

Latin American feminist film and visual art collectives

by special section editors, [Lorena Cervera](#), [Sonia Kerfa](#) and [Elizabeth Ramírez-Soto](#)

During the last years, there has been a revitalization of feminist movements internationally. In Latin America, the performance of "A Rapist in Your Path" by the collective LASTESIS on 25 November 2019 put Chilean feminism in the global spotlight.



Women performing 'A Rapist in Your Path' by LASTESIS.

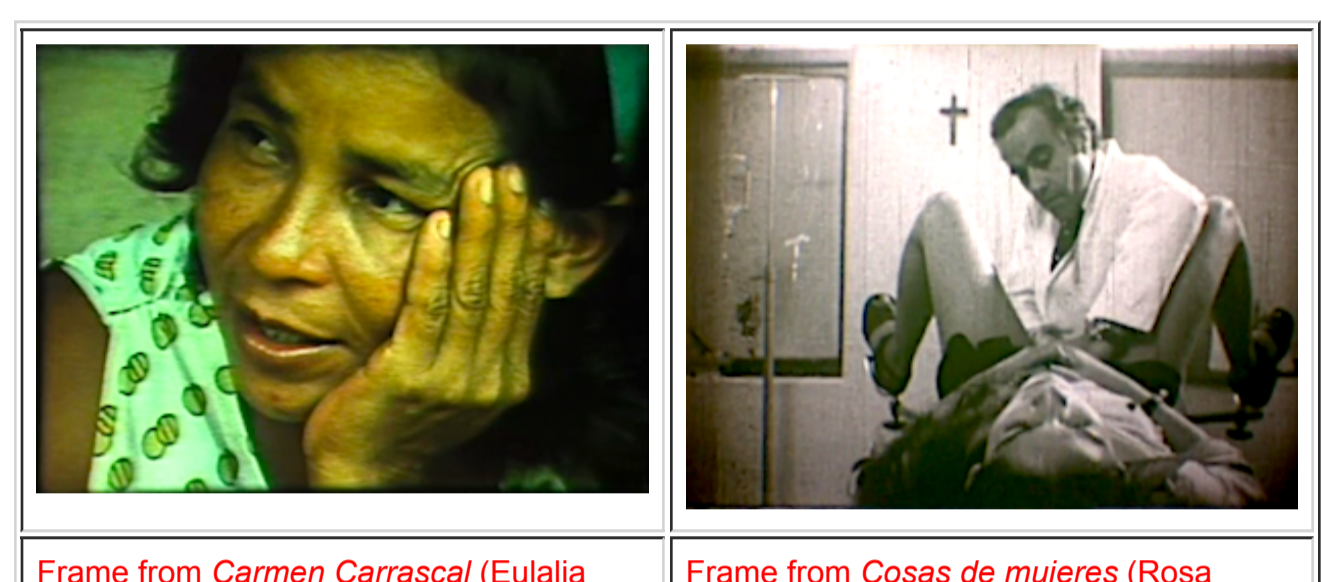
This revitalization is also pushing for political and legal reforms, such as the approval of a bill legalising abortion in Argentina on 30 December 2020. The alliances between feminists, artists, and filmmakers in Latin America are not new. Fuelled by the 1970s women's movement, several feminist film collectives emerged during this decade and used cinema to raise awareness about women's issues and to intervene in political contexts. Their films exposed issues related to reproductive rights, sexual violence, and the status of domestic work, amongst others. In recent years, numerous feminist collectives that combine different art disciplines have continued to address women's issues. Within this context, there are questions that need addressing:

- What can current feminist activists, filmmakers, and artists learn from past struggles and their visual representations?
- How can artistic practices on women's issues most effectively raise awareness, initiate public debates, and change situations of injustice?
- How can collective and collaborative artistic practices transform the world around us?

The opportunity to edit this special section arose soon after the celebration of the international online conference "Cozinhando imagens, tejiendo feminismos. Latin American Feminist Film and Visual Art Collectives" in April 2021. This event gathered researchers, filmmakers, artists, and activists based in Latin America, the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom. The overall aim was to provide a space for reflection and discussion on relations between art and activism within feminist and women's movements through the study of women's collective artistic production at two key moments: the late 1970s, which was a formative moment for Latin American feminist cinema, and the current revitalization of feminist movements. The conference included panels, screenings, round-tables, and coffee breaks where organizations that promote the work of Latin American women presented their projects.

