. That is where the tension, the fear and the shootouts later arise, all familiar elements in contexts of exclusion.

Rather than think the project through in advance, Teresa Margolles acts with the people. She intervenes reality to establish new, subtle gestures which allow for inclusion and togetherness, for another type of activity that also becomes habitual; activity on the threshold of dignity, which continues to emphasize the value and integrity of many human beings for whom being able to choose is not an option.

In those first weeks in Cúcuta, Margolles observed, studied the terrain in which the bodies are individual groupings wandering about in unlawful permissiveness. In the turmoil, women's bodies are isolated, incommunicado. It is there that the artist's *in situ* action brings about a new state and a new reality.

Many of the women who lived (and continue to live) on the border had little communication with one other. By listening and accompanying them, Margolles not only gains their trust, she creates a context in which mutual loyalty, the support and acknowledgement of one another, may arise. In other words, a context for empowerment from absolute fragility; a fragility exacerbated by the existing environment and supplanted by the force of the women's spirit of survival.

Thus, Margolles defines a new territory that springs from a piercing reflection; a triangular space where each of the vertices corresponds to a present-day debt: border, work, women. A triad that reveals the condition of vulnerability in a situation that affects all who live there, although not all live in equal conditions. The selection of works presented at Es Baluard Museu reveals the connections between the three elements and brings out the issue that must be considered autonomously: the work that millions of women have been doing on the borders, and how to deal with a reality that aggravates their vulnerability.

The exhibition underlines the importance of resignification, of taking into account the sociopolitical reality and the existing inequality with respect to gender. That is why the approach to the exhibition project is one of tension and contrast, going from voices to silence and from iconoclasm to the images, to reach the movement and the final action, accompanied by the women's defiant gazes.

Almost in darkness, the testimonies of some of the women who identify as *trocheras*[1] take us into their private lives. All differences considered, hearing them in a darkened space lets us into the invisibility in which they live: darkness like that of the reality of night-time in which crossing the bridge may be easier, but also more dangerous. And invisibility because their existence on the border is reduced to serving as the last resort of transport. Their voices recount how, in better days, they were *carretilleras*: that is to say, they had handcarts to carry all sorts of goods (basic necessities, food, even human beings). Some also recall how in different, not-so-distant, and yet utopic times, they worked at jobs accepted as part of normal life. Their stories carry

1. *Trochero/a* [masculine and feminine forms]: a person who carries merchandise or people from one place to another. This type of transport may be legal or not, depending on the specific border location.

echoes and sighs, reality and wishful thinking; but, above all, strength, an iron will to carry on.

Leaving behind the voices, we return to the bodies in silence. Their gazes inescapably meet ours, as does the 30-kilogram stone suspended from the ceiling that gives the exhibition its title. A space governed by tension and the challenge: *Look at me! I can do it, I am still here, despite all.* The presence of the bodies and the gazes leads us to the necessary, crucial questions: When did merchandise become inseparable from the human body? When did labor power come to embody it?

> "Not only is labor power a commodity unlike any other (the only possible term of comparison being money), but the markets in which it is exchanged are peculiar. This is also because the role of borders in shaping labor markets is particularly pronounced. [...] There is also a peculiar tension within the abstract commodity form inherent to labor power that derives from the fact that it is inseparable from living bodies. Unlike the case of a table, for instance, the border between the commodity form of labor power and its 'container' must continuously be reaffirmed and retraced. This is why the political and legal constitution of labor markets necessarily involves shifting regimes for the investment of power in life, which also correspond to different forms of the production of subjectivity".[2]

The last part of the exhibition brings us to action and anonymous movement. The thousands of steps coming and going between Colombia and Venezuela every day across the

2. Mezzadra, Sandro; Neilson, Brett. *La frontera como método.* Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2017, p. 39. [The translation quotes from the original book, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, 2013, p.19.]

Simón Bolívar International Bridge immerse us in this daily human mass, in this contraband of jobs, always in the plural, and the mercantile nature of contemporary society. In front of the video screen, a box full of bolivars awaits. A box of currency that, even at the time when the artist acquired it, was already devaluating at an unstoppable speed; a time when the volume of a packet of sugar occupied less than half of the volume of the bills needed to purchase it. In the period in which Margolles lived in Cúcuta, the bolivar was racing to its death and disappearance; it was a period when the national currency coexisted with the dollar, the latter, a symbol of the black market and the limitless impoverishment.

That is why the project presented at Es Baluard Museu closes with an action of which we do not know the end. At the time of writing this text, the only information we have is the following: the knowledge of the existence and origin of the box, the knowledge that the currency no longer exists, and the knowledge that thousands of people continue to cross the border endeavouring to transport objects of basic necessity, and even people.

"The Stone" recovers some of the central ideas that run through all of the artist's work. Teresa Margolles denounces the current migratory crises in an outspoken manner; she opens the debate around the work; above all, she bears witness to the vulnerability of women in any situation. She establishes a semantic triangle – women, the border, and work – that gives visibility and voice, and restores the dignity of these bodies.

The exhibition invites – in this order– to listen, to accept the challenge of the women's gaze, and to consider where dignity resides. At the same time, we are able to take part in the memory of the experience. We inescapably acknowledge our co-responsibility in the situation in which millions of people in different latitudes find themselves. It is no accident that the exhibition closes with the devaluated bills in transit. Is it not the human being that suffers the

greatest devaluation and loss? Are the bills not put in circulation once again, making it manifest that they have always been tainted? Perhaps, it is the gesture that springs from the action that best reveals the need to acknowledge how colonialism reigns in contemporary societies.

