Countering Columbus

"La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan"—Antimonuments and Artistic Interventions on the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City

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During protests that have advocated the destruction of colonial monuments or their removal from public display, the figure of Christopher Columbus has come repeatedly into focus.[1] Previously revered as a transnational hero, a visionary explorer who gave the "Old World" a "New" one, a personification of enlightenment and progress, Columbus has come to be regarded mainly as the initiator of a history of genocide, forced missionary work, and enslavement. In this process of changing perceptions, several forms of public dissent have emerged in opposition to monuments originally erected to pay tribute to the Genovese navigator. These range from vandalism and removal, replacement and relocation, to various forms of artistic reframing.[2]

In Mexico City, on October 10, 2020, the municipal government preempted a demonstration calling for the removal of the Columbus monument on Paseo de le Reforma. It was removed as a precaution, as were the statues of monks seated at his feet, under the pretext of planned restoration. The octagonal pedestal, however, including a dedication to Columbus, remained. Like the United States and other Latin American countries, Mexico built its post-independence identity around Columbus as an embodiment of the nation's European heritage, an identity that has become embedded into the country's commemorative landscape as well.[3] The *Monumento a Colón* on Paseo de la Reforma, created by the French sculptor Charles Cordier, is probably the most prominent tribute to Columbus in Mexico, inaugurated in 1877 as the first monument on Mexico City's prestigious boulevard (fig. 1).

The Paseo de la Reforma, planned along the lines of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, with similar *glorietas* (roundabouts, or *étoiles*, in French) with streets leading away from it in a star shape, was intended from the outset as a site for monuments. Originally built at the behest of Emperor Maximilian I, who wanted to achieve a direct connection between Chapultepec Castle, which he occupied, and the former Palacio Imperial (now the Palacio Nacional) on the Zócalo, the first part of the boulevard entered into operation in 1865. Its further development can be seen in the context of the symbolic legitimation of Porfirio Díaz's enduring regime, the *porfiriato* (1876–1910). Diaz's quest for national modernization included public health initiatives and extensive engineering projects.[4] The boulevard thus conformed to the European tradition of creating memorial spaces in city centers, with the intention of conveying ideas of modernity, progress, and civilization, of national identity and national

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1. For examples of the defacement or toppling of Columbus monuments, see "Christopher Columbus Statue Beheaded in Boston, One in Richmond Thrown in Lake," NBC News, June 10, 2020, www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/boston-christopher-columbus-statue-beheaded-richmond-statue-thrown-lake-n1229201; "Christopher Columbus Statues Temporarily Removed in Chicago," BBC, July 24, 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53530752; "Manifestantes derriban una centenaria estatua de Cristóbal Colón en Barranquilla al grito de 'Colón asesino,'" *El Mundo*, June 29, 2021, www.elmundo.es/internacional/2021/06/29/60da7c5c21efa06e2f8b4605.html; "Christopher Columbus Statue Smattered in Red Paint in London's Belgrave Square," *Evening Standard*, October 12, 2021, www.standard.co.uk/news/london/christopher-columbus-statue-belgrave-square-london-red-paint-mexico-city-b960202.html.

2. For a summary of earlier examples of "symbolic vandalism" of Columbus monuments, see Erika Doss, "The Process Frame: Vandalism, Removal, Re-Siting, Destruction," in *A Companion to Public Art*, ed. Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016): 403–21. On the wide range of acts of iconoclasm and vandalism as political tools, see Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution* (Reaktion Books, 1997).

3. Silvio Zavala has produced the most comprehensive study to date of artistic engagement with the figure of Columbus in Mexico, with a particular focus on monuments. See Silvio Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino en el arte de los siglos XIX y XX* (Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1991).

4. See Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City, 1876–1910* (University Press of Colorado, 2003).

Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture, Vol. 7, Number 3, pp. 4–26. Electronic ISSN: 2576-0947. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/lavc.2025.7.3.4.

FIGURE 1. Charles Cordier, *Monumento a Colón*, 1873–77, bronze. Formerly at the Glorieta de Colón, Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City, sculptures currently in storage (photograph by ProtoplasmaKid, Wikimedia Commons, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 international license)

pride. In Europe, these highly exclusionary spaces have historically been strongly gendered. Female figures appear, if at all, only in the form of allegorical representations, whereas male figures represent historical figures—and are based, moreover, on essentialized ideas of homogenous, white nationhood.

In his essay "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage,' Re-imagining the Post-nation," the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall points to the exclusionary nature of everything that is commonly defined as heritage.[5] He highlights the importance of "National Heritage" as "a powerful source of [cultural] meanings" that is essential as a vehicle of inclusion for a unifying sense of national identity, and concludes that "those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly belong."[6] Cultural heritage, as described by Hall, is shaped by constellations of power. It is defined by the authority of those who have "colonised the past" and whose representations of history are therefore the only ones of significance.[7] According to him, however, "it takes only the passage of time, the shift of circumstances, or the reversals of history to reveal those assumptions as time- and contextbound, historically specific, and thus open to contestation, renegotiation, and revision."[8] Hall challenges us to "think of The Heritage as a discursive practice."[9] What heritage signifies and what it contains is subject to continual reevaluation and should therefore not be set in stone.

Monuments in the nineteenth-century sense, on the other hand, which today still form an integral part of national cultural heritage, were very much and quite literally set in or—to borrow the title of Sanford Levinson's book—"written in stone."[10] They, too, are the products of power structures, whether political, religious, economic, gendered, racial or otherwise, and hence "do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection."[11] As stone manifestations, they assert a claim to general, enduring validity of hegemonic notions of history, culture, and progress, a claim that is inevitably challenged due to processual social dynamics, the polyphony of contemporary cultural realities, and our ever-changing reception of history.

Given that the seemingly eternal validity of monuments has been called into question increasingly since the start of the global Black Lives Matter protests, the question inevitably arises of how to deal with a type of heritage that is perceived today as "dissonant" or "difficult," according to scholars John E. Tunbridge, Gregory J. Ashworth, and Sharon MacDonald.[12] Should all these "difficult" monuments be destroyed and removed from public space, which also means erasing the difficult history associated with them? And if alternatives to the removal of monuments are considered that neither eliminate the history associated with "difficult" monuments nor leave them in public space unchallenged, how can these provide opportunities for ongoing collective conversations, not only about the past but also about the hierarchical structures, the institutions and politics that shape our reality today? When replacing or reframing these monuments, how can we develop a visual language that is not formally continuous with the language of imperial domination? Are solutions that respond with a similar monumentality suitable? Or would it be more effective to call into question notions of monumentality and permanence altogether by choosing ephemeral materials or performative actions as counterstrategies? What should successful modifications to monuments look like? And who decides on their design?

In exploring how best to deal with "difficult" monuments, the analysis of the Mexican case is especially interesting because there several different options have been proposed or realized, with their advantages and disadvantages publicly discussed. After initial city plans to replace Columbus with a depiction of an Indigenous woman were withdrawn in response to massive criticism, a feminist collective appropriated the empty pedestal, an action that resembled a symbolic reconquest. The Mexican debate around the *Monumento a Colón* can contribute to understanding the complexities of memorial culture and to imagining possible solutions that preserve

5. Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage,' Re-Imagining the Post-Nation," *Third Text* 13, no. 49 (Winter 1999): 3–13.

6. Hall, "Whose Heritage?" 4.

7. Hall, 6.

8. Hall, 6.

9. Hall, 5.

10. Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Duke University Press, 1998).

11. Kirk Savage, "The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton University Press, 1994), 135–36.

12. John E. Tunbridge and Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (John Wiley & Sons, 1996); Sharon MacDonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (Routledge, 2008). In using these conceptualizations, however, it is important to underline that, as Laurajane Smith has pointed out, "what constitutes 'difficult' or dissonant heritage is itself changeable and fluid." Laurajane Smith, *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites* (Routledge, 2020), 189.

the traces of a difficult past while respecting, representing, and giving agency to those who continue to be affected by this past today. In this way, the analysis of this case can help to resolve similar questions that will undoubtedly arise not only in Latin America but throughout the world. I first discuss the original monument and its proposed replacement, particularly as it relates to a similar monument exchange that was carried out in Buenos Aires years earlier. Then I analyze the feminist intervention on and surrounding the pedestal, placing it in the larger context of various artistic counterstrategies that have been articulated on the Paseo de la Reforma in recent years. The example of the Paseo de la Reforma will be used to examine how the exclusionary mechanisms that manifest themselves in these heritage spaces might not only be questioned but even disrupted through artistic counteractions and creative processes of protest and resistance.

CORDIER'S *MONUMENTO A COLÓN*: A MONUMENT TO PROGRESS

Before its removal, Cordier's Columbus stood at a height of circa ten meters above the Paseo de la Reforma on the Glorieta de Colón, lifting his right arm with an open palm pointing toward the sky. Made from bronze, Columbus steps forward slightly with his right foot. Next to his left foot, a globe rests on a book, the back of which is covered by a cloth. Viewers could witness Columbus lifting this cloth with his left hand, uncovering the globe and thus revealing the "other" half of the world, which had literally lain in darkness beforehand.

Columbus was placed on a pedestal made of fossil limestone. This remaining pedestal has two levels, both octagonal, but the municipality removed the additional figures and reliefs in the wake of the 2020 protests, leaving visible fractures. Seated on the four corners of the lower level were the bronze figures of four monks, two Dominican and two Franciscan, whose identities have been the subject of debate.[13] Despite the differences over the identification of the seated figures, consensus on two points has existed ever since the monument's dedication: that the four friars first played a part in the preparation of Columbus's voyage in Spain (Diego de Deza, Juan Pérez, Antonio de Marchena) and that they played a central role in the early missionary work in the "New World" (Bartolomé de las Casas, Pedro de Gante). By placing the four monks on the pedestal below Columbus, Cordier highlighted the importance of their work as well as their knowledge of the Holy Scripture and the sciences as the basis for the "discovery" and evangelization of New Spain. Columbus, who stands above the monks, is not only depicted as the "discoverer" of a new world and associated with the spread of knowledge and the ideas of the Enlightenment (symbolized by the book lying at his feet), but he is also positioned as the one who paved the way for the introduction of the Catholic faith. On the pedestal's front side appears the dedication *A Cristóbal Colón*. On the opposite side, in gold letters, Cordier placed an excerpt in Latin from Columbus's letter to the Catholic monarchs announcing the "discovery" of the Americas.[14]

The right side of the pedestal as seen from the front bore a relief depicting Columbus's arrival in Hispaniola (fig. 2). His ship can be seen in the background, while in front of it (where dense vegetation opens to form a circular clearing) Columbus himself falls to his knees and thanks God for his safe arrival. In the foreground, a group of nude Indigenous men, women, and children flee into the impenetrable jungle to the left and right. These figures almost merge with the vegetation, roots and limbs in some places being hardly distinguishable.

