

A Fourth Life? Artistic strategies within privilege, access, and diplomacy

by Oscar Lara

Introduction

On Monday 4th September 2017, the Embassy of Peru in Sweden sent the diplomatic pouch number 08/2017 from Arlanda international airport with destination Lima, Peru. The diplomatic pouch described ‘Official Communications and Documents Only’ as its content, but it was transporting two textile pieces that were fair replicas of 2000 year-old Paracas¹ textiles. The diplomatic pouch was to be picked up at the offices of the MRE - Ministry of International Affairs of Peru in Lima city.

On the morning of 7th August, I was double parking on the busiest street in downtown Lima, running into the MRE offices with nothing more than my Peruvian ID in my hand. I was received by an extremely high level of security, as is normal at any state authority office in Peru, and I was questioned about my reasons for being there to claim a diplomatic pouch. I was consciously trying my best to speak in as clean Spanish as I could, knowing that the over-articulation of the language in Lima denotes a higher level of academic status, and in this instance could better excuse my reasons for being there.

It is perhaps the fact that I grew up in the suburbs of Lima, in a mixed neighbourhood with all the limitations and implications of being raised in an upcoming² family. Maybe the fact that I have followed the professional and economic development of my family, has shown me the many nuances that cohabit a monster city like the Peruvian capital. I understand very well how a security guard with an Andean background would look at a dark male from Lima, and it must be in my unconscious to respond defensively with the need of presenting myself as something else than just someone from the suburbs of Lima. Now that I reflect on that, I find a lot of aggression in that exchange. A power game was initiated by me because of my own insecurities over not being able to enter state offices as a random Peruvian citizen and leave with a couple of fake Peruvian textiles.

The performing of power games as a mode of day-to-day interaction is something that I have always found distant from the Scandinavian realm and more connected to post-colonial nations.

¹ The Paracas textiles were found at a necropolis in Peru in the 1920s. These textiles were made by South American people over a thousand years before the rise of the Inca. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paracas_textile

² Here the term upcoming is used to refer to families which have socially and economically developed over a period of time.

But I must admit that it was within a power game structure involving Swedish diplomats and institutions, that the motivation of two very demanding art projects was sparked. Power games are well mastered by the random citizens of most Latin American metropolises and are often connected to race and social status. They are charged with a huge load of resentment, heartless sharpness, and violence. It is as though they mirror what the Latin American colonial project was about, and it is very difficult not to think about living in a constant exercise of what Quijano would call, coloniality of power:

In some cases, the Indian nobility, a reduced minority, was exempted from serfdom and received special treatment owing to their roles as intermediaries with the dominant race. They were also permitted to participate in some of the activities of the nonnoble Spanish. However, blacks were reduced to slavery. As the dominant race, Spanish and Portuguese whites could receive wages, and be independent merchants, independent artisans, or independent farmers—in short, independent producers of commodities. Nevertheless, only nobles could participate in the high-to-midrange positions in the military and civil colonial administration.

Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America, Anibal Quijano, 2000

Reflecting on Quijano's description of coloniality of power, my interaction with the Peruvian Ministry of Culture revealed a real-life manifestation of the colonial dynamics that he outlines. Quijano's description of the coloniality of power reveals how colonial structures organized societies by race and economic function, creating an enduring hierarchy that continues to inform modern-day social, cultural, and political systems. In this context, Quijano's idea that certain groups were allowed specific privileges due to their proximity to colonial power, while others were entirely marginalized, is a fitting framework for the interactions I experienced while attempting to retrieve these diplomatic pouches in Peru, and serve as a microcosm of these broader colonial dynamics. As I stood before the security guard at the Ministry of Culture, attempting to over-articulate my Spanish in a bid to assert my social status, I felt the weight of these colonial structures. The performance of this power dynamic mirrored the very race-based hierarchies Quijano describes: those who are considered "closer" to European ideals—through language, skin colour, or perceived education—are granted more access and respect. But I am convinced that the imaginary picture I have of how a meeting between Svens Karell, Swedish consul in Peru during the thirties, and famous looter, *El Sordo*³ Quintana, could have been, has to be the most harmonic visual representation of *coloniality of power*.

