***Documentality and Display: Archiving and curating the violent past in contemporary Argentina, Chile and Colombia.***

**British Academy’s Sustainable Development Programme 2018, supported under the Global Challenges Research Fund, Reino Unido**

**Visita Bogota, October 2019**

**I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

* Name and position: **Erika Diettes**, Colombian artist.

Interviewers: Vikki Bell, Jaime Hernández, María Paula

Location: Bogota, Colombia

Date: 24th October 2019

Duration: 1:43:38

**II. TRANSCRIPTION**

Jaime: Introduce yourself briefly and then we’ll give you the talking.

Vikki: So, my name is Vikki Bell, I’m a professor of Sociology on Goldsmiths college in London. And I have been writing for over 10 years now about artists mainly from Argentina, Northern Ireland and Chile. And this research project is also bringing Colombia into our [inaudible 00:00:33:00]. And we have another research project that is also in Mexico so we are talking to lots of people but they are slightly different projects. But the thing that I’m most excited about is the artistic side of it. So I wrote a book from my work in Argentina that is called ‘The art of post-dictatorship’. And maybe you know some of the artists who I’ve been working with, so I became friend with Graciela Saco for example. You might know her. And I’ve written for her, for her catalogues and some academic work as well. So, I’m really interested in your work and this sort of your career and how you came to be working on these issues, but also about the process. Because as you know is not a straight forward, the idea of representation is very complicated in this area. So I’m interested in talking to artists about the process and how they understand their work in relation to the place, to the history, to the present, and situations of conflict and the armed conflict in Colombia.

So, yeah, I would like to mention also, that I’ve been asked by an online magazine called Western [inaudible 00:02:12:00], I don’t know if you know it, it’s mainly been historically focus in Africa on artists and writers from Africa. But now they want to put their work in dialogue with other parts of the world. And I’ve been asked… and they have done some work in Uganda. So It would be interesting to hear about that. They particularly in this issue asked me if I can write something about artists from Argentina and Colombia. But the issue is also looking at East Africa as well so there is a sort of connection I think, maybe with your sensibility. In relation to…

Erika: Thanks you so much.

Vikki: And María Paula.

Jaime: Do you want to introduce yourself?

María Paula: Yes. My name is María Paula, I’m a [inaudible 03:13:00] scientist and I would like to work in all these topics about post-conflict, victims, memory, so that’s why I’m working with them. I’m really interested in introduce myself in these topics. So, and also I studied another career, major, that is about cultural studies so I don’t know I am related with representation, with how the language or images create reality. So, that’s why I do thing.

Erika: In the Andes?

María Paula: Yes.

Jaime: I’m Jaime, my background is as an architect and planner. But I work for the Aesthetics department in the Javeriana University. I’m part of this research as Vikki told you, we are now in this week doing a big group with some people from Chile, México, so we decided because we have some more activities come here with you, and some others are staying in the university talking with Madres de Tumaco, you know that? They are visiting us. Because we are in this week working in 2 different project, there are some linkages but they are different. One which is this one, that Vikki is the main researcher, is about documentality and display, of the use of archives of violations of human rights into different areas. One in terms of reparation, transitional justice, but also in terms of the work of artists like you. The other research is about force displacement, also in terms of documentation and [inaudible 00:05:22:00]. We work in both. There are some other colleagues that could not make it today. She is also very important in both researchers, she is the main researcher of the other research, that maybe, I don’t know if you have come across her, her name is Oriana Bernasconi from Chile. She has done a lot of work in this [inaudible 00:05:48:00] an artist in Chile and the artist produced a piece that is called the Sábana.

Vikki: Is Nicolás Franco.

Erika: Yes, yes.

Jaime: But we are here. Vikki will just be here for this week.

Erika: How long have you been here for?

Vikki: I arrived last Saturday and I’m just here until Sunday. And we are going to Medellín on Friday.

Erika: Oh, you are going on Friday.

Vikki: Yes. We are going to the Museum of Memory in Medellín and to the other museum.

Jaime: Museo de Antioquia and Casa Museo de Memoria en Medellín.

Erika: Yes, the Casa de la Memoria.

Jaime: Yes, la Casa de la Memoria. With Catalina, the director, and with Clara and Cristina. And they do the opening, the opening of an exhibition now on Friday.

Erika: Ya, ya. Have you enjoyed your time here so far?

Vikki: Yes, it has been very busy. We came last year, almost the same time and we were doing interviews mainly with the archivists in Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. And this time we are continuing with that work on the archives and how documents are disseminated. But as the same time we are also doing the work in force disappearing and force displacement so it’s a lot. But It’s so, I mean…

Erika: And emotionally it is a lot too.

Vikki: Yes, yes, yes. Because we don’t, neither of the projects is designed to speak to victims or to, you know is not that sort of anthropological project, but because of the subject matter you always end up speaking to people that have these experiences.

Erika: It’s impossible not to. Well, my name is Erika Diettes [Laughs]. I don’t know what would you like me to…

Vikki: Well, maybe it would be great if you can say something about how you came to be working in this sort of area, or how the history of your art practice has been.

Erika: I think that you have mention that you were able to see Sudarios in Liverpool.

Vikki: Yes, no. I didn’t go to Liverpool. I just saw the images. I’m sorry. Because somebody sent me the link of the…

Erika: Oh, it was so beautiful and so intense because I’m starting with this point because is your homeland [Laughs]. Also because I think that experience was sort of, how can you put this without sound too ‘new age’ [Laughs], was sort of very important for me because it embraced and gave me like a very, in my face, sort of reason to do the job Because as you know and as you have listened to lots of artists from different backgrounds, this type of work one emotionally takes a huge, it takes your entire being. Once you start, it’s sort of like this weird espiral , right? I know it’s sort of, you go down and down because there is definitely no way of reparation, there is no way of, no reparation, once the violence exist life is different, if you can call it life. I have listened to over 400 testimonies of victims of different types of victimization. I sort of have to say this in this way because one of the main things that I had, I decided to do with the relicarios was to be able to portray, to have, this is not the way I like to phrase it but it’s sort of in the academic arena where you have to sort of defend the work…

Vikki: Not to me.

