

## Panel 1

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(HELENA PRODUCCIONES), GEORGE OSODI AND RUBÉN ORTIZ TORRES

### Catastrophe, Protectionism and Exploitation Or, these same words but in another order

HELENA PRODUCCIONES  
(ANA MARÍA MILLÁN, WILSON DÍAZ, CLAUDIA PATRICIA SARRIA-MACÍAS)

Every year on August 7<sup>th</sup>, Colombia commemorates the Battle of Boyacá, which took place in 1819 and was decisive for Simón Bolívar's Venezuelan rooted liberation crusade. August 7<sup>th</sup> is also the day when Colombian presidents begin their terms. While writing this very text, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, after eight years in power<sup>1</sup>, handed his seat over to the economist Juan Manuel Santos, member of the powerful family that owns the newspaper *El Tiempo*, one of the highest in circulation in the country.

In 1956, on the morning of August 7<sup>th</sup>, the city of Cali, which then had a population of 240,000, suffered a massacre. Seven vans belonging to the national army<sup>2</sup> and loaded with 42 tons of dynamite exploded in the heart of the city. The Codazzi Battalion building disappeared, the Third Brigade Military Police buildings disappeared, eight densely populated blocks from the residential and commercial sectors of the city, roughly between 30<sup>th</sup> Street and 22<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> which made up Cali's downtown until the 1940's—fifteen blocks in all—were harmed by the explosion.

<sup>1</sup> Álvaro Uribe Vélez' presidency: first term, 2002-2006, second term, 2006-2010

<sup>2</sup> Fourteen vans loaded with dynamite were headed to Bogotá from Buenaventura, seven of them stayed in Cali the night of August 6<sup>th</sup>.

Nothing but smouldering sticks remained of the affected neighbourhoods' iconic palm trees. A red dust fell from Cali's morning sky, the dust from the bricks of the buildings and houses that flew through the air. The media reported 1,300 dead and more than 4,000 hurt. The official version—that is to say the Colombian President's version,—of that fateful day is that there was a 'political sabotage'<sup>3</sup>. However, the report that made the biggest impression on our collective memory is that fireworks and shells were being fired in anticipation of the country's August 7<sup>th</sup> party, and that there had been an accident.

On the evening of August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1956 Colombia's first 'Teletón' was broadcast on national TV. People in Bogotá paraded on TV screens, donating money and goods to the National Ministry of Social Assistance (SENDAS) and the Red Cross.

Many national and international initiatives, in the vein of the Teletón, have succeeded in raising donations and provisions for the victims.

Official history has it that the Cali explosion, as well as the public's interpretation of it, influenced Colombia's president at the time, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, to give up his power in 1957 and go into exile, while remaining protected by a Central American dictator<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> César Ayala Diago. *La explosión de Cali, agosto 7 de 1956 [The Cali Explosion, August 7, 1956]* Revista Credencial Histórica. September 1999. Number 117. Found in its original Spanish on: [lablaa.org/blaavirtual/revistas/credencial/septiembrede1999/117/explosion.htm](http://lablaa.org/blaavirtual/revistas/credencial/septiembrede1999/117/explosion.htm).

<sup>4</sup> General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, high-ranking military official and civil engineer, came to power through a coup d'état against the conservative Laureano Gómez on June 13, 1953, a holiday dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Laureano Gómez was a president worn by sickness who governed from his convalescent bed. After the military coup, he was replaced by Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez, who was well received by Colombia's opportunist political groups, the military and the public at large, because since 1948, following the assassination of the liberal political leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the country suffered an ongoing blood-filled bipartisan violence. When General Pinilla assumed power, the radio blared over the Colombian masses: *No more blood, no more depredations in name of any political party. Peace, justice and liberty.*

His government oversaw significant social reforms benefiting the most disadvantaged sectors which propelled economic, social and educational development. He introduced television as a pedagogic tool by creating a national television network that broadcast educational shows; he founded the Pedagogic University of Colombia; created the National Service of Learning (SENA); automated the urban and rural telephone system; depoliticized the police force, merging it with the Ministry of War; built the El Dorado International Airport and eighteen more airports; paved the greater part of the country's main highways; finished the hydroelectric dam in Lebría; the new refineries, Barrancabermeja and Acerías Paz del Río; the Military Hospital; the National Administrative Center (CAN); the Military Club; the Astronomic Observatory; created the banks, Ganader and Cafetero; capitalized on the Agrarian Fund; established the Tobacco Development Institute and the National Institute of Provisions; created the Office of Relief and Rehabilitation to help victims of violence, and the National Secretariat of Social Assistance. And, among others, he recognized the

The atmosphere of solidarity that the 1956 catastrophe generated made it possible for the national government to craft the Housing Plan through which an investment design was sealed—a sum no less than 10 million pesos—for the construction of a neighbourhood of mobile houses for the victims of Cali. The mobile neighbourhood was at some point contemptuously called the ‘tin neighbourhood’.

