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### Un Guisado: Allí, Allá and the Space In Between

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# *Un Guisado: Allí, Allá and the Space In Between*

By  
Quinn Antonio Briceño

A thesis presented to the  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
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# Introduction



St. Louis, Missouri, 1998  
From left to right  
María José Briceño. Jill Lauren Quinlan-Briceño. Quinn Antonio Briceño

Dear Reader,

I have written this text as an insight to my practice and how I have come to be the person I am today. It is an introspection of how I have come to accept who I am. I am a Nicaraguan American artist from St. Louis, Missouri, who works with painting and collage as a form of image making that carefully takes inspiration from those traditions to create a new narrative.

I view myself, and by extension my work, as a *guisado*. A savory stew. A blend of two worlds: *Nicaragüense* and *Estadounidense*. My work explores my identity and the conflicts felt as a bi-racial and bi-cultural individual. As an artist, I examine both my struggle with that identity and how I came to be the person I am today. As I am both *Nicaragüense* and *Estadounidense* it is important that my paintings reflect those two worlds. Through the act of collaging and painting, my work takes society's scraps of discarded material and my own personal history to create a new environment: one that celebrates my identity.

To make a delicious *guisado*, it is necessary to have multiple ingredients. The necessary ingredients to make my personal *guisado* are *The Loss of the Mother Tongue*, *A Merging of Two Worlds*, *Nostalgia (The Longing for Wholeness)*, *The Botched (An Other)*, and *the Hybridity of Globalization*. Once these ingredients have been addressed, the process of making the *guisado* can begin. It is my hope that insight into this process may help bring you a feeling of fulfilment.

*Sinceramente,*

Quinn Antonio Briceño



Managua, Nicaragua, 1995  
From Left to Right  
Quinn Antonio Briceño, Milton Marcelo Briceño Lovo

# The Loss of the Mother Tongue



Quinn Antonio Briceño, *Allí*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

¿Eres Nicaragüense o Estadounidense? Soy los dos. I am a *guisado*. A savory blend of two worlds: one of Nicaragua<sup>1</sup>, and the other of the United States. I am both Nicaragüense and Estadounidense. My whole life, my identity has been questioned by those around me. Growing up in two countries separated by thousands of miles, I felt that I had to choose to embrace one and discard the other. Once I moved to the United States at five years of age, almost immediately I felt the pressure to assimilate into this new American culture. I wore more *American* clothes, I only wanted to eat *American* food, and I did not want to participate in anything tied to either my Nicaraguan side, or by association, my father.

But to say American culture by itself is problematic. On one of the trips back to Nicaragua to visit my abuelitos, I vividly remember having a conversation with my abuelita where I stated that I was from America, meaning from the United States. My abuelita replied that she too was American, and that everyone in Nicaragua was American as well. This reply shocked me. All this time spent trying to assimilate to this new culture and dispose of the old under the guise of becoming more American, just to find out that being American is an all-encompassing term. America is not just the United States, but all of North America, Central America, and South America. I was already American because I was both North and Central American. There was no need to throw away my Nicaraguan identity to assimilate into what I thought was America. But to the typical *Estadounidense*, you are not American unless you conform to what they believe someone living in the United States should be: *una persona que no habla español, sino sólo inglés*.

In grade school, I was taught that the United States is a melting pot of peoples and cultures. According to my elementary school teachers, to be *Estadounidense* is to be of many things. However, for many of those who have lived in the United States their whole lives, no



matter how hard someone may try to assimilate into this so-called melting pot that is accepting of other cultures, people like me, my sister and my father will never be enough to be called “American” by them.

Whenever my parents spoke Spanish to my sister and me in public, I felt the harsh gaze of the Anglo. The Anglo, used by Gloria Anzaldúa in *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*, is a person that comes from the descendants of Anglo Saxons, the Old English.<sup>2</sup> They are those who took these lands from the indigenous peoples and hold a greater influence in the United States than people with a higher melanin level in their skin. They are people that are privileged and scared to lose that privilege to the growing number of minorities in the United States. With these Anglos comes their glare. It is a critical glare, one that if given words would say “you’re in America, and in America we speak English. If you don’t like it, get out.” It was demeaning and embarrassing. The pressure to acculturate led me to lose most of my mother tongue, Spanish.

From one colonizing language to another. Spanish to English. Both languages have forcefully taken the linguistic identity of many. It is difficult to comment on for myself because all I have ever known is Spanish and English. They are both intrinsic to my identity, but they both have a past that is flawed.

*Entiende mucho, pero no habla muy bien.* He understands a lot, but he doesn’t speak well. When either of my parents were asked about my Spanish, they would answer with that. I can understand the majority of what is spoken to me but replying is the issue. My Spanish is slow, clumsy, and filled with errors. Often it is embarrassing to try to speak with a fluent person. I can tell by the look on their face that my Spanish is not good, that it can be hard to understand, and that it lacks confidence. If they are bi-lingual, they will immediately switch to English to accommodate me; however when they do this, they inadvertently take away my chance to

practice Spanish, to try to reclaim my mother tongue. My whole life I have been forced to reckon with both the physical distance of being separated from one culture, and the psychological distance created when I lost my mother tongue.