> "Borders, far from serving merely to block or obstruct global passages of people, money, or objects, have become central devices for their articulation. Borders play a key role in the production of the heterogeneous time and space of contemporary global and postcolonial capitalism".[3]

And the reply:

> "I used to be a *carretillera*, now I am a *trochera*. I have to feed my family; yes, I am afraid… There goes the shooting".[4]

3. *Ibidem*, p. 13. The translation quotes from *Ibidem*, p. ix.
4. A fragment of the testimony of one of the women who recounts her experience at the Simón Bolívar International Bridge.

"I am from Yaracuy, I came here to work. I used to be a *carrochera* [handcart porter], now I am a *trochera*, everything is an effort, we run the risk of lifting weights of 30 to 60 kilos: suitcases, sacks, people […] I've fallen twice".

"I have two children; I leave them with a friend when I make the trip. Quick, you have to take advantage of the day to earn 30 to 40 thousand pesos per day. Because we have to pay rent, food, and send money to our families".

"I used to be a *carretillera*, I am a *trochera* because they closed the border. There is a big difference, it's rough working here, a big difference form one thing to the other. The suitcase you carry is heavy. On the bridge, you move fast, but it is far".

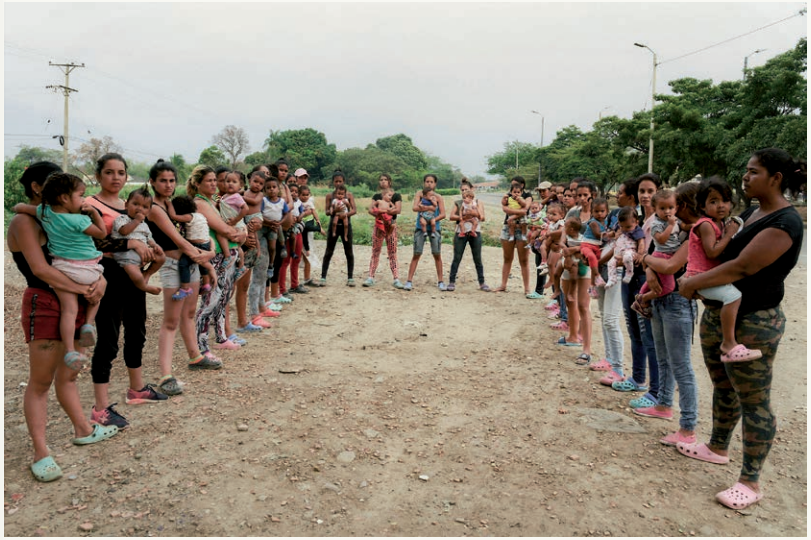
"I am from here, from La Parada, I am 25. I used to work as *carretillera* because of the border, now I have to do the *trocha* [trail], cross the river risking my life. I've gone to San Antonio and returned to La Parada in one hour. Afraid that, all of a sudden, there'll be led, as they say here, shooting. My life is at risk, I have to risk it to feed my children. And fight to survive".

"I am 19, I carry 40 or 50 kilos; I can't carry more, I can't make my body carry more weight. I am doing this right now because they closed the bridge, and we can't cross with the cart. We have to do the *trocha* [occupation], sometimes you work and sometimes you don't. We cross over on tree trunks and rocks. Happy because I'm making my money, and I help my family that's over there. I have a seven-month baby, I'm here alone, his daddy died. I work for him and for my mom".

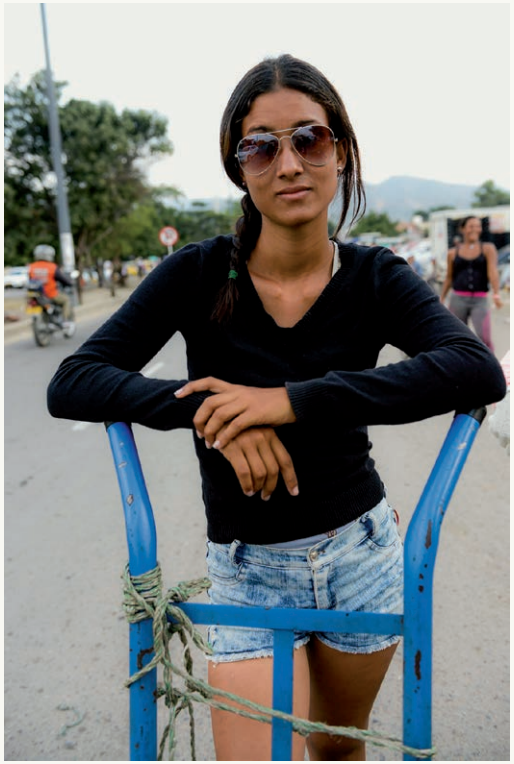
"I am Venezuelan, I'm 18, I came here to work as *carretillera*, right now I am *trochera*. We have to carry on our backs, at night everything aches; I've fallen in the river because it's not easy to cross through there with a 60-kilo suitcase on your back. We don't have guides, we have to pay over there. I want to get a decent job. Bad men have asked me out, [asking] if I want to work in prostitution, where I'll be well, I'll have food and clothes. I wouldn't do that, I came to work".

