Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Koyoltzintli Miranda-Rivadeneira Interview

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions
www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Koyoltzintli Miranda-Rivadeneira. It was conducted by Fernanda Espinosa as part of the In Colors Project. Koyoltzontli Miranda-Rivadeneira and Fernanda Espinosa have reviewed the transcript and their corrections and emendations appear below.

This transcript has been lightly edited by the In Colors Project for readability. Readers should bear in mind that the original document and medium of this interview is the spoken language and that the audio recording should be considered the original source, with its particular tone and grammar.

In Colors is a project by Fernanda Espinosa, a 2022 Oral History Association oral history fellow funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This is one of several interviews conducted under this fellowship and in collaboration with the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this interview, do not necessarily reflect those of the Oral History Association or National Endowment for the Humanities.

Interview

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: This is Fernanda Espinosa interviewing Koyoltzintli Miranda-Rivadeneira, for an oral history for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution as part of the In Colors Project. Koyoltzintli is joining from her home in West Haverstraw, New York. And today is December 29th, 2022. So, welcome Koyoltzintli. Thank you again so much for joining the In Colors Project and for your willingness to participate and spend some time with me today. As part of this short oral history that we're going to record today, I'd like you to start telling me—in your own words—what we need to know about you, where you were born, where you come from? And we can go from there.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Thank you, Fernanda, for inviting me to be part of this series. I wanna say, well, my name—my birth name—is Karen Miranda Rivadeneira, and I go by Koyoltzintli, which is my artistic name. And maybe later we can talk a little bit about why and when I did that transition.

I am born in what we know as New York City. At the age of two, my parents moved us to Ecuador. They're both from the same region in Ecuador and I grew up around that region in Manabi, and I lived there—I grew up there—until my early twenties when I came to the United States.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you for introducing yourself. Can you say more about the particular place where you were raised after you moved to Ecuador, what the region is called, and what memories do you have from your early childhood in that area?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yeah, absolutely. I really think that it’s those early geographies that have really permeated in my work and represent a lot of how I see the world and the stories that I also want to tell.

I grew up in Guayaquil—is a coastal city in Ecuador. My mother and father, they're both from Manabi. So, we went to Manabi quite often to visit family. I spent a lot of time going back and forth from Guayaquil to Manabi—something that for me was, you know, it's the type of thing that when you grow up, you're not thinking about your story; you're living your history, right? And, as I reflect on my work, I really think about how my mother and father—the way that they live—really impacted the way that I also work. My mother took me to Manabi quite often and also to Quito and we would interact with culture, with family, with tradition. And my father, because he was a businessperson and also drove a truck—I would travel with him, to Colombia and to Peru for business.

So, with him, I really experienced what long-term, long-distance driving was like, and really crossing to another culture. Although these cultures from far—we can say—they're similar, they're Latin America. But once you are in your own country, you go to another province and it's just so different. And going to another country, it's just tremendously different.

I do remember a lot, being in the car for 12-14 hours with him and going to Colombia and experiencing this whole new reality without my mother, which is also almost like a rite of passage—as a woman—to just be able to travel with your father alone.

I remember the things that your mother said to you about traveling. So, I think that these things, these early memories, really have an impact on my work, especially the beginning of my work, as I started doing photojournalism.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: How old were you when you started traveling in Latin America with your dad?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Ten, eleven, very early age. Maybe even earlier, at twelve. I think the first time I came to the US after I was born, was actually with my dad, and we went to Florida because he had family there. So, even that travel, I went with him and my brother.

[00:05:23]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm[affirmative]. You mentioned before that your mom would bring you to Manabi, which is—just for context—a region in the coast of Ecuador, a province. Can you say more about that? Where your family comes from, or who you consider your ancestors on that side of your family?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think to talk about my family is to also talk about my grandparents and my more recent ancestors, my grandparents and, to a certain extent, also my mother. They were what is refer as migrant farmers, which means that they travel from––in Spanish, we call it *campo*-–I'm really trying to figure out how to translate the word *campo* because it's not necessarily a farm, but it is a form of a farm, I guess. Well, they traveled to different *campos* in Manabi when this was like maybe in the 1940s, 1930s, 1950s—It was less populated. So, there was more cattle, there was more land, there was more fields. And what my grandparents did is that they took care of different farms and that's how they traveled.

So, it's interesting to me to think about how that also. Is so different from the way that we grew up—or, I grew up—where my mother had to live, my parents had to live in Guayaquil, so I can have a continuous education. Whereas neither of them had to do that. They both traveled with their parents to different farms, and then in those places they found education.

It was not about staying in one place for the children, it's adapting the children to their lifestyle. So, I think just to think about—especially now as I am becoming—I'll become a mother—I think about those dynamics and how we structure our social realities around what is possible for our children.

So, they're from there and I have done some work around our ancestry and I really cannot find anything else that is not from Manabi. Both my parents are from Manabi, deep, deep, from there. Maybe up to like six, or seven generations. And before that—then I come into like Portuguese, West African—all these different ethnicities that we, as Latin American, Latinx we are all sort of mixed.

My father also grew up in Manabi and his parents are also from Manabi and his great-grandparents are also from Manabi. So, this is really a place very close to my heart. However, when I started being an artist, I really didn't look into Manabi as a place of inspiration; or as a place of art maybe because it was just too close to home.

I started really traveling to the Andes and spending a lot of time by myself in different areas in the Andean Ecuador, and also in the rainforest—what we in Ecuador call ''El Oriente''. Those were the places where I found my own tribe, my own language outside my maternal or paternal language or heritage.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Before we go on to talk more about the connections because as you mentioned before, your work—has a lot of influence and also connections to your own background into the places where we say we belong to—but I also wanted to know more about your nuclear family.

So, do you remember,[clear throat] who you were surrounded by in addition to your dad and your mother, and what was your daily life, as a child in Ecuador? Also, you were born in New

York, then you went to Ecuador, and when did you go back to continue your life in the United States?

[00:10:07]

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Oh, okay. Okay [laughs]. Now, I understand. In my early life, I have a brother, he's 12 years older than me. I remember a lot, just doing many things. I have always been interested in the arts. So, I started with dancing and then I started with piano and flutes. I did a lot of flamenco when I was a child—I really enjoyed that. I had a lot of cousins. My father has 12 siblings, and each sibling has about four kids. So, if you calculate that, that's a lot of little Miranda[laugh] in Guayaquil. I was very close to them, so we spent a lot of time playing and being together, and that was also really nice.