For most of my practice, I have painted the everyday working-class Nicaraguan as a means to reconnect and reclaim my other half. For instance, *La Cortadora de Café*, 2021, depicts a Nicaraguan woman picking ripe coffee beans. As La Cortadora picks the beans, she places them in a basket, where they will later be taken to be processed in a plant, roasted, and turned into coffee and sold. Coffee has been a major export for Nicaragua, and further connects to my father's side of the family. The Briceño family has long been a part of the coffee business in Nicaragua, and the smell of coffee has always evoked nostalgia for me. My abuelitos had a small processing and roasting plant in their back yard, and on our visits to Nicaragua the aroma of coffee roasting would fill the air. These connections to both my experiences as well as my family's experiences are what I find exciting to paint because it is a means to reconnect to my Nicaraguan side even though Nicaragua is thousands of miles away from where I call home now.



Quinn Antonio Briceño, *La Cortadora de Café*, 2021  
Acrylic, Made in USA Stickers, Found Prints, and Lotto Tickets on Canvas  
30 in x 30 in  
Courtesy of the Artist

*Mamá, no tengo amigos.* Mom, I don't have any friends. When my mother moved us to the United States to live with my grandparents for a better life, it wasn't an easy transition. I was struggling. According to my mother, I learned English quickly, but my sister didn't speak at all for six months until she learned the language. Within our first year in the United States, we lost much of our mother tongue to the dominant English language in St. Louis. Losing our mother tongue was a mixture of not being able to speak to others in Spanish (my mother worked at a pre-school full time, my father wasn't around, and my American grandparents didn't speak Spanish), and we felt the heavy pressure from outside sources to assimilate quickly. In grade school this pressure was further applied as my sister and I were forced to take ESL (English as a Second Language) class. Even though we had been living in the United States for a few years at this point and spoke English well, it was not good enough for the Anglo. To this day, my English is still not good enough. It is informal and it is more of the everyday rather than the scholarly. My writing is full of incorrect prepositions that show those editing it that while I may not have an accent while talking, the accent is there when I am writing. It is obvious that English is not my first language.

While growing up, my father, in an effort to try to re-teach me Spanish, would give my sister and me as well as our friends mini-Spanish lessons both at our home and in the car. It was embarrassing for us because we thought we had already fully assimilated, but it was my father's way of reaching out to try to repair our relationship to our other world: Nicaragua.

These lessons were never very difficult or long, and usually were around small phrases. One such phrase I remember vividly. *Hijo, there is Aquí, Acá, Allí and Allá. Here, right there, there, and over there.* When he would say over there, he would tilt his head up slightly and purse

his lips to point to a further direction than where ‘there’ was. According to my mother, this is the way many Nicaraguans indicate something rather than pointing with a finger.

This idea of different distances separated by words with slight differences has always stuck in my head: especially *Allí* and *Allá*. Maybe subconsciously it was my brain connecting the distance of those words to the distance of Nicaragua in comparison to the United States and the loss of my mother tongue. While making my paintings for *Nine Ways from Sunday* at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum in St. Louis, Missouri, these words came back to me. The paintings are of scenes of daily life in specific places I hold dear in San Marcos, Carazo, Nicaragua. These paintings depict the street where my abuelitos’ house is and the corner of the city park, where people would gather to play, sell items, and go to church. They are important because they were focal points in my memories of this far off place I so desperately want to reconnect to in order to regain some semblance of my other half. They are paintings of *allí/there* and *allá/over there*.

In painting the town where my father grew up, where my abuelitos’ house is, and where I’ve spent a handful of summers visiting my abuelitos and other family members, the memory of my father explaining distance to me through one of his mini-Spanish lesson came back. It felt right to name my paintings *Allí* and *Allá* to connect both the physical and psychological distance that I have felt my whole life.

In St. Louis, if my family ever left the house and were speaking Spanish out in public, we were met with the Anglo gaze, which had no words, but told us that Spanish was unnecessary and unwelcome here. In *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*, Gloria Anzaldúa states that

if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity - I am my language. <sup>3</sup>

In losing Spanish, I lost my linguistic identity, I lost a part of who I was when I was five years old. It wasn't just the language I lost, but a loss of a signifier of culture. As I am not fluent, Nicaraguans, Latinx, and Spanish speakers in general don't accept me. Because I speak Spanish in a clumsy way, with little confidence, Spanish-speaking people look at me differently. Gloria Anzaldúa has a similar experience being Chicana. Anzaldúa explains that:

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.<sup>4</sup>

Growing up, it was not uncommon to hear my tías and abuelita criticize my Spanish, to the point where even trying felt like failure. I felt that physically moving from where I felt home was, and then being chastised for my lack of Spanish, my identity was being questioned.

According to Anzaldúa, this is not uncommon when it comes to the estimation of the mother tongue: "If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me."<sup>5</sup> However, there was one thing that never questioned my identity, and accepted me for who I am: making.





