Teresa Margolles

WE HAVE A COMMON THREAD

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Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles's Textiles

Patrice Giasson

A red stripe of fabric is sewn onto a special canvas that the Mexican artist Teresa Margolles provided to members of the Harlem Needle Arts cultural arts institute: Michelle Bishop, Sahara Briscoe, Laura R. Gadson, and Jerry Gant. This stripe is covered with images of bullet holes and surrounded with metal African-like masks (fig. 1). At a distance, it becomes clear that it is the bottom stripe of an American flag (see page 98). We see that the other stripes are made of neckties (nooses), red handprints, pieces of quilting, and stenciled airbrushed drawings. Text emerges throughout the work—portraits of victims are surrounded with names, ages, and the date and location of their deaths: "Kenneth Chamberlain, 68, 11-19-2011, White Plains NY." Strident calls emerge from the red painted hands: "I Am a Man," "Hands Up Don't Shoot," "I Can't Breathe." The rectangle with the stars is inhabited by a female icon. Her back faces the viewer; she wears a crown with a triangular halo. With a silver brush she combs away small policemen from her hair. She is surrounded by angels and stars with the names of women who have been victims of police shootings. A

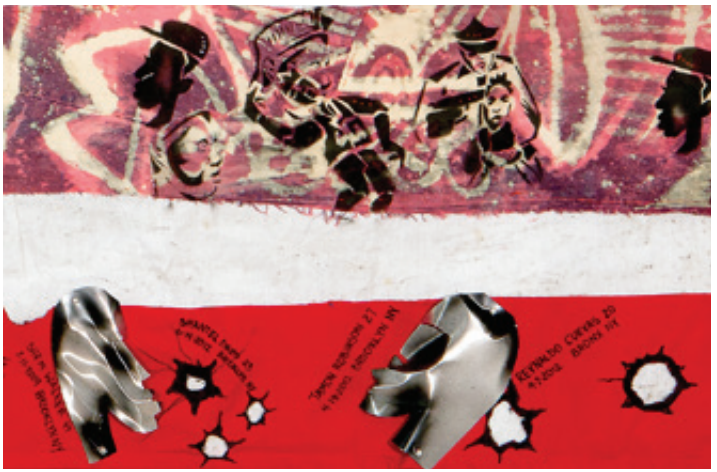

Figure 1 Teresa Margolles, Detail of *american Juju for the Tapestry of Truth*, 2015.

"juju"—a West African word for amulet—containing white sugar and messages is hanging from the work.

This powerful textile is entitled *american Juju for the Tapestry of Truth*. It is both a tribute to the African Americans who have died in recent years while in police custody and a reminder of the need for social justice in the United States. Michelle Bishop explained the lowercase *a* in the title: "With a lowercase we are sending a strong message to shame America, the almighty leader of the free world, who has the highest numbers of police killings in the world. Not to mention probably the most people in prisons."[1]

american Juju for the Tapestry of Truth is the last of a series of textiles created across the Americas by Teresa Margolles with the participation of groups of local embroiderers, mostly composed of women. With the help of local curators, Margolles identified skilled weavers in Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States who share her concerns about violence, particularly against women. After explaining her vision for the project, she provided each group with fabrics that had been stained through contact with bodies of women who had suffered violent deaths, and invited the embroiderers to create patterns on the discolored fabrics. The Harlem embroiderers were given a stained fabric produced by an "imprint technique" of the spot in Staten Island where Eric Garner died while in police custody. This technique, previously used by Margolles in Ciudad Juarez (Mexico), involves dipping a fabric into a sticky substance and dragging it along the streets to absorb micro-substances.