Martínez Magaña brothers, sold a designated plot of land to the Land Credit Institute, and that’s when the Aguablanca neighbourhood was built, which shouldn’t be confused, as so often happens, with the minted Aguablanca District. The neighbourhood was small, 23 hectares, subdivided into 25 blocks, two of them reserved for green zones or parks. Rafael López Uribe was the architect who oversaw the construction of the 157 mobile homes. The architects, Juan Osorio and his partner, López Aldana, built two more sectors. And so 468 aluminium houses in all, without very much ground anchorage, were erected. Years later those houses flew out of there, but not because a tornado or an explosion plucked them, but because they were very easy to pack up and take away. Brick houses were also built in the area, which made the neighbourhoods 457 homes larger, thanks to national and international funds. And so Cali victims were entitled to buy houses thanks to donations.<sup>5</sup>

*“The explosion of 1956 was a terrible thing. All of the houses between 26<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> street were blown away. They say seven trucks had come in from Ecuador loaded with powder. They were parked in front of the train station at one in the morning. No one could look up at the sky because fist-fulls of ash would fall in their eyes. And the sirens’ scream was horrendous. Electric power was out and people ran from one place to another in total darkness. Then we heard on the radio that the explosion had been on 25<sup>th</sup> street, between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> which was the designated ‘zone of tolerance,’ a place that was full*

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political rights of women and their right to vote with the third legislative act of the National Constituent Assembly (A.N.A.C) of August 25, 1954.

Like a good dictator, Rojas Pinilla also succeeded in getting away with more than his share. Among other abuses he closed the newspapers *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador* and *El Siglo* in 1955. While confronting this situation, the editorial board of *El Tiempo* strategically came out with its identical twin, the newspaper, *El Intermedio*.

Enrique Santos Molano, *Treinta y seis mil quinientos días de prensa escrita [Thirty Six Thousand Days of Print Media]*, Credencial Historia, issue 178 October 2004, <http://lablaa.org/blaavirtual/revistas/credencial/octubre2004/prensa.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Arturo Rodríguez O. and Gladys Bossio Jiménez. Aguablanca Protagonista 1984. Historia de los Barrios de Cali (History of Cali’s Neighborhoods), Administrative Department of Social Promotion and Community Action, Valle del Cauca Room, Departmental Library of Cali.

*of bars. Many of my friends and neighbours had gone there to have a good time. Three friends of mine, who I used to play soccer with, died. They’d gone there to spend the night out. The Aguablanca houses were donated by the government. This is good land; it was one of the only barrios still standing after the explosion. The victims had the opportunity to enjoy government aid because they’d been left with nothing. The government of Venezuela donated the Edificio Venezolano (Venezuelan Building), which is where my wife’s uncle got an apartment. He worked on the train, and was one of the August 7<sup>th</sup> victims. The donations were an incentive for people to go on because it’s very hard to be left with no house, no belongings, no rooms, everything gone. It was a wonderful thing the government did...”*

*“A lot of time has passed but there must still be one or two victims living in the neighbourhoods. Though most of the inhabitants are new people who have built modern houses—two, three and four-story tall. People bought the aluminium houses and then, with time, they took them down and started rebuilding brick houses, and that’s why this neighbourhood is more organized and modernized now. As far as I know, most of the little aluminium houses were taken to farmland. I have a few friends who have one in Dapa<sup>6</sup>. Many wanted their home to be out in the country. These houses can really look out of place. Back then no one knew of aluminium houses, they’d only seen tin houses with zinc-plated sheets. But this aluminium is a wonderful thing, and many people have preserved them.”*

*So that’s what little I can tell you about how this neighbourhood came about and what became of it. Many of the people that grew up here are now well educated. They were raised to become doctors, and now they’re people with a lot of weight and they live in other parts. They sold their houses and they left for other, more comfortable sectors.”*

*“I was born in this barrio, in this very house. I’m 46 years old and, well, this barrio has definitely progressed. The streets didn’t even used to be paved. All the houses were aluminium, which was donated by the Dutch or German government. How great! People don’t know which of the two governments it was, but we do know it was a great donation they made. More than one owner has decided to sell half their property to better their economic situation, because to improve these houses we have to talk economics, because they’re*

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<sup>6</sup> Township in the Municipality, Yumbo, of Colombia’s Valle del Cauca.

<sup>7</sup> Manuel Saa in conversation with Helena Productions in the neighborhood of Aguablanca in Cali, 2010.

big houses. They're about three hundred meters squared, which is twenty-five meters long by eleven wide. The barrio has been developing since the Pan American Games came here some forty years ago, when the tin houses started disappearing because most people started rebuilding. Because, as I already said, they were determined to sell half their lot in order to build a better half-lot. That's the way to do it. Only if one has enough cash flow, is it possible to build up their entire property and have a huge house enviable to anyone.