San Marcos, Carazo, Nicaragua 1996

From Left to Right

Juan Diego Briceño Montealegre, Quinn Antonio Briceño, Carlos Sebastian Briceño Montealegre

# The Merging of Two Worlds





Quinn Antonio Briceño, Detail of *Allá*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

After moving back to the United States at the age of five, I became obsessed with creating with anything I could get my hands on. I would take printer paper and draw for hours, build cardboard structures from the Aldi grocery boxes brought home, draw with chalk on both the sidewalks and walls of our home, and while our time was short together, I remember drawing figures with my grandma. Along with making, my grandparents would take my sister and me to the St. Louis Art Museum, where we got to experience great art firsthand. Throughout grade school, I even made my own stories of superhero's, drawing them, printing them into comics using my father's printer, and selling them to classmates for fifty cents. According to my mother, she had always seen this creativity in me, but she believed, or maybe hoped, that I would become an architect: a respectable career with a potential good income and an easier life. But that would not be the case because for me art making is innate. I believe I was born to do it. Because art making is so deeply tied to who I am, it has become an instrument for me to accept myself and be proud of myself. *Yo soy Nicaragüense y Estadounidense.* I am unique because I am both. It is my art making that creates a new space where both of those worlds can be celebrated.

The contact zone that merges my own Nicaraguan-ness and American-ness is the collaging of different found materials from my life in the United States colliding with the imagery of Nicaragua. Materials I frequently use are discarded images and packing stickers from the production framing warehouse I have been working at for the past four years, discarded Missouri lotto tickets, fabric, transferred color family photographs, and bean-stained paper. These materials, both found and fabricated, are specific contact zones that serve as a bridge to connect the painted imagery of Nicaragua to my life in the United States.

To create a space where both worlds are represented, moments of both cultures must interact with one another in my work. This idea of interaction of different cultures within an artwork led me to resonating with the Nigerian artist Njideka Akunyili Crosby. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth's Associate Curator Alison Hearst explains that Crosby's work "reveals aspects of living between two cultures in what really goes into her hybrid sense of identity."<sup>6</sup>

Within her paintings, Crosby has elements of both her Nigerian identity and American identity. Transferred pictures and cloth from her mother's senate run in Nigeria, juxtaposed with more western elements like furniture, Crosby combines the best of both her worlds. Hearst explains:

Akunyili infuses her interiors with images that are uniquely personal and political. These images range from Nigerian photo magazines, fashion magazines, personal family photo albums and pictures of black civil right leaders. Which really merges binationally references and traditions in her work.<sup>7</sup>

Crosby uses the photos and combines it with layers of paint and cloth. This layering "metaphorically references the complex layering that goes into one's sense of self and identity."<sup>8</sup>

It is both the complex layering of material and the juxtaposition of the two worlds that directly speak to my work. Through this, I merge both my Nicaraguan and American worlds within my artwork to create a sense of fulfillment, and in turn, reconnect with a part of myself that has been lost since moving to the United States. Combined, they create a new space that hold both aspects of my Nicaraguan-ness and American-ness. Crosby's work is similar because, as she explains, "The overarching theme in the work is this point of union between two cultures."<sup>9</sup>

In her painting *Wedding Portrait*, 2012, Crosby has painted herself kneeling and handing her now husband a cup of wine as they are looked upon by her family members. In Crosby's tribe, this moment of interaction where her husband takes the cup is the moment of marriage. This moment, symbolically, is the fusion of both cultures and is important within Crosby's work. Crosby explains

That image is something that comes in a lot in my work because I think of it as a contact zone in my life the moment when my Nigerian-ness and American-ness collided.<sup>10</sup>

These works elicit both a sense of longing and nostalgia very familiar to me.



Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Wedding Portrait*, 2012  
Acrylic, Pastel, Colored Pencil, Marble dust, Transfers and Custom Fabric on Paper  
63 in x 54 in  
Courtesy of SFMOMA

# Nostalgia (The Longing for Wholeness)





Quinn Antonio Briceño, *Allá*, 2022

Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in

Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

According to Merriam-Webster, nostalgia is the state of being homesick, or a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition. For me, nostalgia is a longing for or an affection of a past or place that holds significant personal association. Within commodity culture, it is used to bring in a consumer to harken back to their earlier years, for example using characters from the original Star Wars in the new movies to sell more tickets, action figures, games, etc. Nostalgia has become a term just thrown about in almost every way. According to Adam Muller in *Notes Toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the Past in Two European Heritage Films*, Nostalgia

involves a backward glance through history, but not toward a place or even a time that is necessarily real... It belongs neither to the present, the past, nor to the future, and yet it remains in some way attached to all three temporal zones.<sup>11</sup>

My work is attached to all three temporal zones. It is not necessarily attached to the past, present nor future, but has a longing to reconnect to a different place. Through the (re)creation of space through painting and collaging, I may then be reconnected with a lost part of myself. Muller uses many theorists to back up his argument, such as Svetlana Boym:

What nostalgics may then be seen longing for, on Boym's view, is the (re)creation of a space within which retrospection may take place unconstrained by the rational necessity of seeking to realize our expectations. Hence again nostalgia's powerful pull on creative and sentimental imaginations, cognitive faculties in a fraught, although not finally detached, relationship for a reason.<sup>12</sup>

While Boym is regarded as an expert in nostalgia, she does not offer a cure. She does, however, offer two types of nostalgia that will help understand it further: Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia.

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nóstos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *álgos*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately. These distinctions are not absolute binaries, and one can surely make a more refined mapping of the gray areas on the outskirts of imaginary homelands. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the



ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt.<sup>13</sup>

My nostalgia lies in the gray area. In my artwork, I attempt to reconstruct a lost home, but I also dwell on this longing for a different place, to reconnect to my other side. I want to belong to both worlds: Nicaragua and the United States.