The conference was intended to be trilingual as speakers could present in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. Video recordings of the individual papers were submitted well ahead of the event, so the organizing team and volunteers could translate them and add subtitles. During the event, the live presentations and discussions were simultaneously interpreted. The aim was to bridge scholarly research conducted in these different languages and animate collective thinking among those writing about Latin American feminist film and visual art collectives. This commitment to bringing together research conducted and published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese has also manifested itself in this special section, where we have translated into English the work of scholars and practitioners who have never published in this language, as we will address later in this introduction. The trilingual aim of this event also meant that the audience could follow the conference in the language of their choice, which increased its reach, as demonstrated by the hundreds of attendees from different parts of the world.

One of the sessions of this conference was a round-table with feminist filmmakers Rosa Martha Fernández, Patricia Restrepo, and Gioconda Espina, who were part of the feminist film collectives Cine Mujer in Mexico (1975-1986), Cine Mujer in Colombia (1978-1999) and Grupo Feminista Miércoles in Venezuela (1978-1988), respectively. Despite the pioneering work of these feminist film collectives and the ongoing relevance of the issues they covered in their films, the historiography of Latin American cinema has too frequently overlooked their existence. As a matter of fact, this conference was the first time that these three women came together (even though online) in a discussion. Moreover, in the conference, two of their films were shown, *Cosas de mujeres* (Rosa Martha Fernández, 1978, México) and *Carmen Carrascal* (Eulalia Carrizosa, 1982, Colombia). We added English subtitles to the first film so now it can be programmed at international events, and we were able to rent the English version of the second film from the feminist film and video distributor Cienova.



Frame from *Carmen Carrascal* (Eulalia Carrizosa, 1982, Colombia). Frame from *Cosas de mujeres* (Rosa Martha Fernández, 1978, México).

We were unable to show any film by Grupo Feminista Miércoles given the poor quality of the existing digitised copies.[1] [\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) Since these three collectives have received increasing scholarly interest in recent years, we decided to shift the focus on this special section and shed light onto different past and recent collectives whose experiences and significance in the field have received less attention.[2]

