

Marisa Cornejo

Un archivo de luz

The photographic archive of
Eugenio Cornejo and Crisológo Gatica



1. Eugenio Cornejo

1940 (Santiago de Chile, CL) – 2002 (Puebla, MX)



This archive of 1,500 slides has been part of my life; since I was born, it was part of our daily life. My father was an art teacher, in the south of Chile, in Osorno, at

the Art Department of the University of Chile. Probably at that time he began to use slides to document materials for his classes, but he quickly also mixed it with his own aesthetic search. In that time, which now seems romantic to me, at the end of the sixties in the south of Chile, Eugenio became interested in the vernacular arts of his environment as an art teacher: the Mapuche weavings, local crafts, his students' works, the architecture of the faculty, the mountains, the landscape, his family, the ruins from his trips to Peru and Bolivia. His whole life was photographed on slides.

During the time of the Unidad Popular, the production becomes less frequent. He has become the father of two children, my brother and me, both very young; he has returned to Santiago and is working, teaching hours at the University of Chile, in Fine Arts, and other hours at Manuel de Salas, an experimental high school in Santiago. He has to take care of his new family. His militant work in the Communist Youth is not entirely abandoned, since it is tied to his teaching work at the Pedagógico until the day of the Military Coup.

When the 9/11 that actually matters – in 1973 in Santiago de Chile – arrives, soon afterwards he is detained, tortured, and released a few weeks later, only to be sent into exile. In the short time we had to leave our country, he selected some boxes of his slides and his camera to take with us, among other essential belongings. He continued to document our exile in Argentina (1973–1976), Bulgaria (1976–1977), Belgium (1978–1980), and Mexico (1980–1983). Every forced displacement – except the one from Bulgaria to Belgium – was a task to make sure the slides were not left behind or lost in a suitcase. And when we arrived in some of those countries, inviting the neighbours to a slideshow was the best way to avoid raising suspicion and to find trustworthy friends.

At the time, the mythologies of the Chilean coup d'état were producing a series of mythomaniacs trying to take advantage of international solidarity. This is also how I learned about my origins, where I came from – through photographs. That was my favourite activity as a child with very poor self-esteem: to spend hours looking at my family albums, from the time before the coup d'état or during those slide shows, showing new friends that what I had talked about was not a lie. Is there a better way to make strangers comfortable with your otherness?

At some time, I belonged... That is what this archive always tells me.

The archive



The archive



The archive



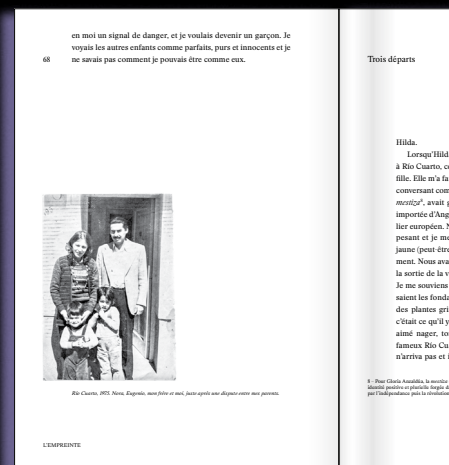
The archive



L'empreinte. Une archive d'artiste soustraite au terrorisme d'État

(Mémorial, publié en 2023)

Foreword: Roland Junod
Graphic design:
Maïssane Escur
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In 2006, a 3 cubic meter box is left at the entrance of a pretty villa in a resort that was built 20 years earlier near Geneva for international officials. It was sent from Mexico and contains some furniture, art objects, paintings, drawings, engravings and thousands of photographs. It constitutes the main part of the archives of Eugenio Cornejo, born in Santiago, Chile, in 1940 and deceased in Puebla, Mexico, in 2002. He was a committed artist and teacher, the victim of political imprisonment and torture under Pinochet's dictatorship, a refugee with no status, who died as an alcoholic in exile, and who never received any form of recognition or compensation from the State of Chile.

His daughter, the artist Marisa Cornejo, has saved these archives and has conducted extensive research from and within them, ever since she decided to digitalize (scan) the content of 15 boxes of 1500 slides, who revealed to her the solar side of the exile which lead her family from Chile to Mexico, via Argentina, Bulgaria and Belgium, in the midst of the Cold War. Whether archeological sites, nature's splendor, family scenery, friendly gatherings or excursions, the images revealed in the process fill the memory gaps of the little girl, who lived this adventure between her 2nd and 9th year. They allow her to build a real story from what had been so far an unspeakable and traumatic confusion.

(Photography, 2023)



La niña de tus ojos

(Slideshows, 2021-2023)



2. Crisológo Gatica

1908 (Victoria, CL) – 1991 (Santiago de Chile, CL)



I brought this slide archive to Switzerland during my last trip to Chile in November 2023.

I knew the heat and dryness of Santiago weren't good for slides, so I asked my

mother if I could take them. Since childhood, I knew my grandfather had traveled extensively in the 1950s and 60s—to Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa—thanks to his work as a teachers' unionist and member of the Chilean Communist Party.