The houses they sold were then taken to the country. They were sold at a good price, and can be put up anywhere. The bare house can be sold at just about 6 million pesos. I've seen them take down many houses. I could even do it myself. Anyone could do it. Here's a better way to explain it: when they made this house, they put down one floor, a well-levelled mortar, and the house basically just laid on there and was fixed into place. These houses don't have any anchorage, even though there are sometimes winds strong enough to lift them, but no, nothing happens; they're stable. When winter comes, they stay strong. And when it rains it's so nice to sleep through the night because the rain drops are loud and that noise cradles you to sleep and makes you want to wrap yourself in another other blanket. I spent my childhood here, was raised here, when all of this hadn't yet been paved and everything lay uncovered. It wasn't paved until after the Pan American Games, when this avenue, the Simón Bolívar, was constructed. Then, as I've said, many started to sell half their house or all of it and they went to go live in other neighbourhoods. I wasn't yet born in the time of the explosion and I don't know why they lodged some victims here and others in the Venezuelan Building. But I can tell you something: I think the guys who got these lots won, because it's very different living in an apartment than living in a house. They say, though, that many of those living in the Venezuelan Building also sold their apartments. The new wave of renters renovated them. And I've heard that it's also very good to live there. We have some friends in the Venezuelan Building and it's been more than twenty years since we've seen each other's faces. They're happy enough so that they don't come back here, and we're happy enough so that we don't come back there.<sup>8</sup>

The Venezuelan president at the time of the Cali explosion, Andrés Pérez Jiménez, generously offered to construct a big apartment building for the victims and sent technical personnel to accomplish this. That's how the Unidad Residencial República

<sup>8</sup> Edinson Rodríguez in conversation with Helena Productions in the neighborhood of Aguablanca in Cali, 2010.

de Venezuela [Residential Unity Republic of Venezuela] or the Venezuelan Building as it's popularly known, was built, located in the neighbourhood, La Flora, on A. North Sixth Avenue, with the address numbers 33-06. The family of the Venezuelan citizen Adolfo Bueno Madrid donated the thirty-five floors that make up this building. Oddly, this building was once part of a condominium complex in the neighbourhood Veintitrés de Enero, on the west side of Caracas, Venezuela. Rumour has it that the eighth building of this complex was donated during the dictatorship of Pérez Jimenez.<sup>9</sup>

*"We were one of the families that were chosen to live in the neighbourhood based on our history and education. I've lived here with my family for 52 years. My two sisters married here at the church, and live at the Venezuelan Building. We've never been rich, but we've also never needed anything. The detonation of one of those devices ruined our furniture, but no one in my family died. We lived by Porvenir, in the Jorge Isaacs neighbourhood.<sup>10</sup> Officials came shortly after to see how we were doing. My mom went and talked with this one politician, Mercedes was her name. She was really good friends with my mom, who told her, 'I came to talk to you because frankly I can't take my kids there.' 'Where did they put you?' Mercedes asked my mother. And my mother said, 'Well they told me they'd put me in Aguablanca, that I should go pick out one of those tin houses.' And she added: 'Do me a favour and get me a good spot, like in the Venezuelan Building, for example, which I know is just being finished.'*

*"The building has been really strong in withstanding earthquakes, and those of us living in the 150 apartments have tried to keep them in good condition. We're fixing the water pipes now, trying to maintain it because we realize how well built it is."<sup>11</sup>*

The British Triangle Art Trust (now Triangle Network) hired Helena Productions in 2006, in order to oversee the implementation of a basic blueprint for artist cooperatives in a rural part of their chosen country, which this time around was Colombia. This blueprint had already been used in various countries, amongst them, India, Mozambique, and Vietnam. These countries were primarily in the southern hemisphere, the majority of them "underdeveloped." Those appointed in each country

<sup>9</sup> Patricia Villegas, *En Venezuela sí hay fuego en el 23* [There is Fire in Venezuela's 23], El País Cal, November 13, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> One of the plazas in the city's market.

<sup>11</sup> Alicia Ordoñez Correa in conversation with Helena Productions in the Venezuelan Building, 2010.

were able to apply the blueprint in differing ways depending on their own context and the main thrust of their organization. After many tries, as it so often takes here, in obtaining the necessary money and after having to postpone the project due to issues in dealing with public policy, Helena Productions finally raised the money to start the process and, after some discussion, finally decided to build this version of the blueprint on the beaches of Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra. With the money from the Dutch Foundation Prince Claus for Culture and Development which works under the Triangle Network's umbrella, and with ties to Colombia's Ministry of Culture, along with the help of Hotel Turístico La Luna and Cali's Comfandi Cultural Center, Helena Productions started the project in February 2010 which resulted in the artist cooperative of this area, finished sometime between July 15<sup>th</sup> and July 31<sup>st</sup> 2010.

