



Buenas tardes,

Thank you to the National Museum of Mexican Art for this recognition. I am honored to be among such an accomplished group of women receiving this award.

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz was an inspiration for me when I was developing my identity as a young woman. I was one of those kids that read a lot and thought that reading poetry was cool. I got some teasing from my peers but a lot of recognition from my teachers. Sor Juana's poetry helped me develop a feminist perspective at an early age and build awareness about patriarchy as a form of oppression. I want to share with you the first paragraph of a poem that Sor Juana Ines wrote, which I read in middle school:

You foolish men who lay
The guilt on women,
Not seeing you are the cause
Of the very things you blame;
If you invite their disdain
With measureless desire
Why wish they will behave
If you incite to ill

I don't know how beautiful it sounds in English. I have to confess that, even though I am fully bilingual, poetry is the only genre that I still have to read in Spanish. Different from other intellectual endeavors, poetry must first set in your heart before it goes to your brain.

Poetry, painting, music, have always been present in the struggle for social justice. Art is a powerful force in society that influences and changes opinions and translates experiences. Art can influence the way a person experiences the world.



It was through art that I was able to build a national network of solidarity here in the US with the indigenous women in Guatemala resisting genocide in the early 1980s.

When I first arrived in Chicago fleeing the civil war in 1982, I brought with me the unwavering commitment to continue defending human rights and to do everything to stop the war I had escaped. Not easy tasks, when all around you looks and feels so different, the language, the smells, the social norms. Things became more challenging when my three months visa expired, and I became an undocumented immigrant because I was too afraid to go back to the war.

Despite initial language barriers, I found a way to communicate with people through the universal language of art. The ancient Mayan art of weaving opened the doors to tell the story in the US of the genocide against the indigenous people in Guatemala, and to bring awareness of the connections between the pieces of weavings displayed in museums and the gross human rights violations against the Mayan people. One of the exhibits was at the National Museum of Mexican Art in 1990. Here is the book accompanying the exhibit. The pieces of weaving are in part of my personal collection.

An idea came to me when I reluctantly attended a Tupperware house party—common in the US in the 1980s. That party gave me the idea on how to build awareness about the war and start a solidarity movement based on the house party model. I replaced the plastic items with colorful and beautiful pieces of art woven by women who had survived the bombing and destruction of their village—most of them had become widows.

The house meetings provided the perfect small set up to learn about the war, secure commitments to actively oppose the US involvement, and expand the reach through the hostess networks. I organized a steering committee of talented committed US women and, together, we organized hundreds of house meetings per month, sold the beautiful weaving that women made to support



their families displaced by violence, and raised awareness and political support to stop the US involvement in the war in Central America.

Even when I always planned to go back to Guatemala when the war ended, life happens, and I fell in love with a beautiful man with whom I had two children. He always joked that I had married him for the green card, but after two kids and a mortgage, that joke wasn't funny anymore.

My experiences with violence, surviving a war, being an undocumented immigrant, helped me build empathy and be able to stand in solidarity with other people's struggles. As Che Guevara said: the most beautiful quality in a human being is to be capable of feeling deeply any injustice committed against anyone, anywhere in the world. It is being able to feel deeply when a child is killed in Little Village or Englewood or put in cages at the US-Mexican border for trying to escape violence and poverty; feeling the urge to cry when families are separated due to incarceration or deportation. I cannot imagine not having been able to put my children to bed every night and calm their fears with a song and a hug.

I am privileged to have been born in this moment in history in which the world is crying out for a new vision, where we can all recognize each other's humanity, where we can see every child as our own, and start caring about the planet by loving more and consuming less. I am doing my best to build a better world, and I trust that I will continue seeing you along the journey.

Thank you, muchas gracias!