My mother and father, their families are very different. My mother's family, most of them either live in rural Manabi or they moved to New York City. And my father, most of them, they live in Guayaquil, and they belong to this much more modern, interested in the westernized way of living. So, I was really exposed to both of these worlds from very, very early on.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And how old were you when you ended up going to the US again?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: I was about 19 or 20. I actually came in 2001, a few days before the towers—the Twin Towers—fell. And it was such a shock. I remember being in Queens and getting ready to go to my first or second day of school and then seeing these towers collapse on TV. So, it was such a strong impression. Something that you can never really forget. That first whole year, when I moved to New York, it was a lot of experience in the grief and the dislocation, and confusion of people around what had happened. I spent that first year in New York and although it was really challenging, it was also such a vulnerable place for so many people. And I felt that I'm in this new world where people are able to express more. I mean, a lot of our classes of that first year, I remember they were all geared towards healing, towards talking about trauma, talking about the effects of this collapse and how to deal with it. So, it was a very very interesting time. That was 2001. I must have been maybe 19, at that point.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: How did the decision to—or maybe not, decision—but the need or decision to go to the US come about?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Oh, well, as I mentioned, I have my mother's family living here. My mother has five sisters, and they're very close to each other. So, I wanna tell you a little bit about how that happened, how they came to the US. My mother lived in—this is right before she got married. She lived near a town called Santo Domingo. Back then it was called Santo Domingo de los Colorados, but now I think it's called Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, which is a proper name. She lived near this place and this town. She did a ceremony, a medicine ceremony. In her ceremony, she saw herself taking an airplane and seeing this big city. She has never left the country. In fact, she's not even a fan of big city. She likes Quito, but she never really liked Guayaquil very much.

And a cousin of hers was living in New York at that time. So, she invited her to come. She came, and then she brought one sister, and then the other, and then the other, and then the other. So, then all of a sudden, the five sisters were in New York. And at that time—maybe also even now, with housing being so precarious and difficult in New York City—but back then, they all decided to live within a block or two from one another. So, they were really in close proximity. They created their own Manabi [laugh] in New York. They were really all in close proximity. I was close to them. I would come and visit, they would come to Ecuador. I would always have connections with them.

When I wanted to go to university, I thought I either go to Quito or I go to New York, and I went to New York as—I was curious. I wanted to see if it was even gonna be able, possible for me. I wasn't sure if that was what I wanted to do, but then I got into a school, which is the School of Visual Arts; then I just decided to stay. Cause I didn't wanna apply again to another school, so I just decided to stay. And that's how I ended up going to New York.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, if I get it correctly, your parents were in New York as part of this larger circle, when you were first born. Then they went back to Ecuador. Then you stayed in contact with your links with your family in Queens, and then decided to go there to study.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes. And I'm sorry, I'm skipping. I’m going a little bit back and forth in time—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —No, it's okay.

KOYOTZINTLY MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Something I wanted to say is that my parents actually met in New York. They met in the subway, and they saw each other and they kind of thought—my dad has this thing with everyone, he always says, Oh, are you from Manabi? Are you Manabita?—he always does that, and I keep telling him, Don't do that, you know like, don’t do that. Well, I'm like nine, nine out of 10, right? And I'm not really—so, I think knowing him, I'm pretty sure that he probably went to my mom and said Are you from Manabi?—anyway, that's how they met. Then they had my brother and 11 years later they had me. So, my mother and father lived in New York at that time for 13 years because they met a few years after my mom got here and my father had just arrived.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I see now, I see. I think sometimes it’s difficult to weave some of the stories that are connected between so many different places. And like, especially I think , it might be difficult for audiences to understand that someone can live between New York and somewhere in Manabi or somewhere in the rural or countryside of a place. So, I find it really interesting to try to make those links and—

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —thank you. And if there's anything that I’m not clear, please let me know.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, Of course. When I try to explain my story to people, and then my background, my dad, my parents went there and then they came back and then they went there and then they came back. I’m like, Which one of all the migrations are we talking about? So, I know exactly [laughs].

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —[laughs] thank you. Yes.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, before you mentioned that you also have a brother and I just wanted to stay there for a little bit and just try to visualize before you moved to the US and started doing your education and your career as an artist. What was your life like in your familiar space, your friends, who were you surrounded by and what were you like before doing that larger transition back to the US?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: I was a very curious person. I did a lot of different classes and extracurricular activities. As I mentioned before, I was into—I was painting a lot, I was learning classical painting. In fact, I was happy that I could replicate, and I could sell paintings that are replicas. That's something like sometimes it's a little bit—when I was growing up in Guayaquil it was a big thing to be able to do a replica of some European master painting and be able to sell it.

[00:20:05]

So, I really took a lot of pride, and being able to do that. My brother was a very important figure. He's my only brother, but he was also so much older than me that we lacked points of connection. When my mother and father got divorced—which was pretty early on—he really became like a father figure to me.

So, he will take me out, drive me to the beach whenever I wanted to stay at the beach with my friends. Just care for me the way a father does. Because for some years my father was absent in my early teens to later teenage years. So, my brother really took in that role. And at that time I really had—it wasn't so much as a sister-brother connection because the age difference is so big, now I feel that in my thirties now he has becomes a little bit more of a brother.

But for a very long time, he really couldn't let go of being a father figure, which was really annoying because It made me feel like I was, an only child. So, it was nice to be able to relate to him and talk to him about other things that are not just about order and this is right or this is what you need to do. So, it's good that that dynamic changed.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And once you decided to go to the United States to do your art education; when you got there, did you speak English?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: That's a great question [laugh]. No, I think that we tend to say that we speak a language, and then once we are in a place where that language is spoken, you realize that actually you don't know this language very well. My first year was really really challenging. I think it was a practice that up until this day, I continue. I remember that in my first year, because of 9/11 as well, we had to write a lot of essays. How do you feel? What is the impact? How are you moving forward? What are some of the actions that you're taking toward healing?

And some things felt that I connected to, but also, I hadn't lived in New York. I had been there for two days before 9/11. So, a lot of things fell a little bit like, I don't know how I feel; and I'm only thinking about school, not about the impact of 9/11 because that fell a little bit —though it was impactful, it was still a little foreign to me. It was only in relation to me when I was in relation to other people. And I could see the impact that this event had on them. So, because of so much questions, I had to do a lot of writing for classes. I was almost failing everything cause I just couldn't do like the simple difference between this and these, and I didn't understand. I just confuse them all the time. Or where with an h and were without an h, that was also very confusing. So, things that are basic were really difficult and it's just practice.

I remember I would go to those every school has, like an English as a second language center. And they will say to me, just write in English, whether you write right or wrong, it doesn't matter, just write in English. So, it becomes like second nature. I really started doing that, and up until this day, I try to write in English [laugh] as much as I can just to keep it in. Just do it well. Although, now I try to write it in Spanish more [laugh] because I noticed that I also—sometimes I have words that I forget in Spanish and I really don't like, I try to not do the Spanglish, I would make fun of a lot of my cousins when they will do that. Now I see myself speaking Spanish and then throwing an English word. I'm trying to avoid doing that.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I totally understand that. I just decided to embrace it because then I [they laugh] think that's who I am at the end of the day. So, I think in both languages—

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —I think you're right Fernanda. I think that at some point I'm just going to be, Alright I'm done with this.[Laughs]. I'm just gonna embrace it.

[00:25:01]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I know I tried so hard for so long and it's good practice, I think. Then I was just you know what? This is not going to work out for me. [Laughs]

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yeah, it's funny. Yesterday I went for a walk with a friend and she's from Colombia, but she also lives here. And I realized that we're both fluent in Spanish and all of a sudden, we switched to some English and we were; Why are we doing this?