Helena Productions managed (and still manages) its program, *Mobile School of Social Practice and Knowledge*, with a framework borrowed from *Investigative Laboratories for Creation*, a program run by the Colombian Ministry of Culture. It does this with, for example, one of their pedagogic courses called *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop*. Helena Productions started its preparatory visits to those communities in February of 2010.

During the development of the first phase of the project *Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice* in Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra, which lasted several months, Helena Productions decided to work from the hotel, Los Acantilados located between Juanchaco and Ladrilleros. This hotel is made up of various aluminum houses which the previous owners, victims of the 1956 explosion, had received as a donation and which once made up the Cali neighbourhood of Aguablanca. Those houses were moved out of that neighbourhood in the sixties along with many more from Buenaventura. Because of the nature of the hotel's material, its interior heats up as the temperature outside goes up, but they're also easily cooled by wind.

This hotel, with its many metal structures, is located between a Navy airstrip and the Pacific Ocean, separated from the township's main highway by a strip of lush vegetation and engulfed by the sound of the sea and the song of frogs and lizards, which is only ever interrupted by the burst of helicopters. It's an architectural space with history, birthed from a context moulded by the presence of military and tourism. A little like the beginning of one of those movies about Vietnam.

*"There are people who come and say, these tin houses... But I tell them, these aren't tin houses, they're aluminium houses. These houses come from*

*below, from Juanchaco, right where the crowd of bluffs begin, until we get here where these constructions end.*

*"These houses, that became what today is Aguablanca, were donated by the Canadian government for the victims of the explosion of 1956. Then, around the seventies, those who lived in these houses started bettering their homes, improving their quality of life, and they began to rebuild with different material. These houses were left uninhabited again. But people saw the opportunity to bring this type of construction over to the countryside because they're so easy to move, so light. Back then, the transportation needed to get here was very complicated, but even then everyone resolved to move these houses and then re-build them. It wasn't just us, but our neighbours, too.*

*"Each organized their home and brought it. Back then, there wasn't any official transportation here. It was only offered during bridges<sup>12</sup> or during certain seasons, until coastal shipping was created. The two most well known boats that brought supplies here were the Asturias and the Learzo. Everyone took advantage of the boat and brought as much stuff as they had, and would stake out a big space for their disassembled houses and whatever other material they need, like cement, the Eternit water tanks that we used back then and scrap wood.*

*"Truth is, everything was done with the help of my dad who, along with my brothers, managed this place. I was really young back in the year '57, '60. I was a teenager. They were older. Back then they were the people who were at the front of the place and I helped them with whatever they needed.*

*"Like I've mentioned, the houses were owned by people who had received them as a form of help. The families were able to better their quality of life and at one point outgrew these houses and sold them. Even today, there is still this type of house in the sector of Santa Elena. The houses were bought either still-standing or already disassembled. Everyone rented a medium truck that could hold four tons to go to Cali-Buenaventura, and simply bring the house along with the rest of their stuff. This job was mostly taken on solo, though sometimes two or three people who were looking for transportation would work together and share the expenses.*

*"These houses are totally able to be disassembled. There's no problem.*

*They're made up of sheets of eighty and forty centimetres wide by up to three meters long. There are actually many types of lengths. They're built with aluminium fasteners, though here we're working with zinc-plated fasteners because*

<sup>12</sup> Refers to a weekend and/or two or more holiday days in a row.

*the aluminium on the roof will bloat and contract with the changes in temperature, and can break or cut into the screw heads. And so the zinc plated ones are of a tougher material, though in reality the zinc plated ones aren't very advisable either. Ours, anyway, are pretty deficient and also get pocked by the weather.*<sup>13</sup>

The topic of land ownership is a flashpoint in this region of the country. Shortly after our moving here, the Departmental Assembly of the Cauca Valley issued an ordinance<sup>14</sup> that promoted land ownership within the parameters established in 1996 through Law 55 which restricted land use proportionally to its potential for tourism.

The ordinance opened the possibility of individual or collective land ownership, which has generated various conflicting positions amongst the population about its potential ramifications. Individual ownership, for example, is the type of ownership that, for the time being, can more easily be sought out, and is highly regarded by the politically powerful group of settlers who have come from various regions of the country to establish their businesses in the area; however, this type of ownership has been fought by the larger population in the region, made up of the native islanders of African descent, who generally prefer collective ownership as a strategy to protect their territory and its resources from individual interests. The possibility of this latter option is a direct effect of the advice given by the Colombian Institute of Rural Development along with the Community Councils, and its advancement would be backed by Law 70 of 1993<sup>15</sup>, written to protect the Afro-Colombian communities represented by said Councils.