A tall white man entering what is known today as the Paracas Bay (Southern Peruvian coast). Doing his best to keep the dust off his shoes and approaching the place wearing only a *BVD*⁴, carrying his shirt in one hand and failing in his attempt to keep it clean and sweat-free. It must have been a very hot day; it is always hot in Paracas anyway. This meeting would have taken

³ *El Sordo—The Deaf*, nick name of Peruvian looter Juan Quintana.

⁴ B.V.D.—pronounced, in English, *bivid*—referred to a commercial brand of men's clothing. The firm was established in the United States in 1876, and the initials of the surnames of the three partners —Bradley, Voorhees and Day— gave rise to the acronym B.V.D. and the subsequent registered trademark (2012: 74).

place in the early afternoon because to get into the bay from one of the millionaires' *fundos*⁵ of Ica, would have taken over five hours on sandy roads in those days, and they needed to leave enough time to be sure to make their way back to safety. Waiting in the bay is famous looter *El Sordo* or *El Sordito*, diminutive because of his short height. And I cannot avoid imagining that such a meeting must have had the presence of illegal heritage collector, Domingo Cánepa, although I have a hard time formulating in my picture which side he might have been supporting. The level of codes that that encounter must have had, is almost harmonic to my imagination. A very *criollo*⁶ Swedish consul presenting himself as a very important white figure, but picking his words very carefully so as to sound important, distant, white, but friendly. Standing in front of him, and half his height, is *El Sordo* Quintana; I picture him as a very outspoken Andean migrant, who has learned how to outsmart even the slyest *Limeño*⁷ - a product of his time negotiating with illegal collectors from the big city. A man who is dangerous but friendly, a looter in the Peruvian deserts who doesn't care much about who is in front of him, as long as there will be something to win at stake.

Quintana must have received the consul with that indecipherable suspicious look, which could be understood as a Peruvian signature by the ones who are familiar with it. A look that hides a huge level of suspiciousness behind a big smile, but with the ears wide open, willing to hear what this white man has to offer. Constantly and cautiously looking at his clothes and accessories in order to decode how much money he could have, how much he could make from this guy.

But why do I have that picture in my mind? Why can't I stop imagining a European consul meeting a Peruvian looter? What business could a diplomat and a looter have in common, to begin with?

Until 2007, I would not have had an answer for those questions, and the imaginary picture described above was not present in me. But it was in 2008, when I was contacted by a Swedish institution, the Museum of World Culture, for the commissioning of an art exhibition that should take as its reference a collection of Peruvian textiles that were looted at the beginning of the XX century and smuggled into Sweden using diplomatic immunity. What was for me just another project, another collaboration with an institution within my field, ended up being loaded with as many colonial codes as the ones so often performed in encounters such as mine with the security guard from the Peruvian Ministry of International Affairs, or of the Swedish consul meeting a famous looter.

At that time, it was impossible for me to comprehend the overall context that the presence of this heritage in Sweden represented, but despite that, my instinctive approach to the work was defensive. I reacted with the same suspiciousness with which Quintana would have reacted to a hypothetical meeting with the Swedish diplomat. I asked myself: Why do they need me? What is at stake for them? How can I take advantage of this?

⁵ Spanish word used in Peru for farms.

⁶ Peruvian term that indicates good navigation of the popular codes of the capital.

⁷ Native of the city, Lima.

The development of my engagement with this subject started with the aim of answering those questions through the production of art projects, but as my expertise in the context and subject grew, my work organically transformed itself into the construction of major challenges where I decided to use the strength of this *coloniality of power*, locating myself in the project so as to use this as a powerful tool.