"I come from Lara, I came here to work as *carrochera*, let's start from the beginning; but after they closed the border, I left the luggage cart. So, you have to wear a cap, a long-sleeved shirt, so the sun doesn't burn you so much. And pull forward to hold the load with the harness and not fall backwards. The harness on your forehead, to hold it tight so it doesn't fall, and that's how you walk there on the *trocha* [trail]. Once I crossed at seven in the evening; yes, I was afraid, but I crossed. There are no lights, everything's dark. I can't put my pone on or anything. The neck is what suffers the most, and everything is always hurting. And yes, the fear of the night".

"My age is [...], I am a lawyer by profession, I went to the Universidad de Luz, in Maracaibo. I am a lawyer, a criminal lawyer. With every day that goes by, the need doubles, and every day, crime runs on and on; there is tremendous overcrowding in the prisons, two by two cells with 25 people deprived of their liberty [in them]. I have studied too much to become a prostitute. No, I wouldn't do that, it doesn't even enter my mind to prostitute myself as such. I came from Venezuela with my husband, to try to get on in life".

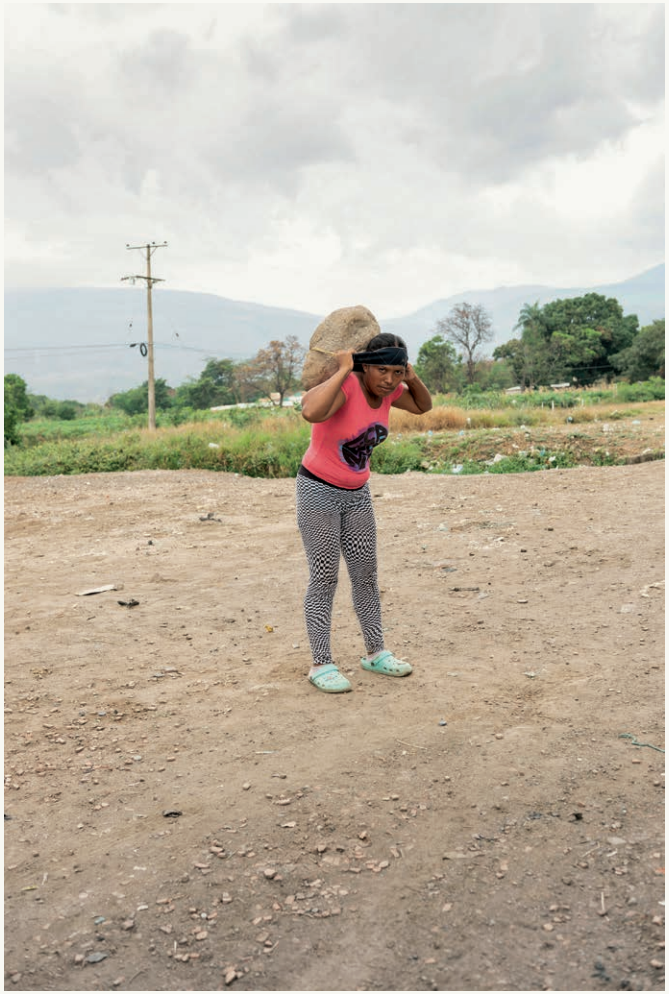


Teresa Margolles, *Trocheras con hijos* [*Trocheras* with children], 2018.
Gabinete TM Archive