On the other side of the pedestal, however, a second relief showed a scene that was also framed by luxuriant natural growth, although the vegetation here is peripheral. Columbus is once again depicted in the center, overseeing the construction of the first church in the "New World."[15] Here, clearing the jungle is presented as not only a consequence of opening up and building on the

13. Early sources agree on the identity of only one of the friars. At the front right corner sits Bartolomé de las Casas, the Dominican who was among the first settlers to arrive in the Americas and eventually became an advocate for the rights of Indigenous people. The oldest source known, Francisco Sosa's *El Monumento de Colón: Estudio artístico, histórico y biográfico* (1877) names the other monks as (1) Diego de Deza, Columbus's advocate at the Spanish court (portrayed with the gospel on his lap), (2) Juan Pérez de Marchena, a Franciscan friar in the Spanish monastery of La Rábida (depicted here with a compass in his hand), and (3) Pedro de Gante, a Franciscan missionary in Mexico who holds a cross in his right hand and instructs the Indigenous boy kneeling at his feet. Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino*, 18. In the years following Sosa's publication, the names of Toribio of Benavente, Bernardino de Sahagún, and Bernardo Boyl were also proposed. For a discussion of the identity of the four friars in more recent literature, see Sonia Pérez Unzueta, "Colón, el evangelizador de América," in *La imagen de Cristóbal Colón en el arte latinoamericano del siglo XIX a través de la pintura y la escultura*, ed. Nanda Leonardini (Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2008), 100.

14. Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino*, 18.

15. Pérez Unzueta, "Colón, el evangelizador de América," 101.

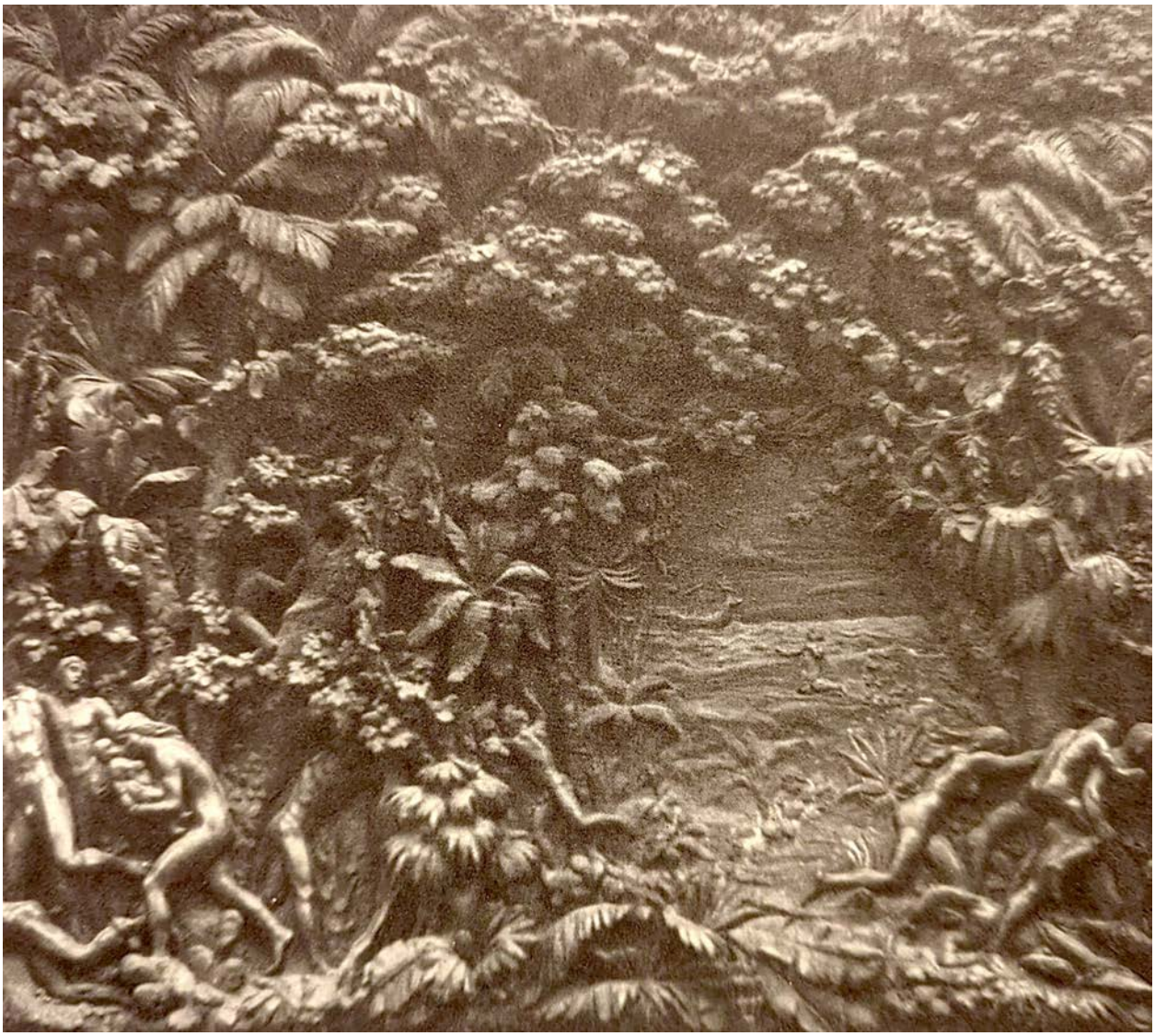

FIGURE 2. Charles Cordier, *Arrival of Columbus*, 1873–77, relief on the pedestal of *Monumento a Colón*, bronze. Silvio Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino en el arte de los siglos XIX y XX* (Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1991), pl. 21.

land in the course of conquest. Rather, it suggests a parallel to the displacement of nature by culture, to the advent of faith, enlightenment, and civilization, a process Columbus was considered to have initiated. Furthermore, the concept of taming the wilderness and converting it into a paradisiacal garden plays a central role in the Christian theological tradition, especially within missionary theology and the conquest of the Americas.[16]

What was the historical context of this monument's erection? Since the *Monumento a Colón* was the first one to adorn the Paseo de la Reforma (such a monument had already been proposed by Emperor Maximilian), the question arises why a statue of the explorer was chosen in the first place, and what role Columbus played within the construction of Mexican identity in the second half of the nineteenth century.[17] These years were marked by great political turmoil and a struggle between liberal and conservative forces in Mexican politics. In his analysis of

16. See George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (Harper & Sons, 1962); Elena I. Estrada de Gerlero, "El sentido simbólico-litúrgico en los murales del claustro del Convento Agustino de la Purificación y San Simón de Malinalco," *Anuario de estudios americanos* 38 (1981): 567–98; Jeanette Favrot Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (University of Texas Press, 1993), 124–51.

17. See Justino Fernández, *El arte del siglo XIX en México* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – IIE, 1983), 170.

the ways in which history was used to legitimize respective political projects in that period, Fausto Ramírez found that Columbus emerged as arguably the most important figure of identification and legitimation for conservatives.[18] In particular, Lucas Alamán, the historian and influential conservative politician who helped impose the restoration of the monarchy and thus the regency of the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I as leader of the conservatives after Mexico's defeat by the United States in 1848, pushed for a return to the country's Spanish heritage.[19] As a historian, Alamán authored the five-volume *Historia de Méjico*, published between 1849 and 1852, among the few historical works written in Mexico that shed a positive light on the Conquista period.[20]

According to Ramírez, two other books had much to do with the reassessment of Columbus and his arrival in the "New World": Washington Irving's *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* and William Prescott's *History of the Reign of the Catholic Monarchs* (published in Spanish in Mexico in 1831 and 1854). They contributed to the "discovery" being seen as the religious crusade of a "romantic hero" who fought for the progress of civilization before falling into contempt and oblivion.[21]

Among conservatives who turned toward Europe, and especially France, was Antonio Escandón, a Mexican industrialist and "francophile progressive" who funded the *Monumento a Colón*."[22] Together with his brother Manuel Escandón, he played an important role in the history of the Mexican railroad. In 1857, he received the official concession to build a railroad line, not only between Veracruz and Mexico City but also extending to Acapulco.[23] Mexico's political elites at that time, as Michael Matthews has argued, "promoted a self-civilizing mission," particularly "through the use of the railway as the supreme symbol of national development."[24] The railroad was seen as the vehicle that would bring order and progress and ensure that Mexico would take its rightful place among the modern nations. This civilizing mission is also expressed in the Columbus monument, which, according to the original idea, was intended to decorate the Buenavista train station, inaugurated in Mexico City in 1873, celebrating the completion of the railroad that connected the capital to the port of Veracruz.[25]

The Escandón-funded monument is thus strongly linked to the idea of industrial development and the self-image of Mexico as a progressive, modern nation. It was aimed at not only a national but also an international audience, and thus corresponded to the demands of liberal voices such as the writer Ignacio M. Altamirano, as articulated in the magazine *El Artista*. The magazine's contributors called for a Mexican art that would nevertheless be international-universalist and in accordance with the progressive endeavors of the nineteenth century. Their views were influenced, as Stacie G. Widdifield has pointed out, by the ideology of positivism, originating with the French philosopher Auguste Comte, which was characterized by a pronounced belief in progress and an evolutionary understanding of history.[26]

In building the railroad, the Escandón brothers took their cue from the United States. In 1857, Antonio traveled there and recruited the US engineer Andrew Talcott, along with a team of railroad workers, to help implement their vision and start construction in Veracruz.[27] Mexico, faced with a plan for national modernization, was largely dependent on US knowledge and investments.[28] At the same time, the country feared for its national integrity after its 1848 defeat in the Mexican-American War,

18. See Fausto Ramírez, "La historia disputada de los orígenes de la nación y sus recreaciones pictóricas a mediados del siglo XIX," in *Los pinceles de la historia de la patria criolla a la nación mexicana, 1750–1860* (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000), 231.