I feel satisfied with the way that I have managed to push my practice to challenge the boundaries of the relevance of the field of fine arts for excusing its presence in investigating social and political issues. However, the distribution of my work still uses the platforms that the field offers, and the materialisation of my projects has used fine art formats. The shift that I was targeting was to test the uses of distribution, and I designed projects that used the recreation of post-colonial structures and strategical displays as tools. But even after the concrete positive impact of the projects, my relationship with the subject exceeded the frame of my field, the institutions involved and in general, became so dynamic that it is impossible to define.

The following text responds to this feeling of being unable to fairly mirror the full extent of an adventure that got *out of hand* in the best way, but for which my formats are incapable of finally grasping in its full dimension. The strategy of this piece is to engage in a narrative, hoping to cover the many strategies, codes, and nuances that my relationship with the subject of the Paracas textiles collection of Gothenburg has had so far. I support myself in the two major projects that I produced, but I focus especially on the areas which are not often enhanced by means of a contemporary art exhibition, for example. The other reason behind the intention of producing this piece is to again instrumentalise my position of privilege, as a Ph.D. candidate navigating in-between two continents, in order to allow the many participants of my projects to make good use of the potential knowledge produced therein; knowledge that could be of use for other fields, and of which this piece could represent an important document, perhaps.

This text is divided into four moments. I have been resistant to calling the different stages of my work chapters, because I feel that creates a wider distance to the audience, reader, artist. I relate to them as moments in my practice and my life, and in this text I decided to use the same terms. The first two intentionally overlap as they aim to provide more ground context to the subject at large. I pay special attention to the way that the collection was smuggled to Gothenburg in the thirties, my very initial contact to the Museum of World Culture, and the *A Stolen World*⁸ exhibition, as well as my participation in it. I have also included a *parenthesis* that makes reference to the backbone reflections of my Ph.D., the presence of my practice in the artistic trend of Social Practice, and the basis of my criticality towards such a trend.

The third moment is fully focused on my project *Within Heritage Movements*. For the first time, I am pushing myself to provide an extensive overview of the different stages of the

project: the initial idea and aims, and how the project was constructed from the field of artistic research but also from other disciplines. I have included an extract from the commissioned text *Loops of Life*, by Elisabeth Hamfelt, one of the participants of the project. This third moment finishes with the first strategical display of *Within Heritage Movements* at the Museum of Art of Lima – MALI, proposing it as a sort of open-ended concluding gesture.

The fourth and final moment embarked on a mixed narrative that takes as point of departure the unexpected factual circumstances that surround *Within Heritage Movements* and its contemporary presence, progressing into an organic deliberation of potential scenarios in order to answer the question and title of this piece: *A Fourth Life?*

⁸ Exhibition at the Museum of World Culture 2008 – 2010. Exhibition divided on three sections. A selection of pre-Columbian textiles, an informative module and an art exhibition.

Moment 1: Mantos Paracas in Sweden

In 2008, I was contacted by Cristian Penalva, producer of the *A Stolen World* exhibition for the Museum of World Culture, requesting a proposal for an art exhibition that should accompany a collection of Paracas textiles which were about to be exhibited in the upcoming major show. That was the first time I heard that there were several *Mantos Paracas* resting in storage at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. Until that very moment, *Manto Paracas* was the way I would refer to any fabric of large dimensions that was crafted by the Paracas people more than 2000 years ago. It was not of my knowledge that the Paracas made mantles, tunics, ponchos, bands, and many other items of similar characteristics. To the random Peruvian they are all *Mantos Paracas*, we have seen them many times in pedagogical contexts mostly, but they do trigger a sense of property in regards to the definition of our identity. What we know is that they are all very valuable and they should be untouchable, but this first contact by a Swedish state museum would initiate a journey that would be very much contrary to that.

Mantos Paracas in Sweden! I didn't quite know how to process this information at first. I was surprised and shocked. I think that my shocked feeling was related to the approach we have towards our heritage in Peru. As stated before, heritage is supposed to be an untouchable thing of sublime and holy characteristics; it is one of the elements that supposedly defines you as a nation, or at least that is what we are trained to believe.