We both have this heavy accent. I'm—Oh, this just feels normal. Then we go back to Spanish. So, that feels very comfortable for sure.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, yeah, it's like the world that you build around you, it's also built by language. So, it becomes difficult to look at the world and name it in a certain language when your relationship with that place hasn't been, or to that person, hasn't been in that language.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes. Mm-hmm[affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, you were telling me about when you first went to school and you were talking about university or did you end up going, to high school for a little bit as well?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: No, university, only university.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —All of this was university. Okay. Can you say a little bit more about your elementary and high school education and what was that like in Ecuador?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Ah, when I think it's interesting, not very long ago someone asked me the same question, and I keep changing my answers because I keep remembering different things. So, today I'm gonna tell you what I remember [laugh]. I changed through a lot of different schools when I was in what we in the US, call middle

school, and high school. I think I went to school almost every year, to a different school; and I just couldn't adapt. Also, it had to do with my brother's addiction problems at that time.

That really affected me quite a lot. So, it made it hard for me to be in only one environment and also go to Anonymous meetings, meetings for families for people that have substance abuse problems. And it made it hard for me to be in one place.

My mother was very, very flexible around that. She really helped me find whatever school was gonna help me at different junctures. So, I changed, I think I went to five different schools; just moved quite a lot. At the end, in my last two years I stayed in one place.

But that definitely had an impact on my education and also in the sense that because the dynamics of my family were so focused on the healing of my brother, I really didn't wanna be another weight for my mother. I was a really good student. I never needed her to check homework or look at what I was doing.

I just did it by myself. Cause I really wanted to be able to be that support. And the relationship with my mother, she always treated me as an adult. She would say to me, If you don't do your homework, it's gonna be your fault. You're gonna repeat the year. That's not what you wanna do. Okay. That's what you're gonna do.

So, it always felt that she gave me that responsibility to take care of myself and to do the homework or show up in school, knowing that that's gonna be—at the end of the day—good for me. So, that was a really, good thing to be able to have that independence, because I think that is something really essential in my life: to be able to choose something and do it and allow my soul to guide me and not feel like I need approval, or I need my parents' advice or anything.

I'm just gonna do it. So, my mother was very open to that. The first time I went to the Amazon, I went to El Oriente. I was 17 years old. I just took a bus and I left. I told her afterwards, cause at this time I didn't have a cell phone. So, I just called her from a booth. I'm celebrating my 17th in this little town. She was worried, but then she asked me the questions that I needed to hear, which were, How are you keeping yourself safe? Do you have a place to stay? What are you planning to do for you for this day? So, questions that instead of adding fear, they add encouragement.

[00:30:13]

And I know that maybe that was a little precarious and wild for a parent to do, but it helped me. I think that in response to that, I was a good student, and I was not—I just try to make it as easy as possible.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I had a question that I just like—totally forgot [laugh] but I'm gonna go back to connect to—you were talking about your education in Ecuador and how of course, part of your education is how you were being raised and taught to be a person by your parents or your mom. Then in New York you were going to SVA [School of Visual Arts] as someone that was also learning English really as you were going.

Before, I wanted to ask you more about SVA , but I also, you mentioned that in Ecuador you were already painting, and doing some reproduction that you were able to sell. Can you tell me more about moments when you were already practicing your art? Or did you have any sort of education, like formal education around that? How did that come about before you actually went to school?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: I did. I spent three years at the Centro de Arte in Guayaquil, and I had really good teachers. They really taught us figure drawing. So, at that time, I think that in a lot of—is a very old mindsets to think that a good painting means that you can do a reproduction of a human body perfectly. Like abstract work, De Kooning—I'm not even gonna mention Picasso—but De Kooning and the 1950s Abstract Expressionists will be a joke in the culture that I was growing up. But if you painted a Dalí, maybe, maybe a Picasso—just Classical—or guys, because most of them were really men from the 1800s, then you are a good painter. So, I didn't know better. That's what I was doing, imitating the human body. I think that I was doing a lot of Surrealism. That was my interest, just to understand how the body bends and shapes, and changes forms through Surrealism and all the connections.

I think even up to this day Surrealism just continues to carry and invokes a language that exists in liminal spaces, that are so interesting in my practice as well. Not, maybe not directly through the language of the Surrealism as we know it, but it definitely touches upon that.

So, that was my formal education. When I applied to SVA, I applied with work that I have done at the Centro de Arte mm-hmm[affirmative] And it was also—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —Go ahead—

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —And I just wanted to mention that a lot of the people that were with me on that first year, they didn't have that type of formal education that I had with the human body. It was more about ideas and about color and abstraction. So, for me it was really interesting to be in a group of people, in a cohort where their backgrounds were so different. Not a lot of people had the strengths that I had, and I definitely didn't have the strengths they had. It was very interesting to see how we learn and evolve with one another.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And how do you end up deciding to do, initially photography? Because I know you've been doing different things over the years, but can you say more about that practice and how do you get into that form?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Oh, absolutely. If we step, just a few years back when I was at SVA, my major was Performance and Sculpture. So, I went from doing paintings for my first year and then my second year, I really felt like I wanna take other classes. I started taking, Performance, I had this one teacher, and I still remember his name: Luca Buvoli, who was a sort of a Conceptual artist, Italian.

[00:35:19]

He was really tough with everyone. He was just not impressed by anything. And I thought this is a challenge I wanna have. So, I took his class and I learned a lot about Performance Art. I really enjoyed it—The 1960s, the Fluxus movement—I enjoyed the use of the body, like the performance that Yoko Ono did at that time and the work of Ana Mendieta that came afterwards.

All of that was really really interesting to me. And just, the idea of use of—and I think there was something liberating about having a studio and using your body instead of painting a body. The other thing, the other inner dialogue that I had at that time—which it stays true up until this day—is that I want to be able to contribute to the history of art in a way that feels authentic to me, and painting did not feel that was the medium that I wanted to continue using. I had been using it for so many years and at that point in my sophomore year. It was when I decided, Okay, I think I need to do something else. Painting is not really speaking; it's not saying what I wanna say. So, then I started taking Performance classes, Social Practice classes, which at that time were so little. It hasn't evolved as it is right now.

Then I started taking Sculpture, Ceramic, Wood, and that's how I finished my SVA degree. So, I had a studio with all these different forms of art. When I graduated, I wanted to go back to Ecuador cause I thought that's what I was gonna do. I graduated here, I'm done with my studies, I'm gonna go back home.

When I went back to Ecuador, I didn't know exactly what to do. And It is interesting, because at that point—well it’s interesting to me—I wanna point out that I didn't like photography. That photography for me was an instrument of documentation. I used it when I had to document my work. I didn't understand it.

SVA is so close to Chelsea where the galleries at that time, a lot of the galleries were, we just walked every week. We had to go and look for an hour, and I was just so underwhelmed by photography that I just didn't understand it. When I go to Ecuador and I'm thinking what am I gonna do?