19. Ramírez, "La historia disputada," 231.

20. See Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Méjico, desde los primeros movimientos que prepararon su independencia en el año de 1808 hasta la época presente*, vols. 1–5 (Mexico City, 1849–52).

21. Ramírez, "La historia disputada," 236.

22. Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876–1910," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl E. Martin, and William E. French (Scholarly Resources, 1994), 130.

23. Paris Padilla, *El sueño de una generación*: *Una historia de negocios en torno a la construcción del primer ferrocarril en México, 1857–1876* (Instituto Mora, 2016), 36.

24. Michael Matthews, *The Civilizing Machine: The Cultural History of Mexican Railroads, 1876–1910* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 13.

25. A Columbus monument by the sculptor Manuel Vilar was finally inaugurated in the Plaza de Buenavista in 1892, on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of his "discovery". Vilar had already created a plaster model in 1858. See Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino*, 60–61.

26. See Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (The University of Arizona Press, 1996), 64–65.

27. Padilla, "El sueño de una generación," 41.

28. John Gresham Chapman, in his 1971 dissertation, pointed to a pamphlet that appeared in New York in 1833, promoting US participation in the Mexican railroad project. See John Gresham Chapman, "Steam, Enterprise and Politics: The Building of the Veracruz-Mexico City Railway, 1837–1880" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 1971), 4.

which resulted in the loss of over half of Mexico's territory.

This dichotomy of simultaneous borrowing and distancing, of orientation toward the US model and concern with preserving national independence, I would argue, is also expressed in the *Monumento a Colón*. For already upon its inauguration in 1877, Sosa compared it with the Luther monument in Worms, Germany, created by Ernst Rietschel and unveiled in 1868.[29] Seated there below the reformer are four statues of personalities who were seen as precursors of the Reformation: Peter Waldus, John Wyclif, Jan Hus, and Girolamo Savonarola. Rietschel's statue of Luther, positioned at the center of the monument, strongly influenced late nineteenth-century monuments throughout Central Europe and North America, among them a monument unveiled in Washington, DC, in 1884, produced at the same foundry.[30] In the United States, Luther was regarded as the forefather of the modern world, a champion of religious and political freedom. The founding of the United States was even characterized as "a result of the Reformation" in the first volume of George Bancroft's *History of the United States*, which appeared in 1834.[31] Bancroft names Luther as one of the nation's ideological founding fathers along with Johannes Gutenberg, John Calvin, and, last but not least, Christopher Columbus.[32] Columbus's enterprise was, Bancroft claims, "more divine than human," a true triumph of the free mind.[33] The education made possible by Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, in turn, became, according to Bancroft, an important prerequisite for the Enlightenment advanced by Luther and Calvin. Together, they laid the foundation for the victory over medieval superstition and Catholicism that was to prevail in the United States.[34]

In contrast, by following the arrangement of the Luther monument in Worms, Cordier, it seems, had found a way to link enlightenment and progress not to Protestantism but to Catholicism. The idea of the country's advancement was directly tied to Spanish influence; it was the Spaniards who paved the way toward modern nationhood. Sosa therefore referred to Columbus as the key to Mexico's history and the cornerstone of Mexican society: "It is to him that we owe the joys of civilization, the relations with cultured peoples, our moral progress, in a word, all that we can signify in the catalog of nations."[35]

Cordier's Columbus monument in Mexico, in this line of tradition, demonstrates how heroic images of masculinity, which were part of a national monument cult, were negotiated in a transnational process and measured against each other in monumentality and materiality. This example also shows, however, that the seemingly immobile narratives of the monumental landscape of the nineteenth century, anchored in this materiality, were in fact flexible and adaptable. Because despite the claim to permanence and immutability, just a few design changes were enough to turn one male national icon into another.

REPLACING COLUMBUS WITH AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN: THE BUENOS AIRES CASE AS A PREDECESSOR

An initial and radical change in the Mexican reception of Columbus was observable already in 1992, when an increasingly negative image of the explorer overshadowed celebrations of the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" of America. The Spanish government

29. Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino*, 19.

30. Hartmut Lehmann, "The Luther Statues in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore," in *Luthergedächtnis 1817 bis 2017*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 95.

31. George Bancroft, *A History of the United States, from the Discovery of America to the Restoration of the Stuarts*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1834), 286. Cited in Hartmut Lehmann, *Alte und neue Welt in wechselseitiger Sicht: Studien zu den transatlantischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 17.

32. Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 286. The fact that the dawn of the self-consciously "new" age of the Renaissance was already linked in the sixteenth century with numerous technical innovations, such as the invention of the printing press and the "discovery" of America, is documented by the series of engravings *Nova Reperta*, published in Antwerp around 1590. See Uta Bernsmeier, "Die Nova Reperta des Jan van der Straet: Ein Beitrag zur Problemgeschichte der Entdeckungen und Erfindungen im 16. Jahrhundert" (PhD diss., Universität Hamburg, 1986). In what is probably the most famous engraving of the series, *The Discovery of America*, however, it is not Columbus but the Florentine navigator Amerigo Vespucci who is shown with a female personification of the continent to which he was to give his name. Christopher Columbus, however, is highlighted by name on the frontispiece. The engravings' depiction of the "discovery" of America was discussed in depth by Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, "Amerigo erfindet Amerika: Zu Jan van Straets Kupferstichfolge 'Nova Reperta,'" in *Geschlechterperspektiven: Forschungen zur frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Heide Wunder and Gisela Engel (Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 1998), 372–94.

33. Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 9.

34. In his remarks, however, Bancroft deliberately obscures the fact that Columbus himself had undertaken his voyage on behalf of the Catholic kings.

35. Original: "Es a él a quien debemos los goces de la civilización, las relaciones con los pueblos cultos, nuestro progreso moral, en una palabra, cuanto podamos significar en el catálogo de las naciones." Quoted in Zavala, *El descubrimiento colombino*, 17. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

had originally planned to hold several ceremonies in collaboration with Latin American countries to commemorate the day. In Mexico, the Spanish government was scheduled to lay wreaths of flowers at the *Monumento a Colón*—a public ritual that was customary for the celebration of the Día de la Raza at the site of this monument.[36] On October 12, 1992, however, the celebration turned into protest as various opposition groups attempted to topple the statue.[37]

Protests opposing the monument gained momentum again in 2020. Almost two months after George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis and the start of the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests, a Change.org petition called for the removal of the *Monumento a Colón*.[38] A few months later, on October 10, 2020, the city government preempted another Día de la Raza demonstration calling for the monument to be toppled. The bronze Columbus statue was removed as a precaution, as were the statues of the monks seated at his feet.[39] The pedestal of the monument, however, remained.

Originally this pedestal was to have made way for a new monument dedicated to the Indigenous women of the country. This was announced on September 5, 2021, by Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, then head of government of Mexico City. For her announcement, Sheinbaum chose another symbolic date: the International Day of the Indigenous Woman. The aim of this replacement would be to vindicate Indigenous women and their contribution to Mexican history as an act of social justice. To this end, the Mexican sculptor Pedro Reyes had been chosen to create a sculpture of an Olmec woman, "the origin of origins."[40] However, the monument to Columbus, it was announced, would not be permanently removed from the cityscape. Like the Columbus monument in Buenos Aires (discussed next), it would be relocated to a park, in this case the Parque América in the Polanco district of Mexico City.[41]

A similar substitution of a Columbus monument had already been implemented in Buenos Aires in 2015. Following a meeting with President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in March 2011, Argentina's president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, had decided to replace the Columbus monument in front of her official residence, the Casa Rosada, with a sculpture of the mestiza heroine Juana Azurduy.[42] Born in 1780 in what is today the Bolivian city of Chuquisaca, Azurduy served as a military leader in the War of Independence against the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata. As Cheryl Jiménez Frei has noted, Kirchner had already promoted Azurduy posthumously to the rank of general in 2009.[43] One year later, Kirchner and Bolivian

36. Omar López, "El día que una multitud enardecida intentó derribar la estatua de Cristóbal Colón," *Infobae*, October 11, 2024, www.infobae.com/mexico/2024/10/12/el-dia-que-una-multitud-enardecida-intento-derribar-la-estatua-de-cristobal-colon/.

37. "El día que quisieron derrocar la estatua de Cristóbal Colón," *El Universal*, October 12, 2020, www.eluniversal.com.mx/opinion/mochilazo-en-el-tiempo/el-dia-que-quisieron-derrocar-la-estatua-de-cristobal-colon/.

38. "Piden retirar monumento a Colón de Paseo de la Reforma por 'colonialista,'" *El Universal*, July 14, 2020, www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/piden-retirar-monumento-colon-de-paseo-de-la-reforma-por-colonialista/.

39. "Retiran estatua de Colón previo a protestas en Ciudad de México," Deutsche Welle, October 10, 2020, www.dw.com/es/retiran-estatua-de-col%C3%B3n-previo-a-protestas-en-ciudad-de-m%C3%A9xico/a-55232517.

40. "Estatua de mujer indígena sustituirá monumento a Cristóbal Colón en Reforma," *El Universal*, September 5, 2021, www.eluniversal.com.mx/metropoli/estatua-de-mujer-indigena-sustituira-monumento-cristobal-colon-en-reforma/.