The information I received from the museum was actually very limited. The only thing I knew was that there would be a major exhibition and that this collection would be on display, but I was not included in the strategical conceptual side of the show. None of that was shared with me, and for an artist, that limits the way you start designing your strategies and editing your content. The subject was massive and of course, there was a lot to say just with the little I knew

about this invitation to participate in such a show, but my role in it felt immediately extra exotic.

Nonetheless, I decided to take part in the exhibition, but in order to propose something where I could contextualize my contribution, I demanded as the only request that I could see the textiles. I needed to experience how it is to see a Paracas without having glass in between. I wanted to see how a *rich* museum in Sweden deals with the conservation of Peruvian textiles. The preconceptions of my Peruvian training in matters of what heritage is and its importance pushed me into the eagerness of embracing the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of having a close look at these wonderful, crafted masterpieces. These preconceptions have changed drastically from that day until now, and I hope this text brings that to the surface by relating the development of its different parts.

I remembered that the only time I had visited the storage rooms of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú, for an interview with archaeologist Carmen Thays,⁹ a permit needed to be issued in advance for a camera to be allowed inside, and I needed to explain in detail my reasons for requiring my presence there, in a formal letter addressed to the director of the museum. Not to mention the strict security controls that involved metal detectors and the guarding of my ID card, among other things. That was my only reference to how ethnographic museums keep their objects. But this very valuable collection in Gothenburg, Sweden, was kept in a very different way.

I was told that I would be received at the address Ebbe Lieberathsgatan 18B, in Gothenburg, but once there, I was convinced that it must be a mistake. I didn't know what I was doing standing in front of a brown building opposite a schoolyard. I thought someone might come down and drive me to a gigantic warehouse where all the collections from the national museums of Sweden are kept and protected by an impeccable security system only to be found in Sweden. To my surprise, just a few minutes after our arrival, we received confirmation that Anna Javer, conservator-restorer for the Museum of World Culture, was ready to receive me. I went up the stairs to a grey door without a single sign or tag. I knocked on the door with my bare knuckles, the same way I would at a neighbour's house, as there was not even a bell to ring. Anna Javer received me with a huge smile as if she were finally receiving someone that she had been expecting for a very long time.

She immediately took me to where the textiles were kept, just one stair down, and showed me the pieces. I could not really appreciate them well at all; I was still more focused on how bizarre the whole situation was. *Mantos Paracas in Gothenburg*, hidden in a house in one of the Gothenburg's suburbs. It was all way too suspicious to me, and the obvious question that arose was: How did all this come to Sweden?

⁹ Carmen Thays Delgado has a degree in Archeology from the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos and has a master's degree in Andean Archaeology. Since 1988 she has been trained in the conservation of colonial and archaeological heritage, specializing in archaeological textiles. She teaches conservation courses. As of 2003 she directs the Department of Textiles of the National Museum.

This was my first ever contact with a Swedish institution and with the working team of that museum, so I had very little context and I didn't dare to ask those questions then. I didn't know much about the profile of the *A Stolen World* exhibition either. I felt I knew very little, and I was not capable of hiding my amazement, but they wanted me for a reason, and I wanted to find out more about that and about the whole picture behind the presence of these objects in those storerooms. Now that I reflect on that, I think that I would have done the show no matter what. I didn't understand the game, everything was new to me in Scandinavia, a region that had made me feel like an outsider since day one. I think it was also about that; I guess I was motivated by the notion that I was part of a power game, this time not initiated by me.

We need to talk about Social Practice

I will make a parenthesis in my narrative to drop some atemporal anchors that will help me locate this journey in a Ph.D. framework, to then relate it to the artistic trend *Social Practice*. I will not go in-depth into the structure of my Ph.D. research, and I will not resolve a conclusion that responds to my research aims, because as stated in the introduction, this piece does not respond to that. I will, however, briefly sketch out the bases from where my research motivation and initial pre-research emerged.