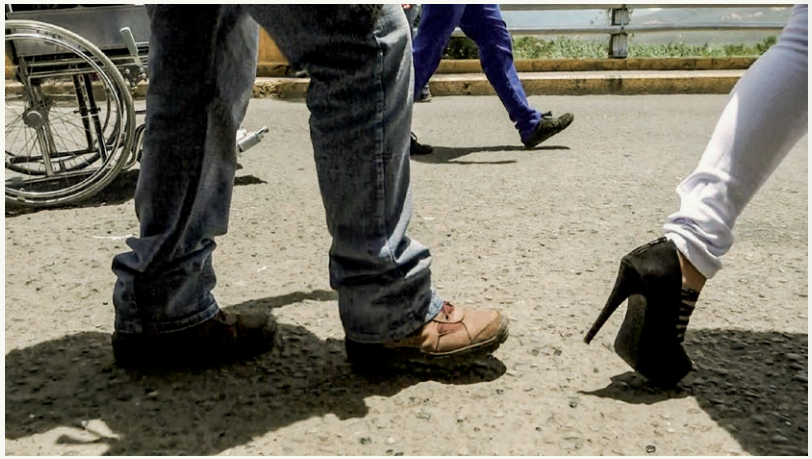


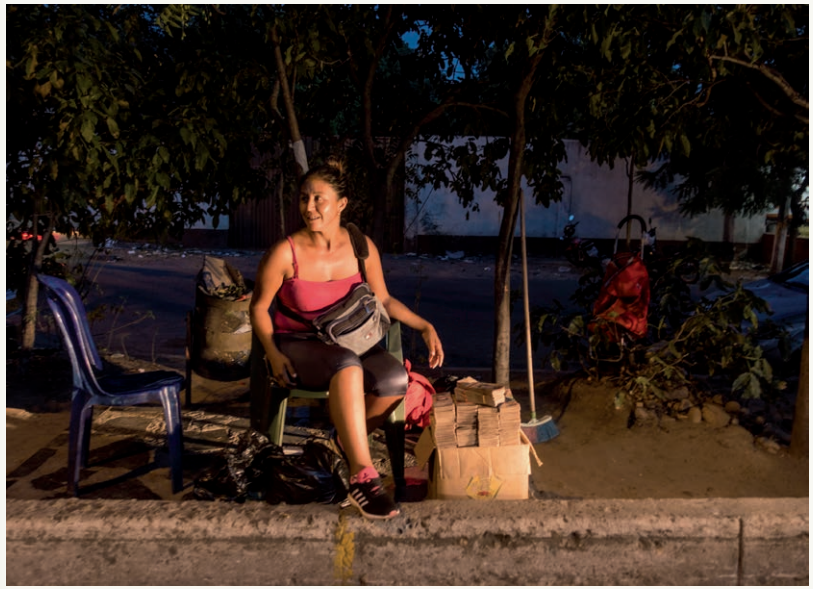
Teresa Margolles, *Carretillera sobre el Puente Internacional Simón Bolívar* [Woman handcart porter on the Simón Bolívar International Bridge], 2018. Gabinete TM Archive

Teresa Margolles, *Trochera con Piedra*
[*Trochera* with Stone], 2018.
Digital print on cotton paper, 200 × 120 cm.
Edition: 1/6 + 1 A.P. and 1 exhibition copy.
Courtesy of the artist

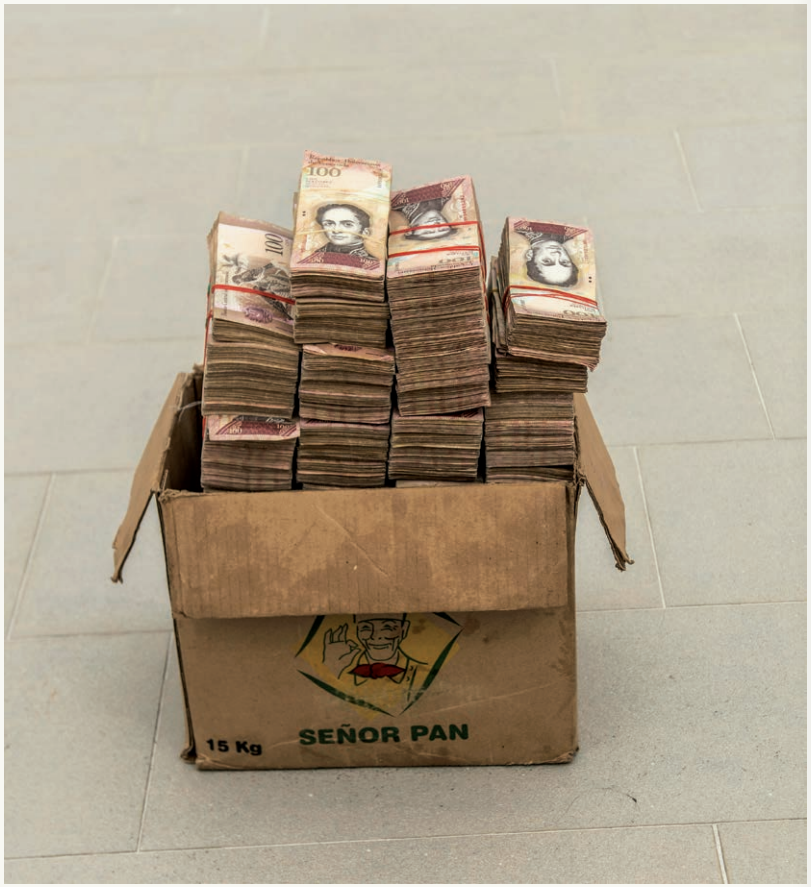


Teresa Margolles, *Puente Internacional Simón Bolívar* [Simón Bolívar International Bridge], 2018 (video still). Full HD video, stereo sound. Duration: 17' 30". Edition: 1/6 + 1 A.P. and 2 exhibition copies. Courtesy of the artist





Teresa Margolles, *Vendedora de bolivarianos sobre el Puente Internacional Simón Bolívar* [Woman Selling Bolivars on the Simón Bolívar International Bridge], 2018. Digital print on cotton paper, 70 × 100 cm. Edition: 1/6 + A.P. Courtesy of the artist



Teresa Margolles, *Señor Pan* [Mister Bread], 2020.
A box of bolivar bills equivalent to 100 dollars in September 2017. Paper bills, cardboard and rubber band, 66 × 67 × 46 cm. Courtesy of the artist

"I am 32 years old, I am Venezuelan, from Valencia. Right now, I'm in Cúcuta working as *trochera*, carrying loads, but on our backs and, on my back, I've carried 60 kilos across, I haven't carried more than that. The *trocha* is a trail full of mountains, through a river. Now they've made stone bridges. It is a path that divides Venezuela and Colombia. These days, the rate they're asking, it's 5000 pesos, it depends on the trocha [trail] you go on. There are many routes to get to the same place. Before, it was up to nine at night, now it's 24 hours a day, you are on the trocha [trail] blind, without light. The only light you have is the moon".

"I am 38 years old, I weigh 70 kilos. I used to work here selling bolivars, but that's over with. Right now, I carry suitcases and loads on the *trocha* [trail]. Before, I had a little cart or barrow, I crossed on the bridge, but because of the border closure, now I have to go on the *trocha* [trail] and walk and carry the weight, up to 40 kilos or 60 kilos on each trip, also people who have been operated, women who recently gave birth with their babies, sure, all this needs help crossing. I believe in us".