41. In February 2023, it was announced that the sculptures would be moved to the Museo Nacional del Virreinato in Tepotzotlán. See "Estatua de Cristóbal Colón se llevará al Museo Nacional del Virreinato en Tepotzotlán, anuncia Sheinbaum", *El Universal*, February 16, 2023, www.eluniversal.com.mx/edomex/estatua-de-cristobal-colon-se-llevara-al-museo-nacional-del-virreinato-en-tepotzotlan-anuncia-sheinbaum/. However, the final relocation of the monument was still uncertain, according to an email communication from the museum itself to the author in February 2024. In October 2024, *El Universal* reported that the authorities had still not decided whether to reinstall the restored sculptures in the museum or in another public space. The sculptures are currently being kept in one of the warehouses of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). See "Monumento a Colón, embodegado casi 2 años y sin destino", *El Universal*, October 12, 2024, www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/monumento-a-colon-embodegado-casi-2-anos-y-sin-destino/. The *Monumento a Colón* would not have been the first controversial monument in Mexico City to be removed from critical public view by being relocated to a park. The sculptural group *Monumento al mestizaje*, depicting Hernán Cortés, the Indigenous translator Malinche and their son Martín, placed on the central square of Coyoacán by the Mexican government in 1982, was later moved to the edge of Parque Xicotencatl to avoid further controversy. Marco A. Villa, "Entre el mestizaje y la conquista: Un monumento controversial 'escondido,'" *Relatos e Historias en México* 15, no. 168 (2022): 82–83. Erika Doss has pointed out that in Hungary and Russia during the 1990s, monuments to Soviet leaders were often moved to "Communist 'theme parks,'" citing Budapest's Memento Park as an example. According to Doss, this relocating of monuments "allows for revised considerations of their symbolic capital." Doss, "Process Frame," 416.

42. "Monumento a Juana Azurduy: Del día que Chávez pidió echar a Colón a su desalojo de la rosada," *Clarín.es*, May 4, 2017, www.clarin.com/politica/monumento-juana-azurduy-dia-chavez-pidio-echar-colon-desalojo-rosada_0_HyxCOztyZ.html.

43. Cheryl Jiménez Frei, "Columbus, Juana, and the Politics of the Plaza. Battles over Monuments, Memory and Identity in Buenos Aires," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51, no. 3 (August 2019): 626. See also "Ascienden a Juana Azurduy con el grado de general," *Clarin.com*, July 15, 2009, www.clarin.com/ediciones-anteriores/ascienden-juana-azurduy-grado-general_0_SyDQfrKC6Fl.html.

FIGURE 3. Andrés Zerneri, *Monumento a Juana Azurduy*, 2015, bronze. Formerly in the Parque Colón between the Casa Rosada and Avenida de la Rábida, now Plaza del Correo, in front of the Kirchner Cultural Center, Buenos Aires (photograph by Raf24, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0 international license)

President Evo Morales declared her date of birth, July 12, the Day of Argentine-Bolivian Fellowship.[44] The erection of a monument in Azurduy's honor can be seen as another effort by Kirchner to make the nation's Indigenous heritage visible as a part of Argentina's national identity. At the same time, as Marisa Lerer has pointed out, the act of "re-siting the white male figure of Columbus, who has for some been reframed as part of a hegemonic narrative of history and a founder of the transatlantic slave trade" and replacing him with "the Spanish-Indigeneous female figure of Juana Azurduy" was of great symbolic importance and can be seen as "an attempt to balance who is honored and who occupies public space."[45]

The *Monumento a Juana Azurduy* was created by Argentine sculptor Andrés Zerneri and was dedicated on July 15, 2015, in a ceremony attended by Kirchner and Morales, who had donated $1 million from Bolivian government funds for the sculpture's construction and declared its erection to be "a form of decolonization" (fig. 3).[46] The bronze statue depicts Azurduy striding forward and raising a sword with her left hand as a symbol of liberation. Her right hand protects the baby she carries on her back and the people behind her, including her other children as well as a Tarabuqueño, a Koya, an Aimara, a Quechua, an old woman, a young woman and a gaucho on his horse. As Lerer has noted, war is therefore iconographically interwoven with "maternal imagery."[47] Azurduy acts as a motherly protector of both her own

44. Jiménez Frei, "Columbus, Juana," 626.

45. Marisa Lerer, "Christopher Columbus and Juana Azurduy: Revising and Revisiting Historical Monuments in Argentina," *International Public History* 1, no. 2 (2018): 2–3.

46. Quoted in Jiménez Frei, "Columbus, Juana," 608.

47. Lerer, "Christopher Columbus," 3.

children and the representatives of Argentina's First Nations that gather behind her. This seems to refer to the mother as a national allegory, which, as in the case of the armed *Moder Danmark* painted by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann in 1851, often also symbolizes a nation's power and readiness to defend itself.[48] As Elleke Boehmer has pointed out, maternal imagery is deeply connected to the narratives that are central to nationalistic discourse.[49] Thus, the allegorical dimension associated with the representation of women in national iconography plays a nonnegligible role in Zerneri's (albeit slightly updated) monument narrative.[50]

Given a triangular arrangement whose apex is formed by Azurduy herself, the sculptural group is vast in scale and, in its verticality, conforms to the traditional language of monuments rather than dismantling it. With a height of sixteen meters and a weight of twenty-five tons, it is the largest bronze sculpture in Argentina to date.[51] Monumentality was thus answered with monumentality. And although the design can be considered more modern since it responds with greater dynamism to the rather static representation of the statue of Columbus that it replaced, and since it honors not an individual figure but "a larger collective," the intention seems to have been to surpass the original monument, if not in height then in the choice of material, while affirming the idea of permanence that is central to the monument concept.[52] This replacement of one monument by another—even if the latter is intended to honor a historical protagonist who is regarded as more worthy from a contemporary perspective—does not call into question the idea of the monumental as such, nor the insistence on eternal fixity associated with it. The elevation of a mestiza to the status of a national symbol and her positioning in front of members of Indigenous groups also seems problematic and outdated. The hierarchization of the sculpture group is reminiscent of the Latin American racial discourses at the beginning of the twentieth century, which made the mestizo the symbolic protagonist of state-sponsored national identity formation. In his essay *La raza cósmica*, published in 1925, the Mexican José Vasconcelos formulated what can be considered the most influential theoretical basis for this identity formation by writing of *mestizaje* as forming the "cosmic race," in which the positive traits of all other races would be combined into a highly advanced synthesis.[53] However, Vasconcelos still asserted the superiority of the white race, which would reinvigorate what he considered the uncivilized and static "Indians."[54]

As Jiménez Frei has shown, the controversy over the relocation and replacement of the Argentinian Columbus monument sheds light on conflicts surrounding national identity and historical memory.[55] The case highlights the complexities of the debates around representation, agency, and the role of identity markers in contemporary societies, as they relate to the well-intentioned replacement of monuments that would emerge later in a similar form in Mexico. From the beginning, this "sculpture war" in Argentina centered mainly on the objections of the Italian community of Buenos Aires, whose ancestors had donated the monument on the occasion of the centennial of Argentina's independence in 1910.[56] The members of this community, who had historically faced discrimination themselves, saw the removal of Columbus from the power-political center of the capital as an erasure of another part of Argentina's history—*their* history.[57] They

48. See Lisa Bernstein, *(M)Othering the Nation. Constructing and Resisting National Allegories through the Maternal Body* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

49. See Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester University Press, 2005), 27.

50. In 2010, Kirchner explicitly placed Azurduy in a genealogy of motherhood in the Argentine national imaginary by linking her to the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the organization of Argentinian women whose children "disappeared" under the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983 under initially unexplained circumstances. See Pablo Ortemberg, "Monumentos, memorialización y espacio público: Reflexiones a propósito de la escultura de Juana Azurduy," *TAREA* 3, no. 3 (2016): 117.

51. Lerer, "Christopher Columbus," 3.

52. Jiménez Frei, "Columbus, Juana," 637.

53. See José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cósmica: A Bilingual Edition* (John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 49.

54. While he idealized the pre-Hispanic high cultures, Vasconcelos regarded the Indigenous peoples of contemporary Latin America as culturally inferior and with no connection to this past, as he made clear in his 1926 lecture *The Race Problem in Latin America*, when he stated that "the weakness of the pure Indian movement lies of course in the fact that the Indian has no civilized standards upon which to fall back." See José Vasconcelos, "The Latin-American Basis of Mexican Civilization," in *Aspects of Mexican Civilization: Lectures on the Harris Foundation 1926*, ed. José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1926), 90.

55. Jiménez Frei, "Columbus, Juana," 608.

56. "guerra de esculturas." Ortemberg, "Monumentos, memorialización y espacio público," 114.

57. The United States sees similar discussions surrounding Columbus, where the Genovese navigator plays a similarly central identity-forming role for the Italian American population. See Laura E. Ruberto and Joseph Sciorra, "'Columbus Might Be Dwarfed to Obscurity': Italian Americans' Engagement with Columbus Monuments in a Time of Decolonization," in *Public Memory in the Context of Transnational Migration and Displacement: Migrants and Monuments*, ed. Sabine Marschall (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 61–93; Kathleen Loock, "Kolumbus in den USA: Vom

therefore opposed Kirchner's decision, including through legal means, but were ultimately unsuccessful.[58] The Columbus monument, created by the Italian sculptor Arnaldo Zocchi and originally inaugurated in 1921, was dismantled and later installed on the riverbank of the Río de La Plata. At this new location, Columbus stands today on his tall column, holding a map in his hand and gazing into the distance, supposedly emphasizing his importance as a navigator.[59]

Columbus was therefore not rejected entirely as an identity-forming symbol of national importance. Evidently the authorities hoped that the change of location would instead lead to a shift in meaning away from the roles of conqueror and colonizer that are globally foregrounded in critical reception today. The fact that Columbus is still visible means that Argentines of Italian descent are still represented in public space. This example demonstrates that Columbus is not a monolithic global figure, and that local meanings must be taken into account when dealing with sculptural representations of him.