Socially Engaged Art or *Social Practice* is in a sense the artistic trend that considers itself more relevant within the field of fine arts, as it responds directly to many important aspects of our day-to-day life, and at times operates using similar methods to many other sciences. Aspects such as climate catastrophe, racism, human rights, and colonial structural traces, are widely researched and transformed by the use of contemporary art strategies, through this developing concrete discourses that could enrich our perception of the role of the arts in our time.

All this might sound very coherent, pertinent, and responsible, but the core of my Ph.D. is exactly the opposite. I have borrowed Manuel Arturo Abreu's article title, *We need to talk about Social Practice*, as I think it reflects the way this Ph.D. journey came about, and I will return again to this title later in this piece.

Throughout my artistic exploration, I found it quite difficult to locate my practice and my way of approaching the subjects that spark interest in me, in a specific trend. And in a way, this is something that has not become easier with time, but what is clearer is that I don't feel that it is my responsibility to define that. Or it is not in my interests to be defined, I suppose. But, I am referring to Social Practice because it helps me to relate my investigation to existing concrete grounds in the arts, and it is the trend that has presented my work and its different materialisations publicly.

What is actually happening within Social Practice? What is happening with the way that social art projects operate?

My observation is that Social Practice could be adopting a systematic way of operating which has similarities with any neoliberal extractive model. Some of the aspects that Social Practice responsibly feels the urge to react upon, rarely escape from being objectified and transform into a cultural product, a product to squeeze and to *profit* from.

In a sense, we could say that the field falls into the exercise of using materials and subjects as elements to take advantage of in order to design great art projects. An exercise that I call: *Cultural profiting*. There have been several artists and scholars who have addressed similar observations such as Shanon Jackson¹⁰, Renzo Martens¹¹, or Manuel Arturo Abreu in his article for *Art Practical*¹². But despite acknowledgement of the matter, this criticality still uses the field's distribution formats and in this, an obvious institutionalisation is performed. At times it feels like nothing that bridges to the art field could avoid being objectivised, institutionalised, and squeezed for the sake of the field:

But if one is simply instrumentalizing people as raw material for one's art, the art world and the capitalist powers that guide it have equal responsibility to critically and ethically evaluate the longer-term stakes. Otherwise, the do-gooder veneer falls away to reveal the same quarterly, value-focused framework we see in other sectors of capitalist markets.

Manuel Arturo Abreu, 'We need to talk about Social Practice', *Art Practical*, 2013

We could say that in the exchange, *subject-art field*, socially engaged art, or social practice, has problems in providing a substantial contribution to the researched subject (the real problem). But I won't extend much more on this subject; I will instead push my heritage projects (Paracas subject projects) into this parenthesis.

On a very immediate note, it would be impossible to distance my projects *Robberies by Request* or *Within Heritage Movements*¹³ from what I described in the lines above. And indeed, they fit very well within that exercise, but here I need to address one important element that makes a small big difference.

I didn't look for this subject. I didn't look for a hot topic to consume or for material to take advantage of. I was looked for. As stated previously, this institution, The Museum of World Culture, was in search of a Peruvian artist who could deliver a contemporary art exhibition. It

¹⁰ Jackson, Shannon. "What Is the 'Social' in Social Practice?: Comparing Experiments in Performance." The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies (2008): 136–150. Web.

¹¹ "There is a problem with some critical art: however strongly pieces may critique, undermine, or deconstruct political or economical systems, they don't seem to change very much at the place of the critique; however they may change a lot in places where such art is shown, distributed, and taught. Most interventionist art is made by Western artists doing all kinds of things all over the globe, but the place where these pieces have their real social impact is most frequently in the places of reception rather than the place where they supposedly intervene." Renzo Martens in conversation with T.J. Demos. Scandalous, A Reader on Art and Ethics, Nina Möntmann (ED.)