[Laughs]

Erika: I took very specific care in Relicarios, to have victims from all the different grupos armados. Is not what I want to make relevant of the work because the intention of that body of work was to create a room where you could feel the grieving country that we are. And we are, there is people grieving victims of the army, of falsos positivos, there are grievers of the guerrilla, there are grievers of the paramilitaries. But I think we insist in sort of make the story about the victimarios, and really not listening the victims. Although the entire framework of justice for peace is based on listening to the victims, I think as a society we still haven’t been able to sort of understand what it is that matters. And I think that’s where art can definitely be the only way to sort of navigate in between those lines. One thing is the reparation and one thing is Grupo de Memoria Histórica, and one thing is like all official and unofficial accounts, but I think that we really need to create a space where we can connect emotionally, to recognize us as human beings. Not only as human beings, but I don’t know this word, *compatriotas*?

Jaime: Fellows?

Vikki: Yes. Citizens without a state.

Erika: And if you make it bigger, we really should care about humans. So, the experience in Liverpool was basically was so enlightening for me. And this is a completely different background, this is a completely different space, you know? Like ‘the cathedral’. When I walked in I was like: ‘Oh my god, I need 80 more sudarios, this is going to be…’ And they are going to be invisible. Is impossible. And somehow they look like they belong there.

I started talking to reverends too, the dean, the very, very reverend [laughs]. And reverend Sue, she was, she is a true spiritual leader, she decided to do a special service for Colombia. And she did that on mother’s day and she did this special prayer. I have to say it’s overwhelming to think, to sort of, think that your work is sort of the channel, to channel all this energy in prayers and in the Anglican choir. Because she basically, I mean it was something that they never do, she brought the entire choir and only the girls stood under the sudarios. And they sing the angelus and reverend made a special prayer for artists so we understand what the purpose of being an artist is. And that it is to take reality and make it into something that we can see. To make us re-think about reality. It is very mystical, and very, I mean is sentido común. If art is not for that, then what is it for? I started long time ago I think. I have been talking to victims for more than 10 years now…

Vikki: When you say that you listened to hundreds of testimonies do you mean that you sort out people of speak face to face or you read things, or you had…

Erika: No, face to face, face to face. When I started The Río Abajo project, I don’t know if you know about that, that’s the one that has clothing photograph in water.

Vikki: Ok. I’m not sure that I’m see that.

Erika: Sure. Is it ok if we go to the computer and I show you short videos.

Vikki: Yes, please.

[Silence]

Erika: Please take a seat.

Vikki: Would you like to seat?

Erika: ¿Could you bring another chair?

[Moving chair]

Vikki: So you are an anthropologist as well?

Erika: [00:16:51:00] anthropologist. I started my master degree in anthropology from Los Andes. I studied Artes Visuales en la Universidad Javeriana. And I studied Social Communication at La Javeriana as well. I'm going to show you, this video has as a brief introduction to 3 main works, which are Río Abajo, Sudarios and Relicarios. So, let's say that trilogy kind of… [Background music begins to play]. That's Rio Abajo. That is a work in which they are objects of disappeared people photographed in water and printed. These are los Sudarios.

Vikki: Where is this [inaudible 00:18:46:00]?

Erika: The first exhibition was in the Museo de Antioquia. Esto fue el Museo de Antioquia. Esta exposición ahora les cuento por parte, me dices si quieres [inaudible because music is too loud 00:19:02:00].

The Reliquaries let's say that for me they are simply a very logical consequence of what the Rio Abajo process was. It is with Río Abajo that I begin to work in the region and speak directly with the victims. There, let's say there was enormous support from a friend who worked in the cinema [CINEP - VB].

Vikki: Who is he?

Erika: Camilo Tamayo. He worked at CINEF [CINEP? VB} and I told him that I wanted to do that work, which consisted of the clothes of disappeared people to photograph them in water and to be able to represent that one of the forms of disappearance is the bodies in the rivers. Let's say that I had that work for me, when I thought about it the images were much darker and more violent and dramatic. When I was faced with the first testimony of a mother who gave me the garment, I said no, that is, when ... and I believe that there, let's say, my work guidelines were formulated for me in some way, and that is, if you are working with the mourners, with the victims of these testimonies, the image that you produce, the texts that you produce have, above all, to honor the form and memory of the person who gave it to you. Then visually Rio Abajo changed. For me it is a work that is beautiful. They are printed on glass, I don’t longer remember.

The water is absolutely crystalline, I did not want to say how, rather, I moved away from the representation, I moved away from the representation of violence and began to work on the representation of ... yes of course ...

This image is printed on glass so it is transparent, they look like stained glass windows. The color was super important because one of the first testimonies that the lady gave me said: ‘It's that the red shirt, it's that this shirt with which my son looked very handsome. It's that when he put on the red shirt he looked divine. ' So I said, this cannot be black and white, because for her the whole meaning of the shirt is that the boy looked very handsome in the red shirt.

So I think that when you work from these testimonies, you should absolutely move what we call talent or the trade that one has, let's say.

Vikki: Just to be clear that I’m understand, the pieces of clothing were given to you…

Erika: As a loan.

Vikki: As a loan, ok.

Erika: So, that was, and I think that was definitely like the first sort of faith talking that was given to me. And I always say, this type of work has to be given to you. Is not a process that you can force, is not a…

Jaime: I think that book was the model, you can do me a favor and put another one, because I see you turning pages that are not the ones there. That's why everyone who is there ...

Erika: I don’t think, because of depends of the way. I think that art can be [inaudible 00:23:38:00] in different forms, you know? Like you can read a paper and be an artist that talk about violence from the paper, but when you cross the line in the sense that you are talking to people and that you are… she takes two books, yes, so you can see them.

I think that makes that something that you cannot make the art more important than the respect for the people that you are working with.