Both of these processes—the re-siting of monuments and their replacement—should be examined critically. Previously, in this particular case, the dialectic of *desplazamiento-emplazamiento* was framed as nothing less than a *vuelco* (turnaround) in Latin American memorial culture, a paradigm shift regarding who is or is not publicly memorialized on the continent, and where.[60] However, although the main argument for replacement was a recognition of the hitherto poor representation of the contributions of Argentina's Indigenous populations to the country's history, not only did the chosen design privilege the *mestiza* as a national protagonist but also the decision-making process did not much involve Argentina's Indigenous communities.[61] Striking instead is Kirchner's personal involvement in the design process. According to the artist himself, the president personally requested corrections to his original sketch: "I had made some more figures: I had represented Padilla in front of Juana. Also Güemes and Belgrano. The president preferred a sculpture solely of Azurduy."[62] Kirchner's personal engagement with the monument can be read as a strategy of political legitimation. The sculpture, which was to be installed directly in front of her official residence, was designed to position Kirchner herself within a genealogy and continuity of strong Argentine female leadership.[63] In 2017, less than two years after its inauguration, President Mauricio Macri resited the monument, which had already suffered serious damage in 2016 due to construction faults. Macri had opposed the statue when he was mayor of Buenos Aires and had it placed in front of the Kirchner Cultural Center. The monument, then, despite its bronze façade of immobility, was not destined to last. Yet to this day it is tied to Kirchner's legacy.

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE AS A TOOL FOR BUILDING NATIONAL IDENTITY

The intention behind the exchange of the two monuments in Buenos Aires can be seen as a continuation of efforts by the Latin American countries to incorporate the Indigenous heritage of the continent into the ideological fabric of their national identities after achieving their independence in the nineteenth century. The criollos of the time, born in the colonies but of European descent, used "Indian" figures—meaning the preconquest Indigenous people of

Nationalhelden zur ethnischen Identifikationsfigur" (transcript Verlag, 2014). In Chile, there have also been attempts by the Italian-descendant community at legitimization through the establishment of a direct connection to Columbus as the "first immigrant on American land." See Naomi Wells, "Porteña Identity and Italianità: Language, Materiality and Transcultural Memory in Valparaíso's Italian Community," in *Transcultural Italies: Mobility, Memory and Translation*, ed. Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi, and Barbara Spadaro (Liverpool University Press, 2020), 54.

58. See Catalina Gaete, "Case Study IX: Re-Thinking Columbus; Monumento a Cristobal Colón, Buenos Aires, Argentina," in *Contested Histories in Public Spaces: Principles, Processes, Best Practices*, ed. Timothy Ryback, Mark Ellis, and Benjamin Glahn (International Bar Association, 2021), 223–48, www.ibanet.org/contested-histories.

59. "Reubican en Buenos Aires polémica estatua de Cristóbal Colón," *La Vanguardia*, November 9, 2017, www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20171109/432749602563/reubican-en-buenos-aires-polemica-estatua-de-cristobal-colon.html.

60. See *El vuelco latinomamericano: De Cristóbal Colón a Juana Azurduy*, ed. Luis Padin (Ediciones EdUNLa, 2015).

61. Gaete, "Case Study IX," 233.

62. "Yo había hecho algunas figuras más: había representado a Padilla frente a Juana. También a Güemes y a Belgrano. La Presidenta prefirió que fuera una escultura puntualmente de Azurduy." See "Pienso en Juana como una interpelación," *Página 12*, July 15, 2015, www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/6-36072-2015-07-15html. Juana Azurduy's husband, Manuel Ascencio Padilla, as well as General Martín Miguel de Güemes and Manuel Belgrano, all fought alongside her in the Wars of Independence.

63. As recently as August 2022, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro emphasized this genealogy by announcing—in a defense letter on the occasion of Kircher's indictment for embezzlement—that Argentina's former head of state was "the most worthy heiress of Juana Azurduy and Evita." See "Maduro se solidarizó con Cristina: 'Dignísima heredera de Juana Azurduy y Evita,'" *Cadena 3*, August 28, 2022, www.cadena3.com/noticia/politica-y-economia/maduro-se-solidarizo-con-cristina-dignisima-heredera-de-juana-azurduy-y-evita_334616.

the past, not their contemporary descendants—as a central ideological resource for constructing an identity that was independent of colonial powers. The intellectual movement of *indigenismo*, from which the "Indian" would emerge as the central identity-forming symbol, became particularly influential in Mexico. Here, the anthropologist and archaeologist Manuel Gamio, who would become one of the leading *indigenistas*, wrote *Forjando Patria: Pro Nacionalismo* (1916), a definition of Mexican identity in which he positioned the contemporary *indio* as the "custodian of pre-Hispanic art."[64] Beyond this role of conservator of the past, however, Indigenous people were perceived mainly as obstacles to modern economic and technical development, and thus had to be absorbed by means of *mestizaje*. Whereas Gamio described *mestizaje* in *Forjando Patria* as a unifying moment, the forging of a new nation out of iron and bronze, the anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla argues in his seminal 1987 book *México profundo* that to "incorporate the Indian," according to Gamio, meant to "de-Indianize him."[65] He calls Gamio "the spokesman of the imaginary Mexico," a fictional Mexico constructed within a Western framework where what he calls "México profundo," representing the Mesoamerican model of civilization, had a place only as a "symbol of backwardness."[66]

Building on the ideological foundation set up by Gamio and Vasconcelos, in postrevolutionary Mexico clichéd notions of cultural originality and pure authenticity were incorporated into the national identity by mostly male, non-Indigenous artists, who focused on the country's Indigenous heritage. Muralist Diego Rivera in particular created a romanticized image of "authentic indigeneity" and positioned the "Indian of the past" at the center of government-sponsored public art. According to Bonfil Batalla, "the Indian presence as depicted in murals, museums, sculptures, and archeological sites . . . is treated essentially as a dead world," a world that forms the ideological foundation for the emergence of the Mexican nation but has "no real connection with our contemporary reality and our collective future."[67]

During the period when the *Monumento a Colón* was installed on Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico sought to position itself as a modern nation. Simultaneously, its political elite strove to legitimize itself through a recourse to history. To this end, not just the country's Spanish heritage, but its pre-Hispanic—and in particular Aztec—past were invoked, while at the same time, the living descendants of this past, as Barbara A. Tenenbaum has pointed out, "were being deprived of their lands through increased use of the Reform laws, new legislation, and economic development."[68] The most prominent example of indigenist art of the Porfiriato is the monument of Cuauhtémoc, a highly idealized depiction of the last Aztec ruler of Tenochtitlan, which was inaugurated in 1887. Together with Columbus, Cuauhtémoc embodied the duality that underlies the concept of *mestizaje*. These two monuments marked the beginning of an entire monument program that would be developed for the Paseo de la Reforma in the following years, culminating in the female allegory of the *Ángel de la Independencia* in 1910. This ensemble of monuments traces the development of a progressive unfolding of Mexico's history, from Columbus and the pre-Hispanic times through the viceroyalty to the protagonists of the later events that marked the life of the nation from Independence to Reformation. Like Kirchner during a later period, Porfirio Diaz positioned himself in this ancestral lineage so as to legitimize his own political status, "to validate [his] stewardship of the country" and "to reconfirm the power of Mexico City and its right to rule the country by inheritance."[69]

All of these monuments represented men, save for the *Ángel de la Independencia*, which included seven female figures. These were allegorical figures with European features, designed to represent the virtues of the nation rather than prominent women of the independence movement.[70] Indigenous women were not represented

64. "Depositario del arte prehispánico." Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria: Pro Nacionalismo* (Porrúa, 1916), 38.

65. Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, 6; Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo: Una civilización negada* (CIESAS, 1987). Quotations from Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (University of Texas Press, 2012), 116.

66. Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo*, 117, xvii.

67. Bonfil Batalla, 54.

68. Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History," 142.

69. As Tenenbaum points out, although Cuauhtémoc is positioned on the Paseo de la Reforma as a heroic fighter against the Spanish conquerors, "the Aztecs ruled over the majority of Mexico in a tyrannical fashion and more Indians fought against Cuauhtémoc than with him. Therefore the statue pays tribute to someone who 'heroically struggled' *against* the majority of indigenous Mexicans and tries to legitimate him as the personification of Mexican identity and his capital of Tenochtitlan as its ancient seat of power." Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History," 141.

70. On female allegories in public statuary, see the seminal book by Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (University of California Press, 2000). For more on female allegory and public art in Mexico, see Mary K. Coffey, "Angels and Prostitutes: Jose Clemente Orozco's Catharsis and the Politics of Female Allegory in 1930s

at all on the Paseo de la Reforma and were generally rarely embodied in the form of monuments. However, an iconographic tradition was established in the nineteenth century in which an Indigenous woman was depicted alongside Columbus, but without her ever being granted equal status. Instead, as the personification of the American continent, she was shown kneeling or crouching reverently before the great conqueror and white savior who brought her knowledge, enlightenment, and civilization.[71]

Knocking Columbus off his pedestal and putting an Indigenous woman in his place might therefore have appeared to be an appropriate strategy for dismantling the mechanisms of racial and gender oppression embodied by colonial monuments. But the design chosen in 2020 by the administration of Mexico City was criticized for regressing into the Mexican tradition of idealizing and romanticizing Indigenous women, once again by invoking premodern and pre-Columbian Indigenous roots. This seemed to confirm that Indigenous women could be granted a place in the canon of identity only as a romantic projection of white male artists. Since the incorporation of a romanticized version of the country's pre-Hispanic past into national art and memorial culture has a long and problematic history in Mexico, people disapproved of the plans for a monument exchange similar to the one in Buenos Aires—although they were intended to decolonize the country's memorial landscape—and a lively debate ensued.

One of the main points of criticism was that with the sculptor Pedro Reyes a "white-mestizo"[72] male artist had been chosen to create a design that was perceived as yet another exoticizing, highly generalizing representation of the Indigenous woman. Reyes's design consisted of a monumental female head sculpted from volcanic stone, a material historically associated with originality in Mexican art.[73] Based on original male Olmec colossal heads and bearing the title *Tlalli* (Nahuatl for earth or land), the design lacked any historical grounding. Instead, as the historian Federico Navarrete has pointed out, the proposal can be viewed as an expression of an "essentialist vision that sees Indigenous people as all the same (from the Preclassic era up to the twenty-first century)."[74] Once again, the Mexican political elite was seen as having taken up and instrumentalized the hegemonic idea of a unifying pre-Hispanic past to create an abstract image of the "Indian" that was totally remote from the present-day reality of Indigenous communities. The vehement protests against Reyes's design eventually led to the city government's plans being scrapped.[75] While further deliberations discussed the question of what or who should replace Columbus, the empty pedestal created a representational vacuum at the site of the Glorieta de Colón.