¹² <https://www.artpractical.com/column/we-need-to-talk-about-social-practice/> (Accessed, March 2017)

¹³ An artistic research project that strategically composed an inverted post-colonial labour structured for the production of fair replicas of the Paracas textile Gothenburg Collection. The mirroring ancient textile crafting techniques and the re-enactment of a diplomatic smuggle of heritage, are among the strategic turns that are recreated in the project.

needed to be Peruvian, it needed to be exotic, and if it comes with dark nuances, even better. How I understand this approach, is that the institution wanted to instrumentalise my context. They needed an artist to take advantage of, just as we do with subjects and objects in social practice. And by this, a relation of power was established by the museum and a post-colonial power game was interpreted by me.

I didn't know yet how these objects made their way to Gothenburg from Paracas, but what I knew was that at the other end there was no rich museum making an exhibition that would also include the proposal of a visual artist. I was very aware that my participation in an exhibition as such had a function, and I was convinced that my role was to help validate the show. I was more needed for my context than for the content.

'Robberies by Request' at 'A Stolen World'

"It is possible that it was a request, it may even be related to two cases of *huaqueo* (looting of archaeological sites) that occurred before the robbery of this museum in Paracas, in Cerro Colorado; who knows if they were looking for textiles, right? Because it is known that in the business of collectors the most requested items are pre-Hispanic textiles."

Susana Arce, Archaeologist, and director of the Regional Museum of Ica, Peru.

On 15th October, 2004, the Regional Museum of Ica, Peru, was robbed in such a professional fashion that for Susana Arce, Ruben Garcia and Carmen Thais, it was a clear request. The robbery was most likely commissioned by collectors who needed to take the best three pieces of the museum to Europe or to the United States. *Robberies by request* is a common kind of robbery in terms of heritage in Peru and it used to be connected to internal, well-architected mafias¹⁴.

The best-known case was the spectacular robbery of a very famous *Tumi*, a ceremonial knife that is connected to the pre-Inca culture, *Lambayeque*. Robbers accessed a well-protected exhibition hall of the Peruvian National Museum through a ventilation channel and stole this unique piece, as well as 200 golden objects¹⁵. Or, the systematic robbery of the national museum of about 4000 objects over time¹⁶. Objects that were later making their appearance in renowned Western museums.

I wanted to expose a *modus operandi* behind the consolidation of collections like the one that was in front of us. I decided to work on a proposal that could use the instrumentalization that I

¹⁴ Hugo R. Ludena, The Robberies by Request of the Cultural Heritage in the Museums of Peru, 2004–reviewed 2018

¹⁵ <https://elcomercio.pe/luces/arte/coronavirus-si-en-europa-robaron-un-van-gogh-esta-preparado-el-peru-para-defender-sus-tesoros-noticia/?ref=ecr>

¹⁶ "An example of the magnitude of this type of crime is the robbery that has been committed to the detriment of the National Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, from which nearly 4,000 pieces of gold and silver have been systematically stolen for years in complicity with the staff that worked there." Luis Lamas Puccio, Professor of Law, PUCP University.

believed the museum was applying to me, as a tool. Still, without fully grasping the content core of the *A Stolen World* exhibition, I attempted to instrumentalise the opportunity. If I was to be of use for the museum because of my context, I would take the best advantage of that, by directly insinuating that this collection could easily have come from a *Robbery by Request*.

"I assume that these collections definitely come from *huaqueos*, that at some point they were taken out of the country illegally"

Ruben Garcia, Director of Archaeology of the region of Ica, Peru.

Robberies by Request investigated that major robbery performed in 2004 at the Regional Museum of Ica, and it reached six Peruvian personalities of the heritage scene: archaeologist Susana Arce, director of the Museo Regional de Ica; archaeologist Luis Lumbreras, former minister of culture and director of the National Museum of Peru; archaeologist Ruben Garcia, director of archaeology of the Ica region; conservator restorer Carmen Thays; historian and former director for the protection of national heritage, Blanca Alva; and director of culture of the Ica region, Oscar Benavides.

