

Catalina Parra
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During its exurban heyday of the early 1970's, Land art wasn't known for political critique. But by 1980's, artists such as Agnes Denes and Maya Lin were tracing a different trajectory of its co-options of Minimalism's formal simplicity, understanding that Land art's monumental scale and extreme geometricization occupied an uneasy relationship to memorialization, histories of territorial dispossession, and the unequal distribution of natural resources among global populations. Like Denes – and also of the same generation as artists such as James Turrell, Robert Smithson, and Walter de Maria- Chilean- born, New York-based artist Catalina Parra adopts a language of abstraction to pointed political effect. In FOSA, 2005, Parra excavated a massive pit the size of a large swimming pool in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile (where Patricio Guzman's 2010 film *Nostalgia for the Light* revealed relatives of the disappeared victims of General Pinochet's regime regularly combing the sand for human remains). It isn't too much of a stretch to see the work's resemblance to a mass grave. Represented here as short video, FOSA initially seems uncharacteristic amid the mostly two-dimensional collages in this small yet tantalizing presentation of Parra's semantically fecund output from 1970 to the present. But in fact, the artist's work evidences remarkable consistency: It is typified by an ongoing exploration of political violence, and a suturing of unorthodox materials to do so.

After spending four years in Germany, Parra returned to Chile in 1972 during the Allende presidency and remained there through the most brutal years of the Pinochet dictatorship until a Guggenheim award allowed her to relocate to New York in 1980. During this period Parra's collage work, which had previously leaned heavily on John Heartfield and Hanna Hoch's politically tendentious photomontage techniques, began to incorporate stitched twine and thread in lieu of Dada's glu-affixed cut's, and featured stacks of newspapers, rather than the images clipped from within them, as its prime material. In her *Diario de Vida* (translated as "Diary of Life" or "Newspaper of Life"), 1977, Parra manipulated issues of *El Mercurio*- long the newspaper of record in Chile and the only national paper in circulation at the time – by basting copies of several editions with coarse twine. Encasing the four-inch stack are two clear acrylic sheets bolted together with large metal wing nuts, through which the headline "*Inminente Crisis en Politica*

Francesca (Inminent French Political Crisis) is legible (the original was lost for decades and a version the artist remade in 2010 is also on display). The displacement of political volatility onto liberal foreign democracies was common during this period in Chile, largely to mask Pinochet and other Allied Southern Cone dictatorship's reliance on terror to stifle dissent. Parra's news brick, with it's fragile, hand sewn perimeter sandwiched between the tightly pressed covers, its an emblem of the fear, control, and impenetrable silences of Pinochet's terror.

Upon closer inspection, FOSA, too, uses seemingly incommensurate material's to compound its power as a monument to the murdered. The sense of the large rectangular ditch as a stand-in for the numerous undiscovered mass graves is supplemented, and complicated, by the video's depiction of workers filling bags with bone-dry earth from a heap of rocks and dirt extracted from the hole, and then uncoiling barbed wire to grid over the pit. The precise geometry of Land art, troubled first by the connotation of the tomb, is troubled again by this fortified pit, which is highly protected and therefore more precious than the tomb's implied victims. Yet perhaps Parra sees the dirt pile and the hole as possible forensic evidence- and FOSA as the coda to the era of Land art that used the scale of the desert and landscapes as a metaphor for history in its tectonic measure, not in its sociopolitical specificity.