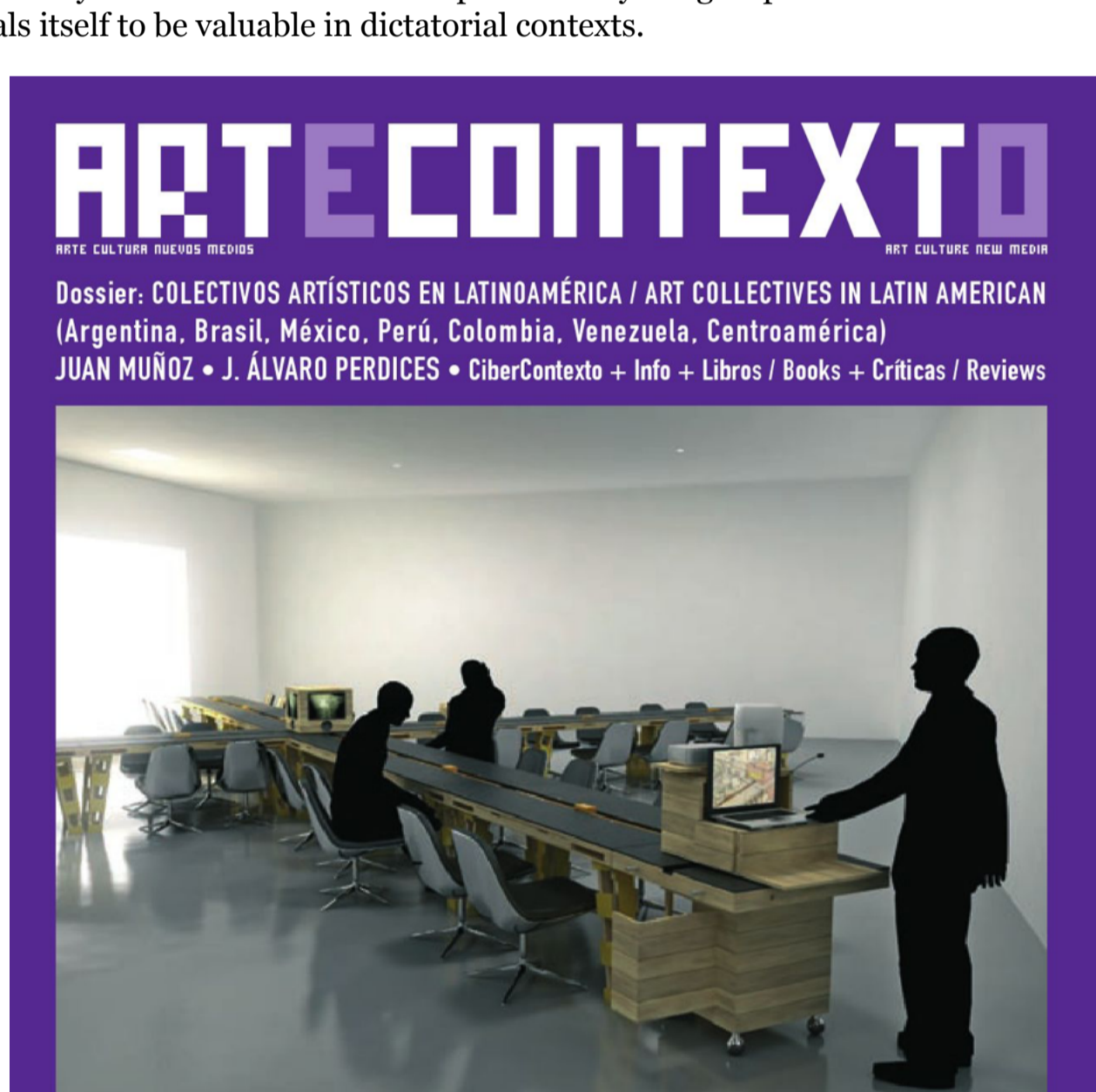


Screen capture of the round-table with feminist filmmakers Rosa Martha Fernández, Patricia Restrepo, and Gioconda Espina, chaired by Elena Oroz, with the kind contribution of Sara Bright.

Reflecting collectively on collective artistic practices in Latin America

Since the 1970s in the Americas, Europe, and beyond, artist collectives have proposed other languages and other paradigms of creation and dissemination according to an emancipatory perspective, and they have shown a great deal of mistrust towards cultural political projects of an authorial and elitist tradition. Often coming from the visual arts, they have favored critical artistic practices with a strong and local social anchorage and have questioned the place of art. Also favoring meaningful praxis over constructing art objects, the collectives have demonstrated for nearly half a century and with diverse temporalities and reconfigurations, the socio-political and aesthetic potential of cooperative artistic work.

In a dossier in the journal *ArteContexto*, entitled "Colectivos artísticos en Latinoamérica" (Art collectives in Latin America; Murriá, 2004), Ana Longoni recalls the histories of these collectives on the continent. These date back to the beginning of the twentieth century, exploded with the avant-garde movements, and then reconfigured themselves to adopt revolutionary forms in the 1960s. According to the Argentinian historian, the power of these movements introduced a fracture that went so far as to postulate "a collective author"—in the words of painter Ricardo Carpani. In the collective, the creator becomes both anonymous but effective and is protected by the group. Thus the collective reveals itself to be valuable in dictatorial contexts.



Cover of the dossier in the journal *ArteContexto*.

This has been the case in Latin American countries where, faced with state violence and socio-economic inequalities, artists' collectives have always been present, even at the height of dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. The concept or idea of the collective is particularly acute in the field of Latin American film creation, as shown by the history of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (New Latin American Cinema). A large part of its identity was created precisely by the collective will of filmmakers from various countries of the continent to take a stance against the cultural and political imperialism of the United States in the midst of the Cold War in order to radically change the course of history.