I have this degree in the most abstract thing that someone can get a degree in. How am I gonna apply it? So, for a few months, I was just trying to figure out what was my role and just to say—I wanted to mention, oh no, no, no. That came after there was a camera in the house, a traditional old school Minolta, 35-millimeter film camera.

I decided—Oh, I have some time. I'm gonna start taking pictures. And I worked at an independent living for older people, for elders. We don't call it an independent living in Ecuador, but it's a place where you send your loved ones when you don't know what to do with them. There were a lot of older people, and this place was close to where I lived in Guayaquil. So, I just walked there and helped them and assisted them and volunteered. But I also brought my camera.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Like a senior, senior center, like a daytime senior center or more like people actually live there. Like a retirement home?

[Cross talk.]

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —Home. Like a retirement home in the north of Guayaquil. So, yeah—like a retirement home [laugh], thank you—So, I was working there. I wasn't really gaining any salary. I was really volunteering, but I enjoyed it. I've always enjoyed being with older people. So, for me it was easy to just go and help and talk to them.

I start photographing and then—I started really understanding, developing the film. I had someone who was working at a pharmacy, he was developing the film and he was interested in photography. So, he was showing me this little thing. He's,—Well, this image is overexposed, maybe next photo you do this.

[00:40:13]

Great tip. So, I'll do that. That type of learning—that happens before YouTube—were you are just like, asking people what do you think about this? And they're giving you their response and the universe makes it so the people that you're asking are people that actually know, What are you doing? So, that was a lot of what happened really at that time. The way that I started learning.

Flash forward—many months—a cousin of mine told me, Oh, there's an opening at El Comercio, at a newspaper in Guayaquil. And I go with my very nascent portfolio, I show it to the editor. And the editor is like, this is really basic, but you're doing something that it's interesting. You're documenting this retirement home. There are some good pictures. So, I'll give you an assignment. He gave me my first assignment and from then on, I started doing another one, and another one, and another one. And then I started working for that newspaper. That's how photography really started for me.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you for sharing that. Even though I try to understand more about how your work had evolved, I had no idea that you had started with painting, then you went to photography and then you, kind of went to sculpture and performance; but then using all of these things. That's super interesting. Can you say more about, how it went from being a straight-up photojournalist, to trying to bring that into your own artistic practice?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Oh yes, absolutely. I mean, that took years in the making from this assignment that I had or from these assignments that I start building from the newspaper, I was actually quite happy. I mean, being a photojournalist at such a young age in a city like Guayaquil, where there's so much going on, it was amazing! It was like the ultimate feeling of freedom and independence that you could imagine just to have your camera and go to all these different situations. And I was quite content, but I had applied with the help and the suggestion of my editor at that time, I had applied for a scholarship, in Denmark.

This scholarship is called for the Danish School of Journalism. At that point, they had it every other year, they accepted only six people from outside the Scandinavian countries. When I was accepted, it was a tremendous shock for me. Tremendous shock. I actually didn't even wanna go because I was having such a good time in Ecuador. I was building a life for myself, I just didn't feel like I needed to go and study again.

But then I thought, how many times am I gonna go to Denmark? That just feels so foreign. And I ended up accepting it. I went there and I spent a year studying Photojournalism. The way the Danish understand journalism—which is incredible—It's just an incredible art form. They're really masters of that craft and everything from the ethics of photography to how you work as a post-production and an image in the computer in Photoshop. All, these different things and just a lot of really good information. And I did a project there.

My final project was in Sweden, and I started getting more and more interested in Photojournalism. Also, everything that had to do with social issues. And I started photographing there and I spent a little bit more time and then I went back to New York for a few months. Then I thought, I'm just gonna go back to South America and photograph.

My interest at the time was, uh, these cities that are bustling and growing in the middle of the Amazon, which is extremely problematic for the indigenous people that live in these areas. Where you start seeing roads, electricity and construction; where there used to be trees, animals and natural pathways.

[00:45:15]

So, that was a really big deal for me. So, I started going to Brazil, Peru, places in Ecuador and just photographing. Because I had already had the study of how to pitch a story, and how to edit a story for a magazine, a newspaper or for an NGO, I already know how to create packages pretty much.

So, then I would just pitch in, connect with an editor; they will see the story, and it will get published. That allowed me to stay in this area and continue photographing. That process was years. I spent doing photojournalism for at least seven years. When I had to come to New York, were at that point it really became my base, because a lot of the magazines and newspapers that I was selling to, were based in New York.

So, if I wanted someone to see my portfolio in person, it would always have to be in New York. I decided New York was gonna be my base. I will spend most of the year somewhere else, and then three or four months I will come back to New York; because you know, it's not a cheap city.

I couldn't afford to just stay on my aunt's sofa and lounge. I still needed to work. So, I would come back and like get into a job. And a lot of the jobs that I had when I was in New York, and I think this was important for me, as a point of balance, was to be able to teach. I came back to New York and I taught at different places from kindergarten, middle school, high school to university; independent workshops—workshops and communities. Whatever I can get my hands into, I would teach. That was a really nice way of having a sense of continuity and feeling, Oh, this is home and I'm here and this is what I'm doing every day; as opposed to being in the jungle or any other place and not having that. That was a really helpful thing for my psyche [audio break.]

—Then, I think it was in 2009 that it was the last time I went to the—I think it was in Brazil—uh, It’s a place called Tabatinga; it borders Colombia. In Colombia it's called Leticia. They're like right next to each other. You really pretty much cross the street and you're in the other country; and then, 30 minutes by boat, you're in Peru.

So, It's this like a little triangle. And I remember that I had these experiences there. So far, every place that I had gone [to], people were very open. I would ask questions, they would tell me their stories. I would be able to photograph it. It felt like maybe because of my presence as a woman, I don't know, I don't know, or the way. I have no idea why, but people just open up.

I was able to photograph, and I was able to carry the stories, to tell their stories up until that moment when I was in this place. I realized that I was photographing and everything was going well. And I thought, I'm really feeling, I'm starting to feel comfortable about how as a photographer I get to extract images and realities from other people, but I don't know anything about my own realities, like my own deep sadness, deep traumas. Like, who is photographing that? Who is working with that? How am I, how am I feeling with that? I really felt that in order to be a more authentic photographer, I had to become a more authentic person to myself.

So, that was a journey that brought me back to New York and started Other stories, Historias Bravas, which is a series that I photographed my family and the memories that were never documented. So, I came back and my mom was in New York. My aunts were in New York. Well, they lived there, and my grandmother also lived in New York, and she was a pivotal person in my life.

[00:50:05]

I start asking questions, asking questions about our heritage. How is it that we have a lot of woodwork? My mom did a lot of healing on me, like with the eggs, or she will read a candle. She would put all these different things with me, but always under the disguise of Christianity or this is just something that we do but we don't tell anyone.

So, a lot of synchronism going on that I never really tapped into or asked too much about. And then things that happened with my brother, or my father leaving, or having very sad Christmases because we were spending it just by just her and me. Just different things that I started thinking [about].