I have felt this longing for a very long time, I just was never able to put words to what it was. I remember as soon as I learned what Google Earth was, I immediately went to my laptop and searched for the town where our house was: San Marcos, Carazo, Nicaragua. I searched the streets that were familiar to me on our visits to Nicaragua, the soccer fields I would play on, and the university tennis courts where my father and I would play tennis: all through the lens and screen of the internet, trying to reconnect the distance I have felt through the digital view. I remember pointing out our house to others, telling friends and anyone who would listen the stories I had from visiting this far off place.

However, with Google Earth, things are never quite perfect. Many images are taken and put together through Google's program, digitally collaging together a space for people to view. But capturing a three-dimensional space through the lens of a camera is difficult. Life is always happening, moving, causing irregularities to happen with the camera. Doubles, and triples appear in the program as if they were copied and pasted. Blurring, half cars, and light poles that were seemingly cut horizontally and then pasted slightly askew creating a zig zag in what should be a straight line. This has always fascinated but also saddened me – almost being able to see this place that I was nostalgic for but pieced and stitched together incorrectly. There has always seemed to be missing pieces in my every effort to reconnect to my roots.

These memories of searching Google Earth in hopes of piecing together a world and being fulfilled struck a chord with me when deciding the project to undertake for my thesis. In my previous work, I had typically painted a singular figure, focusing on them and their labor as a means of uplifting someone normally looked down on by society. However, in the grand scheme of trying to reconnect and recreate a space, it felt necessary to return to Google Earth to recreate and improve upon the space that I have been yearning for as long as I can remember. Google Earth's blemishes and its stitched-together nature felt as if it were a digital collage and would work well together with my own analog method of collage. I felt that the sense of fulfillment of connecting to my roots that I was so desperately seeking was in reach through the merging of this digital collage, with my method of combining discarded materials and painting.

An artist who has resonated with my personal feeling of longing is the Brooklyn based painter, Maia Cruz Palileo. Palileo is influenced by the oral history of her family's arrival in the United States from the Philippines, as well as the colonial relationship between the two countries. Palileo's paintings infuse these narratives with memory and care. Palileo explains,

The paintings, while not depicting a specific time or place, remind us that the land we inhabit is full of mystery, stories, ghosts, and history. Yet the way history is told, especially the way U.S. history has been taught, conveniently reorganizes, prioritizes, consciously erases and promotes selective memory. They are one-sided stories that rely on a linear time system that tries to erase the past to bury stories in an effort to whitewash. While some paintings employ a panoramic format, they do not conform to a linear time or narrative. The complex line work of lush overgrown fauna serves as a compositional mechanism through which the eye can traverse the circular path of each canvas. There is no start, no stop. Just continuous progression of breath and life. Instead, time is collapsed, and viewers are invited to consider many possibilities and imaginations of past lives both remembered and forgotten.<sup>14</sup>

These narratives with memory and care can be seen in Palileo's painting *Towards the Bay Shores Where the Reeds Grow*, 2021. In the painting, there is a male figure with holes in his torso

accompanied by a dog in a colorful wilderness. Bright colors juxtapose the solemn figure, giving us clues as to what may have happened. Inspired by a story told to Palileo about a hunting trip with her grandfather and great grandfather, the painting depicts a boat man that was accidentally shot with a shot gun and had holes all over his body. According to the story, the man survived because he went to a healer who instructed him to write prayers down on a piece of paper and to put them on his wounds. Palileo is inspired by cultural stories that depict histories like *Towards the Bay Shores Where the Reeds Grow*, and they inhabit many of her works.



Maya Cruz Palileo, *Towards the Bay Shores Where the Reeds Grow*, 2021  
Oil on Canvas  
83 in x 71 in  
Courtesy of Monique Meloche Gallery

Most of my paintings are inspired by cultural stories and histories as well. One painting that does this is *La Virgen de Cuapa*, 2022. *La Virgen de Cuapa* is a 24 x 36-inch painting which has bean-stained paper, found foil, tablecloth and transferred color family photographs on watercolor paper collaged together. These media, combined with acrylic paint, create the image of the Virgin Mary crying. Inspired by the stories of the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Nicaragua in the 1980s that coincided with the then newly formed Sandinista government along with the many miracle stories of crying Virgin Mary statues, I created a painting depicting Mary, the patron saint of Nicaragua, weeping the bright blue tears of the Nicaraguan flag in reaction to the current political situation in Nicaragua with Daniel Ortega rigging elections and imprisoning anyone who opposes him.





Quinn Antonio Briceño, *La Virgen de Cuapa*, 2022  
Acrylic, Watercolor Paper, Solvent Transfers, Tablecloth, Foil and Bean Stained Paper on Canvas  
24 in x 36 in  
Courtesy of the Artist

My work, while it depicts the Nicaraguan working class, is not necessarily a specific time or place, but a feeling. My work is narrative, but the story it tells isn't necessarily one that is linear. As an artist, I want to reconnect with my roots not only to try to understand my father's side of the family, but also to offer to my viewers a glimpse into the non-linear approach to this narrative. I want my viewers to imagine their own returns and reconnections, bypassing borders and divisions. I am drawn towards the work of other artists who have a similar sense of longing, like Palileo, who expressed her desire to not only connect with the motherland, but also with her deceased mother:

