

The Print Center Announces the 97th ANNUAL International Competition Solo Exhibitions

Cheryl Mukherji: Ghorer Bairer Aalo (The Light Outside Home)

in the Zemel Family Gallery

María Verónica San Martín: Geology of Memory / Geología de la Memoria

and

Idalia Vasquez-Achury: Mind of Winter



(left to right) Cheryl Mukherji, *Riding the MTA in New York City*, 2020, screenprint on MTA poster; María Verónica San Martín, *Make the Economy Scream*, 2017, charcoal, letterpress, plastic, textile and copper; Idalia Vasquez-Achury, *Untitled 1*, 2020, inkjet print

January 20 – March 25, 2023

PHILADELPHIA, PA – The Print Center is pleased to present solo exhibitions of recent work by **Cheryl Mukherji** (born India; lives Brooklyn, NY), **María Verónica San Martín** (born Chile; lives Brooklyn, NY) and **Idalia Vasquez-Achury** (born Colombia; lives Philadelphia, PA), opening on January 20, 2023.

These artists were selected as Finalists and awarded these solo exhibitions from the over 400 applicants to the 97th ANNUAL International Competition.

Many common themes emerged among the winners of this year's solo shows. Cheryl Mukherji, María Verónica San Martín and Idalia Vasquez-Achury are all women born outside the United States who came here to further their artistic education and remained to pursue their careers. Beyond that shared circumstance, viewers will discover threads that relate to the artists' varied identities as mothers, daughters and immigrants; the lasting effects of political and familial trauma; the meaning and weight of inheritance; the intersections of performance and photography; and the complicated relationship between truth and memory.

– Liz K. Sheehan, Independent Curator

Cheryl Mukherji: Ghorer Bairer Aalo (The Light Outside Home)

The events surrounding **Cheryl Mukherji's** move from India to the US in 2018, and the separation from her family since then, are the main subjects of her series "Ghorer Bairer Aalo" (The Light Outside Home), which examines her relationship with her mother in the context of cultural and familial tradition, likeness and inheritance.



Cheryl Mukherji, *Self Portrait with Maa (1)*, 2020, inkjet print

The title of Mukherji's exhibition comes from a 1916 novel, *Ghaire Baire* (Home and the World) by Bengali author Rabindranath Tagore. Written during India's National Independence Movement (which aimed to end British colonial rule), it tells the story of a multigenerational family struggling as sociopolitical upheaval shifts traditional values, including women's roles in and outside the home. Over a century later, Mukherji explores similar territory in her work, which combines screenprinted images of her childhood photographs with embroidery, autobiographical text and self-portraits that establish her identity as an artist and woman. In her words, the work is, "an exploration of my origin and inheritance embedded in the figure of my mother. It deals with memory, mental illness, transgenerational trauma, personal and collective South Asian histories and how they inform my identity as an immigrant in the United States. Family albums – a primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation – traditionally celebrate

success, leaving out depictions of tragedy and mourning from family life. In my work, I recall four years ago, when my mother self-harmed in front of me on my last day at home before moving to New York. Through an uncanny juxtaposition of photographs from my mother's life and my own personal writing, my work brings forth the complications of a mother-daughter relationship, meditating on domestic labor – not as in washing dishes, but in the work it takes to stay related to someone, even your own mother."

Family photographs included in the exhibition represent this generational divide in the artist's family and provide source material for imagery that repeats throughout the work, playing with connection and separation through the revealing contrasts and similarities between Mukherji's life and her mother's. A series of large-scale, performative self-portraits builds on the family album while upending its curated traditions. For example, in *Self Portrait with Maa (1)*, Mukherji stands nude in front of a full-length mirror capturing herself in the act of making the photograph, her face obscured by the camera but revealed in a smaller mirror on a table beside her. The photograph is dominated by the table, which holds evidence of the artist's work and life. Plants, a blank picture frame, an open bottle of wine and one glass, a cell phone and art supplies, sit among books of poetry and feminist theory: signifiers of influence, resistance and knowledge. In contrast to the neat and demure portrait of her young mother hanging on the wall, Mukherji's contemporary, domestic space appears defiant and powerful in its chaos.