There are so many people who tell me their stories and I'm like listening to them. A lot of photography. It's about listening. It's really about listening. So, I spent a lot of time listening to people and I thought, I need to start doing this process with myself. And that's when I started doing these photographs with my family.

From that body of work, I realized that I wanted to explore something else and then something else. Then, photojournalism transforms into personal documentary photography.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Can you say more about Other Stories in Spanish the name is Historias Bravas? The name it's not a literal translation[laugh], but can you say more about that project, from looking at your history as a professional, perhaps? I see it as a way where you were like transitioning into this kind of art practice.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes. I mean, I think that Historias Bravas was my first and most important project. I had a lot of exhibitions and later it became a book. But the way that it was conceived, it was really about healing. It was really about understanding who am I, where I come from, what's my heritage, and how can I be consciously aware of my footprint on this planet.

Other Stories were very pivotal in that way. Also, I had never used the camera that I used for Other Stories, which is a medium format, it's a square form of a film. I'm sorry—not a square film—the format is square, and it just felt perfect for the series because the images became a formal tableau.

So, I really wanted to break my work from the nature of documentary, which is so often 35 millimeters, or it's a little bit like that elongated photograph to a form of photography that it's a different way of seeing it. So, in that way, it just made sense. Started using media format, which is what I continue using, up until this day. –What else were you asking about that? [laugh]—I forgot.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I was just asking you to say more about that important point of transition and maybe also, how like that kept evolving, if you wanna say it, or like being transformed into this art practice that really brings in photography but is not only photography.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes! Thank you. I wanted to mention the role of memory and how I was doing. I was reading at the time that memory, it's a very tricky thing because the more that you remember a memory, the more you're gonna change it with time. So, when I thought about that, I thought that if I remember less when I remember, I will remember it more accurately.

So, I thought, Wow! how interesting. Especially as a journalist where you want to document things as they are, it was important for me to be okay, I'm not gonna recreate a memory that I have played in my head many times. I'm, uh, gonna try to recreate a memory that I have that I do not even remember.

[00:55:08]

So, how am I gonna do that? How am I gonna photograph something? How am I gonna remember something that I don't remember and then photograph it? That was what I was thinking about, how am I gonna do that? I started using hypnosis and working and working with hypnosis and, well, a person that does hypnosis—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —hypnotism, hypnosis, hypnotic—

KOYOTZNTLI MIRANDA RIVADENEIRA: —the person that does hypnosis[they laugh], and she

was really helpful. At some point she's, I think that you can do this by yourself. So, then she just gave me some tools because I wasn't interested in going back in time or a past life. I was really interested in just childhood memories and also childhood memories that were accessible to me.

Not childhood memories that when I was five months old, but things [that] had happened when I was four, five, or ten; or things that you are able to remember, but because so much life has happened, you just forgot about them. So, then I started doing that and I started remembering, I remember that when I got sick, you healed me with an egg and you call it evil eye. And my mom said, Yes, I remember that.

Then the way that it happened—with this memory with my mother—we started talking about it and I started drawing. So, she's in this bed, in this room. And I'm, Oh, I remember that room. There was a hammock in that room. So, then I started drawing the hammock, Oh, there was this Jesús Negro in the bed; you really like that one. So, we always put it there when we did the healing. I'm, Oh, yes, I remember. I remember the necklaces. Then I started drawing. So, when the photograph happened, the photograph was a representation of the drawing because I thought if I record this, my memory is gonna change the way I perceive the recording, but if I draw it, then there's gonna be a more actual image of that memory. So, [laugh]It was very much how I want to try to get this as identical as it was as possible; even though that is not even true? You know because my mom could have changed some things as well. But there was that idea you know, first we do the drawing and we base a photograph on the drawing.

So, then I did that process with my mom, and then there was something else. The first time I made *pan de yuca* and that was with my aunt, which was in Ecuador, it was in New York. And I always thought, because *pan de yuca* is such an Ecuadorian or it's just a staple food that I thought, Of course, I did it in Ecuador. But then, when I remember we did it in that apartment, so then that photo came up.

Then all the other things are my mom feeding the iguanas in the park in Guayaquil. All these things I had to draw and then they became photographs. So, that was a really healing process. But because it was very slow, I ended up doing like maybe ten photographs a year, because it's not something—and that was also like something that I wanted to be—I didn't want this flood of memories to come, but I really wanted the essential memories to come through.

Sometimes they take time, sometimes a month will pass, and I don't remember anything. Then the next month something will come up. So, then that's the creation. It took about two years to finish that work.

The other thing I wanted to say about it is that when Other Stories, Historias Bravas—when I did it, it was what I said before, it was a very personal work—so I wasn't really interested in promoting it or selling it.

In fact, it was still a time when it wasn't very popular or common to use your body to tell a photo story or as a documentary artist now a lot of people do it. I see a lot of competitions in documentary photography where the person photographing is the main subject. Back then it wasn't like that.

In fact, I remember being rejected three times on the notion that it's not real photography, not real documentary photography. If I'm, using myself at the subject I remember that very clearly. Things that now people will never have to worry about. But back then there was still that mythos that it has to be a community somewhere outside, like something far that will make it more, more authentic.

[01:00:22]

So, I had created this project and because I had the time, I really took my time to make it nice and like printed well and write about it. And it was so intimate. But I felt happy about the work in terms of a healing that had taken place, but I wasn't interested in sharing it with people because I felt who cares about my life.

That's pretty much it, I'm not an actress. I'm not a famous person who cares about what happened to me when I ate *pan de yuca* for the first time. That is such a personal thing. Who cares about that? Or how my mom healed me or things like that. But as it happens in New

York, I was struggling for money, and I decided, I'm gonna apply with this body of work to En Foco.

En Foco is an organization that I really owe so much to En Foco. At the beginning of my career, En Foco really helped me. I applied and it was a thousand dollars grant, but at that time a thousand dollars, I could pay for the film; I could pay for the development of the film. I just felt like it was a lot of money. So, I applied and I won. The additional thing that they did for me is that they invited me to go to Houston. In Houston they have this photo fest where people present their work, and the very prominent curators, museum curators could look at your work. So, I went there and I showed the work that I had done in Cuba, the work that I had done in Brazil, the work that I had done in Ecuador; and people were interested. They were, Oh, that's great.

Then at some point I'm, Alright, I'm gonna show this other work just to see what happens. I just get so much attention for Other Stories. In fact, I sold one of the two images to the museum and I'm just, Why? How is that even possible? In my mind, it's, Why do people care about this?

Then from there, another curator saw the work, an artist, a director of a residency saw the work, and then started getting connected. So, Other Stories became this. This body of work that really opened up my career to the photo art world.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I have so many questions, and I also wanna ask you if you want to take a few minutes, if you're comfortable before we continue.

