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Chile, Research Grant
Summer 2009

During the proposal stages of this project, I had in mind only one concrete goal: learn something. Of course I had many half-goals, which I suppose is appropriate given that one objective of investigative research is to explore half-thoughts and find answers to questions of interest and significance. I wanted to learn more about art but I wasn't sure exactly what kind, so I concocted a project that would expose me to two extremes – indigenous tradition and contemporary approaches. I wanted to better acquaint myself with the rich political histories of Latin America, so I chose two hypothetically parallel yet at the same time radically different movements in two geographically distinctive places. I wanted to improve my language skills without adopting a particular accent (other than a non-gringo one). I wanted to experience the people of a new place but was intimidated by the limitations of my own inexperience and naivety.

Now far beyond the proposal stage and into the terrifying realm of the evaluation process, I would describe my accomplishments regarding this project as without doubt academic, but more importantly realistic. The exposure to the art and histories of Chile and Nicaragua, especially during the political turmoil of the late twentieth century, is one that might be summarized in a textbook but only on a very surface level. If there is one realization that I have stumbled upon it is that, trite as it may seem, the value of personal experience and first-hand interaction could never be bested by text. This is especially true to me in terms of art – understanding the context of a work can exponentially enhance the experience of witnessing that work in real life, and witnessing a work in real life can catalyze the desire for academic investigation and scholarship. For the first time I

independently engaged with the critical process of examining and experiencing art, an art that coincides with a culture of great interest to me. Given the minimal academic opportunities at Notre Dame's South Bend campus for the study of Latin American art (especially compared to the classical art of Europe and North America), I feel privileged to have been provided the support for independent study and feel pleased with my efforts in taking full advantage of that opportunity.

More accomplishments directly involve the people with whom I interacted during my research. The most significant component of these interactions was the constant bombardment with various (and often differing) perspectives. The need for considering a variety of perspectives is extraordinarily important to artistic and cultural histories, as it is to any kind of history. Further, my language skills have certainly improved. I still struggle with establishing a unique voice and personality in a non-native tongue, but now understanding the importance of being able to communicate verbally in order to better understand different cultures has only heightened my interest in and desire to master the Spanish language.

Some of the challenges that I faced were ones that I had anticipated, including the general acclimation to a new place. Among the most prominent of these challenges was learning how to navigate the gender and safety issues, especially those concerned with being a woman, in both Chile and Nicaragua. But other challenges were very much a surprise to me, albeit perhaps only surprising due to my previous lack of true experience with investigative research and extended travel in Latin America. Much of the information I had gathered before departure proved to be outdated, and I learned quickly that Internet resources in Central and South America are not nearly as prevalent nor reliable as those in the United States. Outdated information led to closed exhibits and frustrated empty-handed

departures. There also exists a general lack of functionality and human resources, especially with regard to art and art preservation, which made many of my research sites not nearly as helpful as I had originally anticipated. Some locations prohibited photographs, leaving me to try to capture thousands of years of art with my sketchbook and a pencil. And in museums and other locales where photographs were allowed, the lighting was often so dim and the condition of the exhibits so dilapidated that my digital camera captured very few useful shots.

However, the repetition of certain images and aesthetic properties accumulated in my mind as I conducted more research. As hypothesized, there were many differences between Chilean and Nicaraguan contemporary political art and how their respective indigenous cultures were incorporated into that art. Most prominently was the sheer volume of it: the Pinochet regime in Chile destroyed much of the art produced during Allende's rule, while most of the murals and contemporary art from the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua remains visible and in very public places (which is consistent with the fact that the Sandinistas are still more or less the most successful political influence in Nicaragua to this day). The art in both countries played with the human figure as depicted in indigenous aesthetic pieces and incorporated it to display modern themes. Geometric designs, especially from traditional pottery, tapestries and textiles, also appear to be a popular aesthetic in contemporary political art. What was most interesting to me was the way in which traditional objects (such as masks and other ritual objects) were juxtaposed with images of violence and struggle. In both countries specific research on the indigenous cultures and artistic expressions of those cultures proved to be crucial to understanding their usage in modern works.

After asking whether or not one artist's work was at all pointedly political, one Nicaraguan art student said to me, "Everything is political here" – I feel that this statement can be importantly applied to the art in both Nicaragua and Chile, and opens up the scope of my research to include so much more than my original project. The pages of notes and hundreds of photographs have left a permanent mark on my way of understanding culture, art, and Latin America in general. It is very possible that this experience will provide the basis for my Senior Essay for my Latin American Studies minor and perhaps even graduate study in art and Latin American culture. I also hope that this project will support future research endeavors and/or fellowships. And undoubtedly the travel experience has allowed me to explore the reality of studying, researching and living abroad, a reality that I now know I would like to explore in a more permanent context.