

María Verónica San Martín: *Dignidad*

October 5 – November 27, 2018

Opening reception: October 4, 2018 at 7pm, with a public performance by the artist.

National Archives of Chile
Miraflores 50, Santiago, Chile



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE— New York City-based, Chilean artist **María Verónica San Martín** will present *Dignidad* (Trans. *Dignity*), an exhibition about Colonia Dignidad, a secretive colony in the south of Chile that became a major site for clandestine operations by the DINA—the Pinochet regime’s intelligence forces—in collaboration with the CIA and Nazi officers, who had been relocated to Chile after World War II. At least 300 people were tortured and close to 100 people were executed without trial at the site. Many of the bodies have still not been located; some are [buried in mass graves and some were incinerated in 1978](#) to eliminate evidence. Soviet-born and naturalized Jewish-American math professor [Boris Weisfeiler](#) is among them.

Dignidad features original files from the National Archives of Chile and previously unreleased audio found by Winfried Hempel, a survivor of Colonia and lead lawyer for the human rights violation case being prosecuted in Chile at this time. Winfried and San Martín have been collaborating on the

exhibition since 2016. Through sculpture, sound, performance, text, and a selection of historical archives, San Martín reveals a complex system of codes and transcontinental actions that culminated in crimes against minors and opponents of the Chilean civic-military dictatorship (1973-1990).

The core of the exhibition is comprised of four large-scale kinetic metal sculptures titled *Colonia Dignidad: Dystopic Utopia*—which San Martín will activate in her performance on opening night—surrounded by the immersive audio recording that reveals the secret operations between Nazi agents in Peru, Germany, and Chile. The piece was developed during San Martín’s participation in The Whitney Museum Independent Study Program and debuted in a public performance at Artists Space (NY) in May 2018.

The artist calls this sculpture “a political abstraction [that] refers to Colonia Dignidad’s history through a performance that physically deconstructs and reconstructs symbols of power.” The physical morphing of the sculpture into various symbolic architectures manifests both the intersectionality of history and ongoing relevance and resonance of the ideologies evoked by these symbols. They include the swastika—originally an indigenous symbol of peace in both the Americas and Asia—, the cross, and the double lightning strike, letterform logo of the German Nazi party Schutzstaffel, more commonly known by its initials: SS. These spaces of segregation and repression are spatially and conceptually reimaged through the architecture of the bunkers at Colonia Dignidad.

Emma de Ramón, Director of the National Archives of Chile, states, “Memory in Chilean society is highly relevant these days and the historical archives have become a key source, not only for research, but for artistic creation as well. When artists use historical archives as a resource to create, they can transform the archive’s nature and help to overcome the amnesia we live in, while subverting the text, the image, and the object. We can certainly observe and experience this transformation in San Martín’s exhibition.”

Dignidad is presented in order to catalyze a renewed and invigorated search for the bodies of the disappeared and, ultimately, to close Colonia Dignidad, which today functions as a tourist resort and German restaurant called [Villa Baviera](#), still owned and run by descendants of the original Nazi and Pinochet collaborators that ran Colonia.

[María Verónica San Martín](#) is a Chilean-born, New York-based artist working in printmaking, artist books, installations, sculpture, and performance. She was a studio artist at The Whitney Museum/ISP (2017-2018). San Martín addresses memory as a pivotal factor for the understanding of the neoliberal, globalized present, turning recently to the subject matter of the Chilean dictatorship’s violence (1973-1990), vis-à-vis the United States and Nazism’s involvement in that violence. She has had exhibitions at The Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Chile; BRIC Arts Media, NY; The Cantor Art Center, Stanford University, CA; The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Germany; and, in addition to this solo show, is preparing another for The Museum Meermanno, Netherlands. Her work is in the collections of The Pompidou Centre, The New York Public Library, and The Walker Museum, among others.

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