In the 1960s and 1970s, "to have a collective consciousness and self-perception as a collective led to repercussions in society" (Sarrour, Cibeá and Talellis, 2020). By becoming aware of the place they were denied in history, Latin American women filmmakers have thought about their practices by coming together. It is this dialectic between mixed and non-mixed collectives that is at work in the ColectIVIS-ARTS research project funded by IDEX at the University of Grenoble Alpes (France).

This project raises many questions related to the place of women artists in mixed collectives, their role in creation, and how the creative process can be rethought from other stances when a gender perspective is taken into account. The project, whose full title is "ColectIVIS-ARTS: Research on women's artistic (visual arts) praxis in mixed- and single-gender artist collectives in Latin America," aims to study the role of women artists in the creation and conceptualisation of collective projects. ColectIVIS-ARTS interrogates other artistic practices (popular, communal and identity-based initiatives) that act as "tools of social and political activism" (Marzo, 2016) proving that feminist art has always contained "a considerable political charge" (Popelka Sosa, 2010) on a continent rich in political, social and artistic experimentation.

To reflect collectively around these questions, the project brought together over two years (2020-2022) a dozen women researchers from different countries, working in universities or institutions in the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with an interdisciplinary approach involving the arts and literature, cinema, education and visual culture. This work has taken the form of various academic events: study days, seminars, research-creation performances and a colloquium—all with international reach. A database of artists' collectives in Latin America and a website will report on the results of this research. A series of filmed interviews with leading women from multidisciplinary collectives will be available online on a platform devoted to such, managed by the University of Grenoble Alpes (France).

The conference "Cozinhando imagens, tejiendo feminismos. Latin American Feminist Film and Visual Art Collectives" was one of the main academic activities organised by ColectIVIS-ARTS. The closing lecture was given by Julia Lesage, editor of *Jump Cut*. After the conference, she proposed to Lorena Cervera and Sonia Kerfa, two of the co-organisers of the conference, to edit a special section for the journal *Jump Cut*. Elizabeth Ramírez-Soto joined them as a third co-editor. This special section is a continuation and an amplification of the conference's aim, shedding new light on the cartography of feminist arts and their inventiveness.

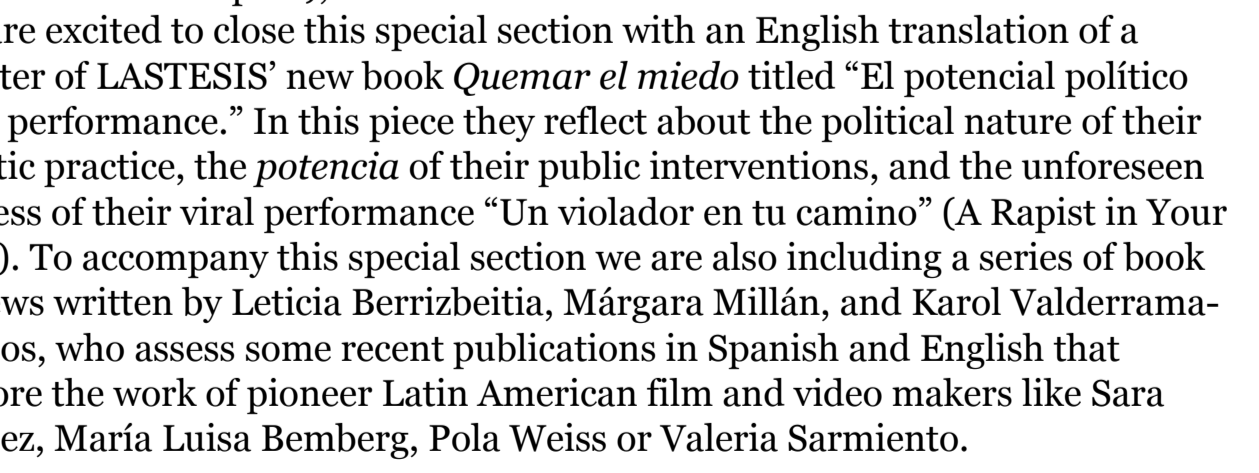
Our Special Section: bridging past and present experiences