Vikki: Yes, absolutely.

Erika: So, I think as an artist, if you are deciding, because that’s a decision that you take, that you are going to talk to family, that you are going to go to the region, that you are going to, they are going to lend you the objects, which is the only objects that they have, because most of these people are also force displaced. And I always sort of, I mean, once they start telling you their story you start sort of putting yourself in that situation. There is a massacre, they have to leave their house right now, right in this second. That mother went back to the closet and took one clothing from the son that is missing, just in case he comes back he has something. Wherever they are. So that act…

Vikki: Is very strong.

Erika: I mean, because she could get kill, just by going back to the closet and do that, but she took the care of taking that shirt with her. When I meet the woman she moved already like from 4 houses, but she will not leave that shirt. So when she lent me that shirt my promise was I will come back.

Vikki: Yes, and bring it back. So you physically took the clothes away with you and you photograph…

Erika: In Bogotá. Because that’s like, it has to be done in my studio, I ended up building a pool to be able to photograph.

Vikki: So these are under the water.

Erika: They are inside the water.

Vikki: They are in the water. Ok. So you let them move with the water.

Erika: Ahá. So the entire process ended up being me with these 150 objects. I thought if I collected 10, I mean I was nobody in the region, no one knew me.

Vikki: So lots of different people gave them to you.

Erika: Yes. And it was a very beautifully done because when I went back to return the first one that was given to me, the other leaders already told the project to the community and they have brought lots of clothing with them to me to photograph it. So it ended being a process of 2 years. Going back and forth…

Vikki: Because people wanted [inaudible 00:26:58:00] their clothing.

Erika: Yes.

Vikki: ‘You’ve done this, now we would like’.

Erika: Exactly. And then when I saw the community was sort of organizing themselves, so in the next meeting they knew I was going to give back some of the objects, they would give me more. So it was 150 and then I decided to go back to the region and do the exhibition with them.

Jaime: Did you mention the regions? Which region was?

Erika: Antioquia [inaudible 00:27:32:00], Barranca, where they invited me. And that's why let's say this format exists. We did these during the [backgroung noise interrupt] [inaudible 00: 27: 50: 00] that process. So, well, Sudarios is a work that is clearly like the result of Río Abajo. All of them, I had seen these faces ...

Vikki: Are women the mothers of those or not?

Erika: Not necessarily. Sudarios are women who witnessed massacres. During the Rio Abajo process, I learned the story of a woman who was forced to watch her mother being tortured, her tongue cut out, her eyes poked out, and the person I knew was forced, yelled at and They said: 'open your eyes you have to see'. So this violence, let's say it is exerted to be seen. Yes, because it is violence that is not intended to kill. If they kill others, but for others to see. And well, the forced displacement is carried out, if obviously that is in certain regions that one goes to see, and it is a mining area. Like the idea of ​​the witness, right? The idea of ​​torture, not just violence, but seeing your loved one killed. That is the subject of Sudarios.

All of them, since it is from different periods, also at the hands of different perpetrators, of different groups. These photographs were taken with psychosocial support. There I started working with Nadis Londoño, she is a sociologist, she worked at CINEP for many years, she is one of those who trained [inaudible 00: 29: 57: 00], one of those who trained the life promoters process and mental health. So she is the person ...

Vikki: It sounds, so that organization is very important to you.

Erika: Well let's say it was like… not as an organization, but that I became friends with two people who came from there, let's say that I haven't worked, I'm not an artist who has been commissioned by CINEP. As an independent artist but the links do ...

Vikki: That sort of happen here. We were with CINEP yesterday and...

Erika: Like that one, that is, definitely that formation, let's say of the victims' organizations that have come, well, that is to say that seems new to certain eyes, but that comes from a long time ago. As people believe that this is being done so far, I think it is becoming more known with the Truth Commission but that comes from… So these are los Sudarios [Background music begins to play].

Vikki: So it’s important to you to have women with different stories, not to represent, like is not a social sciences project, but it feels important to you to try to show some thing shared between the women, something, what is the something I wonder? Because you talked about humanity, you know… And I just wonder if, because is a religious theme, a Christian theme, but is also a humanitarian theme, maybe is, you know, it gets express through Christian…

Erika: I think, if I have to think one word, which will be like the background, like the back story of my work it would be grief. I think if we are able to recognize that Colombia is an open wound, I think we have to be able to create empathy in the good sense of the word. I think that when you step into a Sudarios installation what you see is another way, amount of pain, which not necessarily is depicted as horror, which is different, you know? Like the concept of horror is one thing, pain once you have talk to people who have lost absolutely everything. I mean there is nothing, absolutely nothing left for them. As one of the women told me: ‘I’m alive but I’m a ghost’. And it is in that space where we have to sort of try to find, create, invent, a tool to be able to reconnect them with the human positive side, but how can you do that if everything is war and if everything is horror? I mean, I think we have to sort of be able to connect again with the desire to live. Live de vivir [Laughs].

So I photograph them while Nadis was directing the interview. These is not an interview that you can, you know, just say what happen, oh my god. No. It’s sort of, we always go back to the moment and I think that is something that I always sort of do with the work, is to be able to tell the women: ‘Tell me the story of your son, before the violence’.

Vikki: While they were telling the story.

Erika: Yes.

Vikki: So you were working with the woman from CINEP and she was speaking…

Erika: Guiding the interview.

Vikki: The interview, and at the same time you are taking the photograph.

Erika: Yes. So the photograph studio is very present, is not like I’m stealing a photograph, you know? I’m not behind the bushes with a big lens. I always work very close and very intimate and very, when I photograph someone I understand the moment when we are together in the same image. I will never photograph anyone without…

Jaime: Touch.

Erika: Yes, there is not authorisation because that’s given already. But I make sure that they are very aware this is the image. So I pay, this interviews were almost 3 hours, if you look at my contact sheets there is no more that 25 images. I listen, you know? Like I always… there are no recorders, there is no video. I believe that when you have video you stop paying attention because you can go back to. So when you know that, all your senses have to be there. So I never record anything, there is mis *cuadernos,* there is notebooks, where I take notes.