Teresa Margolles has spent the last two decades exploring sociopolitical issues related to violent deaths in Mexico, such as the anonymity surrounding hundreds of unidentified bodies in Mexico's central morgue, the unprecedented violent nature of crimes resulting from the drug war, the massive disappearance of women in Ciudad Juarez, and more intimate matters such as messages left to relatives by people who committed suicide. Through the works presented in *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread*, the Mexican artist brings her textile exploration one step further and takes us on a journey through

1. Conversation in Harlem in April 2015.

different corners of the Americas. By providing stained fabrics to embroiderers, Margolles also triggered conversations around social violence. These conversations were video-recorded and are included in the exhibition. While Margolles has created site-specific works outside of Mexico in the past, requiring on some occasions the participation of craftsmen and performers —a jewelry maker for *Score Settlings* (2008), performers in *What Else Could We Talk About?* (2009)— this is the first time that she had been involved so actively with local creators, giving them the freedom to decide the subject matter and the technique for the creation of the works.

We have a common thread

When the embroiderers from Harlem Needle Arts were introduced to the project, Margolles decided to play the video that was produced in Guatemala. While watching the video, Michelle Bishop, the leader of the group, exclaimed "We have a common thread," which was to become the title of the whole exhibition. Bishop was expressing that she felt, while listening to the challenges that Mayan women from Guatemala were facing, that they also had a common cause. While focusing on domestic violence, the Mayan women also insisted on the inequality of the social system they lived in, the injustice that they faced, their state of marginalization, and the impunity that surrounded the perpetrators. A Guatemalan embroiderer states: "Do you remember when we, indigenous women, used to live with violence in silence? It seemed then it was only us, but now we can see this also happens around the world. Our authorities were always hiding the facts, saying 'they are used to being treated like this.' But, as another embroider says, [...] now we know there are places where we can go and say what is happening to us."[2] Like the Harlem artists, the Guatemalan embroiderers also revealed the idea of a "common thread" by sympathizing with the cause of other women from across the Americas and the world:

> This fabric will then speak on behalf of the sister who has her blood on it, and it will speak on behalf of all of us who need peace in this place, but not only in Guatemala, also on behalf of our sisters in Mexico. Through the news we get to know they are also suffering violence, like our sisters in Afghanistan, and in other countries where the violence is still extreme. This fabric, wherever it goes, we send our energy with it. We send art, which is one of our little strategies to show that if we put all of our energies together we will one day stop the violence. I would also like to say that this case should not go unpunished, because if it remains unpunished, the killings of women will continue rising every day. Every year the statistics will get higher.[3]

This Guatemalan testimony recalls the recent outcries for justice by the African American population scandalized by the impunity that often seems to protect the police officers involved in the killing of black people. The echo of the Guatemalan embroiderers could be applied to their own stories: "Over her blood we are building a new future for ourselves, for our daughters and the new generations, so we can finally put an end to the way the society is seeing and thinking, and the way it is saying that we should suffer in order to be happy."[4] One of the most important aspects of the works in this exhibition is the place given to women. Santiago Olmo, who curated the exhibition in Guatemala, explains why it is important, in a place like Guatemala, to

2. See "Testimonies from the Guatemalan Embroiderers" in this catalogue.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

focus on the violence perpetrated against women, and recalls that "a high percentage of women murdered in Guatemala as a result of family violence come from indigenous communities living in rural areas or on the urban periphery."[5]

While three out of the four embroiderers in Harlem were women, and while they related to the reality of the Mayan women, their work unveils another reality: the violence perpetrated against black men. At the beginning of their conversation with Margolles,[6] the Harlem embroiderers insisted on the need to also talk about the violence that affected men. They all agreed that some of the first victims of segregation and discrimination were males, and that far more men than women are imprisoned. This explains the nature of the work they created, which gives an emphasis to male victims. The work reveals a reality that has come to the attention of national media, as attested by the recent article from the *New York Times* entitled "1.5 Million Missing Black Men," which demonstrated through statistics that "more than one out of every six black men who today should be between 25 and 54 years old have disappeared from daily life."[7]