THE "GLORIETA DE LAS MUJERES QUE LUCHAN": COUNTERING OFFICIAL MONUMENTAL RHETORIC ON THE PASEO DE LA REFORMA

In the midst of the controversy surrounding the monument's replacement on the Paseo de la Reforma, activists of the feminist collective known as Antimonumenta Viva Nos Queremos (We Want Us Alive Antimonument) took advantage of this representational vacuum by climbing the barrier surrounding the empty plinth where the Columbus statue once stood. In 2019, the group had

Mexico," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4, no. 2 (2004): 193–98; Seth Dixon, "Making Mexico More 'Latin': National Identity, Statuary and Heritage in Mexico City's Monument to Independence," *Journal of Latin American Geography* 9, no. 2 (2010): 131–32; Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 214–18.

71. Famous examples in the Americas of this type of representation are (1) Luigi Persico's *The Discovery of America* (1844), formerly placed at the east façade of the US Capitol in Washington, DC; (2) Salvatore Revelli's Columbus Monument in Lima, Peru, from 1860; and (3) Vincenzo Vela's Columbus Monument, inaugurated in Colón, Panama in 1867. Persico's sculpture also exemplifies how the removal of monuments due to a change of values is by no means a new phenomenon: it was removed due to public pressure in 1958, together with its counterpart, Horatio Greenough's *The Rescue*. See Vivien Green Fryd, "Two Sculptures for the Capitol: Horatio Greenough's 'Rescue' and Luigi Persico's 'Discovery of America,'" *The American Art Journal* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 16–39.

72. Taylor Dafoe, "After Outcry from Activists, Artist Pedro Reyes Will No Longer Design a Monument to Indigenous Women in Mexico City," *Artnet*, September 15, 2021, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/pedro-reyes-pulled-from-indigenous-artist-monument-2009658.

73. The volcanic rock covering the Pedregal de San Angel in the valley of Mexico City, for example, is associated with the origins of the nation. The artist Gerald Murillo, called Dr. Atl, suspected the presence here of the legendary Atlantis, invoked by Vasconcelos to explain the origin of the pre-Hispanic civilizations. See Antonio Luna Arroyo, *Dr. Atl* (Hachette Latinoamérica, 1992), 93–96, 118; Kirsten Einfeldt, "Moderne Kunst in Mexiko: Raum, Material und nationale Identität" (transcript Verlag, 2010), 165.

74. "la visión esencialista que ve a los indígenas como todos iguales (desde el preclásico hasta el siglo XXI)." Quoted in "Critican escultura de mujer indígena que sustituirá a Colón; es una cabeza olmeca con nombre náhuatl," *El Financiero*, September 10, 2021, www.elfinanciero.com.mx/cdmx/2021/09/10/critican-escultura-de-mujer-indigena-que-sustituira-a-colon-es-una-cabeza-olmeca-con-nombre-nahuatl/.

75. See Dafoe, "After Outcry from Activists."

already erected the countermonument of a purple fist inside a symbol of the female sex, engraved with the words "EN MÉXICO 9 MUJERES SON ASESINADAS AL DÍA. ¡NI UNA MÁS!" and "EXIGIMOS ALERTA DE GÉNERO NACIONAL. NO + FEMINICIDIOS" in downtown Mexico City, in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes (fig. 4). Two years later, they appropriated the empty pedestal of the Columbus monument by installing a wooden cutout of a woman or girl as an unofficial antimonument (fig. 5). The figure, also painted in purple, a symbolic color for the international women's movement ever since its introduction as one of the colors of the British suffragettes in 1908, was named *Antimonumenta Justicia*, with the Spanish *monumento* here deliberately changed to the feminine form *monumenta*.[76]

The terms *anti-monument*, *counter-monument*, and *counter-memorial* were originally introduced into Anglophone literature by James E. Young, who explicitly referred to the emergence of a new type of monument that emerged in the 1980s in the context of Holocaust remembrance.[77] This type was meant to respond to and oppose, or, as Young has put it, "to counter—and thereby neutralize" already existing, rejected monuments without directly interfering with their design.[78] In the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, the original monument itself was transformed. The wooden female figure replaced the bronze male statue, thereby reappropriating parts of the original monument while countering it via a different aesthetic language that departs from traditional ideas of idealization, monumentality, and permanence. Rather than depicting an individualized figure, the activists translated the universally comprehensible and relatable language of the pictogram into monumental form. Pictograms have been present in Mexico City's urban landscape as an official guidance system ever since US graphic designer Lance Wyman developed a scheme of pictorial signs for the 1968 Olympic Games to guide international visitors. Later, Wyman also designed the pictograms for the Mexico City Metro, which are still iconic today and are based on pre-Hispanic visual traditions.[79] This linkage to a visual language that is so familiar in the Mexico City area ensured the legibility of the monument figure, creating the impression of official, state-approved art. At the same time, the material originally chosen for it preserved its character as an unofficial intervention, since the purple addition to the monument revealed itself at second glance to be a cheap wooden cutout.[80]

The position of the figure's hand (she raises her left fist in response to Columbus, who raised his open right hand to receive the grace of God) takes up the visual language of the original monument while decisively altering it and charging it with new meaning. With the raised fist, Antimonumenta Viva Nos Queremos adapted an internationally legible symbol of the struggle against oppression, a historical element of what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has called an "iconography of liberation."[81] It has been used since the 1880s as part of a visual rhetoric of workers' strikes and protests, and it appears widely in Mexican art of the 1930s and 1940s.[82] Rivera included clenched fists in his murals for the chapel of the National School of Agronomy at Chapingo (1926–27) as well as in his *Detroit Industry* murals (1932–33). In the 1936 linoleum block print *El gran obstáculo* by Leopoldo Méndez, an oversize clenched fist bursts out of a field to stop a tank manned with personifications of capitalism and fascism, including a representative of the Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista and a caricature of the corrupt union leader Luis Morones.[83] A similar illustration of a giant raised fist graced the cover of *El Popular*, published by the Taller de Gráfica Popular in 1948.[84] As a potent symbol for workers' rights and the fight against fascism, the

76. See Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (Routledge, 1999), 136–37.

77. See James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 267–96; James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1994), 5–8.

78. Young, "Counter-Monument," 271. Not all countermonuments exhibit this dialogic structure. See Quentin Stevens, Karen A. Franck, and Ruth Fazakerley, "Countermonuments: The Anti-Monumental and the Dialogic," *The Journal of Architecture* 17, no. 6 (2012): 951–72.

79. See Luis Castañeda, "Choreographing the Metropolis: Networks of Circulation and Power in Olympic Mexico," *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 3 (2012): 295.

80. In July 2022, the activists themselves inserted their intervention into the pictographic system of the city's public transportation network, adding a pictogram of their own design to a Metrobús station on Paseo de la Reforma, renaming it from Glorieta de Colón to Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan. See "Renombran estaciones del Metro como Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan y de las y los Desaparecidos," *Voces Feministas*, July 16, 2022, https://vocesfeministas.mx/renombran-estaciones-del-metro-como-glorieta-de-las-mujeres-que-luchan-y-de-las-y-los-desaparecidos/.

81. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Disability Liberation Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Disability*, ed. Adam Cureton and David T. Wasserman (Oxford University Press, 2018), 105.

82. See Gottfried Korff, "From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker's Hand," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 42 (Fall 1992): 70–81, esp. 77.

83. See Deborah Caplow, *Leopoldo Méndez: Revolutionary Art and the Mexican Print* (University of Texas Press, 2007), 138.

84. See Jo-Ann Morgan, *The Black Arts Movement and the Black Panther Party in American Visual Culture* (Routledge, 2019), 47.

FIGURE 4. The *Antimonumenta*, 2019, on Avenida Juárez Avenue, in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City (photograph by Luis Alvaz, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0 international license)

FIGURE 5. La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan with the *Antimonumenta Justicia*, 2021–22. Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City (photograph by Luis Alvaz, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA international license)

raised fist was thus already part of a well-known political iconography in Mexico before it resonated internationally as the "Black Power salute" during the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, when the US sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved clenched fists high during the medal ceremony.[85] The *Antimonumenta* collective also chose the representation of an oversize clenched fist for its first countermonument in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Here, the fist is enclosed by the circle of a female symbol, the cross shape serving as the base.

Since 2020, the gesture of the raised fist has become a powerful sign of protest used to visually counter monuments that embody mechanisms of colonial oppression. The most famous example of this form of visual protest performance is the widely distributed image of British Black Lives Matter activist Jen Reid standing on top of the empty pedestal of the Edward Colston monument on June 7, 2020, and raising her fist into the air in a Black Power salute. The statue of the seventeenth-century slave trader Colston had been toppled and thrown into Bristol Harbor by demonstrators moments earlier, leaving behind an empty base. The following month, Reid's pose was translated into sculptural form by the artist Marc Quinn and placed on the same plinth, where it was intended to memorialize this moment of shifting power dynamics. Although this sculptural realization, titled *A Surge of Power (Jen Reid)*, was the result of Quinn's collaboration with the activist Reid, this form of countermemorial has been criticized for once again literally elevating the individual achievement of a well-known white artist.[86]

85. See Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Sharon Monteith has pointed out that precisely "its synchronicity as performance art" made the protest such a powerful symbol in the struggle for Black liberation. Sharon Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 46.

86. See Kadish Morris, "Marc Quinn's Black Lives Matter Statue Is Not Solidarity," *Art Review*, July 21, 2020, https://artreview.com/marc-quinn-black-lives-matter-statue-is-not-solidarity/.

In Mexico City on July 31, 2021, the artist David Alejandro Hernández also adopted the pose after climbing the still empty base of Cordier's *Monumento a Colón* for his performance *Pendiente de remover* (Pending removal). For one hour and forty minutes, Hernández stood on the pedestal, at times positioned leaning forward or to the side, held only by a rope, wearing a paper bag on his head (fig. 6). With his performance, Hernández juxtaposed the monumental narrative of "dead men, foundational myths, and the patriotic or painful allegories that inhabit it" with a living body, also seeking to explore how long such a body could escape removal—not by the public but instead by state authorities.[87] The leaning position of his body kept it in an unstable state of suspension, thereby counteracting the notion of stability otherwise associated with monuments. Hernández posed with his left fist raised, mirroring the gesture made by Cordier's Columbus and converting it into a stance of resistance.