KOYOTZINTLY MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: We can continue.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Oka. Okay. So, okay. The first thing I wanted to ask you is, you said the person that was helping you with the hypnosis as a way of accessing early memories or like earlier memories, had told you that you could continue doing that on your own. Uh, I wanted to know if you can say more about that process of you being your own, medium to access. It's so personal in so many places. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, you know, you are being the person who accesses your own memories. And then the connection between—or why you were thinking that, if you did it from drawing instead of starting from photography, it would bring out more authentic in some sense, memory or something that was closer to reality.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Hmm. Thank you. So, the process of hypnosis. It was—I don't know how straightforward it is, but I'll tell you what I had to do—uh, or what I was suggested to do. It was pretty much a sit down, relax; and then try to imagine yourself going into a hole. Then you keep going deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper. And then, once you are at the deepest place that you can be, then look around, and then it's always gonna be a sort of landscape. So, sometimes it was very rocky, sometimes it was a desert, sometimes it was an ocean. Imagine the spaces as you are walking them and really just enjoying that place where you are.

[01:05:09]

And then imagining that you're opening a door in any of these places, and you go in there with the awareness that you wanna connect to an early memory. So, then you allow the process to be. So, that's why I said like sometimes things will come up. Sometimes they wouldn't. So, once you're going there, you open this door and then you start remembering it, something from your childhood that you remember a lot.

It doesn't have to be something new or, or something that you don't remember. In my case, it was the house that I grew up. I would remember going up the stairs, which was something very common or being in this hammock that I mentioned, which was also something very common in the house. So, from that then I would step into a memory that I haven't remembered. It was like all these little prompts and sometimes it would happen; sometimes I will remember something, and I will say, Oh! and then I would ask my mom, Do you remember that? Or my aunt or my grandmother. Sometimes there will be things that I made up and she was, That didn't happen or, I don't remember. I really thought that was a memory[laugh]. So, things like that. It was always kind of like fact checking also with the people that were part of these stories. The drawing aspect was important, first because it was mine. Drawing is such an immediate medium that for me, as a visual artist, it really felt as the medium that I needed.

And also, my mother likes to draw. That also made it easier to have a sheet of paper and start drawing a memory and her seeing her drawing, something in that drawing. So, that was also a helpful thing because then you have someone adding something that has a different aesthetic than yours, and it comes from a different place. So then, Oh, I didn't even think about that, would also add to the map that I would later recreate as a photograph.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I remember looking at some of the pictures from Historias Bravas or Other Stories, and thinking, I wonder what your mother or your personal connections, how was their reaction to you asking them to be part of such a personal and public? So, something that's so personal and public at the same time.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes. I feel like I'm really lucky that my mother was so open-minded. There's one photo that is called *1983* where I am at my mother's breast. Close to her nude breast. And it says something about—I don't even remember it anymore, but it says something about, Close to my mom in 1983, or something; I can't remember. And it's just her big boob and then my head. That image must have been printed a million times? She was just like, Everybody has seen my boob! And I'm, Yes, mom. I'm very sorry about that. Do you feel concerned? And she's, No, it's art. And I'm, Oh my God, thank you so much for seeing it that way.

But a lot of other family members were, Oh, how can you do that? That's not okay. And this and that. But they were very supportive. My mom, my aunt, my grandmother; there's a photo with my grandmother in the bed, I have very little clothing, and that one was one of the first memories.

And that's why it's the first image that appears on the book and on the website. I think, uh—that I remember that they will shower us together. So, that contact will make me wiser in a certain way. Like it will make me like a calmer child, just like a wiser child to be able to bathe with my grandmother. That image is there, and I ask my grandmother, Is it okay with you? She's [like], I don't care. It's fine. They all had that feeling. My father's side, they were a little bit more, This is not as proper. You shouldn't be sharing your body. I didn't care, as long as the people that were in the photographs were fine with it, then I was fine with it.

[01:10:00]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I know we don't have a lot of time. So, I wanna make sure that you can document, or we can document more about other opportunities in your, career as an artist that you feel have, have marked, a different stage or that have been important in your personal practice or in your professional practice.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes. I would really like to talk about—I don't know how much more time we have—but I wanna talk about Mama Matilde and the influence of her life in my life. And after I finished Other Stories, right after—probably not—I don't even think I was done, but it was about 2009, I went back to Ecuador and I had received a knife of fellowship and I decided to extend other stories and I was gonna do Other Stories, part two. I remember so clearly thinking about what am I gonna do for part two, and my mother saying to me with my birth name, Karen, I think that you are going to repeat yourself. It's time for you to do something else. And I'm, Oh, that was such a slap in my face; to hear like your parent, just as someone that is just telling you, do something else, don't be doing the same story. You already did it. So, I was, Okay, I think she's right. I think it's time for me to really think about other bodies of work. And at that time—it was 2009—I had been doing, temazcales, sweat lodges from before, and participating in ceremonies from before, but I wasn't as engaged. And the year that I was in Ecuador, 2009, was a year where I was exposed, I was completely exposed to the medicine path or the red row path. And I started doing a lot of ceremonies and meeting people in those circles and thinking about. It was a good thing for me because I was also trying to think about my next project.

So, I didn't wanna rush. I wanted to also give myself that opportunity of connecting to healing and to, and to earth wisdom while I am thinking about what am I going to do next. And in that time that I met this lady, her name was Mama Matilde. Matilde Cunalata, but she was called Mama Matilde.

As a lot of elders in Ecuador, they're always called *mama, mama* something, *mama* their name. And, if it's a man, it will be *Taita,* [and] their name. So, I met her and I thought, If she allows me, I'm, uh, gonna start photographing her. And she loved photography. She was a

natural.

I think at that level of healer, I always think about this, how when you become a certain level of a healer when you do ceremonies and you're healing all the time; there's an aspect of performance art that also happens because ritual is so highly performative. And it, and not in a way of showing off or showing out. But the whole nature of dancing, singing, drumming, curing, working with plants is very bodily. So, it's naturally a performative, a performative action. And she was like this, and she loved having so much jewelry, so much headdress, so much everything. When I started photographing, she was in complete delight, and that became easy for me. I'm, Oh, okay, so then I can do this.

So, then I started photographing and I spent almost that entire year just working with her, photographing; going and staying with her and learning. But what happens a lot of the time is that when you are photographing—someone in such proximity—you kind of become their assistant. At some point you leave the camera, and you pick up the herbs, or the babies. Because she was also a midwife. This is 2009, she passed away in 2020. I spent 11 years living with her, photographing her. When I say living on and off. I wasn't in Vinchoa; this is where she was in Guaranda. It's a province of the capital, the province is called Bolívar; the city, the capital school, Guaranda. And the town where she lived was 20 minutes outside Guaranda which is called Vinchoa. I was spending a lot of time there. Every year I would go, spend months, come back, develop the photograph, teach; cause I was doing more teaching at that time and then go back to Ecuador.

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So, I spent like almost half a year. It was kind of like my Persephone time where I'm like half a year in one place, half a year in the light, half a year in the dark. And I spent a lot of time there and then, a few years passed by and the lines between being an assistant, a helper of a *yachay*, which is a wise person.