<sup>13</sup> Efrain Urrea Delgado in conversation with Helena Productions in Juanchaco, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> "(...) First article: Governor of the Valle del Cauca Department, authorized to oversee the distribution of land in the areas of Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra, of the Municipality of Buenaventura, Valle, which the State conceded in Law 55 of 1996." Departmental Assembly of the Valle del Cauca, Ordinance 302 of December 23, 2009. See more at: <http://www.valledelcauca.gov.co/asamblea/publicaciones.php?id=7633>

<sup>15</sup> "Objectives and definitions. Article 1. This Act is intended to recognize the black communities who have been occupying uncultivated land in rural areas along the Pacific Rim, in agreement with their traditional production practices, and gives them right to collectively owned property in accordance with the following article provisions. It also aims to establish a framework for the protection of cultural identity and the rights of Colombia's black communities as an ethnic group, and the promotion of their economic and social development, with the goal of guaranteeing that these communities obtain the same conditions of equality and opportunity as the rest of the Colombian population. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1 of article 55 of the Constitution, this Act shall apply in uncultivated, rural and waterfront areas in other regions of the country that have been occupied by black communities who work with traditional production practices and fulfill the requirements established in this Act." Congress of Colombia, Law 70 of August 27, 1993. See more at: [http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/base/doc/ley/1993/ley\\_0070\\_1993.html](http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/base/doc/ley/1993/ley_0070_1993.html).

Another pull in the area comes from the indigenous populations native to the region who, in spite of a self-recognized resistance to opening their communities to the greater Colombia, paradoxically try to have a constant presence in the economic and political arenas of Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra. The indigenous leave their safeguarded communities located in the jungle to buy land from the black communities, as they've done in the sector of Arrastraderos in Ladrilleros where a small village within the Wouunaan community's territory has been strategically growing.

The three nearby indigenous communities are governed or influenced by, among others, public organizations like Community Councils, Hotel Unions and, in the case of the Wouunaan, by the Indigenous Councils as well as the Catholic and Evangelist Churches who have a strong voice in the region. Similarly, the State of Colombia is influenced by the Pacific Armed Naval Force, the National Police and the Department of Administrative Security (DAS). This complicates any negotiations in a situation like the one that developed when the *Mobil School of Social Knowledge and Practice* came onto the stage, along with its various components like the *Artists Workshop of Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra* and the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV*.

Helena Productions develops projects, which, through field investigation as well as archival research, come to new places with new ideas. Before all else it seeks to discover a broad sense of place based on direct experiences, all with a sense of adventure that has characterized many of its projects. The members of the collective have had many personal life experiences in these three places over the course of three decades. Boldly, they developed this project by going directly to the political actors of these three communities without first going through any of the filters accustomed in Colombia's political arenas which are so often corrupted by vice, cronyism and WAM (What About Me?). This made room for difficult but direct negotiation that produced solutions and growing possibilities. One local coordinator created a pedagogic tool, *Investigative Laboratory for Creativity in the Pacific South IV*, which forms part of the newest version of Helena Production's *Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice*, which has the goal of investigating in a space that is formed by the following two questions: What would you like to learn and do? And, what would you like to teach? Or, what do you know and would like to share? These questions gave birth to a process that unfolded through presentations and exchanges of information, the development of practical exercises, conversations and experiences having to do with local culture and daily life.

These workshops created a meeting space for the inhabitants of the three locations where the struggle to earn money, which came from a dependence on tourism,

had made friends, families, and neighbours forget how to work in a group, as a community, and had created an individualistic model of everyday life. At the same time, tourism is threatening current cultural customs. We should note that tourism in this area, to this date, hasn't had the opportunity to really take off. Ecological tourism is sought through a modest infrastructure, which has kept it affordable to tourists. The area's development, growth and possibilities seem to be limited by the politically and socially powerful, which can be seen in the fact that the place is very rich in various ways, but that this isn't reflected in the economy or the rights of its oldest communities. Another point to have in mind is the lack of unity between various ecologic projects to protect and promote the area, which is evident in the deterioration of the environment because of the mismanagement of waste and the pollution caused by its inhabitants, foreigners and tourists.

Any plans of ecotourism are still incipient, and so they're at a purely developmental phase and people are still torn over the importance of protecting the area and the benefits in exploiting it with tourism. These enumerated conditions gave the push to open a workshop dealing with topics raised by its participants, including: working together, developing events and projects, supporting each other, sustainability, markets and tourism.

The first two sessions of the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV*, took place in the main buildings of the primary and secondary schools for the entire area. The Educational Institution of Juanchaco is a simple building that was constructed in almost two months as part of a technical training set up between the Colombian and North American military to realize engineering and military projects in the area. The agreement called for the two military units to collaborate on public work, and it was agreed that whatever was constructed could be used by the community. The construction of the school and health post were just two of the humanitarian works done by 156 North American military officers who came by helicopter and cargo ships to the beaches of Juanchaco and Bahía Malaga.<sup>16</sup>

Consistent with Helena Productions' interests in land politics and its complicated place in Colombia's economic and political history, this place was picked to hold discussions on the making of local handicrafts and traditional products, local history, and policies that affect every day life.