Vikki: But the testimonies, the horror testimonies was that part of your art project? Or was that was going to a different place? To the [inaudible 00:36:19:00].

Erika: That’s only for me. I make sure because that is, I know one of the biggest criticize of my work [inaudible 00:36:30:00] académicos is that I do not write down the story. I don’t think that is the point. This is not documentary; I mean that’s someone else work.

Vikki: I just wondered If the women of CINEP was using, was doing a sort of two projects at once.

Erika: No. She works with me and this is sort of…

Vikki: A collaboration.

Erika: The final effort is to be able to have the spectator walk through this place. I think you don’t need to listen to the testimonies, they are unavailable. I think you can, when you walk under them, they have been seen for more than 20 audiences in the world. I mean that is a body of work that has travel a lot. And I believe, they sort of keep the aura of the audiences as well. In the first shows the Iglesias que me prestaban eran a little bit smaller. So they were at the spectator level, and for example in República Dominicana I saw one woman that took one Sudario and started crying and she wept her tears with one of the Sudarios.

So I believe they sort of keep also that energy with them. And I also believe that if that is a body of work that has been asked to go to so many places in countries, is because there is something that resonate to the place that has the work invited to be seen there. I don’t think is only, you know, is not about the work, is about the pain also of the place, that needs them.

Vikki: Can you say something about the technical process of getting the image onto the material?

Erika: [Laughs] It’s digital print on silk.

Jaime: Silk.

Erika: Silk. Pero is a special process that allows, no hay sublimación, que la sublimación stays como encima de la tela. This one absorbs the fabric, so when you look at them, that’s way you are able to see them on both sides, so it’s not a coat on top. No es como un forro, no es como tener polvón acá para quitárselo si no es… Es una, there are very difficult to print. There are no copies, it’s very difficult to make copies and to have the 20 Sudarios sort of in the same tone. It was a very high level of experimentation and patience but they exist [Laughs].

Vikki: Yes. And the people, are they happy about the work traveling around the world? How was the reaction you have from them?

Erika: It was. We had a show in Manrique in Medellín. I think it was after like the fifth exhibition. And they were invited with their families and it was incredible because the father of that church, he made a special prayer for them and they were orgullosas, they were happy, they were very proud, they were very proud. And I will never forget one of the testimonies of them, she was like: ‘I’m so happy to be able to see that image because I’m not that woman anymore. I’m able to recognize that I left already that sadness’.

Vikki: Oh wow. That’s great.

Erika: So, that’s, and I also, I meet with all of them like 4 years ago when this book was published. So I meet with them and I gave a presentation of all the places that we have been with the show and show them the book. And they were, I mean they are so proud, they are very, very proud of the work. I get very close contact with most of them in Facebook [Laughs]. So, I think that is another other tool that I think is worth sort of thinking.

The same happens with the families of Relicarios. Most of the mothers follow the work in Facebook, so I’m very careful to sort of always, I make sure that I always photograph all the Relicarios in any part of the process that I’m in. So if the installation and I’m working with the cards, with the photograph I photograph this group and then I make sure I photograph the other group, because I don’t know what mother is looking for their Relicario. So if you see, I think that’s a work that someone have to do at some point. Check out my Facebook and sort of see how they follow and what they write, you know? I will never forget Pipe’s mum, she always, I’m so happy that Pipe is now in Argentina, so they follow…

Vikki: Where did you show your work in Argentina?

Erika: En el Haroldo Conti, it was…

Jaime: [inaudible 00:42:33:00]

Vikki: Yes. Is part of the ESMA. Is the big building on the right.

Erika: The little one, the cafe, and the theater. I'm going to contra de Relicarios [Background music begins to play]. Relicarios then is a process that took 7 years, each Relicario has an object that the family is the one that decides what object, what object wants to talk about, or what part of the story wants to tell. It is a work that is not only about the disappeared. There are testimonies of murders, of sexual violence, of kidnapping. I believe that here part of the process that we have to do for a true reconciliation is to allow people to hurt. Yes, the pain of each one is valid. Here we try to justify one pain over the other, right? So is he a victim of that or not?

It happened to me with General Mendieta. General Mendieta has a Relicario, he was kidnapped for 13 years and gave me objects that he had during his kidnapping. The photo with which he had is totally blurred that photograph, with which he saw his children. Then there is his testimony also because the important thing about this work is that we can think as a country about the pains that constitute us, right? It seems valid to me that General Mendieta says: "I am a victim, yes I was kidnapped for 13 years, tied to a tree in the jungle."

That is because in court, he was denied the category of victim, they do not consider him a victim because he was in uniform. So well, let's say, the law does not interest me, I am interested in pain. So when you see Relicarios, you walk into this room and you think that every story has pain inside that is encapsulated. This piece [Background music begins to play], wait for me, I think ...

Relicarios is a work where people already donated the object, then people also did as an act of liberation, to let go of the object. An example, a lady kept her husband's bloody shirt, unsewed it, unstitched the pillow, put the shirt between the pillow and sewed the pillow and slept with it ...

Vikki: I don’t understand that word.

Erika: Ok. The testimonies, and I thing this, this will some arise what Relicarios is, which is an exercise or an intent to let go all the horror and move on to grieve. A woman kept her husband shirt, the one that he was wearing when he got shot so it has the bullet hole, and she also kept one of the… como se dice casquillo de las balas? Like the shell of the bullet? And she kept one of those and the bloody shirt and she opened her pillow and put that inside her pillow and she sew it and she slept with that for many years. She took it out, she washed the shirt and when she came to the studio she had it in a bolsa de regalo, in a gift paper bag. And she gave it to the project.

So I think that really shows what this project is about, which is sort of let go. And is not to erase history, but is to let go the horror, because she has the right to go back to the memory of her husband alive. And not only be caught up in the smell of the blood. Because that sort of allow violence to win.