And a photographer started merging. So, I started doing more ceremonies and less photography. I was supporting her more than I was doing my own work. So, I guess it was also kind of like a Castaneda moment, you know, where I have to kind of like step back and be, Okay, what am I doing right now? Because I have just spent a whole week with her and I think I've taken two photos,[laugh] so what? What's the what? What's going on? So, I had to —remember earlier when we were talking earlier about language and about the Spanglish—I just had to embrace it and I just had to let it be and just had to really say, It's okay if right now I need to be part of this ceremony and be her assistant, and it's okay right now if I need to take this photo because she was really okay with that. She was okay with me doing that transition, of going back and forth, camera and assisting. So, I spent a lot of time doing that. Then I came back to New York, and I did other stories, not other stories. I did other work. I started getting more into drawing. I also started having more of my own.

I moved to Alaska. I lived there for almost three years, on and off as well. I traveled to other places. I lived in New Mexico for a while—twice—since that time I lived in California. I spent a few years in California, so I was also trying to have my own life and see where I fit. So, within all that time, I started also drawing and painting.

But she was really my main focus. And then I also went a lot to Tena, where another healer lives, another medicine woman, her name is Mama Celia, and I spent equal amount of time with both of them. So, I always thought about Mama Celia, I'm sorry, Mama Matilde; because Mama Matilda was older, and was in her eighties by the time I met her. So, there was a real contrast between me and her.

Mama Celia is much younger. I still go to her, and I still have a contact with her. But with Celia, I was also learning, and I was also photographing, but—for some reason—I was learning more than photographing. And that was a place that I was also visiting quite a lot.

So, it was photographing. But the thing is that once you start building these relationships, you cannot just drop them. So, even though at the beginning with Mama Celia—the one in Tena—I was photographing her, and afterwards I stopped. I still had to go and see her. I still had to go and stay with her and be with her. This is not something that you just say, Okay, I'm done, and bye. There's a lot of doors that were open so I can be with her, I can photograph and I can be admitted to do all do these things that I cannot just leave. So, the same time, for those 10 years, 11 years, that I was with Mama Matilde photographing,

actively photographing or somewhat active, I also visited Mama Celia; so I was with both of them and also learning about planned medicine, which became a huge passion for me.

I was just doing it without thinking whether this is something that I wanna pursue in the future, or what I wanna do. I was just allowing the universe that was gifting me these two wonderful women and their knowledge. I was just taking it in.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Can you maybe say a little more about the different traditions that, uh, you were first remembering through the rituals that your mom would perform with you and on you; and then, the traditions that you were following; either through the Red Road Temazcales, or with these two, mamas, or other healers?

[01:20:07]

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: I think that they all intermingle. I think that the traditions with my mother—they came much, much later. I think actually after the pandemic, things started becoming more, more clear, more obvious. And that's like with my latest work. But I think that what I was saying also earlier with anything like sometimes you'll wanna push away from what's very familiar to you and really going directions that you feel like you're learning something that is different from what you grew up with.

So, the Red Road was that introduction to Mama Matilde. And I spent four years doing the rituals, going into vision quest and *temazcal* and the ceremonies in the Red Road style. But after those four initial years, I really wanted to learn more about the medicine practices in Ecuador and the medicine practice of the people that carry this medicine for a long time.

I wasn't so interested in the mingling of the north and the south. The Pan-American Healing aspect, which the Red Road brings, which is great. But I wanted to learn more about, that plant grows very locally, and this is what it does. So, Mama Matilde taught me a lot about the use of plants, the use of alcohol, and how to cleanse a body in the Andean style.

And then Mama Celia taught me the same, but with using tobacco. Tobacco was a very prominent plant and how to do cleansing with tobacco and ceremonies with tobacco and *ayahuasca*, and like all these different things. And I was also her assistant. So, it was anything that she was doing, I was just coming along, sometimes photographing; but mostly just helping.

That's how she kind of operates. She lets women come and help her. So, they can also learn. And I personally didn't feel particularly okay to be teaching or to be doing these ceremonies because I felt like neither Mama Celia nor Mama Matilde was my personal tradition. So, there was a little bit of an ethical inner dialogue for me also because I'm, uh, not living there.

I think that if I were living in the Amazon, in El Oriente, for a long time, and like my body, like Robin Wall Kimmerer talks about that. She's the writer of ''Braiding Sweetgrass''. She talks about the nature of naturalizing in a place. So, she talks about how when we think about invasive species, those are species that have become naturalized to a landscape and they grow the way that they think is the way that they need to grow.

So, like really rejecting this, this whole idea of something being invasive, but really working around how there's a really good example. Milkwort is an invasive species, but it's such a healing plant if you use it, it's incredibly healing [Laughs.] So, we can all just grab a lot of milkwort and it's a plant that works.

I'm not gonna get into that, that whole different thing, but it's really good for the body. That was the thing like, I wasn't naturalized to the Andes or to El Oriente, to Tena. I didn't feel that way because I was still living in New York. So, it really felt to me like an ethical conundrum to be, Okay, I'm gonna talk about these traditions, but a) I don't live there; and b) I'm not part of them.

So, the way that I made sense of this was by using it in my work. So, bodies of work, like MEDA, like the photo project that I did, the one that is about the land and the body. That body work comes from learning about living and learning from this two *mamitas* and how to understand the body and the connection to the earth and the body and how much body carries memory and all of that.

[01:25:00]

So, that's how I sort of, synthesize their knowledge. And then the other way that I synthesize their knowledge was through walking here, the way that I learned how to walk there, which is, for example: if you're going to harvest, don't harvest the first thing you find, but wait until you find that for a third time. Then you're taking in from a deeper place and not an immediate place. Or when you wake up, say good morning to the sun and goodnight to the moon, as a way of always being connected to these beings that surround us, or like doing meditations with trees or different things or healing with tobacco or using tobacco.

I do that a lot and tobacco is something that has also grown in my own place of origin. So, it doesn't feel like I am taking from another tradition, but it's the plant that is really from all these traditions. So, things like that I started like sort of incorporating in my practice and then.

I dunno if you have more questions [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. No, thank you so much for, taking the time to make all of those connections. About how your work comes about, in such a short time. I really appreciate that.

You had started talking, I do wanna hear a little bit more about Piedra Redonda, which is work that came out of your relationship with Mama Matilde—if I understand that correctly—

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —Mm-hmm[affirmative.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, perhaps if you can say a little bit more about that work, and then anything that you think is worth—obviously everything's worth mentioning—but, that you think it's important to document in this space about either work that you have done recently or that you're working on right now?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yeah, Piedra Redonda was the project that I did with documenting and photographing Mama Matilde, which later became In the Mouth of the Mountain Jaguar Everybody is a Dancing Hummingbird , where I integrated a whole village instead of just her. But with Piedra Redonda there's like different frames, different lenses, different cameras.

Because there was also a lot of time spent with her, I also brought different equipment and see, you know, what worked. And how it evolved and different things like that. But, at some point I'm thinking, I'm gonna make a book because what I have on the website is to just scratch the surface of the amount of photographs that I actually have of her.