<sup>16</sup> *Juanchaco a la orilla de la desinformación* [Juanchaco at the edge of misinformation], *El Tiempo*, January 8, 1994 <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-8962>.

*"Although my field is in electro-mechanics and electronics, I've dedicated myself to making hand crafted things from materials that are autochthonous from this area, that are representative of it, that have a strong relationship with the medium that is the sea, the shores, the folklore. In short, the work that I do is authentic. I haven't copied it from anyone. I'd never seen anything like it. And lots of people who know a lot about handicrafts assure that they've never seen anything like it, that it's something very authentic. It's something that teaches my art is didactic.*

*"I work with coconut, with 'chonta' wood, which is the bark of palm trees, and a material called 'guerregue,' that comes from the same palm from which indigenous get their material for the outer coating of hand crafted jugs and vases. With these materials, I make things that I'm passionate about, which are model boats from every year.*

*"There's a boat that is very typical here in the San Juan River, the 'potra remontada' (turnaround mare). A 'potra remontada' has a 55 horse motor. People here say that those are military boats. This one is called, 'the military.' We have another boat that is very modern. It has really powerful motors that are being used for drug-trafficking and this model is more or less a flying boat. They're made for two people only; one person goes strapped in the driver's seat, without a helmet, while the other co-pilots. That one is called, 'the bang.'*

*"I also do works like this cup. The priest from the town Ladrilleros takes his wine in a cup made by me. A lot of people like them.*

*"I'm a mathematician, I'm a technologist, an industrial designer. I like to read a lot. I'm a man of a lot of information, of encyclopaedia, from which I've taken so many ideas. I've done a lot of work, and necessity has called for me sell these works. But my dream is to have a museum in my house where I can have some 50 model boats from different times and cultures."<sup>17</sup>*

*"There's a traditional hand craft made with the root of a plant that is common in the woods, that is called 'chocolatillo.' It's very pretty and ancient, and it was used to make baskets. Our grandparents were the ones that worked the material most. I began to find out about 'chocolatillo' by talking with my grandmothers. They used to make baskets too, they also made hand held fans and mats out of them. Then I started to seek my mother out. My mother also wove. Yes, there were many women who worked with the material here, but now hardly*

<sup>17</sup> Oscar Barandica at the Investigative Laboratory—*Creativity for South Pacific IV*, *Helena's Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice*, Juanchaco, 2010.

anyone is making them. It might be because when people really work on something, those things are just left there, no one sees a way out with them. Not even tourists buy these things. Anyway, I've taught my daughters how to weave."<sup>18</sup>

"I'm going to talk a little about food, about the typical dishes of the region which are 'pianguas,' shrimp, rice in coconut, the 'guagua,' and fish stew. Everyone cooks differently here, but still everyone seasons with coconut and herbs. 'Nato' is the best for seasoning fish; also 'pargo'... Tourists ask for 'pargo'; it's used a lot here. But to make the best seasoning in the entire community, everyone knows to use 'nato,' it's healthier, while 'pargo' irritates the stomach, and so it's not recommended to use when one is ill."<sup>19</sup>

Later on the workshop opened at various sites in Juanchaco and in Ladrilleros, such as places formerly reserved for the Community Council's meetings, as well as at the recreational centre, *Los Robles*, where training events were held for the community by the community.

Because of the needs expressed by the enablers of this workshop, who are also the community's inhabitants, it was developed with the aid of Helena Productions who's members discussed and made possible the study and confrontation of the community's stories. Multiple exercises were developed based on the topics and needs that were surfacing and workshop participants were encouraged to lead and share their knowledge about these matters.

Sometimes using not much more than a pencil and notebook, the workshop participants developed and shared their own investigations and stories. *La Escuela de Esgrima con Machete de Puerta Tejada* [The Woven Door's School of Fencing by Machete], an alternative school, presented a project that focused on Colombia's colonial past and the problem of exploiting workers who harvest cane sugar for the sugar industry. This investigation was included in many of Helena's projects as well as in, more specifically, the *Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice*.

The industrial designer and artist, Sammy Delgado Escobar, also participated, representing the art collective, Konvertible. Sammy developed a furniture prototype for street vendors, which was then constructed and used by craftsmen and other businessmen in one of the important events of this project: the *Coco Show*.

<sup>18</sup> Rosalbina Valencia speaking at the *Investigative Laboratory—Creativity for the South Pacific IV*, *Helena's Mobil School of Social Knowledge and Practice*, Juanchaco, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Luz Mary López speaking at the *Investigative Laboratory—Creativity for the South Pacific IV*, *Helena's Mobil School of Social Knowledge and Practice*, Juanchaco, 2010.

The interest in production at the *Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice* was reflected in, among other things, its mobile workshop on production that worked hard to meet the different needs of its participants (local residents and some artists who joined in the last stage of the project). This workshop functioned in various spaces, like hotels, streets, the beach, etc. Molds were produced to make sand forms, diverse montages, tables and other wooden constructions; in general, discussion, advice and various technical solutions were spurred. Also the organization and the artists worked in various spaces of production within the community: tailor shops, sawmills, a carpentry workshop, artisan workshops and other places.