The first three articles of this special section recover overlooked feminist histories from the 1970s and 1990s by drawing on oral histories and a plethora of primary sources, including audiocassettes, pamphlets, press reviews, and photographs. Elena Oroz painstakingly reconstructs the landmark event *Cocina de imágenes* (Kitchen of Images), held in Mexico City in 1987 and conceived as the "First Exhibition of Latin American and Caribbean Film and Video Made by Women." Organized by feminist activist and filmmaker Angéles Novechea, *Cocina de imágenes* stands as a pioneering event in the strengthening of audiovisual production made by women in Latin America and, as argued by Oroz, played a pivotal role in the development of transnational feminist film networks in the region.

Isabel Seguí and Marina Cavalcanti Tedesco recuperate the contributions of two film and video collectives led by women, offering historical approximations to these underexplored groups: the Peruvian *Warmi Colectivo Cine y Video* and the transnational *Women's Film Project* (WFP, later called *International Women's Film Project*, IWFP). Whereas Seguí redresses the long-standing negligence endured by María Bavao and the *Warmi* Group she founded, Cavalcanti Tedesco retraces the trajectories across the Americas of pioneer feminist director Helena Solberg and the internationalist feminist film collective she led in the 1970s in the United States after leaving Brazil.

Moving forward and exploring contemporary practices of Latin American film collectives, Raquel Schefer focuses on the work of the anonymous Mexican group *Los Ingrávidos*, paying special attention to the collective's denunciation of femicide in the country. In her theoretical piece, Schefer inserts the work of this hermetic group in two different genealogies in film culture: the collective filmmaking tradition and that of political and experimental filmmaking. Continuing with the focus on contemporary practices, the closing article by Lita Rubiano Tamayo sheds light on the work of two community filmmaking projects carried out in rural Colombia which are led by Black and Indigenous women respectively: the *School Renacer y Memoria* (Rebirth and Memory) and the *School of Indigenous Communication Ka + Jana Uai* (The Voice of Our Image).

To provide further insight into the work of feminist collectives currently active in the region, we have transcribed one of the roundtable discussion that took place during the conference "Cozinhando imagens, tejiendo feminismos" between visual artists working collectively today. The conversation was moderated by Colombian art historian Daniela Gallo and the participants included members of *Afrofémias* (a platform that serves as a site of encounter for Afrolatinas in Spain), *Colectiva Lemov* from Guatemala and *Trenzar Perú*. We are excited to close this special section with an English translation of a chapter of LASTESIS' new book *Quemar el miedo* titled "El potencial político de la performance." In this piece they reflect about the political nature of their artistic practice, the potency of their public interventions, and the unforeseen success of their viral performance "Un violador en tu camino" (A Rapist in Your Path). To accompany this special section we are also including a series of book reviews written by Leticia Berrizbeitia, Marga Millán, and Karol Valderrama-Burgos, who assess some recent publications in Spanish and English that explore the work of pioneer Latin American film and video makers like Sara Gómez, María Luisa Bemberg, Pola Weiss or Valeria Sarmiento.



Mesa redonda con cineastas: Rosa Martha Fernández [...] Mesa redonda con artistas visuales: Afrofémias [...]

106 views · 1 year ago 62 views · 1 year ago

Screen capture of the contents available on the YouTube Channel of Latin American Feminist Film and Visual Art Collectives. Click on image to see availability of videos from the event.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xeo2x8FkIVs> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7WkhGkV4>

As mentioned previously, in this special section we have made an effort to include Latin American researchers who are publishing in English for the first time. The task of translating these articles has been both exciting and challenging. Often academic texts do not only require translating words from one language to the other, but also translating ways of articulating and structuring ideas. These dialogues and translations have enriched this special section that amplifies the space initially launched through the conference. In this way, "Cozinhando imagens, tejiendo feminismos" continues to generate reflection and discussion amongst researchers who come from different countries, academic traditions, generations, and backgrounds. In this effort, we hope this multivoiced and diverse space reaches the readers in compelling and thought-provoking ways.