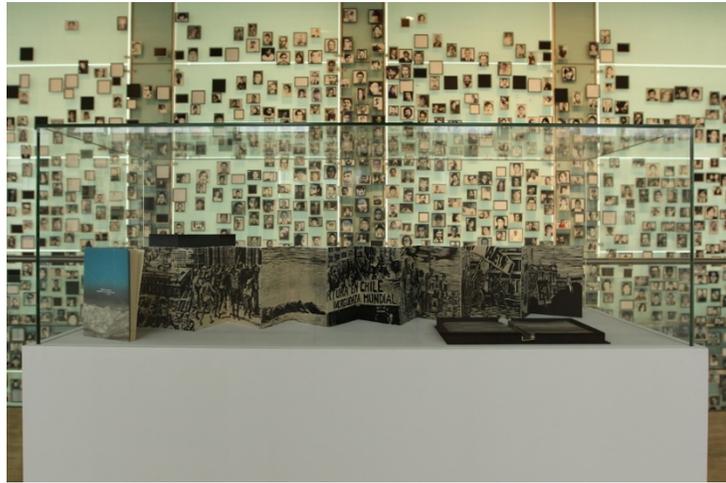
Cheryl Mukherji

Cheryl Mukherji (b. 1995) is an Indian visual artist and writer based in Brooklyn, NY. She earned an MFA in Advanced Photographic Studies from ICP-Bard College, New York. Her work has been exhibited at venues including the Brooklyn Museum; Baxter St. at Camera Club of New York (CCNY); International Center of Photography, New York; Museum of the Moving Image, Queens, NY; Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul; and the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; as well as internationally at Capture Photography Festival, Vancouver, Canada; Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa, India; Format Photo Festival, Derby, UK; and Huxley-Parlour Gallery, London, UK, among others. Mukherji is a finalist in the 2022 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. She has had residencies at the Center for Photography at Woodstock and Baxter Street at CCNY, where she had her debut solo show *Wanted Beautiful Home Loving Girl* in January 2022. Previously, Mukherji received Brooklyn Museum's #Your2020Portrait Award; Capture Photography Festival's 2020 Writing Prize; a Firecracker Photography Grant in 2020; a South Asian Arts Resiliency Fund grant; and was a finalist for the 2020 Dorothea Lange-Paul Taylor Prize.

María Verónica San Martín: Geology of Memory / Geología de la Memoria

María Verónica San Martín engages with the complicated political history of her native Chile through printmaking, installation and performance, with handmade artist books at the center of her practice. She believes that art has a civic, historic and political responsibility to reconstruct the story of the past in order to create social change. Acknowledging the form of the book as a repository of both memory and knowledge, her work challenges systems of power while proposing a way to learn and heal from past trauma.

Many of San Martín's books contain text and images derived from government and press archives that expose the human rights violations committed during the 1973-1990 regime of dictator Augusto Pinochet. Her ongoing series "Moving Memorials," begun in 2012, consists of thirteen editioned books: a total of 203 individual volumes hand-printed and bound by the artist to honor the tens of thousands of murdered citizens and *los desaparecidos* – the thousands still missing. Making work connects her to her country's past, and



María Verónica San Martín, *Memory and Landscape: Unveiling the Historic Truth of Chile*, 2013-2015, drypoint etchings with aquatint, woodblock, screenprint, charcoal powder, ink and video

she selects media and materials that serve her message. San Martín describes carving woodblocks as "carving into history," and observes that while making an etching, "an image that disappears in the printmaking process then reappears printed on paper, like the search for truth and reconciliation." She activates her books and engages audiences in performances that transform the intimate act of reading into a public conversation rooted in visual poetry, using expressive choreography that positions reading as a physical act of protest and remembrance. A selection of videos documenting her process and performances will be on view in *Geology of Memory*.

The relationship between the body, the work, and the landscape is an important element of San Martín's practice. For this exhibition, she designed a labyrinth of tables to display her books in a sculptural topography that surrounds the viewer. The title *Geology of Memory* can refer to this immersive installation; to the Chilean landscape in which so many of its citizens are buried or lost; or to the layers of history and rhetoric that threaten the truth. On the walls surrounding the tables are portraits made with charcoal powder on plastic, based on photographic records from a national database that families use to search for missing loved ones. Text on the walls underneath the images comes from declassified documents of conversations between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in which they plotted to overthrow the 1970 election of President Allende. San Martín made these portraits during a 2016 residency at Art OMI in upstate New York as part of her work *The-Right-to-Know: Under the U.S. Sky*, where she displayed them on the exterior of a silo and left them to erode in the weather. The result suggests both the fading of memory and the transition from human to ghost. Despite their fragile and transparent appearance, these portraits serve collectively as a powerful tribute to lost humanity. As the artist explains, "To move forward you have to look at the past, recognize it, take charge and repair."