Some exercises developed advertisements for the businesses of the workshop participants—their restaurants, hotels, stores, artisan shops and their individual or family run micro-enterprise projects. This vision culminated in the organization, production and realization of an open invitation community event, both festive and commercial, called the *Coco Show*, which was held on the main road, at the Community Council Meeting Hall of Juanchaco. For this event, artisans exhibited their projects and sold the furniture they designed and built during the workshops and with the help of the production team contracted by Helena. There was also a gastronomy event with local and foreign delicacies and a concert presenting the musical group, Guascanato, who's lyrics talk about the social history and recent politics of Ladrilleros, the band's hometown.

The group that formed during the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop* includes the following. Yonamine (Angola), Samuel Tituaña (Ecuador) and Edinson Quiñones (Colombia) were photographers for the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV*. They divided cameras amongst themselves, and documented some of the artisan pieces and other products made by the people of the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV*, which ended up also serving as advertisement for these pieces. The pictures were developed, laminated, handed out, exhibited and discussed. The artist, Alejandra Gutiérrez (Colombia), owner of a restaurant in Cali, lead a workshop about food and the kitchen. In a similar manner, Jennys Fernanda Obando (Colombia) designed drawing exercises based on the utensils and spaces of the kitchens of the workshop participants. Ana Olema Hernández (Cuba) started a project for the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV* called Leviathan. Little by little, participation and the invitation to lead these workshops grew.

Some of the artists in both the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop* and the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV* and who participated in the *Coco Show* were Juan Carlos Leon (Ecuador), who lead a free

gastronomic event in the street, in which he prepared “corviche,” a recipe of fish, banana and peanuts, typical of his hometown Guayaquil located on the Pacific Ocean; Eliana Otta (Peru), who presented a series of products, amongst them, prints, vinyl, dolls, key chains, and clothes, which could be bought in exchange for a picture drawn of any of the objects; and Alejandra Gutierrez, who did representations of the “chigua” using drawings and fruit found in the region, a topic which was then developed through further investigations done in the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop*.

From Juanchaco and Bahía Málaga one can see humpback whales, also known as “yubartas,” that come between July and October of every year to spawn, have their baby whales and raise them during their first months of life. This, amongst other natural wonders of the area, makes the region an exceptional site of natural wealth. This is one of the rainiest places on the planet; and so the rainfall determines the lack of an aqueduct and the absence water to bathe in and drink. Here, one finds the jungle and the sea, and an exuberant plethora of animals and vegetables, which forces visitors to be cautious with some of the insects, reptiles and sea animals that are known to be a danger to people.

As of some years ago, two possibilities with a potentially great impact have been discussed by two very powerful sets of interests: one possibility is declaring this area a National Natural Park, which would come with its advantages, responsibilities and, surely, limitations; the other possibility which has the favour of a lot of the nation as well as the favour of the industrial sector of Valley of Cauca’s, is constructing the longest and most important dock in South America in Bahía Málaga. This would impact the local economy in an important way and on the other hand would affect, to give just one example, the whale’s migratory route. These Helena Productions projects were developed in an environment shaky with the change that either of these possibilities promised.

The artists’ arrival and the development of their goals in the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop* was enthusiastically received by the community because they were initially perceived to be a group of diverse national and foreign tourists.

As was expected, and in spite of the boat trips down river, the daily and nightly hikes, the expectation of seeing whales jumping out of the sea, the preoccupation of putting on sunscreen and moisturizer and trying to stay cool, the pleasure felt in jumping in the pool at the Hotel Turístico La Luna and the Hotel Costa Real, enjoying good cuisine, the fruit of the sea, the evenings spent on the beach as well as the nights in the Templo del Ritmo, or simply the killing of mosquitoes with No Piquex

spray, it seemed none of the artists wanted to be called a tourist. This gave way to many heated discussions that, in the least, happily ended with a dip in the pool.

The artists investigated and worked in the community in various ways, and they started even before they came. They succeeded in doing exhaustive field investigations, they visited places of interest to their projects and arranged meetings and negotiations with individuals and organizations they recompiled information and made products. They gave talks about their work, they also produced, with or without help, various things that could then be bought or exhibited or that were part of other production processes, like videos or photos. They developed pedagogic processes that enabled them to make, among other things, workshops and events, prints, drawings, edible products, sculptures and outdoor installations. For Helena Productions, too, it was an important and unprecedented experience, a memorable exploratory trip. The *Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice*, invited artists to the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop*, participants to the *Investigative Laboratory of Creation for the South Pacific IV*, and the community at large to various events. The *Mobile School of Social Knowledge and Practice* is a mechanism to negotiate and exchange, and this experience was made possible and was also enriched by Helena Productions’ flexible pedagogic model that brings together artists with community organizations, artists with Catholic priests, and even artists with Colombia’s Administrative Department of Security (DAS).