Later, I discovered he had been editor of the international magazine *Educadores del Mundo*, funded by FISE in France. As I began working with dreams, he started appearing in them—always kind, humorous, and politically principled. Wherever I went—Mexico City, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Madrid—people who knew him welcomed me.

In a 2024 dream, I saw men in suits claiming to be his disciples, followed by a powerful light beaming onto my body. I had to become a star—Guñelve, the Mapuche eight-pointed star that represents Venus. Unlike political symbols that have lost their power or caused confusion, Guñelve felt right. My grandfather was born in Mapuche territory and had even participated in a youth rebellion in support of them.

As I scanned his slides, I found exactly what the dream predicted: well-dressed men, political gatherings, and rare photos from 1960s Algeria—of Ben Bella, mass

prayers, and international solidarity. He appeared in airports, always fragile, missing half a lung, yet driven—carrying packages, creating connections, spreading revolutionary ideals.

He believed in education, equality, and international cooperation. He loved photography—not for art's sake, but to remember, to prove his stories were real, and to keep communism alive. His message was simple but powerful: that the impossible is still possible.

The archive



The archive

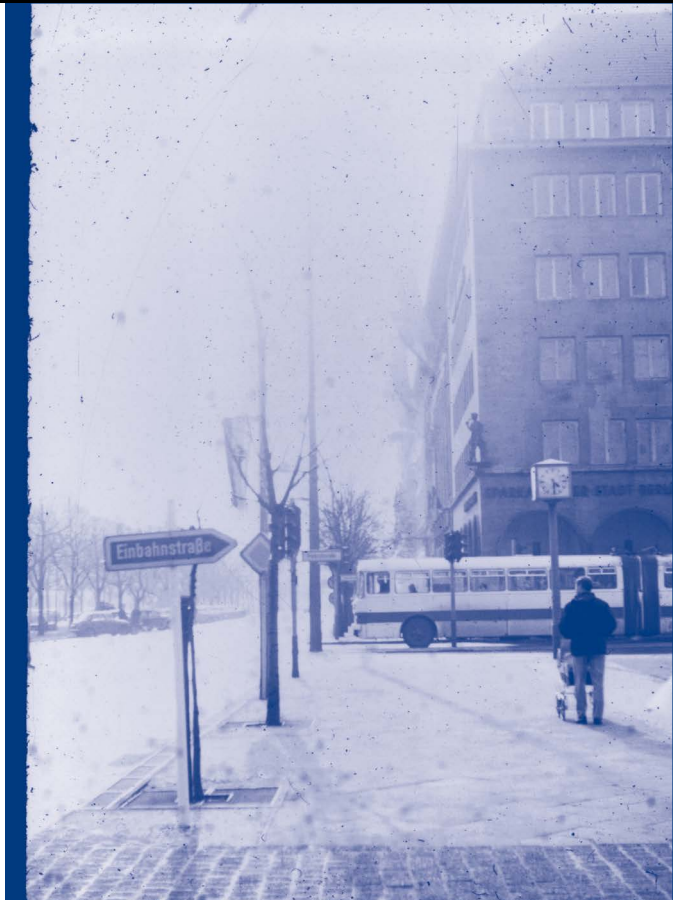


Color transparencies

(Research, 2025)

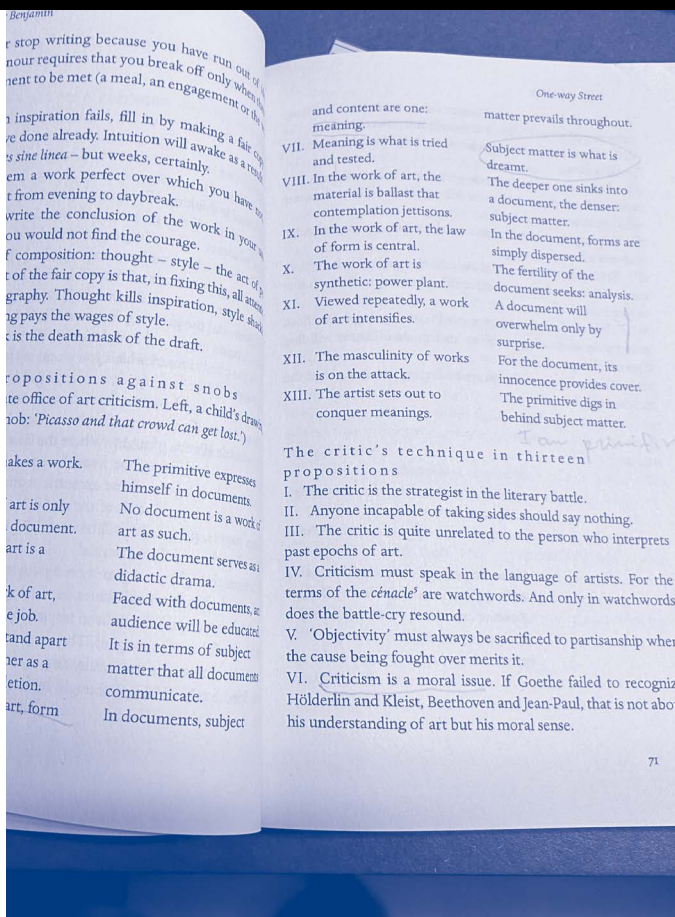
On one slide, I could read «Berlin» and «Einbahnstrasse».
I thought it was the name of a street, but then realized
it meant «One-way street», like Walter Benjamin's book.
We are «behind the wall», the building is the «haus der
Schweiz», built in 1936, still standing after the war.
I wonder What caught my grandfather's interest – The man
walking with a pushchair?