"My daughter stayed with my mom, she is 11, I want a better life for her. I had a good post, I was the head of the prefecture of my town, I was a human rights coordinator, I was the right hand of the secretary for citizen safety, but when it all came to a head, I couldn't live in Venezuela any more. The average salary is 18000 bolivars, and that doesn't even pay for 1 kilo of cheese anymore. We had no water or light. We couldn't withdraw money, it's useless now. I brought only my passport, now you can have them sealed even if they have expired; a passport costs 350 dollars now".

"I am 39, I don't know how much I've got right now, but I'm carrying it. I believe in myself. I have four children; they help me too".

"I am 38 years old, I am from Anaco, the east of Venezuela; right now, I am *trochera*, before I was *carretillera*. I work carrying loads because there are no medicines in Venezuela. My father died. And it's all very, very rough".

"I am 20 years old, my work here is as *trochera*, carrying loads through the rivers, passing people, with the responsibility for the weight on my back and on my head, because sometimes we fall. We look for people who need our help ourselves, the *trochas* [loads], and we help them cross. We are guides for them, so that they feel safe".

Testimonies of Venezuelan women who work on the Simón Bolívar International Bridge: Osdali Aria (Yaracuy), Doralis Arias (La Victoria), Oscarlin Barreto (Yaracuy), Dayana Bolívar (Yaracuy), Michel Colmenares (La Parada), Daniela Contreras (Lara), Edila Flores (Lara), Emilianis García (Lara), Ariana Hurtado (Villa del Rosario), Joana Koolman (Lara), Madali Martínez (Oriente), Leniz Peña (Ciudad Bolívar), Leniz Rodríguez (Lara), Alida Rojas (Lara).

Note: the word *trochera*, which is how these women define their occupation, derives from the word *trocha*. In the present-day context of the border between Venezuela and Colombia, it has come to be used both in its original meaning of path, track, trail, and to signify the loads carried by the women and the occupation itself.

ESTORBO.
A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Eugenio Viola

> "It is not only animal species that are disappearing; so too are the words, expressions, and gestures of human solidarity. A cloak of silence has been forcibly imposed on emancipatory struggle: the struggles of women, or of the unemployed, the 'marginalized', and immigrants —the new proletarians—".
>
> Pierre-Félix Guattari[1]

The quote from the late Guattari that I chose to begin this text with was written in a context and historical moment quite distant from the current one; but it is unfortunately still relevant today, as we are witnessing, throughout the world, a number of problems connected to dramatic mass migration, and resultant xenophobic reactions. The "condition of the immigrant" is what connects the experiences and the statuses of millions of people across boundaries, nations, genders, languages, classes, races, and religions. Despite the impact of immigration on a planetary scale, and its potential for political power, the immigrant remains the embodiment of the oppressed, exploited, and marginalized.

If it is true that the artist is a sensitive social barometer, often able to predict events, this is particularly accurate in the case of Teresa Margolles. The Mexican artist has been working on the Colombian-Venezuelan border since 2017, before the surging humanitarian emergency we are witnessing as we organize this exhibition, and as I am

1. Guattari, Pierre-Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by Chris Turner in *New Formations 8*, Summer 1989, p. 135.

writing this text.[2] As the reader probably can't imagine, Margolles discussed this project with me long before we planned to present it as my inaugural exhibition as Chief Curator here at MAMBO. At that time, I wasn't even planning to move to Colombia, although I wished to work with this artist again, whose research and commitment I deeply admire and respect.[3]

Since the nineties, Teresa Margolles has become internationally known for her work, in which she addresses and fights fiercely against the endemic violence that holds Mexico in its grip. She concentrates on phenomena linked to processes of marginalization, exclusion, and injustice, such as drug trafficking, femicide, and violent deaths. As is widely known, her interest in subjects related to death and violence derives, in part, from her medical training, from her work in a morgue in Mexico City.

Working across installation, sculpture, photography, video and performance, Margolles has developed, over the years, a unique, restrained language, with which she is able to speak for her silenced subjects. In fact, her main thrust is that the socially underprivileged cannot relinquish their social role even after death.[4]

2. In 2017, Teresa Margolles was invited by La Fundación Centro Cultural Pilar de Brahim "El Pilar" in Cúcuta, within the framework of the BIENALSUR. Afterwards, she returned four additional times in order to shape this project.
3. I had already worked with Teresa Margolles on the occasion of the second edition of *Corpus. Art in Action* (MADRE Museum, Naples, 2010) a festival of performance which presented, that year, site-specific performances by Tania Bruguera, Regina José Galindo, Maria José Arjona, and Teresa Margolles. See <https://www.eugenioviola.com/corpus-art-in-action>.
4. I have already written about these issues connected to Teresa Margolles's work in "57 cuerpos", an essay included in the artist monograph published on the occasion of her retrospective at the PAC Milan. See Margolles, Teresa. *Ya Basta Hijos de Puta*. Edited by Diego Sileo. Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2018, p.172-79.