So what we do in Relicarios is always try to go back in the narrative, in the testimony. Tell us who your son was, he looked cute in the red shirt, he liked eggs with banana and a bit of salt. So we take, in these interviews we take three hours, as much time as people want. And we always try to not only stay in: he was taking by grupo 40 de las FARC, we try to go back, he was going to be an amazing futbol player.

Jaime: How do you convince people to give these important things to you?

Erika: I think it was impossible to do this without Río Abajo. I became very well-known in certain areas and with the community leaders with this process. I make sure in Río Abajo that I went back to every single place that I was given one object. And if it was 8 hours away in the mountain I would go there with the exhibition. So I think that when people do not feel used, because what happen is that sometimes art stays so far away from the communities. It makes no sense who the artist is, what the person is doing, so I always make sure people see the results.

And when I was doing the Sudarios project I knew people wanted to sort of give, get rid of the weight, so that’s why I thought of Relicarios. I have to say that I had to stop the process otherwise I will be still doing it. During the process, people gave me the object not expecting anything in return. But from the beginning I had the idea of giving them the photographs of the Relicarios So, in el Museo de Antioquia was the first opening. My main, dream was that the first people to see the show where the families. Logistically that was insane. I mean, everyone was: ‘You are crazy’, I mean, ‘now we really know you are crazy’, and I say: ‘We are doing it. Is official’. Because it meant flying, driving, I have to rent a [inaudible 00:50:06:00]. I was like: ‘Ok. How do we do this? I have no idea, let’s rent a [00:50:11:00]’. We brought 330 people to the Museo de Antioquia, it was done close doors. I didn’t want any journalist; no one was able to document that. That was also a big struggle because obviously it’s [inaudible 00:50:31:00] to show it, and I say no, only the two photographers that I hired will be able to be there. We had a team of 10 psychologists and we did a three day workshops with the families.

And at the end of the workshop I gave them the photographs and it created this huge motion, we ended up in a high note, because the three days were, we started in [00:51:06:00] and we say ok, we cannot leave people worst that they came, so we have to be able to ensure that this is transformative in a way. So, with the photographs…

Vikki: So in the workshops they were, people were just sharing experiences, talking to each other? Or what was the workshops about?

Erika: The first part was sort of, because there is people that I haven’t see in 7 years, because I told them: ‘This will take long, I don’t know how many time, I cannot promise anything, it will take long’. So I was sort of asking them: ‘What was your thoughts?’ So people say: ‘We thought that she was never going to come back with anything’, and to sort of recollect people’s expectations. Then, the workshop was about them sharing their stories, so that was, the second day was extremely difficult, because it was listening to all this 165 stories. But you have to take into account that there were people from está el general Mendieta con alguien que pudo haber sido de la guerrilla. So it was sort of a very mix group. And then we enter in groups to the Relicarios.

Jaime: One question, when you see the work that you have explain to us [inaudible 00:52::53:00] en Sudarios you have work with people. Have you ever considered to work with archives to produce your work, your art?

Erika: I think I produced an archive [Laughs].

Jaime: I know that this connection with person is very important.

Erika: For me, yes.

Jaime: But have you considered eventually? Or have you done it?

Erika: No. For me I think that it’s in the human experience where, for me is the smell of the people, the touch. As for me it is this testimony that inspires me. In other words, it is in the word, I think that as an artist if your senses are open the work presents itself, right? So I know that the files speak, that is, but for me it is like the, is this right? It's talking to people, it's him, I absolutely remember. I mean, I see this and I look back at the person. So I think that in that sense for me it is like the engine, finally it is life, I am very connected to life, although it seems that I work with death.

Jaime: Have you been contacted or anything, by the Museo, the idea of the Museo de la Memoria aquí en Bogotá? Is there any connection? Do you know anything about it?

Erika: When Gonzalo was director, Gonzalo was very supportive of my work. I never worked for the Historical Memory Center, I have never been commissioned for anything, but Gonzalo knew my work. When they wrote the museum script, they sent me the script to read it and give my opinion. And now I don't know what's going on [Laughs].

Jaime: [inaudible 00:55:04:00] Rafael Tamayo. He said this is a sort of continuation of the last administration. And he said that is not so clear for anybody that the museum is going to be built one day. And he said that to some extend there is the linkage with people [inaudible 00:55:35:00] in terms of the museum at least. However, there are also some tensions, some things that we all know because of the news, of course. But, it seems to be, however still they haven’t start building the building.

Erika: I don’t know; I think that I have always been sort of very careful not to be involved with any part of politics. I have rejected any collaboration with government or official.

Jaime: But art is kind of a political statement.

Erika: I think that is the most political statement. That can be said, is to try to be…

Vikki: But is political with a small ‘p’ as we say in inglés.

Erika: Well, in fact, it happened to me, for example, there were some friends from Médicos sin Fronteras who did not let me go to my exhibition in Río Abajo. There was an absolutely clear directive from the current president, that this group could not see the exhibition. I think that my work has been vetoed in certain ways, for example, Relicarios was a work that I returned from the Museum of Antioquia and passed the proposal to donate it to the entire Banco de la República. I'm going to look for them to see, in fact, I had it around. They rejected the donation, I literally gave this process away, because I consider, returning to the subject of archives, that there is a file here, yes? In other words, there is a file here, and in many cases there is even evidence of the crimes.

There is an emotional archive, let's say, that if you stop at a work like Relicarios, then that beats! I thought then, as an artist, that this should stay here, that is, regardless of any professional interest, for me the best institution was this, I donated it in full, they rejected it, which I am grateful for today. At the time I said: ‘But wait! This belongs to Colombia. '

They are leaving, in fact, that's why they are like this [inaudible 00: 58: 18: 00], 56 Relicarios are leaving, they are the ones outside the Foundation [inaudible 00: 58: 23: 00]. It is a very important foundation in the United States, they have, they own Light and Feel, part of MARFA, that as an artist is a huge triumph. But for me as a Colombian it is a defeat, because this is a work that belongs to this country. But let's say it comes out like ...