María Verónica San Martín, 2017. Photo: Nina Davenport

María Verónica San Martín (b.1981) is a Chilean, New York-based multidisciplinary artist and educator. She has an MA from The Corcoran School of Art and Design, George Washington University, Washington DC. She has exhibited nationally and internationally including at BRIC Arts Media, Brooklyn, NY; Artists Space, the New York Immigrant Artist Biennial, the Queens Museum and Rockefeller Center, all New York, NY; and the Chilean National Archive, Santiago and Museum Meermanno, The Hague, Netherlands. Her work is held in more than 60 collections including the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; The Metropolitan Museum of Art,

New York; Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, Chile; and the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. San Martín was a fellow at the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program; a scholar at the Center for Book Arts, New York; an artist-in-residence at Art Omi, Ghent and Interlude, Hudson, both NY; and has been awarded two New York Foundation for the Arts and three Chilean National grants. Since 2016, San Martín has been performing and talking about her projects "Moving Memorial," "Dignidad" and "The Javelin Project" in museums, public spaces and cultural centers. She recently performed at the Lincoln Center, New York, had her fifth solo show in Chile at Galeria NAC and launched "Collective Roadmap," a co-curated project based on the Chilean constitution. She is currently working on a commission for the National Museum of Women in the Arts while preparing a solo exhibition for Trinity College, CT and group exhibitions that will commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the Chilean coup. She teaches at the Center for Book Arts, Penland School of Craft, Bakersville, NC, Miami University, Oxford, OH and Booklyn Inc, NY, where she is also a board member.

Idalia Vasquez-Achury: Mind of Winter

Idalia Vasquez-Achury's exhibition *Mind of Winter* is titled after the essay "Reflections on Exile" by the postcolonial theorist Edward Said, in which he considers how immigrant artists might use the feeling of dislocation to their advantage. Said proposes that the lived experience of more than one culture creates a plurality of vision and a clarity of perspective that he terms a "mind of winter," quoting poet Wallace Stevens. Using both digital and film cameras, and a mix of street and documentary photography, performance and installation, Vasquez-Achury blends fact and fiction to establish metaphors for the complex experiences of immigrants and mothers.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is the handmade book, *Marisma*, which means "estuary," a turbulent and transitional marine environment that nevertheless supports some of the most diverse and productive ecosystems in the world. For Vasquez-Achury, this ecological metaphor helps to convey her experience as a Colombian-born woman, mother and artist living in Philadelphia. She places the project in a liminal space between cultures and nationalities, physical locations and imagined or represented spaces where a sense of place, home and identity are built.

Marisma contains two overlapping signatures that open flat to become three pages, allowing the viewer to play with the narrative of the book's visual structure. Inside, the images pose questions about identity, representation, difference and motherhood that are simultaneously personal and universal. A blood-stained handkerchief stands in for a traumatic childhood memory of her mother attending to her brother after a neighborhood assault, but also refers to menstruation and childbirth. Multiple self-portraits show the artist in her home, yet in nearly all of them her face is not visible – either cropped out of the frame, turned away from the viewer, or concealed by blankets, scarves, or clothing. The focus is on her presence, her body and form, hidden but central. These staged and performative photographs, some including her husband and young daughter, are interspersed with found moments captured in the



Idalia Vasquez-Achury, *Intersection 1*, 2020, inkjet print

landscape, like *Intersections 2* – fragmented scenes that, out of context, border on the absurd or surreal.

The book closes with a photograph of a detail of one of her paintings that serves as evidence of her hand and her artistic journey, which she includes as “an element of tension with the title” and an “abrupt and open closure” that she intends as an unresolved ending. In the

gallery, the artist extends the rhythm and energy of the book to the walls by installing her photographs in a range of sizes, hung at various heights. Like *Marisma*, this dynamic visual experience alludes to the nonlinear and complex immigrant existence – a life full of profound, dislocating moments.