Nevertheless, the central element characterizing her modus operandi is the disconcerting short-circuit between a reassuring surface minimalism, and content that relates to death in a brutal way and without symbolic mediation. This effect is undoubtedly assured by the specific materials that Teresa chooses to build her uncomfortable work: water used to wash the bodies of those who have been brutally killed, soil steeped in blood, clothing soaked with body fluids. This is the artist's provocative way of further challenging the perception of the viewers, who are directly exposed to the social conflicts and the contradictions of real life and are forcefully drawn into the invisible specter of death.

Should one linger solely over the use of materials, or their description, without seeing the works, then certainly one would not appreciate the rigor, the imperturbable formal cleanliness of her installations. Almost as a counterbalance, the brutality and violence linked to the materials she selects to build her works are transformed (in the formal elaboration stage of the work itself) into austere objects. Moreover, it is not by chance that, in its exquisitely formal characteristics, her work can seem influenced by minimalism: "It is a form of perverse minimalism. Historical minimalism has no emotions. However, all of my works are filled with emotions. People are better at concentrating when faced with minimalist forms".[5] Beyond its formal appearance, her practice, in terms of content, is closer to the experiences linked to political and social issues that have been asserting themselves in Europe and the Americas as a whole, during the course of "the short

5. Margolles quoted in Gygax, Raphael. *Extra Bodies* —Über *den Einsatz des, anderen Körpers' in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2017, p. 188.

twentieth century".[6] Artists have become adamant reactionaries to unjust political actions, speaking out on behalf of human rights and against oppression, contributing to LGBTQIA rights, feminism, pacifism, immigration rights, and rights for people of colour. In times of crisis and conflict, artists are always among the first to protest against authoritarian tendencies and propose alternative ways for relating to social issues.

Margolles denounces the excessive violence, often referencing the tragic news chronicles of her country, Mexico; but she universalizes it through considering it inherent to the excessive social, political, and cultural violence that afflicts contemporary society. The artist usually returns to the places where the abuse took place in order to "reenact" the events, starting from their traces, thereby triggering a process of rapprochement from the symbolic to the real, able to stimulate, in the viewer, a physical and emotional reaction to the experience of death, violence, and loss in general. This is the conscious mechanism that supports Teresa Margolles's practice —one that is constantly suspended between presence and absence, singularity and plurality, visibility and invisibility. For this reason, bodies, bodily fluids, blood, or suture threads, are not merely presented in their materiality as ready-made, but employed as an indexical sign. This means that the bodies or the traces of death are seen first as the work's media, and second, as a sign of intersubjectivity, one that establishes a relational bond between the artist and the viewer, and which includes an emotional reaction that becomes a linguistic and behavioral act.

"Estorbo" [Obstruction], is Teresa Margolles's first institutional solo exhibition in Colombia. It comprises a

6. For a more extensive discussion of the term, see Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. New York: Vintage, 1996.

new body of work and an urban project the artist specifically conceived for this exhibition, which deals with the dramatic diasporic migration currently occurring on the border between Venezuela and Colombia.

Historically speaking, Latin America has already seen mass exoduses. In the decades after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, about 1.4 million Cubans fled the island, many heading for the United States, where they transformed the social and ethnic fabric of Miami. In the 1980s and 1990s, more than one million people —a quarter of the population— were displaced during El Salvador's civil war. After the leftist firebrand Hugo Chávez became president in 1999, thousands of Venezuelans —especially from the upper classes— moved out of the country. However, the current exodus is far more dramatic, and we can consider it one of the largest mass migrations in the continent's history. The number of Venezuelans fleeing economic and political crisis in their homeland has accelerated dramatically, reaching a total of about three million since 2015, the United Nations has announced. The new figures show that about one in twelve of the population has now left the country, driven to escape violence, hyperinflation, and shortages of food and medicine.[7]

Colombia has sheltered more than one million Venezuelans in the past eighteen months, causing growing alarm in the country. About three thousand more arrive each day, and the Bogotá government says four million could be living here by 2021.

The political crisis appears to be reaching a boiling point amid growing efforts by the opposition to unseat the Socialist president: Nicolás Maduro. Venezuela's long-running political crisis began a new chapter on January 23, 2019, when Juan Guaidó, a young opposition leader, declared

7. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/venezuela>, accessed March 15, 2019.

himself the legitimate interim president. He was quickly recognized by regional powers, including Brazil, Colombia, and the United States, and anti-government demonstrations ensued, leaving many convinced that Maduro's fall was imminent —at the time of this writing, he is still in power. Recently, the relationship between Colombia and Venezuela has become more delicate as Maduro broke relations with Colombia and blocked the border crossings after Guaidó's frustrated attempt, on February 23, to bring in humanitarian aid, an initiative that ended in an outbreak of violence. The nationwide blackout that struck Venezuela on March 7 caused chaos across the country, paralyzing airports and hospitals, disabling phone and internet service, and shutting down water supplies. After a strained forty-eight hours for Venezuela, in which almost the entire country was affected, thousands of demonstrators turned out to champion their respective leaders, both of whom claim the presidency. Experts blame the massive power outage on poor maintenance, incompetence, and corruption. However, Maduro and his backers claim it was part of a US plot to destroy Chávez's leftist Bolivarian revolution and force him from power. We still don't know what will happen, but we hope the Venezuelan population will quickly wake up from this long nightmare.