Auratic presence and permission rituals

In these textiles, produced throughout the Americas, several stories are superimposed and intertwined. The first story is in the stained fabric, the matrix, which contains the trace of the violent death of an individual whose "auratic" presence is ingrained in the fabrics. Rather than a figurative imprint of the body, as in Margolles's previous works such as *Dermis/Derm* (1996), we are dealing with a more abstract "residue" of the deceased person. But, with the exception of Eric Garner, the story of the initial victim, whose blood and body fluids are on the fabric, remains unknown to the embroiderers. It is nevertheless imagined, because Margolles informs them that the "shroud" came from a local victim, which is enough for the artists to engage with the fabric on a deep, personal level. When the different embroiderers received it, they often treated the cloth with profound veneration. Harlem artist Jerry Gant mentions:

> When I got to actually see the dirt, and it was touching this same space, it was not a shroud to me. Now this became a human artifact…it was more than just a material, now it became this other layer of his being, the earth work as I saw it. And now that I get to retouch it and get to put something that I created into the fiber of it, into the dirt, just that alone—it was more alive…and I needed to keep that aliveness activated, and not cover it.[8]

Before working on the textile of Eric Garner, the Harlem artists felt the need to ask permission through a ritual. Pouring water from a vase into a bowl placed at the center of the fabric, they called out loud the name of Eric Garner, along with the names of other African American victims, whose names now appear on the work. Verónica Corchado, a human rights lawyer who assisted Margolles when she worked with the Tarahumaras on the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez in 2014, recalled a similar ritual:

> The women listened intently, serious and surprised by the story of the cloth's origin. Then they took the cloth out with extreme respect and laid it out on top of the table. […] The

5. See Santiago Olmo's text "The Story of an Itinerant Embroidery between Lake Atitlán, Ciudad de Guatemala, and La Antigua" in this catalogue.
6. See my text "Walking with Margolles" in the present catalogue.
7. Justin Wolfers, David Leonhardt, and Keavin Quealy, "1.5 Million Missing Black Men," *New York Times*, April 20, 2015.
8. See "Testimonies from the Harlem Embroiderers" in this catalogue.

two women directed by Rosalinda returned with some dry plants that had been smoked. They folded the cloth and slowly passed it through the plant's smoke and incense as they accompanied this powerful ritual with words in Rarámuri [the Tarahumara language] […]It was a form of elevated prayer to the universe so that their friend, who had been here, could be accompanied and illuminated in her journey. "We will work on this cloth with her permission. We will honor her memory."

The governor concluded the session with the ritual, and the women kept the cloth so that they could start to consider together what they would depict on it.[9]

Through these permission rituals, the distance with the deceased seemed to disappear and a process of identification occurred. As one of the Guatemalan embroiderers remarked:

> […] the blood spread on this fabric could have been from one of us […] Her blood is going to help us all. She is giving us freedom. She is giving us the voice, the energy, and the strength to be able to report, so other sisters don't have to go through what she lived through, what she suffered. Over her blood we are building a new future for ourselves [….][10]

Touching the image: A crystal of time

The subtle presence of the deceased fuels the embroiderers' powerful intervention that transforms the stained fabric into a textile. It stimulates new memories, reterritorializes the original story into the present, and allows the textile to become a place to address additional contemporary issues. First the embroiderers, and eventually the public, will relate the work to their own environment and experiences while listening to the stories of these women.

It is precisely because the embroiderers are able to relate to them on a personal level that these images are not traditional "cult" or devotional images, which can only be seen and should be kept distant from the viewer.[11] We could argue that with contemporary images, trace and aura become reunited.[12] Here, the image is to be touched and intervened with, appropriated, and covered with new layers, reducing the distance and making the object part of the present moment. This sudden proximity allows people to fully engage with the work and experience the "common thread." In that sense, Margolles's work cannot be reduced to the idea of religious relic. Traditionally, the relic is related to miracles and unearthly powers, while on the contrary, all the elements here are rooted in reality. The fact that the stain can be of "any body" means that anyone can relate to it.[13] While