I have this longing to understand the motherland. Where I came from. It wasn't necessarily about the Philippines. When I was a teen-ager, my mom died suddenly. After my mom died, I just missed her. There's so much that I didn't know, I was just so young. So, it's not necessarily about knowing my roots, I just want to know about her. My mom was the kind of person that was who she was. Like she was very fierce woman in the world. I was very grateful that I had her as a role model in that way. She would say that the purpose in life was to become who you are. It's terrifying but it feels worse to stay quiet and stay silent. <sup>15</sup>

When I talk about my work, I talk about reconnecting with my past, with my roots, but I'm not completely sure that's correct. There is so much I feel I don't know about my other half that I want to explore and learn about, so I can become who I am, so I can reach a sense of fulfilment, one of being whole. As Adam Muller explains discussing Nostalgics, they "desire the return of a lost perfection: sometimes a kind of certainty; other times a psychological unity; at still other times a perfect moral virtuousness." <sup>16</sup>

# The Botched (An Other)





Quinn Antonio Briceño, Detail of *Allá*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

I desire the return of a psychological unity for myself and the viewer. A unity where we feel fulfilled through reconnecting to stories and through the making of art. Since I view myself as an ‘other’ in being both *Nicaragüense* and *Estadounidense*, it is necessary that my work does the same. The figures in my work operate in an in-between state, they operate as an ‘other’, or something that does not check a typical box of descriptors. They can be rendered, stylized, or even completely collaged over, creating a sort of phantom or cypher of figures. This ‘otherness’ is particularly true of my collage work, as it takes the scraps of society to transform what was once thrown away into artwork. In using this transformative process, the work has a quality of breathing new life into the old, similar to that of taxidermy.

In Steve Baker’s *The Postmodern Animal*, Baker speaks of a certain otherness within the art world. While this book is about animals and not humans within art, I believe what Baker says has a lot of substance when I am speaking about my own work. Specifically, Baker speaks about this idea of the botched taxidermy to give a name to this ‘other’.

they might be said neither to be like what viewers *do* know nor to be like what they *do not* know about animals. To borrow a term from Derrida (a term he in fact applied to humans), these pieces might be called ‘*questioning entities*. In a field with many competing forms of knowledge and expertise – zoological, historical, anthropological, taxidermic and more – these works are perhaps the most usefully regarded as improvised knowledges, *inexpert* knowledges of the animal. Their value may lie precisely in their direct acknowledgement of absent or fractured knowledges <sup>17</sup>

The botched taxidermy uses this improvised knowledge where the value is the fact that they are fractured.

When I am working on a piece, I use an improvised knowledge to feel things out. What colors to look for in a collage element, how a photograph or material works with the paint, and conceptually does it make sense now. Other than the source image that I have edited in photoshop, nothing is concrete or completely planned out from the beginning. I use feeling to

know what should go where. Sometimes it's trial and error or adjusting certain areas. Other times, before I've even started painting, I know that I want to use a specific material: but I am never totally married to the idea. While painting, I'll even take pictures of my work and edit them using procreate on my iPad to play and find any issues that may be happening in the work. During the making process, found materials tend to be thrown around my studio as I search for the feeling of fulfillment that can only be achieved when the correct material is found and works in harmony within the painting. The work is fractured, as is the process, but in finding this authentic fulfillment through the collaging process the work gains depth and value beyond what I may have even initially intended. It is a process of fluidity, one that never has a set path.

The botched taxidermy pieces might even be seen as the nearest thing to an authentic expression of the state of the public's necessarily fractured, inexpert postmodern knowledge. But this is neither wholly new, nor a cause for particular concern, and it applies to the artist as much as to anyone else<sup>18</sup>

Even though the botched taxidermy is fractured, its value lies in not being what it claims to be and that is why, according to Baker, it is an authentic expression of the inexpert postmodern.

My work doesn't claim to be a realistic rendition of its source imagery. It could never claim that because the found materials I use, alongside both the rendered and flattened painting, abstract and flatten the imagery, creating a completely different space than the original imagery.

For years, my aim was to render the figure using paint, while using collage to connect with the subjects and their labor. Collage was, at that time, not the forefront. Collage was just a way of blocking in certain areas and shapes with materials that had meaning to me. However, I had always felt a desire to collage on the body. It was not until I painted *Untitled (Carlos)*, 2021, that that became a reality. I felt as I painted this man that I had known for years that I was doing him a disservice. I felt that no matter how long I painted, I wouldn't be able to correctly depict

who he was as a person. I again felt the desire to collage on the figure and using scraps of my fabricated Red Bean-Stained paper and a discarded image of a black and white city, I collaged onto the face, hiding the work I had already done. This collaging onto the face created a sort of apparition, a ghostly quality: a sort of phantom.



Quinn Antonio Briceño, *Untitled (Carlos)*, 2021  
Acrylic, Found Print, and Bean-Stained Paper on Canvas  
24 in x 24 in  
Courtesy of the Artist

In *Allí* and *Allá*, 2022, the collaging onto the figure continued. However, this time, the whole figure was collaged. In so doing, this apparition or ghostly quality continued, but was different than *Untitled (Carlos)*, 2021. In looking to name this quality, a few words came to mind: Phantom, cypher, avatar. But these figures weren't necessarily ghosts or deities, they were something both more and less: Cypher felt right. Typically, a cypher is a secret code or message in a mathematical algorithm. When applied to a person, a cypher is someone that is unimportant, blank, and devoid of human personality. But I don't believe the cyphers in my paintings are unimportant, or devoid. They have been reduced to a core element, that stands in place of the highly rendered figure. It is not erasure or dehumanizing, but thoughtful. It is holding the figure in high regard in having it stand out in being a collage material, demanding the viewer pay attention to it. The cypher becomes an important key to unlocking the fulfillment I seek through my paintings.