I never thought that she was gonna die. So, I just kept photographing her and never really thought about a time to finish the book or finish her story, because why would I ever stop photographing her? And she passed away in the pandemic in 2020, right before it hit.

She didn't pass away by COVID, but maybe like two weeks before it exploded in Ecuador. Then because of that, I was not able to go and I was not able to be part of the funeral rights and all of that. So, it was extremely, extremely difficult for me and extremely sad for me.

She meant so much, and not being able to be part of that closure of her, earth life was a big deal, was a big impact for me. Uh, you had another question?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I wanted to know more about what you're working on, right now. Okay. And then after that we can try to start concluding this recording, and then start thinking about the other one.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Yes. I think I have just a little bit more energy before break.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Let me know at any point. I know people will be listening to this—not watching it—so Koyoltzintli is currently pregnant and giving birth really soon—

[01:30:03] ,

—so I'm trying to be as good as possible about the energy, and I'm really grateful for you spending your energy with me.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Thank you so much. I'm very, very happy to be

here. So, I just wanted to wrap it up, because I think that, when she passed was a moment for me to revisit my own existence. I think I had relied on a pattern of life where I go visit her, stay with her, then go see Mama Celia, stay with her; and then come back. I have relied on that pattern for so long that when the pandemic hit, not only was she gone, but I was also not able to go back and carry on with my life in that way.

So, as my own personal rituals—funerary rituals—I started doing performances and I thought that that was the best way to honor her. So, I started doing performances in Long Island City, just going to the ocean and doing things for her that were not really recorded. I wasn't really thinking about it as an art form to be shared with people, although they were art forms because I think that she would enjoy that. She really enjoyed art and that way of thinking. So, I did these performances for her. So, it was just, for it. They lasted a few months and then afterwards my practice started shifting and I started thinking about what other materials can I use?

I started missing her. So, clay became something that made me touch something. I wanted to be able to touch and make something. So, I started using clay, *arcilla*; and I started doing all these forms and all these beings, and they were all based on memories that I had with Mama Matilde.

So, it was also in honor of her. Almost an entire year I was just doing things, thinking about her. Everything that I was doing was about her. I had a miscarriage at that time. So, there were two losses for me. And in that same period, I did a performance—that is actually on the website—called *Asee*, where I drew this giant monster.

I wish I could show you the original *Asee*, because it's actually right here, the original drawing. I thought about this being, that has a form. Then when you stop drawing it, evaporates. So, it's like a constant, you know, a wave. Like it comes and goes. It comes and goes, and when it comes it's so visible and when it leaves, it's so visible.

It's absence, it's so visible. So, I kept thinking about that. I did this drawing in the ocean *Asee* for her and for the fetus that I had miscarried. After that, I decided to—what happened afterwards?—Oh, I decided to move upstate. I was living close to the forest, and I wasn't exactly sure what's gonna happen, but that was the decision that my partner and I made at the time.

And I enrolled in a MFA [Masters of Fine Art] program, so long after 15 years of being out of school, I decided to do a MFA, partly because I wanted to be able to teach and have a tenure position. And partly because I wanted to be able to play with materials. I knew that I wanted to shift out of photography, not entirely, but somewhat. So, I wanted to explore again drawing or metal. And I wanted to explore clay. I enrolled in school and within that time I remember asking the universe, I need a little direction again. I need a little help. And I really want to also discover, so when you asked me about my, my heritage and about all these healing practices. This is when my mother's heritage and what I know from Manabi really comes back and I realize, Wow! I've really spent so much of my life, of my adult life looking into healing practices from other places. But I don't know anything about Manabi. I don't know anything about the ancestral healing practices of this region. And it's a region that is so highly *mestizaje*, is so strong and anything that is sync is so kept secret, that I wanna be able to open that and explore that; and like just make it visible.

[01:35:32]

And I started in, within that moment, I connected with this person that teaches how to make ancestral instruments. That's been my project for two years, is to make instruments that are from Ecuador, that were made and were used. And then through the process of colonization, that connection with the sound legacy of Ecuador was severed, especially on the coast.

So, this teacher—who's Argentinian—is a little bit obsessed with Manabi, which was perfect for me. So, his main research is in instruments that come from Manabi. It was really like a prayer delivered from heaven. And I start learning and also doing my own research and then going to museums.

And it really began this whole different line of work where I'm, uh, thinking now about museum history, museum reparations, the connection between the documented object and the undocumented people. And how do we bridge that? How do I, or how do we educate Latinx, Afro Latinos, migrants, immigrants, and their own legacy and their own traditions.

Because now I also learned about instruments from all the Americas, all Abya Yala or from Mexico, all the way down. I can make instruments from all these different places. Not that I am like a mega-professional, but I have the basics and I can share that. So, I think that continuing and sharing a sonic legacy is a really important thing and I feel like that's where my work is heading or where I would like to.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you. And I think you can hear—talking about wind, you can hear the strong winds behind me and the sounds—

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: —a little bit though. Mm-hmm[affirmative] [laugh].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you. Thank you for sharing what you're working on right now. And I think to kind of conclude with this part about how your career has evolved. I was wondering if you can say a little bit more about what you're currently, you are the recipient of a Latino Artist Fellowship this year, and I'm not sure if this was this year or last year, but you were also at the Socrates Sculpture Park. Can you say a little bit more about what you're working on, with those two opportunities?

And then I have some other questions that are a little more reflective.

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: Well, with Socrates, it's still up until March 2023. And I made an altar for the equinox. So, if you go, it's a flat piece, which was quite a challenging thing to do because everything there is big and sculptural. And here I am doing a flat piece on the ground; but it is sort of like a cosmic map. I am interested in also that, in thinking about astronomy and the ideas of how our ancients saw the stars and how we can also decolonize this way of thinking about Orion, when we look at the night sky instead of thinking about, uh, other symbols that are more akin to the places that we come from.

So, that's part of that piece. Then there's a sound component that I activated during the opening. And right now, when I am working on, I am doing a lot of drawings and I mentioned at the beginning, I am trying to work with a designer, a 3D master to make my drawings into 3D forms.

[01:40:05]

That's something that I'm working on. I'm also working on two shows that are coming up and they both have sound incorporated into them. And really thinking about just the stages of life. I'm thinking maybe because I'm pregnant, about the cycle of life from birth, growth, maturation, renewal, on death. So, I'm really thinking about how that plays in our lives. Sound, earth practices. Sound as how they can relate to our current time.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Great. Thank you. So, I think actually I might just leave. I was looking at some of the questions I have in terms of reflections of this time, and I actually think maybe those are good questions for our next recording. So, I think this is a good place to stop. And just before I stop, is there anything else that you want to document in this oral history that I haven't asked you about?

KOYOLTZINTLI MIRANDA-RIVADENEIRA: I think this is great. Yeah, I think that we've covered quite a lot. Thank you.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: We have. Thank you so much. Okay. So I'm gonna stop recording now.

[END OF TRACK]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]