9. See Verónica Corchado's text "Rarámuri Women: Light Feet" in the present catalogue.
10. See "Testimonies from the Guatemalan Embroiderers" in this catalogue.
11. Indeed, Walter Benjamin explains that "the distant is by essence what cannot be approached: for the image that serves the cult, it is, in fact, most important that we cannot approach it." Benjamin, *Sur quelques thèmes baudelairiens* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1939), Paragraph XI; translation is mine.
12. Georges Didi-Huberman observes how, as opposed to "miraculous images"—like the Veronica's Veil, for instance—the work of contemporary artists attests the hand of man and thus expresses an unprecedented combination of trace and aura. Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2000), p. 260.
13. This "relational possibility" has also been found in previous works and decisions taken by Margolles. While describing her works from the 1990s, Rubén Gallo explains how Margolles had deliberately avoided displaying a full corpse, instead choosing other means of transfer to evoke the presence of a body; "We see that the missing body in her work points to the culture of violence that prevails in Mexico City and to the countless deaths it has produced. The missing body in her work is the most effective representation of the thousands of bodies left behind by the spiraling hate crime." Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004),

talking about the display, Margolles expressed her desire that the visitors have the freedom to touch the work, as the weavers touched it while working on it. Her request was meant to reduce the distance between the viewer and the textile, and to initiate the possibility of a relational identification.

While echoing the tragic death of an individual, the images left by the stains also act as an agent of time, creating a connection between the present and the past, between the dead and the living. Contemporary philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman recalls that for Walter Benjamin the "image is, before anything else, a *crystal of time*; the form, constructed and flamboyant at the same time, of a powerful clash where the 'Then' [*Autrefois*], writes Benjamin, 'meets the Now [*Maintenant*] in a flash to create a constellation.'"[14] The time factor in Margolles's textiles spans both the past and the present. The work directs, for instance, the gaze toward the one who is deceased. This allows the deceased individual to extend his or her "existence" into the present in order for us to perceive the nature of a postmortem claim. The end of a testimony from a Brazilian embroiderer who worked with Margolles tells us emphatically: "It means that a person who was born, who had a name and an address, was killed but could be buried as if no one had known her because she lacked the proper documents."[15] The viewer, in present time, will therefore be confronted with the reality that injustice may persist after death, as not all people receive a fair burial. But while giving attention to the "claims" of the deceased, the narrative and embroidered layers in the images also bring forward the voices of the ones who remain, the living ones, exploring their challenges and expressing the manner in which they cope with absence and loneliness. The past and the present, the then and the now, are united in this crystal of time embodied in these powerful textiles.

A look back at Margolles's explorations with fabrics

The textiles presented in this exhibition are the result of a long process of exploration with fabrics undertaken by Margolles for more than twenty years. While she worked with the art collective SEMEFO,[16] the artist created a series in the morgue called *Dermis/Derm* (1996), which consisted of corpse imprints made by using a white sheet that would keep the bloody trace of a body part. The technique was later used to create imprints of a full body, which seems to pull out of anonymity an existence that had been forgotten (fig. 2). The artist later proceeded with the making of "collective imprints," where several bodies appeared in a single work. Her work *Lienzo (The Shroud)* (1999–2000) consists of a blanket nine meters long (nearly thirty feet) that holds the bodily fluids of nine corpses.

This "figurative" stage was then followed by more abstract works—large fabrics covered with human secretions collected

p. 121. On the iconographic rendering of the disappeared as "any body," see the recent study by José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski on representation of massacres and genocides, in particular, their chapter on the role of silhouettes "as symbol of a strange and disturbing presence, that could be what we do not see from a person but that constitutes his intimacy, or the paradoxical sensible apparition of the missing one, the deceased, or the disturbing projection of our desire to complete the truncated existence of the one who disappeared." Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, *"Cómo sucedieron estas cosas", Representar masacres y genocidios* (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2014), p. 186; translation is mine.

14. Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps*, p. 241; translation is mine; emphasis in original.

15. See "Testimony from the Brazilian Embroiderers" in the present catalogue.

16. Margolles was a founding member of the art collective group SEMEFO, the acronym for Servicio Médico Forense (Forensic Medical Service), which commented on social violence through provocative art performances from 1990 to 1999.