All three interventions—Reid climbing the Colston plinth in Bristol, Hernández posing on the empty Columbus pedestal in Mexico City, and the *Antimonumenta Justicia*, erected later in the same place—can be read as symbolic transfers of power visualized through the replacement of one elevated figure by another. Compare this strategy of inversion with the intervention by artist Simone Leigh, who in January 2022 deliberately presented her sculpture *Sentinel (Mami Wata)* (2020–21) in front of—rather than on top of—the base of the former Robert E. Lee monument on Egalité Circle in New Orleans. The statue of the confederate General Lee had already been removed in 2017, but Leigh made a conscious decision not to replace it, to avoid merely reversing the hierarchy expressed by the elevation of the figure.[88] Instead, she placed her sculpture at the viewer's own level, on equal footing. *Sentinel (Mami Wata)* was designed to establish a relationship with viewers, thereby dissolving the visual authority traditionally associated with monuments.

Although a single figure once again assumes an elevated position with the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, the staging nevertheless goes beyond the simple exchange of one statue for another. First, in order to break with the traditional monument aesthetic, an ephemeral material was chosen rather than bronze, which has connotations of high value. Secondly, the emphasis here lies on the recognition and empowerment of multiple, diverse voices, for which the figure—the work not of an individual artist but instead the result of collective authorship—is only a symbolic representation. This is also made clear in the renaming of the roundabout. According to its title, the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan is dedicated to all women who have fought for equality and justice, and in particular against gender-based violence, since it also keeps alive the memory of the victims of femicide.[89]

Since the erection of the *Antimonumenta Justicia*, activists have inscribed the names of women who have disappeared and/or been victimized by patriarchal violence in Mexico on the barricade (originally erected to protect the base of the monument). The list is continually being changed and supplemented. The invisibility of these acts, made visible now through artistic activism, is also reflected in the design of the memorial. The two-dimensional figure is recognizable as such from the front or rear view. Viewed from the side, it disappears; appearing now, however, is the inscription "Justicia" (fig. 7). The purple female figure is also comparatively small, and the original—replaced by a steel version in March 2022 to make a more permanent claim to the space—was made of inexpensive plywood.[90] In this way, *Antimonumenta Justicia* aesthetically contradicted the classical rhetoric of the monument on several levels. In terms of content, the

87. "hombres muertos, mitos fundacionales y alegorías patrióticas o dolorosas que le habitan." Quoted in "Artista hace performance en el pedestal del Monumento a Colón en Reforma como protesta," *El Universal*, August 5, 2021, www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/contra-el-colonialismo-intervienen-monumento-colon-en-reforma/.

88. Naima J. Keith and Diana Nawi, artistic directors of the Prospect New Orleans triennial, of which Leigh's installation was a part, said in a statement: "Ultimately, Simone felt, and we agreed, that because the original placement of the Robert E. Lee atop the pedestal was one of power and domination—the statue loomed over the city, symbolizing the tyranny of white supremacy—that her work should be closer to the level of the individual." See David Guido Pietroni, "Simone Leigh Sculpture Replaces Robert E. Lee Statue in New Orleans," *The Art Insider*, January 25, 2022, www.art-insider.com/simone-leigh-sculpture-replaces-robert-e-lee-statue-in-new-orleans/3468.

89. The term *femicide* refers to women killed by men on account of their gender. The English term was introduced in Diana Russell and Jill Radford, eds., *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (Twayne Publishers, 1992), xiv. This book was later translated into Spanish by Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, who made an important distinction by changing the literal translation *femicidio* to *feminicidio*, to include under the term a number of forms of violence that lead to the murder or suicide of women. See Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, "Introducción: Por la vida y la libertad de las mujeres. Fin al feminicidio," in *Feminicidio: Una perspectiva global*, ed. Diana E. H. Russell and Roberta A. Harmes (CEIICH-UNAM, 2006), 20.

90. See Christian Vázquez, " ¡La lucha sigue!: Colocan nuevo antimonumento en la 'Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan,'" *Sopitas*, March 6, 2022, www.sopitas.com/noticias/8m-colocan-nuevo-antimonumento-glorieta-de-las-mujeres-que-luchan-paseo-reforma/.

FIGURE 6. David Alejandro Hernández, *Pendiente de remover*, 2021, performance on the plinth of the *Monumento a Colón* on the Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City (photograph by Iván Campos, provided by the artist)

FIGURE 7. *Antimonumenta Justicia*, La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, 2021–22. Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City (photograph by Luis Alvaz, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0 international license)

female figure is antithetical in relation to the staging of the monument. Here, the perpetuation of colonialism still commemorated by the pedestal is juxtaposed with a tribute to those who have endured its consequences up to the present day, since the intersectional experiences of oppression it addresses represent a colonial continuity. Erin L. McCutcheon therefore described the intervention as a "symbolic disruption" that "drew together two seemingly disparate contexts of past and present. The action brought to the fore the layering of historic violence committed against Indigenous and Afro-descendant ancestors and their subsequent erasure in contemporary struggles for justice."[91]

Although the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan marks the first time an existing monument on the Paseo de la Reforma has been invested with an alternative meaning, an entire culture of antimonuments has evolved on the boulevard in recent years. The definition of the *antimonumento* offered by Elena Lacruz and Juan Ramírez applies to these examples: namely, that it aims to deconstruct the concept of the monument itself. "The prefix *anti-* means 'opposite' or 'with contrary properties.' . . . This deconstruction does not annul the term but rather uses the concepts contained in the idea of the monument to produce a critique and establish a new concept."[92] Márcio Seligmann-Silva has linked the phenomenon of antimonuments in Latin America to the tradition of Holocaust commemoration discussed by Young. According to Seligmann-Silva, the Latin American form of the antimonument arose from the need to confront dictatorships and ongoing state violence.[93] It can be expanded to include performance and participatory aesthetics in ways that may blur the boundary separating artistic practice and political protest. Susana Torre has also included "ceremonies and rituals" under this category, such as the commemorative march enacted in Argentina since 1977 by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.[94]

Common to all of the Mexican *antimonumentos* is that they are not intended to convey permanence or stability—as signaled by the choice of materials and participatory practices. Concerning this aspect, Alfonso Díaz Tovar and Lilian Paola Ovalle write: "Anti-monuments are not created with a commitment to outlast time; their intention is to have a certain temporality, to remain in the public space until reality has been transformed into one where truth and justice reign."[95] The challenge of contemporary Mexican commemorative culture, as described by Alexandra Délano Alonso and Benjamin Nienass, lies

91. Erin L. McCutcheon, "Performative Resurrections: Necropublics and the Work of Guadalupe García-Vásquez," in *The New Public Art: Collectivity and Activism in Mexico Since the 1980s*, ed. Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra (University of Texas Press, 2023), 131.

92. "El prefijo anti- significa 'opuesto' o 'con propiedades contrarias' [. . .] La deconstrucción no anula el término sino que utiliza los mismos conceptos contenidos en la idea de monumento para producir una crítica y establecer un nuevo concepto." Elena Lacruz and Juan Ramírez, "Antimonumentos: Recordando el futuro a través de los lugares abandonados," *Revista Rita* 7 (2017): 88.

93. See Márcio Seligmann-Silva, "Antimonumentos: Trabalho de memória e de resistência," *Psicologia USP* 27, no. 1 (2016): 49–60.

94. See Susana Torre, "Ciudad, memoria y espacio público: El caso de los monumentos a los detenidos y desaparecidos," *Memoria y sociedad* 10, no. 20 (2006): 20.

95. "Los anti-monumentos no surgen con la vocación para perdurar en el tiempo, su intención es tener una temporalidad determinada, permanecer en el espacio público hasta que la realidad sea transformada por una donde la verdad y la justicia sobresalgan." Alfonso Díaz Tóvar and Lilian Paola Ovalle, "Antimonumentos: Espacio público, memoria y duelo social en México," *Aletheia: Revista de la Maestría en Historia y Memoria de la FaHCE* 8, no. 16 (2018): 6, www.aletheia.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/article/view/ATHv8n16a10.

in this temporal dimension, in the need to commemorate continued grievances rather than past events in a country where "violence is ongoing and is manifested in various ways."[96] *Antimonumentos* are not officially authorized (unlike the countermonuments that fall under Young's definition) but rather guerrilla structures, conceived as sites of living commemoration. They recall the victims of the still ongoing "war on drugs," proclaimed in 2006 by then-President Felipe Calderón, the well over one hundred thousand missing persons to date (such as the 43 students who went missing in 2014 in the state of Guerrero), or the ten women who are murdered daily in Mexico, as is the case with the first countermonument the Antimonumenta Viva Nos Queremos collective installed in 2019.[97]

Tania Gutiérrez-Monroy has just recently examined how these countermonuments on the Paseo de la Reforma serve the feminist movement in Mexico as projects of "place-making," as they are used as meeting places, to hold workshops, raise funds and generate support.[98] Tania Gutiérrez-Monroy sees this use of memorial sites as part of a genealogy of the use of monuments in Mexico by feminist groups as protest sites since the 1980s. The *Antimonumenta* as well as the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan have become landmarks on feminist march routes. In addition, the Paseo de la Reforma has become the scene of feminist interventions that inscribe themselves into the official monumental landscape as a form of protest action. These actions include iconoclasm in the form of graffiti, for example during the feminist protests after a gang rape in August 2019, when the *Ángel de la Independencia* was smeared with slogans such as "México Feminicida." In the aftermath of these protests, a group of professionals from diverse academic specialties associated with cultural heritage, under the name Restauradoras con Glitter, campaigned for the preservation of these spray-painted demands, stating that "lives lost cannot be restored, the social fabric can."[99] For International Women's Day in 2020, feminist activists turned the water in the La Diana Cazadora Fountain red to call attention to the issue of femicide.[100] In December 2022, the feminist group *Colectiva Hilos* covered the base of the *Ángel de la Independencia* with a large, red, knitted fabric as a metaphor for bloodshed and to denounce femicides and the crisis of missing persons in the country (fig. 8).[101] Here, that which is ordinarily concealed was placed on display through the textile medium. This intervention exemplifies how textiles have been used effectively in recent years by several artists, among them Joiri Minaya and Aaron McIntosh, to cover and hence resignify "difficult" monuments. Traditionally, textiles have been associated with femininity and domesticity, and have therefore long been devalued as a serious form of artistic expression. Precisely for this reason, however, they are well-suited to serving as a countering medium for recontextualizing monuments, for obscuring them and transforming their appearance in order to expose them as physical remnants of colonial patriarchal supremacy in historically male-dominated public spaces.

The Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan has also repeatedly been the site of gatherings, protests, and artistic interventions. On March 5, 2022, a few days before the International Women's Day protests, feminist groups held an event replacing the original wooden sculpture with a two-meter-tall steel version and inaugurating the *Jardín de la Memoria*, a garden of remembrance featuring fixed panels

96. Alexandra Délano Alonso and Benjamin Nienass, "Memory Activism and Mexico's War on Drugs: Countermonuments, Resistance, and the Politics of Time," *Latin American Research Review* 56, no. 2 (2021): 355.

97. As of October 2023, 111,896 people were registered as missing in the interior ministry's official database. See Stefanie Eschenbacher, "UN Raises Concerns over Mexico's 'Alarming' Numbers of Missing Persons," *Reuters*, October 3, 2023, www.reuters.com/world/americas/un-raises-concerns-over-mexicos-alarming-numbers-missing-persons-2023-10-03/. In Mexico, the number of femicides is particularly high. According to government data, ten women and girls in Mexico are killed every day by intimate partners or other family members. In 2022, 2,481 women and girls were officially reported as "missing." See "'We're Here to Tell It': Mexican Women Break Silence over Femicides," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, July 3, 2023, www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/07/were-here-tell-it-mexican-women-break-silence-over-femicides. In the same year, the national statistics agency INEGI estimated that more than 70 percent of women and girls over fifteen years old in Mexico have experienced some kind of gender-based violence. See "Violence Against Women in Mexico Rises to over 70%, Study Finds," *Reuters*, August 31, 2022, www.reuters.com/world/americas/violence-against-women-mexico-rises-over-70-study-finds-2022-08-31/.

98. Tania Gutiérrez-Monroy, "Firearms, Flowers, and Barricades: Women's Reinscriptions in the Mexican Landscape of Monuments," in *Breaking the Bronze Ceiling: Women, Memory, and Public Space*, ed. Valentina Rozas-Krause and Andrew M. Shanken (Fordham University Press, 2024), 169.

99. "Restauradoras toman postura frente a las pintas en el Ángel durante la marcha #NoMeCuidanMeViolan," *Revista Código*, August 22, 2019, https://revistacodigo.com/restauradoras-glitter-carta/.

100. See "Fuente de la Diana Cazadora luce 'ensangrentada,'" *El Universal*, March 7, 2020, www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/patrimonio/tinen-de-rojo-el-agua-de-la-diana-cazadora/.

101. See Micaela Varela, "Una mancha de sangre 'tejida' en el Ángel de la Independencia se alza contra la violencia," *El País*, December 12, 2022, https://elpais.com/mexico/2022-12-12/una-mancha-de-sangre-tejida-en-el-angel-de-la-independencia-se-alza-contra-la-violencia.html.

FIGURE 8. Colectiva Hilos, *Sangre de mi sangre*, 2021, raffia and jute, crochet technique. Intervention at the base of the *Ángel de la Independencia*, Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City. (photograph by Aldoso and Angie Queupumil; courtesy of Claudia Rodríguez/Colectiva Hilos)

with information regarding disappearance, femicide, and sexual violence.[102] The space was also surrounded by *El tendedero de denuncias* (The clothesline of denunciations), a version of a project originally known as *El Tendedero* and created by Mexican artist Mónica Mayer (fig. 9).[103] Mayer first presented this work in 1978 as a clothesline—"a structure that alludes to a traditionally feminine everyday activity"—full of reflections provided by women who answered the artist's question regarding what they hated most about living in the city.[104] For the version surrounding the *Antimonumenta Justicia* at the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, participants answered the question why they had not reported a sexual assault.

102. See Azucena Rangel, "Instalan Jardín de la Memoria en Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan," *Milenio*, March 3, 2022, www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/instalan-jardin-memoria-glorieta-mujeres-luchan/.

103. See María Ruiz, "Las luchas detrás de la Glorieta de las Mujeres," *Pie de Página*, October 7, 2022, https://piedepagina.mx/las-luchas-detras-de-la-glorieta-de-las-mujeres/.

104. Karen Cordero Reiman, "Politics of Enunciation and Affect in an Age of Corporeal Violence: Mónica Mayer's *The Clothesline* and Pinto mi Raya's *Embraces,*" in Polgovsky Ezcurra, ed., *New Public Art*, 90.

CONCLUSION

In the nineteenth century, known as the century of nation building, public monuments contributed to a developing sense of national identity. Their function was to help shape this identity by reflecting a sense of national values and national art and, ultimately, to promote a sense of national unity. They were therefore conceived as permanent: their erection was associated with the desire to suggest the enduring existence of the historical, cultural, emotional, and aesthetic ideals they represented. But the *Monumento a Colón*—modeled by Cordier on the Luther monument in Worms—demonstrates that the nationalist monument iconography of that century was not static, contrary to what the materiality of the monument might suggest. If the figure of Luther could be transformed into Columbus through minimal adjustments, then these nationalist conceptions—contrary to their proponents' claims—were not rigid and fixed but proved instead to be adaptable. The antimonumental concepts developed since the 1980s have taken up this idea of changeability and transported it to an aesthetic level.

FIGURE 9. *El tendedero de denuncias* at La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, 2022. Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City (photograph by Raj Valley / Alamy Stock Photo)

The events following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 have demonstrated on a previously unprecedented and global scale that monuments are not, as Erika Doss has put it, "forever" but instead "subject to the volatile intangibles of multiple publics and their fluctuating interests and feelings."[105] The example of the *Monumento a Colón* illustrates the task of addressing this multivoiced discourse in shaping a more inclusive commemorative culture. In their 2015 book *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*, Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens explore how changing approaches to the design of contemporary memorial spaces have increasingly resulted in their collective appropriation and use.[106] In the case of the Columbus monument on the Paseo de la Reforma, it is possible to trace how spaces of memory can collectively be not only used but also (re-)designed, thereby decentering individual achievement on both artistic and representational levels and bringing community into focus. Through collective interventions, the official version of a glorified history is inverted into the continuing commemoration of the inglorious developments of the present. The Mexican state's systematic practices of repression and concealment are countered by artistic interventions that wrest these topics from invisibility.

The *Antimonumenta Justicia* is representative of this development. While the city's original plans called for a permanent, monumental replacement of Columbus, a living memorial space has now emerged through activist interventions and collective design, thereby assigning agency to previously marginalized voices. Parts of the historically burdened memorial were integrated into the redesign, and visual contradictions have helped to dismantle the traditional monumental narrative. Through the use of a more ephemeral, inexpensive material and a pictogram aesthetic that is reflective of Mexican urban space, activists have transformed the language of stone and bronze, of monumentality and permanence. The resulting memorial space represents one possible response to the debate about the potential

105. Erika Doss, "Guest Editor's Statement: Thinking About Forever," *Public Art Dialogue* 6, no. 1 (2016): 1.

106. See Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens, *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement: Design, Use and Meaning* (Routledge, 2015).

FIGURE 10. The *Antimonumenta Justicia* at La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, with *La joven de Amajac* in the background, 2023. Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City (photograph by EneasMx, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0 International license)

appearance of a more inclusive, contemporary memorial culture.[107]

Recently, however, the municipal government made an "official" addition to this space with *La joven de Amajac*, a replica of a monolith from the Mesoamerican Postclassic period that was unearthed during excavations in Veracruz in January 2021 (fig. 10). In monument form, *La joven de Amajac* is to be nothing less than "a symbol of anticolonialist and antiracist struggle," as proclaimed by Mexico City's head of government, Martí Batres Guadarrama, at its inauguration.[108] However, the monument represents another problematic reference to the country's pre-Hispanic heritage, since cultural identity is once again established here by reference to a bygone era. The monument, which was finally positioned on the periphery, on a neighboring traffic island, hence relates to the colonialist practice of the "denial of coevalness," which, according to Johannes Fabian, employs an exclusionary perspective to fix the imagined Other in a time that is remote from modernity.[109] For this reason, critics of this official solution did not see it as an appropriate symbol to counter Mexico's colonial legacy. Moreover, the design of this official solution adheres to the aesthetic language of the nineteenth century, again staking a claim to permanence through its monumental size and stone materiality.

Through the confrontation of the two monuments, the *Antimonumenta Justicia* becomes not only a countermonument to the "difficult" legacy of colonialism embodied by Columbus. Inevitably, it also opposes another official narrative, a current form of self-representation by the Mexican state that is seen to still feed on idealizing representations of Indigenous communities while refusing to adequately address Indigenous experiences of the present and taking intersectional categories of race, class and gender into account. Both monuments aim to honor Indigenous heritage. But *La joven de Amajac* is criticized for presenting this heritage as fixed and completed, as belonging to the past. This mode of remembrance reverts to the static nature of nineteenth-century memorial culture. The dimension of heritage as a constant process of negotiating historical, cultural, and social meanings, on the other hand, is embodied by the *Antimonumenta Justicia*, which allows for doubt because it embodies changeability through its ephemeral materiality and appearance.

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107. According to Gutiérrez-Monroy, however, the actual inclusivity of this space can be questioned, since the majority group responsible for the reclaiming of the Columbus roundabout consists of mestiza women. See Gutiérrez-Monroy, *Firearms, Flowers, and Barricades*, 173.

108. "Devela Martí Batres el monumento 'La joven de Amajac' en Paseo de la Reforma, símbolo de anticolonialismo y antirracismo," *Obras*, July 23, 2023, www.obras.cdmx.gob.mx/comunicacion/nota/devela-marti-batres-el-monumento-la-joven-de-amajac-en-paseo-de-la-reforma-simbolo-de-anticolonialismo-y-antirracismo.

109. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (Columbia University Press, 1983), 31.