So I have always tried, one that does not become, let's say, like a work that belongs to any particular organization because the idea for me is to be able to see ourselves as Colombians and Colombia is not an organization, Colombia is not a political group, Colombia is all of us. I understand what that generates, I understand it, but when we were in the Museum of Antioquia… [she is the woman in the shirt] When we were…

Jaime: Do you know anything about Carlos Mario at the Museum of Antioquia?

Erika: Carlos Mario the one who does the projects? Jimenez. Carlos Mario Jiménez, yes.

Jaime: That is all funny.

Erika: Yes, divine! These are, this is the registry of the families donating the objects. This record, there are notebooks ... notebooks and albums, I have all the testimonies. Then those memories are.

There are the names of the people, data, well. There is the story.

Vikki: So when they came to donate the things, this is the same day that you are taking this image of them?

Erika: When they are telling me their story.

Vikki: So you set up a photograph studio in your studio.

Erika: In my studio. I always make sure that the photography is very present.

Vikki: The operator.

Erika: Yes. I think is important for people to know what’s happening.

Vikki: Yes, interesting.

Erika: So, it’s a professional equipment, you see the lights, you see the background. They sit there, we spend time there, we drink coffee. I want to make sure people understand what is happening. I don’t want to sort of, like I said, stealing an image. It’s like: we are here. You know? And I always work with short lenses, always macro, so I’m very close to you when I’m photographing you. So it’s sort of we are connected. I don’t want people to sort of… so this are the Relicarios…

The objects are composed in the space, sort of very close to the story that they were telling me.

Vikki: And so these are in a [inaudible 01:01:38:00]?

Erika: It’s more like a jelly. So they are very delicate, so gelatine, es como gelatinoso.

Vikki: So it doesn’t set.

Erika: It doesn’t set.

Vikki: You don’t see that in the, what’s the…

Erika: No, no. I will show it to you now. They are very delicate, you have to take care of the dust sticks to them, the temperature melts them. They are very delicate. They are like touching skin.

Vikki: What is the name of the substance.

Erika: Rubber tripolymer

Vikki: Ok. Can you write that for me?

Erika: Like rubber tri-polymer is the translation. Es parecido al gel balístico, pero no es gel balístico.

Jaime: Tripolímero de caucho.

Vikki: So this is why there are some little bubbles in there as well.

Erika: And you have to melt this material so the process is very similar like making a candle so you work in a molde, upside down, because when you have to take it outside the *molde…*

Vikki: Does anybody ever get upset about. Because something that upset me about photograph, you know, is not been able to touch the photograph again. Do you make a copy of the photograph in case the relative is like: ‘Oh, no, I shouldn’t have done that. That was a mistake’.

Erika: To give it back? No. They all felt very honour, they are proud that the object is there.

Vikki: Uf [Laughs].

Erika: Yes. And that’s why I choose also this material, because when you work with resin it’s pretty much definitive. In these objects you cannot say: ‘up’s I’m sorry. I need another one’. So this allows me to, some of the Relicarios I produce them 10 times, I had to work with them many, many times for them to be in the shape that I wanted them.

So the photograph, the family has the photograph and there is also this diptych, that I work only with three copies. I only print my images three times, so the entire portfolio of the 330. Portfolio number 1, the edition 1, is at the biblioteca de la Universidad de Tulane. Portfolio number 3 is going to la Universidad de Bologna, to Umberto Eco centre. And la 2 is the only one that is able to sort of live by itself.

Vikki: So the photographs of the…, so you have the objects in the exhibition, and then the photographs of the… they are not in the same exhibition.

Erika: But they are never in the same. For me, the photographs are more, I’m a photographer, like my main medium is photography so I think I created the Relicarios to be able to take photographs and I think in time, with time, I don’t know how this material will react for me to ensure time.

Vikki: Yes.

Erika: Erika: I have to take a picture! [Laughs] These are some of the images of the meeting with the families in the museum.

Vikki: Ok.

Erika: Oh no, this no, that's another exposition that was made in the police.

Vikki: Ok. Very elegant.

Erika: The intention is that right? Like somehow indicating that gesture of respect, like slowing down.

Vikki: That space is very, very big. I was here with León Ferrari. I’ve written about León Ferrari’s work and when he had his retrospect in this space I was there with him. Oh no, not that one, that's another exposition that was made in the police.

Jaime: Which space?

Vikki: Is in the ex-ESMA en Buenos Aires.

Erika: It's where the bookstore is, outside. It is there, it is that space.

This was here at Tadeo. And this phrase I think for me sums up that process.

Vikki: Is it one of the mothers?

Erika: Yes, it is a testimony of what happened at the Museum of Antioquia. 'Then I found my son's Relicario and my husband's. I felt joy to see them together and to be able to embrace them with my arms. Without saying a word I raised a prayer and told them: I have not abandoned you, look at my beloved where they are. Inside a museum and how they deserve it. I have done my best so that you are here. I feel satisfied because I fulfilled my duty by giving them the most dignified and welcoming space. Rest in peace.

Vikki: Very good.

Erika: I don't know how long, can I show you another video? Do you have to go already? Oh look! This is it, yes. This is the meeting with the families. This is the part about psychosocial support, the part that ...

Vikki: And this was with your 2 photographers that you gave permission.

Erika: Yes. And the team of 10 mental health experts to support.

Jaime: How do you do yourself to work with this very emotional, difficult testimonies and things?

Erika: I believe that phrases can give you energies to sort of… Let's see, do you want to take it?

Vikki: I’m taking photographs just to document, so that I remember what you said.

Erika: It was beautiful. And we also worked very close with the museum team, to sort of tell to the people that take care of the sala that if people touch the Relicarios is fine. Don’t [make the shhh sound], if people cry let them cry. They don’t have to leave; you don’t have to move them. If people want to sing they can sing. There were choirs, there was a woman that went whit cuarzos to pray, people meditated in the space, so it was something that was meant to be very…

Vikki: It’s a very big space.

