

Los Escombros de la Señorita Irene / The Debris of Miss Irene

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The belongings we accumulate throughout our lives are left behind after we die. Evidence of our lives, pieces of a jigsaw that start in the physical, then transcend. Like debris from the aftermath of a great storm or earthquake.

It's December 2018. Avenida Azteca, Mexico City. It's a Sunday. Dust swirling around in the hot midday air. People are lined up, manning their makeshift stalls, miles and miles of old junk. A rusty children's bike missing a wheel, a box of mismatched hubcaps, a suitcase full of old photographs. I stop my beeline forward to take a closer look.

Sometimes I look at the objects I've accumulated, think of their stories. The associations I have with each item in my possession is unique, that's true for everyone. Some people say that a part of you lives on through your belongings, an energetic residue. An object has many lives, many narratives. The object starts in the physical, but their collective narratives transcend.

A battered old suitcase. Maybe these photographs were treasured once. Maybe they were hidden in boxes, lovingly displayed in albums, cupboards, books, wallets. Maybe they were taken out every now and again. Spoken of. Looked at with love, resentment, disgust. Some from the 30s, some from the 40s... Some with messages scrawled on the back, some blank, some postcards, never sent... Who kept this record, what did it mean? Who is Miss Irene?

I make a selection of seven and pay up. A few pesos 80 years later and their existence takes on a whole new meaning. Parts of Miss Irene's narrative, dispatched into the world, ready for their new life. Those memories transcended along with Miss Irene. They drifted away in with wind, years ago. All that is left is this physical debris, but I breathe her up when I cycle around the city, inhaling deep lung fulls of hot air and dust.

'Los Escombros de la Señorita Irene / The Debris of Miss Irene' is a semi-autobiographical series of seven linoleum prints, made over a period of around 2 years during my time living in Mexico City. Among many things, I credit my love for printmaking and the start of my "ruta gráfica" to the five years I spent there.

In this series, I express my role as spectator in a different land to that of my own. I am observant, inquisitive, adventurous. Living abroad has been a voyeuristic experience: I have been the voyeurist, and I have been the subject of others' voyeurism. I am no stranger to the feeling of being on the outside looking in. Reworking a very small selection of Miss Irene's possessions, her photographs, is an extension of this.

Our memories are like play dough. Some of them turn black and sit at the back of your head, refusing to come out. After a while you forget about them. Some you think you share but after you've rummaged around, after you've shone a light on them, after you've taken them out and blown off the dust, after comparing them, you feel like you're listening to an account of an event in which you played no part. We build a narrative that only exists through our eyes. Working on this series has given me time to reflect on how our relationships, understandings and prejudices are like modelling tools that shape our play dough memories.

"Escombros" is a word I learnt during the big earthquake in Mexico City in 2017. "Debris". I have a friend that watched a building fall on Amsterdam street in Condesa that day. Hearing the alarm, feeling my heartbeat accelerating, noticing the sweat break out across my palms. Being in an earthquake is like replaying trauma, it's someone plunging their icy hand into the back of your head, without warning, pulling out a painful memory, and pushing it directly into your line of vision.

Sometimes I wonder, as I so often do with missed opportunities, what would have happened had I have asked the two men with the suitcase if they knew Miss Irene. Maybe they didn't know her. Maybe they were her grandsons. Maybe Miss Irene used to make them chilaquiles every Saturday morning. Maybe it was difficult to see me rummage through these once beloved photographs. Me: a stranger, a voyeurist, someone from another place and time from that of Miss Irene, touching down, looking through, then taking off again. Maybe they just wanted to sell as much as possible and take off, too.

For a couple of minutes, I wonder if I should leave Miss Irene's photographs in Mexico City. But if my possession of these photographs has shown me anything, it's the extent to which my creative pursuits can take me with them in my ownership. Smiling, I put them safely in an envelope and think about everything I have learnt, as we make our way out of Mexico.

Artworks (in order of creation)



La Doña sin Historia

(The Woman Without A History)

2021

Limited edition relief print carved from shoe sole on 200gsm

Fabriano paper

17 x 13.5 cm (image only)

19.7 x 25 cm (total sheet size)



Irene, tu Prima

(Irene, Your Cousin)

2021

Limited edition relief print carved from old Mexico City bus floor on 200gsm Fabriano paper

16 x 21 cm (image only)

22.4 x 28.9 cm (total sheet size)



Georgina y Leonila en Puebla

*(Georgina and Leonila in
Puebla)*

2021

Limited edition relief print carved from linoleum on 200gsm Fabriano paper

14.8 x 19.2 cm (image only)

20.7 x 27.6 cm (total sheet size)

La Familia Olvidada

(The Forgotten Family)

2021

Limited edition relief print carved from linoleum on 200gsm Fabriano paper

36.6 x 22.7 cm (image only)

50 x 29 cm (total sheet size)





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'La Tarjeta Postal, Nunca Mandada'

18/21

La Tarjeta Postal, Nunca Mandada

(The Postcard, Never Sent)

2021

34.8 x 22.1 cm (image only)

47 x 28 cm (total sheet size)

Benjamin a los 5 Años

(Benjamin At 5 Years Old)

2021

Limited edition relief print carved from linoleum on 200gsm

Fabriano paper

19.3 x 13.9 cm (image only)

27.5 x 19.5 cm (total sheet size)





La Ahijada en Chignahuapan
(The Goddaughter in Chignahuapan)

2021

Limited edition relief print carved from linoleum on 200gsm

Fabriano paper

17.8 x 27.2 cm (image only)

36.8 x 24.1 cm (total sheet size)