These dramatic events have consequently shifted Margolles's project. Many Venezuelans escaped to Colombia over the Simón Bolívar International Bridge, the starting point of the project, which was dealing with, as the artist says, "what was happening on and underneath it".[8] This small bridge is about three hundred meters long and seven meters wide. It straddles the Rio Táchira in the eastern Andes, a river that snakes along the border between Colombia and Venezuela. Teresa was fascinated by the similarities

8. Conversation with Teresa Margolles, via Skype, November 12, 2018.

between Cúcuta (Colombia) and Ciudad Juárez (Mexico), another city located on a river and on a problematic (and violent) border, where the artist has been researching narcotrafficking since 2009, when she represented Mexico at the 53rd Venice Biennale with the subversive ¿De *qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?* [What Else Could We Talk About?].[9] Now that the bridge is closed, Venezuelans are trying to enter Colombia through other routes.

The massive scale of the Venezuelan exodus is being compared to the flow of Syrians into Western Europe in 2015.[10] And, just as in that crisis, countries overwhelmed by the flood of new arrivals are beginning to bar their doors. The crisis is extremely acute here in Colombia, where three thousand troops are fanning out across the 1,400-mile border to contain the influx of Venezuelans escaping a collapsing economy and an increasingly repressive socialist regime. Colombian authorities are now launching operations in which dozens of Venezuelans are captured and expelled daily.

In this exhibition the viewer confronts unsettling works that refer to the traumatic experience of escape, along with the traces of what people have left behind. The look of the show, as always in Teresa Margolles's work, is minimalist, yet her deceptively quiet works raise more questions than answers: How do we remember the victims of violence and trauma? How can we deal with loss and displacement? How can we challenge the disappearance of bodies? How

9. In this work, Margolles exposed Mexican drug trafficking as a crime, outlining a universe catechized by the demons of drug cartels that do the implausible and punish any attempt to rebel against them.

10. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/03/02/feature/i-cant-go-back-venezuelans-are-fleeing-their-crisis-torn-country-en-masse/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cabf0b186b6a>, recuperat l'11 d'abril de 2019.

do we deal with the "problem" of immigrants? How do we pursue politics connected to a coexistence of differences? These are all urgent and tricky questions connected to this exhibition, that seem even more relevant against the backdrop of recent events.

"Estorbo" [Obstruction],[11] the provocative title of this exhibition, refers to these tricky questions. It is a term often used by populist parties, all over the world, to blow the winds of intolerance towards a worried and insecure audience.

In recent times, a wave of support for radical right-wing policies, connected to immigration and anti-refugee positions, is gaining power in the political and social spheres, reshaping the political landscape in Europe —emblematic are the cases of Italy, France, Poland, and Hungary— as well as in the United States.

These policies, aside from regional specifics, share the same concerns: a sense of exclusive nationalism, a belief that national identity is under threat from foreign culture, a desire to sharply cut immigration, and a distrust of elites. Unfortunately, these ideas are having an unduly strong influence on mainstream parties' political agendas; they are drawing on current economic instability and societal change, demonizing immigrant integration and societal shifts as religious and ethnic diversity grows.

As the reader can imagine, it was not an easy decision to choose this confrontational and disturbing word as a title for the exhibition, but unfortunately, we are witnessing an upsurge of intolerance worldwide at every level, involving social, cultural, political, gender, and racial issues.

11. From the Latin *exturbāre*, it refers to a person or thing that annoys or bothers. An obstacle to an action, an obstruction, an impediment. In English it can also be translated as a disruption or a "nuisance."

We think that Art has to react to these attitudes, facing uncomfortable realities, sometimes disrupting them, because the most crucial point is to react; it is indifference that risks killing every sensation, every emotion. Furthermore, we firmly believe that Art has to create bridges instead of borders, and for this reason we present, in this historic moment, this unsettling exhibition.

Through an empathic process in which she researched, documented, collected, archived, and shared images, sounds, stories, objects, and clothing, Teresa Margolles analyzed general issues via individual cases while intertwining private stories with History, in order to keep them from sinking into oblivion. She shifted what is a space of social injustice, violence, and death —the Colombian-Venezuelan border— into the protected ecosystem of art. In this specific case, she shows us the difficulties, the fear, the hope, the (small and big) outbreaks of violence and injustices that happened and are still happening on this sensitive border, bringing all these different experiences into the Museum. For the urban project, we expanded it beyond the perimeters of the institution, creating a sort of "osmosis" between the interior and the exterior of the Museum. From this perspective, Teresa Margolles bears witness to all this pain and violence in order to preserve the memory of these events and to pass on their stories; to recognize their identity and thereby counteract the lack of information, the impunity of those responsible, the negligence displayed by the authorities, and the fear that engenders oblivion.

Initially we approach the works in the exhibition unaware of what they entail; we observe and read, we learn about the tragedy at hand. It is precisely at this moment that we are called on to elaborate, to reconstruct and fix, to employ a process of total and direct emotional, cognitive, and sensory engagement. In this way, viewers become both witnesses and interlocutors, victims and torturers,

innocent and guilty, outsiders and accomplices. And only then must we take on the responsibility of making a decision, of not hesitating or avoiding, of not remaining unmoved.