Erika: And then the most beautiful reward. The Relicarios is [inaudible 01:08:58:00] in their home. People started send me photographs.

Vikki: Oh, sending you the photographs, that’s amazing.

Erika: It was in November so it was almost Christmas.

Jaime: And was is ahead Erika? What’s the future? Where are you looking at? Thinking, looking.

Erika: I have a project called Oratorio de los Disaparecidos. I’ve been working on that 3 years, and it´s literally to create a space. Look, this is divine. She told me not to give her the Relicario to The Museo de Antioquia, she didn’t receive it in the museum. She said: ‘You have to promise me that you will come to my house and have lunch’. So I went, I gave her the Relicario, she never did Christmas again after her daughter was taken. So that day with ended up building tree for the children.

Vikki: So those are her other children.

Erika: It's the girl, the disappeared one. Here she kept the little things of the girl. Now it has replaced the things. The invitation of Sudarios, she is part of Sudarios, so now she keeps it there, the little virgin, the Relicario´s invitation. This is a little box in which she keeps small coins because she wants that, if the girl arrives, she can buy her a cake or send her to mass. So this is like her dynamics. There she is showing the Relicarios to the little children. And now already here there are only the things of the exhibition and the locket is already outside. So it is like something that the pain will not pass, but looks different.

Vikki: So the new project [Laughs]. Oratorios doesn’t continue the same sort of work? or is it…

Erika: I think so, I think at the end when you are interviewing, when you are being asked question about the work, I have learnt to sort of talk to it like it belongs to a different [inaudible 1:11:33:00] but I think it’s the same process, and I just try to find one more way of, a different way, a visual way, to sort of say the same thing. It’s sort of an endless spiral.

Vikki: So this one is also using photography, Oratorios?

Erika: It’s building a place, literally a place to pray, to be able to pray for the disappeared, praying in any religion, it’s not about religion. But I think and I thought that at the Relicarios opening the families of the disappeared, it was so intense, they kept going back to the museum. I mean, the show was there for 6 months. The director, I say, all the families of the Relicarios have free entry, they can come as much as they want to. And we noted that the families of the disappeared went every week, most of them. So, the need for space. What I’m working and studying is studying a place… que no hace cierre, because that has to be done by el Estado. That cannot be done in art.

So, it's like a space that gives it a tangible shape, but it is in that space in the middle, that is not a tomb. Because it cannot be done irresponsibly. Not even mentally, the issue with the disappeared is that the family is the one whose action is to determine if they believe them to be alive or dead. So the idea is to help in that transition, because it is a state of transition, it is not there or here, so in the representation, the idea is to make a space that is, but that is not determining that it is here, because that is ... Yes, art cannot assume what justice has not solved, right?

Vikki: So you take inspiration from, in a sense, the reaction to your previous projects, gave you the inspiration to think about another mode of…

Erika: I woke up the next day of the opening of Relicarios, I woke up with lots of messages from the families. And I woke up and I saw it. I know what I, like I’m trying to sort of [inaudible 1:14:30:00]. It’s going to be crystal, I wanted it to be like a big crystal house. It has to be, I don’t know the word [inaudible 1:14:43:00], but it has to be sort of mute.

Vikki: Ok. Calm.

Erika: Yes. It has to be a space of… This is obvious, this sounds obvious, but it is not necessary to remind the victims of what they have suffered because they know it and they do not forget it. In other words, when speaking in memory discourses, that it is necessary to remember in order not to forget, believe me that a victim does not forget, I wish they could forget for a minute of what happened to them. So it is a space where it can be, so as if they do not need to carry it all the time because it is there. So I am studying a lot of psychology and how.

Vikki: Architecture. Sí. I don’t want to keep you much longer but I just wanted to ask you a little bit about the Uganda connection. Just because it might be something that’s interesting for the magazine.

Erika: I am part of a research group at the UBC, University of British Columbia. I was invited by Pilar Riaño.

Vikki: I don’t know her.

Erika: Pilar had to do with the writing of the museum script.

Jaime: Pilar.

Erika: Riaño. With Martha Nubia, she is part of that group. And well, it's a group of transformative memory. And the exchange was in Uganda this year. It was incredible, that is, we worked with the Justice and Reconcilation Project, I got very close to the psychologist who worked all the sexual abuse part within that context. I worked with several of Joseph Kony's ex-wives. So, then, let's say how to narratively consider a different life. In other words, it is finally in the definitive connection with the spiritual, people believe a lot as in healing spirits, you have to give spirits a place to be able to be well in the present. I want to show…

Vikki: You took the messages, that are around the messages, the little messages, you took them.

Erika: Oh, you saw that. Ok. So, when I, you are going to an exchange, you are going from Colombia to Uganda and I said: what’s the point of giving a conference about Relicarios and what it makes. I mean, none of them make sense. The only thing that makes sense is your presence. And I said, when you are going, I thought when you are going to a place that has suffer, I went to [inaudible 01:18:06:00]. What can you take that makes sense for a community and I said, what’s better than a testimony of surviving and hope. So that’s why I recorded the testimonies. And I told, I work with both of them in Relicarios and I said: If you have the opportunity to say some things to a community that has suffer something similar, what would you say?

So, that’s the message that I took. And then they send back messages. I was with them last week, we watched the messages and they were so happy. Let me show you a photograph. They were thrilled to sort of, to see that they got a response.

Vikki: Yes. It’s like when you are a child and you have a [inaudible 01:19:05:00], you know? Like before internet. You will send a letter to somebody and you never expected a result [Laughs]

Erika: Exactly! So, you know, I said: It’s good that they see because I think that when you sort of fulfil that agreement of… it’s an exchange.

Vikki: Putting things in relation. I mean it’s like you are putting people in relation but you are also, you know the art, using objects here to put people in relation to each other. Facilitating.