Idalia Vasquez-Achury

Idalia Vasquez-Achury is a Colombian-born, Philadelphia-based photographer and educator. She has a BFA in photography from the College for Creative Studies, Detroit, MI, an MFA in photography from the Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA and studied graphic design in Bogotá, Colombia. Vasquez-Achury has taught at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture and the Pennsylvania College of Art and Design, Lancaster; and worked in advertising in Bogotá and Quito, Ecuador.

She has exhibited at venues including the Scarab Club Gallery, Detroit and 555 Gallery, Dearborn, both MI; Photo Place Gallery, Middlebury, VT; and Goldilocks Gallery and Woodmere Art Museum, both Philadelphia; as well as Casa SinFin, Bogotá. Her works have been featured in *Lenscratch* and *Don't Take Pictures*, among other publications.

Programs

Gallery Talk & Opening Reception

Thursday, January 19, 2023

5:30pm Gallery Talk

6 – 7:30pm Reception

Artist Talks (all 6pm, in-person and on Zoom)

The artists will discuss the works in the exhibition and their artistic practices.

Cheryl Mukherji

Thursday, February 2

María Verónica San Martín

Wednesday, March 1

Performance and conversation with the artist

Idalia Vasquez-Achury

Thursday, March 23

All of The Print Center's exhibitions and programs are free and open to the public. To register for a Zoom event or for more information, visit printcenter.org.

All images are courtesy of the Artists.

About the ANNUAL International Competition

Solo exhibition winners were among the 10 Finalists selected from the 411 international artists who submitted to the 97th ANNUAL International Competition juried by **Dr. Makeda Best**, Richard L. Menschel Curator of Photography, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA and **Curlee Raven Holton**, Executive Director of the David C. Driskell Center, University of Maryland and The David M. and Linda Roth Professor Emeritus of Art, at Lafayette College, Easton, PA where he founded the Experimental Printmaking Institute. Online portfolios of all the Finalists' and Semifinalists' work will be available online beginning in February 2023.

The ANNUAL is one of the oldest and most prestigious competitions in the United States, which is juried each year by distinguished colleagues in the fields of photography, printmaking, book arts and contemporary art. Artists who use printmaking and/or photography as critical components of their work, or whose work pushes the boundaries of traditional photographic and printmaking practices, are encouraged to enter. The ANNUAL's focus reflects The Print Center's interest in the use of photography and printmaking in intriguing and expansive ways, both in content and in process. Awards from the ANNUAL include three museum purchase awards: the Art Museum of West Virginia University Purchase Award, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Purchase Award and Stinnett Philadelphia Museum of Art Collection Award.

Finalists

Midori Harima, Jayne Reid Jackson, Sarah Kabot, Brian Kreydatus, Cheryl Mukherji, Nicholas Roberts, María Verónica San Martín, Stephanie Santana, Lihie Talmor, Idalia Vasquez-Achury

Semifinalists

Ruthie Abel, Noah Addis, Craig J. Barber, Codi Barbini, Jillian Browning, Jessica Buie, Madison Cooper, Philip Crawford, Mehdi Darvishi, August Felix Heid, Cooper Holoweski, Matthew Kamholtz, Colleen Keihm, Sharon Koelblinger, Ray Koh, Hyejeong Kwon, Emily Legleitner, Toni Pepe, Andrew Polk, Endi Poskovic, Heather Rasmussen, Jason Reblando, Eduardo L. Rivera, Terry Schubbach-Gordon, Vaune Trachtman

About The Print Center

Mission

For more than a century, The Print Center has encouraged the growth and understanding of photography and printmaking as vital contemporary arts through exhibitions, publications and educational programs. The Print Center has an international voice and a strong sense of local purpose. Free and open to the public, it presents changing exhibitions, which highlight established and emerging, local, national and international contemporary artists. It mounts one of the oldest annual art competitions in the country, now in its 97th year, provides the Artists-in-Schools Program to Philadelphia public high school students and its Gallery Store offers a carefully selected array of contemporary prints and photographs onsite and online.

Funders

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The Print Center

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Free and open to the public
Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 6pm

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