As the days went on and various of the artists projects came to light within the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop*, things got complicated. After their “honeymoon” with the community during the development of the *Investigative Laboratory*, came, the very next day, the break-up. Now it’s important to point out the capacity that art has to problematize and create friction, as well as the capacity it has to see things in various, disparate ways and of posing uncomfortable questions.

The artist, Juan Carlos Leon of Ecuador, presented his project, INEC, in which he sought to take the population’s census using surveys and graphing methods. This process was recorded in a few books that were produced for the purposes of the project. He’d initially planned to do this with three populations, but he was only able to accomplish this with one group because of the pressure he received from local public organizations that acted on surprisingly nationalists and xenophobic concerns. After a round of negotiations with some community action coalition groups, the police and military armed units got involved and, to make matters worse, some of the questions on the census made some of the personnel in the military armed units uncomfortable and the project was looked at with suspicion due to the current conflict between Colombia’s and Ecuador’s authorities (some



even whispered that the artist was actually a spy). Finally, DAS showed up at the *Juanchaco, Ladrilleros and La Barra Workshop*. Another reason why DAS came was to review the project *Leviathan*, put on by the Cuban artist, Ana Olema Hernández. In this workshop, leaders of the three communities were represented, along with his ideology and the context that helped shape this ideology. The workshop also included the participation of a hypnologist. This project angered the community and the leaders of the Catholic and Evangelist churches because of its title, *Leviathan*, and possibly because of the role of the hypnologist. Around the pulpits it was said that because *Leviathan* was a marine monster whoever created that workshop must be part of a local cult. Also, techniques were used which the military called brainwashing. The project, needless to say, was not to their liking. In addition, the tours lead by the collective formed by Yonamine, Samuel Tituaña and Edinson Quiñones caused uneasiness in the community who asked themselves what someone from Angola (Angola was suffering from guerrilla warfare at the time), Ecuador and the southern part of the country were doing in these remote areas. And, in general, people questioned the meddling of each artist within the communities. Finally, *Helena Productions* was understood to be a Non Profit Organization and, because of this, was looked at suspiciously, basically because of prejudices related to this form of organization. Non-Profits have been distorted and attacked in Colombia during the last eight years.

These developments pushed the group to hold a private meeting at Hotel Costa Real, where they discussed the possibility of traveling to Cali to hold their Open Day (an event in which the group presents their projects to the public) in order to gain distance from the tense situation they were confronting. But this possibility was finally discarded. Though the group felt that the community and local authorities were turning their backs on them, they decided to hold Open Day there in the hotel. This was an important decision, because holding Open Day at Hotel Costa Real was an opportunity to show the community what the artists had accomplished, as well as what they themselves had participated in. These were projects in which the community could somehow find themselves: there were representations of the local motorcyclists who move primarily between Juanchaco and Ladrilleros offering to give everyone rides, both local and foreigners; there was Tocayo, the most eccentric character of the region; the flag that Fluvia, a local seamstress, made and that is captured in a video documenting the event at La Barra, which had the traditional music of *viche*, *tumbacatre* and *arrechon* playing in the background; this same video also captured the local landlord talking about the importance of community and; there were drawings of ice-cream shops and

other businesses. The public had the chance to eat the almost forgotten recipe of "chigua" wraps and Yonamine's Angolan dishes and three-milk cakes from a traditional Southern Colombian recipe. The event had all of this and more and was held in the middle of a pretty hotel, a space that, though it was usually closed to the public, opened its doors to make the celebration possible and so helped bring these initial phases of the *Helena* project to a close.

A few days later, when everyone had gone back to Cali, or to their states and countries of origin (while this text was being written) the Colombian government, with less than 48 hours before the new president's inauguration, declared the *Uramba Bahía Málaga Park* a protected National Natural Park which generated an uproar that is still very much alive in the industrial sector of the country which, at least for now, sees its developmental ambitions truncated. The importance of this park lies in the sheer amount of animal and plant species that live there. Without out a doubt, this declaration will help preserve the environmental services that the area offers the local community, like fishing, the production of raw materials used in artisan manufacturing and the possibility of optimizing ecotourism, which would be a push to improve waste management and protect the diversity and cultural richness of the ancestral indigenous communities, the afro-descendent *raizales*, and bring us closer to a different kind of relationship with the newer settlers and tourists in the area.

We should always keep Bahía Málaga's diversity in mind. It's not only a biological diversity, but also a political, social and economic one. This diversity represents a crucial attribute of the country at large, one that has resulted in so many unique phenomena. To see this place as only a tourist hotspot would be far too innocent and unrealistic of a vision.

These artist workshops seek to find a home-base where they can sharpen and develop. Given the current situation and that they're prone to wandering, they will continue to look for a place to house their next project. In the end, at least, their house is very light and mobile.