Figure 2 Teresa Margolles, SEMEFO, *Dermis / Derm*, 1996.

in the Mexico City morgue. In works such as *Olvidados/Forgotten* (2001–2002), the image produced was blurry to the point that the human figure was completely erased. What remained was an abstract work, dominated by stains from which strong odors emanated.

With thread being part of the art of sewing, Margolles also explored autopsy stitching, in her work *Linea Fronteriza (Border Line)* (2005). In a recent conversation, while working in Harlem, Margolles recalled that the art of closing up bodies after an autopsy was reminiscent of the practice and ritual of sewing.

Another important exploration with fabrics resulted from the exhibition *What Else Could We Talk About?* (Venice Biennale, 2009), when Margolles began using fabrics as a vehicle to carry blood and the remains of bodily substances from Mexico to Italy. Each fabric was submerged in a sticky substance and dragged in Ciudad Juarez to collect micro-particles from sites where assassinations had occurred. Each fabrics was later dehydrated, transported to Venice, and rehydrated on site, "as if it was a tea bag," said the artist. A large piece of fabric was then brought to the Lido, an island in the lagoon just east of Venice, for a performance that embodied the action of "cleaning the flag" by submerging it in the sea, draining the water from it, and dragging it along the beach. The final artwork, *Bandera (Flag)*, was then draped outside the Rota Ivancich Palace, between the flags of the European Community and Venice. Other fabrics impregnated with mud from places where people were murdered in Mexico were displayed on the walls inside. Fabric was also used during collaborative activities in the streets of Venice by participants who embroidered in gold thread on bloodstained cloth messages left by executioners next to their victims.

This technique was later used for the 2010 installation *Frontera/Border* at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum Museum in Kassel, Germany. Fabric stained in Mexico was stretched onto frames and installed, from the exterior, over the windows of the second floor of the museum, impeding the light from coming in. As with the flag in Venice, when touched by the rain the fabrics released red fluids on the surface of the museum. German and foreign visitors would see the white museum turn red as the

days went by. I learned through the artist that Adolf Hitler had once given a speech in that museum. Though alluding to the situation in Mexico, this striking work directly engaged with German history.

Violence and creation

While the textiles presented in *We Have a Common Thread* at the Neuberger Museum of Art are the result of Margolles's long experience working with fabrics, they also express a new direction in the artist's career. More than ever, the crude approach to death and violence is not an end in itself; it is rather a point of departure for creation, in which a constant dialogue between tragedy and "repair" is artistically expressed. The stained fabric thus evolves through the process of embroidery into a textile. Many embroiderers, including Michelle Bishop from the Harlem group, used the expression "embellish the stained fabric" to define their intervention. The choice of patterns with butterflies (a symbol of metamorphosis) and flowers (a symbol of resurrection), which we find in numerous textiles (fig. 3), often articulates a balance with the tragic reality. Juanita Bermúdez, who assisted Margolles with the Nicaraguan embroiderers, recalls in her text:

> During the days it took the women to embroider the piece, they realized that the war of thirty-five years ago remains an indelible mark in the memory of the people. I feel it in the same way. But the embroiderers also told Teresa that embroidering a blood-stained cloth was like putting a balm on the wounds of the person who had been covered by it.[17]

17. See Juanita Bermúdez's text "Teresa Margolles in Managua, Nicaragua" in the present catalogue.

Figure 3 Teresa Margolles, Detail of *Gerlaine GG Om Pào Com Molho: Identidade desconhecida / Gerlaine GG Om Pào Com Molho: Unknown Identities*, 2014.