makes me think
about breathing.



The same place in 1946. Instead of a bus, a bicycle and a
chain of buckets. instead of a pushchair, a shovel.

In One-way street, I read: «Subject matter is what is
dreamt» and «A document will overwhelm only by surprise.»



Me vuelvo un guñelve

(Performance, 30 min, 2025)

Curated by: Nathalie Killias and Cristiana Contu

Assisted by: Stéphane Fretz

Technical support: Sarai Aron

Sound: Simon Risi

Exhibition: Passato Presente

Venue: Helmhaus, Limmatquai 31, 8001 Zürich

Date: 09.06.2025, 4pm

Open today

Helmhaus

de/en



MARISA CORNEJO

Me vuelvo un guñelve

PERFORMANCE & FINISSAGE

Mon 9.6.25, 4pm–5pm



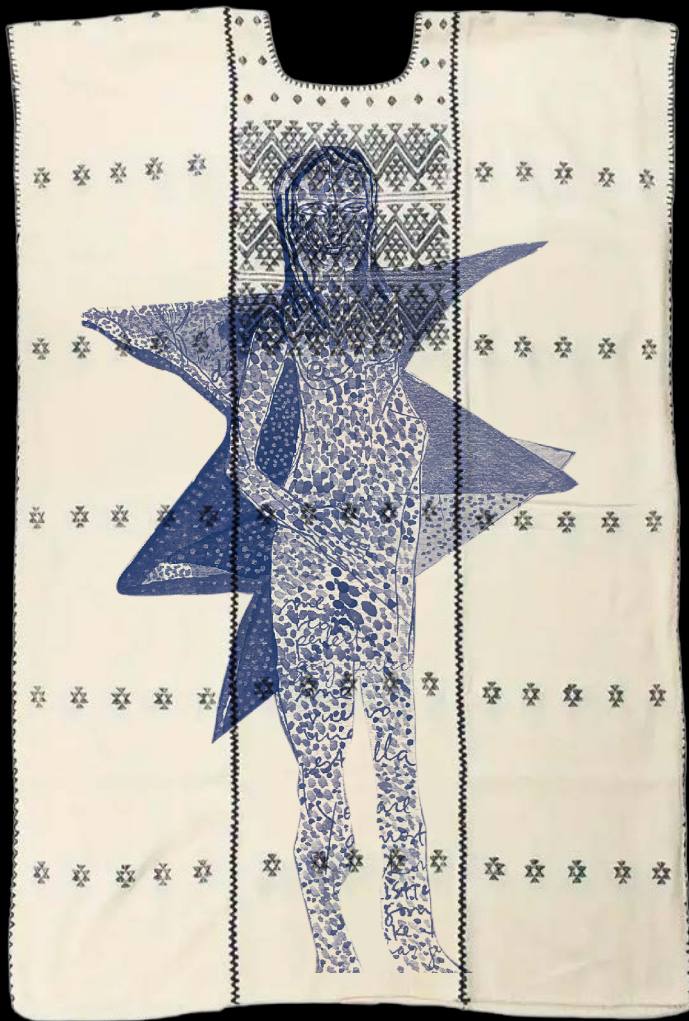
Me vuelvo un guñelve

(Performance, 30 min, 2025)



Me vuelvo un guñelve

(Documentation, 2025)



This performance by the artist Marisa Cornejo is based on a dream in which she metamorphoses into a Guñelve. The Guñelve, in mapudungun, the mapuche language, is an eight-pointed star that symbolises the dawn and Venus.

During this performance, Marisa is momentarily blinded by the light of a slide projector, an imposed blindness that leads her to search within her memories. In that moment, she feels like a membrane of history, determined not to let go of certain values: solidarity among workers, remembering freedom fighters like Ahmed Ben Bella, and her humble grandfather Crisológo



Tanu, spirit of the Hain ceremony among the Selknam. Laguna de Pescados, Isla Grande, Tierra del Fuego. Photo by Martín Gusinde, 1923.

Marisa Cornejo, Sueño con Crisológo, 20.09.2024.



Gatica, a Chilean communist who never used his political convictions to seize power for himself and who left these slides as heritage.

The audience witnesses Marisa become a channel in an attempt to bring the past into the present.