Erika: Exactly so that’s exchange, you know? I say, me trying to explain what I do, I don’t even understand it in Spanish, we are trying to say it in English [Laughs], in Uganda, you know? What exactly is that we can sort of be connected by? I know that I already feel a citizen of Uganda, and they won’t forget what we did there. But this is a bit to answer again the question about the archives, for me it is like the physical experience. Finally, having been there, having known the red soil, they sewed me a dress because they sew to earn money. One of them and this is a testimony that marked my heart. One of them say: Some people want are born to be the fabric, the main fabric of a dress, some of us had to be the remnants (retazos), the traces. What we have to do to be able, what memory does is: we are sewing all the remnants together and we can create a new dress.

So that’s why the whole experience there, the colours, them cutting a dress for me, that woman saying that testimony, and when you see them together and when you understand what it is like to be a woman that was taking by the other tribe, you are rescued, but you are rescued for what? If you are [inaudible 1:21:34:00], if your father rejected you, you are nobody, if you have no husband you don’t exist. The father of your children is the victimario (perpetrator), they become nothing, they are not even person. So when they get together and form that community and work in a women’s advocacy project, and they saw to be able to buy things and they become a community by themselves. I think that’s why is worth time to create memory processes that can make a difference, like a real difference in people’s life. So I think that’s sort of like the whole point of being an artist if you understand that that can be sort of the space.

Without sounding altruistic either because I understand the limitations too, right? So, I think Uganda, the idea is that the Oratorios will include testimonies; it is no longer something that will only include testimonies from Colombia. I am going to work with people from Uganda as well, that is, the Oratory of the Disappeared will include testimonies from Argentina, from Mexico, from Uganda without a doubt, from Colombia.

Jaime: It’s a big project.

Vikki: 7 years.

Erika: At least. I have no eagerness either, you know? Of course, that is also one of the freedoms that I take. Well, I am receiving, that is, I do not have to meet a date, I do not have to meet an applicatiaon deadline, for the time it takes, at the pace it takes .

Vikki: Thank you so much.

Erika: Thank you.

Vikki: Is it ok if email you if I need your permission to use some images or to write something about your work.

Erika: Of course. Can I give you a book or you have lots of…?

Vikki: That would be amazing.

Erika: Or you have lots of…

Vikki: Always! And I’m sorry I should have brought my book for you, but I can send you the most recent pieces that I’ve written because I think that you would like to see them.

Erika: Of course, I’m going to tell you a little bit about this image. I worked with, she is Ricardina, I work with Ricardina’s daughter to create this Relicario. Yolanda, she is, in fact, a very well known victim, Yolanda Perea. She is part of the Truth Comission, she is part of it. Yolanda was raped when she was 8 or 9 years old. She told her mother Ricardina what happen, she was raped by the guerrilla. Ricardina was a lideresa, she went whit her brother, how do you say it?, to reclaim the guerrilla for Yolanda’s rape? She got shot in front of him, the bullet that killed Ricardina went through his leg. I have worked with Yolanda, so that’s why the Relicario is already done. He went to the studio with el grupo de personas de Urabá, that Yolanda help me organize. He went because he wanted to see Ricardina’s Relicario. I think they wanted to speak by itself. He said: Can I take her? I was like: Of course. I always died because he kept touch it, and I was like, oh my god, I’m going to have to re-do it [Laughs], but it’s ok, I had to re-do it.

But you see how, I think he is one of the biggest maestros I have had. I said: why are you smiling. And he looks at me, like: Oh my god, you don’t understand what are you doing, don’t you? And I was: Tell me! and he was like: I am able to see Ricardina even in the fond of the Relicarios, and is still ruling. I’m able to see her here like she was before, because I always remember her when she felt in my lap and she went like this. And I always remember that image. But now I remember her differently.

Vikki: And what is this? is it a…

Erika: The cell [La célula].

María Paula: ID.

Vikki: Oh, the ID, ok. So you had, sorry, just to be clear. So you had made this with her or with him.

Erika: With the daughter. The daughter gave me the objects.

Vikki: So the daughter who was raped, she gave you these things, and then the brother came. Ok, sorry, I just need to be clear because sometimes I think that I understand and then later on I try to write and I think hang on. Ok. Ok. A beautiful image, congratulations. This is the consent.

Erika: Do I say yes to everything? [Laughs]

María Paula: You can choose.

Erika: But let's say, the questions are set to say yes. [Read the document aloud and agree].

Argentina’s exhibition brought me to Rubén Chababo. And it was during a meeting about archives as well, yes, 'The archives haunt me'.

Vikki: Oh ok. Yes. I already know Rubén. A man with strong opinions [Laughs], but I liked that.

Erika: And Alejandra Naftal.

Vikki: Yes, yes.

Erika: She is so wonderful, she was here last week. I met her then.

Vikki: I was with him in Madrid.

Jaime: LASA, Boston. Madrid was…

Vikki: The year before. Yes, because there is another project, that one of our teammates is working with Alejandra Naftal in the ESMA and they are bringing a Polish artist, an installation artist. Is the first time that somebody who isn’t part of the story of Argentina has been allowed to show art inside the casino building, which is the building where the disappeared were held in the hood. So that’s quite interesting, Alejandra [inaudible 1:29:30:00]

One is for me, I think.

Erika: Is this me? Alejandra is hilarious. She was here last week. We met.

Vikki: I think she is very intelligent, the way she is working in the casino building and ESMA because it was a very precarious situation with the change of government that they were allow this to continue. And to continue in a way that’s very active, is not a museum...

Erika: I love that place more now because is very alive. There are memory museums that only ninth semester students go to, which is where they send you to school.

Vikki: If you can include your email here as well, please.

Erika: I'm going to England next week, I think. I'm going to York University.

Vikki: Yes To give a talk?

Erika: I'm going to show this. It's such a mental health thing. I don't know if they are watching me.

Jaime: I did my master's degree in York. Many years ago...

Erika: This is what I'm going for.

Jaime: You don't travel next week but the following one.

Erika: Contact information is my phone?

Paula: Yes. And mail.

Vikki: Thank you very much.Erika

\* \* \* \* \*