In both paintings having such a large scale at 96 inches by 60 inches, *Allí* and *Allá*, 2022, elevate the subject to something grander. The scale gives importance to the subjects within the painting, both rendered and cypher, by demanding attention from the viewer and taking up important white-wall gallery space. The play between both cypher and rendered become a key in me understanding the fulfillment I so desperately seek. In *Allí* and *Allá*, both the rendered and cyphers metaphorically demonstrate to the viewer the information that I have, and that I lack. They are physical manifestation of the memories, stories, and histories I've been told by my mother and father, along with the information I've put together myself from family photographs. But at the same time, not everything is completely linear. Not everything lines up properly and information is missed. Through the act of collaging and painting, I hope to build a connection to the missing information that I am longing for to feel fulfilled.



Using found materials for myself is unruly. Many times, the collage materials do not work out for me. Their color may not work within the painting, they may not adhere properly, or their thickness may protrude from the canvas causing areas that should be further away in space to appear closer. If things are not working out, I then make the necessary adjustments, tear the material off the canvas and try something new. But the important thing is I won't know if it will work unless and until I explore and experiment with my materials. It is that they don't conform and have a life of their own that gives the material its own meaning and depth, even if the image is 'fractured' and is of the 'other'.

These found materials are discarded for their defects. Many times, there are scratches or general damages, other times the materials are just poor print quality. They're meant to be thrown away or recycled, but in using them I am giving them a new life. In taking found images, cutting them, and making them conform to a new shape completely different than that of the typical rectangular confines of a photograph, I create a fracture of the original material. This fracture is an insight or memory of what the material was, and what it might allude to in the painting. It is my hope that the memory left from the collage intrigues the viewer, and then invites the viewer to look longer and contemplate the meaning beyond the original raw materials. Through the combination of all these fractures, the original meaning of the source imagery has changed, creating something new: an 'other'.

I believe that value of the fractured makes sense to me because my paintings might be categorized as an 'other,' just like how my identity as a bi-racial and bi-cultural is classified as an 'other.' The collage incorporated into my paintings create layers of meaning but are not direct representations of the photos from which I paint. They are changed and manipulated to create an 'other,' because I'm coming from the view of the inexpert. I am the inexpert because I don't



know what my other half is like, because I long to become whole, because I long to become who I am. It is because of this that I paint the figures I do, because I believe I can find my own history through the action of making. This is why I am interested in Palileo's argument that history cannot be erased:

I sense that there's something that continues on through the generations, whether its spoken or not. There are just some things that can't be erased. There is some kind of deeper memory that can't be eliminated. It continues to live on somehow. <sup>19</sup>

It is my intention to unearth my own history, or memory that cannot be erased through my making. Within my work, I use many discarded materials from my job at a production framing facility. Many of these are photographs of landmarks and architecture for the use in regional hospitals, senior living facilities and hotels. These photographs find their way into my work using collage. Annette Kuhn states that

Photographs are evidence, after all. Not that they are to be taken at face value, necessarily, nor that they mirror the real, nor even that a photograph offers any self-evident relationship between itself and what it shows. Simply that a photograph can be material for interpretation—evidence, in that sense: to be solved, like a riddle; read and decoded, like clues left behind at the scene of a crime. Evidence of this sort, though, can conceal, even as it purports to reveal, what it is evidence of. <sup>20</sup>

What Kuhn speaks about is felt throughout my own work, although it is a bit more transformative. The photograph becomes veiled through my manipulation of collage and transferring method, transforming what would be evidence into more of an artifact. Through cutting, pasting, and collaging both these discarded landmark photographs and transferred family photographs, these elements become artifacts of my life. Be it location or memory, these photographs become decoders of who I am today as *Nicaragiense* and *Estadounidense*. While the photographs may be about the past, they are evidence of who I've become today. Kuhn explains:

Family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them —how we use them —is really about today, not yesterday. These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of our selves—now<sup>21</sup>.

Once combined, both the transferred photographs with the feeling of the hand through its mark-making process, as well as the discarded digital landmark photographs, show how the traces of our past are pressed into the process of the making of our current selves.

The placement of each collage photograph is important. What is going next to it, what it is touching, how it interacts within the painting. Kuhn states that

Family photographs are quite often deployed — shown, talked about — in series: pictures get displayed one after another, their selection and ordering as meaningful as the pictures themselves. The whole, the series, constructs a family story in some respects like a classical narrative — linear, chronological; though the cyclical repetition of climactic moments—births, christenings, weddings, holidays (if not deaths)—is more characteristic of the open-ended narrative form of soap opera than of the closure of classical narrative. In the process of using — the producing, selecting, ordering, displaying —photographs, the family is actually in process of making itself.”