While talking about the work created in Brazil, curator Moacir dos Anjos explains:

> On the bloodstained cloth shapes emerged in various colors, marked by their delicate beauty. Despite the fluid

> that stained the sheet, evidence of death, and despite the stories of violence narrated by the women, embroidered flowers and birds took form, nearly obliterating the marks of violence.[18]

The Brazilian curator then explains that Margolles associates this phenomenon of creating art over the marks of violence "with what happens in ordinary life; somehow we cling to what brings us warmth, not succumbing to the violence that exists around us and that threatens us daily." [19]

In Panama, the traditional *mola* textiles created by the Kuna Indians are frequently composed of symmetrical images that express dual forces. But in the work they created for Margolles in 2013, entitled *Dylegued (Burial)*, the Kuna embroiderers opted for a new type of representation featuring a single main subject; all the attention is centered on this young victim who lies in a hammock (see page 34). He wears a little hat and is surrounded with tender objects of youth; a teddy bear appears on his shirt, and he holds a small doll in his hand. Lively birds, elaborated in different styles, fly around him, and music seems to emerge from these birds and from the gourd rattles (called *nasis*, a recurrent motif in *mola* textiles[20]) at the bottom and in the left corner, creating a joyful balance with the wounds and red stains that appear on his small body. While hearing the oral testimony in the video that accompanies the work, we learn that the victim is in fact a teenager. Citlali Cruz, who assisted Margolles in Panama, recalls that "for the construction of the *mola*, the sisters and aunt of the deceased were directed by the grandmother to embroider the fabric, offering pieces of cloth from their own dresses and *molas*."[21] The deceased boy is probably represented as a small child because his grandmother, in her memory, still sees him at this young age. But most importantly, the whole image seems to act both as representation and place for a funeral ritual. Cruz, who explains how the hammock is an essential part of the traditional rituals, also mentions that the family was not able to offer a real burial for the young boy: "The family was still in mourning as it had not been able to have a proper burial in the Kuna tradition. Therefore, for this design, Margolles proposed that the group decide what to depict on the cloth."[22] Thus, the fabric given by Margolles became a place to perform the impossible burial, which is expressed through the collective artwork. The sisters, aunts, and grandmother offered pieces of cloth from their own *molas* to add onto the textile, investing it with part of their collective history.

If we return to the work created in Harlem, we understand that there too violence is a point of departure that will be surpassed by the creative process. The presence on the artwork of the "juju" (amulet)—a bottle containing white sugar and papers with written words such as "Malice" and "Recklessness"—expresses a form of negotiation. The reason for choosing sugar, instead of cayenne pepper, for instance, demonstrates a desire

18. See Moacir dos Anjos's text "Notes on a Work That Is Needed" in this catalogue.
19. Ibid.
20. Women usually play the gourd rattles, and music can be performed in dances and celebrations such as puberty ceremonies. See Mari Lyn Salvador, ed., *The Art of Being Kuna* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1997).
21. See Citlali Cruz's text "A Meeting with the Kuna Women" in the present catalogue.
22. "In Kuna tradition, with an untimely death one mourns with the families, remembering and honoring the deceased. The body is then taken in a canoe to the cemetery, where a hole is dug in the earth so that the body, suspended by a hammock, does not touch the ground. Finally, a roof is built over the hammock to protect the deceased, and his personal belongings are left near the burial site in memory of his life." Ibid.

to appease tensions in an already tense environment. It is thus through the artistic process that the purification ritual becomes possible.

The artistic freedom offered to the embroiderers is absolutely novel in Margolles's work. By putting herself aside and giving the local embroiderers the power to decide the direction the final work will take, Margolles produced an unprecedented symbiosis between traditional ways of crafting and contemporary conceptual art. This mutual exchange between craft traditions and conceptual art is expressed in a myriad of ways. For instance, in the case of the textile from Recife (Brazil), the embroiderers have taken care to encircle with a red thread the fabric's most visible stains. In the textile from Nicaragua, the intervention of the embroiderers is limited to the periphery of the work (see page 50), giving the emphasis to the central part, dominated by a large brownish stain left by the deceased body. In the work created by the Kuna family in Panama (fig. 4), the embroidered image of the young victim superimposes itself onto the story of the previous, anonymous victim inscribed at the fabric's base. It is interesting to recall how for Roland Barthes a text could be interpreted as a textile due to its capacity to function both as the repository of previous texts and as the possibility for the inscription of new ones.[23] Margolles's textiles are meant to induce new meaning.