"The fear of refugees is connected to the broader anxiety over globalization. The distinction between fear and anxiety is illustrative of complex processes of interconnection in contemporary life", states Nikos Papastergiadis.[12] This is a complex phenomenon where: "The fear of the refugee has been internalized within an anxiety over homelessness as the new global condition. It has proved harder to address the interconnection between people who have been displaced and the growing sense of not being in control of your own sense of place. However, what is more common is the attempt to restrain a cultural panic towards global anxiety by offering a heightened defensiveness against the fear of refugees".[13]

Cultural panic over global terrorism and the growing awareness of the turbulent patterns of globalization provides further ballast for the government's emerging policies on national security and border control. It is what Appadurai efficaciously called the "fear of small numbers".[14]

12. Papastergiadis, Nikos. "The Invasion Complex: Deep Historical Fears and Wide Open Anxieties". In: *International Migration and Ethnic Relations 2/05*. Malmö: Malmö University, 2005, p. 7.
13. *Ibidem*.
14. "There is a basic puzzle surrounding rage about minorities in a globalizing world. The puzzle is about why the relatively small numbers that give the word minority its most simple meaning and usually imply political and military weakness do not prevent minorities from being objects of fear and of rage. Why kill, torture, or ghettoize the weak? This may be a relevant question for ethnic violence against small groups at any time in history". See Appadurai, Arjun. *Fear of Small Numbers. An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 49-85.
15. Derrida, Jacques. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 11 (trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas).

For Jacques Derrida, the notions and experiences of "community," "living", and "together" never ceased to harbor radical, in fact infinite interrogations. The often anguished question of how to "live together" moved Derrida throughout his oeuvre, animating his sustained reflections on hospitality, friendship, responsibility, justice, forgiveness, and mourning. Does democracy lead to more ethical or just systems of welcoming, of hospitality? Derrida considers an analysis of sovewreignty as pivotal to any re-evaluation of contemporary politics and ethics, tying such a project to deconstructions of democracy and hospitality: "What is 'living together'? And especially: 'what is a like, a compeer', 'someone similar or semblable as a human being, a neighbor, a fellow citizen, a fellow creature, a fellow man', and so on? Or even: must one live together only with one's like, with someone semblable?" he asks in *Rogues*,[15] prompting us to think through what it means to be, at once, democratic and hospitable.

Analogously, Margolles has used the space of art not only as a tool for public discourse but as a stage to publicly challenge the boundaries between sovereignty and hospitality. No nation can ever totally open its borders, but the current hostility towards refugees is symptomatic of a more profound ambivalence towards our sense of place. Since the beginning of this project, she has had the opportunity to experience various environments and situations, and her emotional and professional ties and relations have enabled her to delve into critical understandings of this context. What Teresa Margolles says through this exhibition is that migration is made up of stories by men

and women. Their stories deserve dignity, respect, and attention. To reflect in this sense is not only a moral and cultural duty but also a pragmatic necessity. We have to stand on the side of hospitality because international human migration is the true epitome of the contemporary world. To read history through the magnifying lens of emergency is a short-sighted approach. Instead, we should equip ourselves with the cultural tools to help us to interpret this change, because only a cultural shift can transform the emergency into a resource.

This is a reprint of the text "Estorbo. A personal Account", first published in 2019 in the catalogue of Teresa Margolles' exhibition "Estorbo" [Obstruction] at MAMBO, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá.

The Stone
Teresa Margolles

From 18th September 2020
to 28th March 2021

Organization
Es Baluard Museu d'Art
Contemporani de Palma

Director
Imma Prieto

Curator
Imma Prieto

Exhibition Coordination
Catalina Joy

Registrar
Soad Houman
Rosa Espinosa

Installation
Julià Homar
Es Baluard Museu
Art Ràpid

Transport
Balears Art & Llar

Insurances
Correduría MARCH-RS

Graphic Design
Hermanos Berenguer

Publication Coordination
Eva Cifre
Irene Amengual
Mireia Guitart

Texts
Imma Prieto. Director, Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma
Eugenio Viola. Chief Curator, MAMBO, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá

Translations
Anna Gimein

Print
Amadip Esment

Photographic Credits
Gabinete TM

Acknowledgments
Asociación Amigos de Venezuela y Baleares
BPS22 Musée d'Art de la Province de Hainaut
Centro de Estudios Fronterizos
Fundación Centro Cultural Pilar de Brahim
Galerie Mor Charpentier
MAMBO, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá

Rafael Burillo
Nancy Casielles
Philippe Charpentier
Claudia Hakim
Marelis Lorenzo
Marianna Mambié
Teresa Margolles
Federico Marotta
Alex Mor
Arturo Quintero
Eugenio Viola
Antonio de la Rosa

Special thanks to all the people who have made possible the realization of this project on the border:

Osdali Aria
Doralis Arias
Sonia Ballesteros
Oscarlin Barreto
Dayana Bolívar
Alex Brahim
Lucho Brahim
Michel Colmenares
Daniela Contreras
Edila Flores
Emilianis García
Ariana Hurtado
Joana Koolman
Madali Martínez
Leniz Peña
Leniz Rodríguez
Alida Rojas

DL PM 743-2020
ISBN 978-84-122542-0-4

#MARGOLLESESBALUARD
@ESBALUARDMUSEU

WWW.ESBALUARD.ORG

ESBALUARD
MUSEU D'ART
CONTEMPORANI
DE PALMA

PLAÇA PORTA SANTA CATALINA, 10
07012 PALMA
T. (+34) 971 908 200

SCHEDULE: TUESDAY TO SATURDAY FROM
10 AM TO 8 PM, SUNDAY FROM 10 AM TO 3 PM

GOVERN ILLES BALEARS
Consell de Mallorca
Ajuntament de Palma
Fundació d'Art Serra