The curation of the photographs is as important as the content of each photograph. By placing certain photos next to one another, a new narrative is built, one that would be different if it were only a singular image. As they are placed, I believe the viewer can begin to put together bits and pieces of my life and how it has come to be: Images of my childhood, photographs of my father’s life in Nicaragua, photos of my parents when they were younger. They all combine to make a story of how I am who I am today.

But they aren’t exactly perfect. The images are rarely aligned with one another, and many are flipped and turned around, creating a history that isn’t exactly linear. In the transferring process, certain details are lost. It is not a flawless process, nor one that can be done in perfect multiples. The way I transfer the images involves dampening the image with a Winsor & Newton

brush cleaner, lining up the image to the substrate, and then marking and scratching vigorously using a bone folder to transfer the image to the substrate. This leaves parts that are uneven, marked almost in a crayon or colored pencil-like texture with the very apparent use of the hand, invoking a sense of childhood. This brush cleaner dries very slowly unlike other solvents, allowing the working process to easily continue. However, because it dries slowly, the brush cleaner can soak through the paper, leaving residue of the image, causing a blurring effect on the transfers done later. It leaves an even more distant memory of what the image originally was.

As clues are scrutinized and pieces fitted together, a coherent story starts to emerge from the seeming contingency and chaos of a past hinted at by these fragments — a photograph, a photograph album, some memories. A coherent story not only absorbs the listener, but — being a moment in the production of self — satisfies the teller as well, for the moment at least.<sup>22</sup>

The chaos from the mark-making and imperfections of the process hints to the fragmented memories of my and my family's personal histories. It is my hope that the viewer takes a moment to look, to perceive these fragmented photographs to put together a story that allows the viewer to experience empathy.



Quinn Antonio Briceño, Detail of *Allá*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist





Quinn Antonio Briceño, Detail of *Allí*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist



Columbia, Missouri 1983  
From Left to Right  
Jill Lauren Quinlan-Briceño, Milton Marcelo Briceño Lovo

# The Hybridity of Globalization





Quinn Antonio Briceño, Detail of *Allá*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

Throughout my work, there is an element that helps create the canvas into a new space: pattern. Specifically, the patterning of Latin American encaustic tile. These tiles have a deep personal connection that has reverberated throughout my own artwork. They are ubiquitous in Nicaragua. From my visits, I remember noticing the tile flooring in historic cities like Granada and León, as well as my family's hometown of San Marcos, Carazo. They graced both large cathedrals, homes, hotels, and businesses. Intrigued by these tiles, I began to use them in my paintings. Originally, I painted the tile pattern as a way to change the negative space and highlight the working-class figure. Using these patterns as a replacement for the background changes the scope of where one would think tiles usually go, from ground or floor to wall or background, giving a new meaning to the design element. As I began to research these tiles, they further connected to me and my work rather than being just a design element.

Encaustic tiles date as far back as 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Originally, encaustic tiles were ceramic, and difficult to produce because of their fragility. But with new technologies created during the Industrial Revolution, concrete tiles were born. These new concrete tiles appeared around 1855-1875 in Southern France and Northeastern Spain, and while not technically encaustic tiles, they were called encaustic tiles due to their resemblance to ceramic tiles. These tiles were more affordable and efficient. They did not need to be fired and only used cement, sand and pigment, yet they were still able to produce the same intricate designs. These designs spread throughout the world, influenced by many countries, regions and cultures from Europe and Africa to Latin America and eventually to the United States. For me, encaustic tiles are a symbol of the hybridity of globalization and a perfect metaphor for the melting pot that is the United States. In *Globalizations Cultural Consequences*, Robert Holton explains:

the complex fabric of globalization, that of hybridization, or syncretization. It centers on intercultural exchange and the incorporation of cultural elements from a variety of

sources within a particular cultural practice. Just as biological hybrids combine genetic material from different sources, so hybrid social practices combine cultural elements from a range of sources. Even if we accept the significance of homogenization and polarization, these two prominent threads in no way exhaust the complex multidimensional elements that make up global culture.<sup>23</sup>

The tiles perfectly demonstrate how the intercultural exchange of pattern, color and technology have come together to make what adorns both the historic architecture in Nicaragua and modern kitchens and bathrooms in the United States.

As my work has progressed the past few years, the tile patterns have changed from the typical grid of a 12x12 square tile. The tile patterns have begun to warp, stretch and turn, playing with the space of my source imagery. For me, this warping creates a new space: Something different than the original image, something different than what there is in real life. The patterns can be disruptive or disorderly, as they seem to have a life of their own once they reach the canvas. Sometimes the pattern peeks out behind the foreground, causing somewhat of an interference of spaces that needs to be adjusted with the use of glazing, or their complete removal of the problem area. But it is because this space is alive that it creates depth and holds meaning that an ordinary space would not. It is a space that accepts me for who I am, both *Nicaragüense y Estadounidense*.

Behind many of the warped tile patterns, lies the element of sky. Within *Allí* and *Allá*, lie both an orange and yellow sunrise and a purple and blue sunset. These changes from the flatness of color from my other painting are not without purpose. They mimic the propaganda paintings of the American frontier during westward expansion, one of manifest destiny where the United States was destined by God to expand its domain and spread democracy and capitalism westward. Artists who were commissioned to make these painting used sunrises and sunsets to point the travelers in their paintings westward, as if God were pointing them west to a new and

better life. While these paintings are certainly problematic, using the element of sunrise and sunsets for me has a different meaning. I believe that my sunrise and sunsets are more of an acceptance of space for those living within it, and a hope for a better future where people (such as myself) who come from multiple worlds can thrive.