The same dynamic occurs with the oral narratives recorded by Margolles. Created as a platform to tell these previously "unknown stories," they are meant to be shared, reinterpreted, and

Figure 4 Teresa Margolles, Detail of *Dylegued / Burial,* 2013.

recontextualized by the listener. All these works are penetrated by a stream of dialogue that surpasses the single narrative and finds echo in a plurality of voices.

Shedding light

By hearing and looking at the stories contained in the textiles, we understand how Margolles's art operates as a powerful "unveiler" of hidden realities and tragedies. Already in the exhibition *What Else Could We Talk About?* in Venice, viewers were suddenly confronted with works that shed light on one of the most challenging crises in the Americas—the failure of a state to protect its population from the disasters of the drug war, and its growth to a global scale through the complicity of surrounding countries.[24] Asked about her specific intervention on the textile

23. "We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture." Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* (1967), http://www.deathoftheauthor.com.

24. In his review of the Margolles exhibition at the Venice Biennale, art critic José Manuel Springer wrote: "The Mexican Pavilion puts the finger on the wound. The problem and the way in which Teresa Margolles addresses it surpasses media and artistic conventional practices; the logic of drug expansion has destroyed criminal alliances and opened a violent struggle fueled by the money of the consumers. A powerful parallel economy runs through the veins of the globalized economy, its product is death. Can art

series presented at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Margolles answered that she considered her role as that of an "activator." The textiles acted as what she called "microphones" through which local participants could express their concerns.

The way in which the works are presented plays a fundamental role, and one could even say that display, for Margolles, is as important as the work itself. It was decided that for *We Have a Common Thread* the textiles would not simply be hung and lighted. We needed something that would intensify the experience. The artist decided to use light boxes to display the work flat in a completely dark room. More than simple devices, these elements give an incandescent dimension to the textiles and allow the multiple layers to appear in unison; the stains from the textile base emerge vividly through the drawings and patterns added by the embroiderers. The gallery display embodies a meaningful sensorial effect, which becomes part of the work itself.[25] Margolles's attention to display may recall her interest in drama theorists such as Antonin Artaud, for whom the theatrical set, light, sound, and special effects were more than just decorative or supportive elements; they embodied meaning, provoking intense emotions such as fury, love, or madness.[26] At the Neuberger Museum of Art, visitors are plunged into the darkness; they walk on a carpet that silences their footsteps; their only references are the light boxes. It is in this state of uncanny hesitation that the visitor is suddenly confronted by the powerful shrouds and their profound echo in the contemporary world.

By gazing at the different textiles and hearing the embroiderers' testimonies, viewers are able to dive into the lives of the Kunas of Panama, the Mayans of Guatemala, the Tarahumaras in the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez (Mexico), and the inhabitants of Recife (Brazil) and Managua (Nicaragua). Finally, the most recent work created in New York City will bring to the fore the dire social realities of the United States and its most urgent challenges.

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speak of anything else?" Springer, "El pabellón de México en la 53 Bienal de Venecia," in *Réplica21*, July 12, 2009, http://www.replica21.com/archivo/articulos/s_t/566_springer_margolles.htm, accessed March 20, 2015; translation is mine.

25. In his introduction to *What Else Could We Talk About?* Cuauhtémoc Medina recalls that Margolles "launched into a wide range of interventions upon actual display spaces and surfaces [...] as a way of spectralizing the exhibition space." The Mexican curator describes the experience as follows: "In place of any neutral, dispassionate observation of 'beauty,' spectators' bodies and feelings were being exposed to works in the form of substances that violated the distance implied by esthetic attention; that threatened to merge with the receptor's very flesh, infused into his lungs and bloodstream." Cuauhtémoc Medina, ed., introduction to *What Else Could We Talk About?* (Mexico City and Barcelona: RM Verlag, 2009), p. 19.

26. See Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary C. Richard (New York: Grove Press, 1994).