Like the encaustic tiles, my work draws inspiration from everyday life, the Latin American working class, the manufacturing process, the colors used to create the tiles, and the globalizing hybridity that comes from the tiles. I feel that the patterns also represent myself. I have always considered myself as a hybrid coming from an American mother of mostly Irish descent and a Nicaraguan father. Like the tile patterns, I am a product of the combination of a range of sources.



Quinn Antonio Briceño, Detail of *Alli*, 2022  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

# Conclusion



St. Louis, Missouri, 2005  
From Left to Right  
Maria José Briceño, Quinn Antonio Briceño



*Did I do the right thing bringing you here? To the United States?* My mother frequently asks this question to both my sister and me. It is always a resounding yes. My mother tends to blame herself for our loss of our mother tongue. But there were a wide variety of factors that came into this loss of my linguistic identity, and she most definitely is not to blame. Growing up, when things didn't work out for my sister or me, my mother had an all-encompassing saying.

*When God closes a door, he opens a window.* When one opportunity passes, another will come along. Although this saying could be frustrating at times, it always gave us a glimmer of hope. Another opportunity would arise, maybe better than the previous one we missed out on. Failure and missed opportunity give us a chance to learn, to grow, to build us a more flavorful roux. Like a guisado, a stew is not always necessarily cooked the same way each time. Ingredients may or may not be there, and there will always be flexibility for ingredients that are available. That's what make each guisado unique, because not every recipe is the same.

The ingredients that make up my guisado recipe are as follows: The Loss of the Mother Tongue because I deal with both the physical distance of being separated from one culture and the psychological distance created when I lost my Spanish; A Merging of Two Worlds, since I am interested in the contact zone that merges my own Nicaraguan-ness and American-ness through the collaging of different found materials from my life in the United States colliding with the imagery of Nicaragua; Nostalgia (The Longing for Wholeness), where I want to reconnect with my roots not only to try to understand my father's side of the family, but also to offer to my viewers a glimpse into the non-linear approach to narrative, helping them to imagine their own returns and reconnections, while bypassing borders and divisions; The Botched (An Other), where my work operates in an in-between state, because the figures operate as an 'other', or something that does not check a typical box of descriptors in being purely rendered or purely

abstracted; The Hybridity of Globalization, because I have always considered myself as a hybrid in coming from an American mother of mostly Irish descent and a Nicaraguan father: Like the encaustic tile patterns, I am a product of the combination of a range of sources.

I am the person and artist I am today because of the collective experiences I have had, because of the ingredients I have had at hand. It is what makes my artwork unique. And it is my desire that my artwork evokes that feeling of uniqueness, of fulfillment to the viewer, so they know that they, too, are unique.



Quinn Antonio Briceño, *Allí*, 2022 (Left) and *Allá*, 2022 (Right)  
Acrylic, Found Prints, Packing Stickers, Solvent Transfers on Paper, and Sand on Canvas  
96 in x 60 in

Mildred Lane Kemper Museum opening of *Nine Ways From Sunday*  
Photo Credit Richard Sprengeler  
Courtesy of the Artist

# Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Nicaragua is a Central American nation lying between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. It is roughly the size of the state of Iowa and has a population of 6.625 million. In 1972, while the Sandinista revolution began to gain steam, a great earthquake hit the capitol, Managua. Due to this, my abuelitos sent my father to the United States for over two years. He finished high school in Nicaragua, and eventually attended the University of Missouri in Columbia, where he met my mother.

<sup>2</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” in *Borderlands: The New Mestiza – La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute book Company, 1987

<sup>3</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” in *Borderlands: The New Mestiza – La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute book Company, 1987, p. 39

<sup>4</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” in *Borderlands: The New Mestiza – La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute book Company, 1987, p. 38

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” in *Borderlands: The New Mestiza – La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute book Company, 1987, p. 39

<sup>6</sup> *Curator Talks - Njideka Akunyili Crosby*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYuCgsR1A9E>.

<sup>7</sup> *Curator Talks - Njideka Akunyili Crosby*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYuCgsR1A9E>.

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<sup>9</sup> *Njideka Akunyili Crosby on Painting Cultural Collision*, 2018.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeKjx0Ed2Zw>.

<sup>10</sup> *Njideka Akunyili Crosby on Painting Cultural Collision*, 2018.  
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<sup>11</sup> Muller, Adam. “Notes toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the Past in Two European ‘Heritage’ Films.” *New Literary History* 37, no. 4 (2006): p. 739. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2007.0008>.

<sup>12</sup> Muller, Adam. “Notes toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the Past in Two European ‘Heritage’ Films.” *New Literary History* 37, no. 4 (2006): p. 751. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2007.0008>.

<sup>13</sup> Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016. P. xviii

<sup>14</sup> Moniquemeloche. “Virtual Walkthrough of Maia Cruz Palileo: The Answer Is the Waves of the Sea.” Vimeo, May 12, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/527423749>.

<sup>15</sup> “Maia Cruz Palileo: Becoming the Moon.” PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, October 14, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/maia-cruz-palileo-becoming-the-moon/15825/>.

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