For the project, questioning them about this robbery functioned as an excuse for drawing an existing route of heritage trafficking that could resonate at a more general level. The exhibition was a vitrine, and the Peruvian diplomatic body was the main audience target. There must be a reason why no one knew about this collection in Peru, and I was interested in understanding why this collection was not of Peruvian interest.

The first time I saw the Paracas collection at Ebbe Lieberathsgatan 18B, I didn't dare to address the big question: How did they come to Sweden? But during my research for *Robberies by Request* back in Ica, in Cerro Colorado¹⁷, Paracas, and walking through the cemetery with archaeologist Ruben Garcia, that was my very first question. He replied that all those collections of European museums were made from looted heritage. He also mentioned that he had never understood why since Julio C. Tello's expeditions in the twenties, no one had shown interest in researching the area¹⁸.

It was surprising to learn that almost all of them were perfectly aware of the existence of the Gothenburg Collection, and that Susana Arce and Ruben Garcia had been researching the collection in Sweden on a previous occasion. But perhaps more surprising was the fact that no one knew about the Swedish plans to make a major show. I found their careless attitude towards the given news impossible to decode at first. They are some of the greatest representatives of the field, yet they didn't seem one bit bothered by the matter. As my work developed, I understood that big museums hosting stolen heritage is an accepted condition; it is a static situation that has been already interiorised and surrendered to. It might be connected to the

¹⁷ A hilly desert where many mummies were found in the Paracas bay. "The case of the Paracas Necropolis refers to a large cemetery located on the northern slope of Cerro Colorado, where 429 mummies were found in a flexed position"

https://educared.fundaciontelefonica.com.pe/sites/peru-prehispanico/h_temprano_2_c.htm

¹⁸ Word of mouth. Ruben Garcia, Cerro Colorado, Ica, 2008

perturbed conscience that Luis Lumbreras referred to in my research¹⁹. He described it as a condition that characterises Peruvian citizens because of the fact of not being surprised if a wealthy person has under his/her possession a small *huaco*²⁰. No one would imagine having a big Paracas in your living room, but for a small *huaco* to be the property of a wealthy family, makes total sense to the *formula* that we manage as a nation.

In this case, the people that I interviewed were not representing the wealthy Peruvian; they were state servants and in a hierarchical structure such as the Peruvian state, their voices and range of action are delimited by higher authority interests. Despite that, my investigation did raise curiosity among them and put the subject in the spotlight for the months to come. The existence of a Swedish exhibition in the making was nothing to be worried about, but the fact that a video piece with their voices would be produced for such a show, sparked a great deal of suspicion. They wanted to know more about me and my work: why would I be interested in a robbery that does not directly involve the material that will be on display in Gothenburg?

My main interest then was to find ways to use their suspicion to strengthen the strategical communication I envisioned with this opportunity. In September 2017, during my 25% Ph.D. seminar at the Museum of Arts of Lima – MALI, Nina Möntmann asked me if diplomacy was important in my work. Now that I look back on such a journey, it is obvious to me that I have mirrored diplomatic strategies as I was learning them. The work of Oscar Lara at the *A Stolen World* exhibition would not resonate with a Peruvian ambassador in Sweden, but the work of Oscar Lara that includes the voice of director of heritage defence, Blanca Alva, or the voice of former Minister of Culture, Luis Lumbreras, was a different thing. And corresponding to that, that was the mission that my contribution to the *A Stolen World* exhibition had. The nature of my investigation needed to be communicated to the diplomatic body of Peru in Sweden. I had no specific impact in mind but I was extremely curious to find out if diplomats would react to such a bizarre setting, or if indeed a Scandinavian Museum can exhibit looted heritage and the Peruvian parties will just applaud.

In September 2008, the *A Stolen World* exhibition was inaugurated. The exhibition was not about the ethnography of the objects but instead focused on the situations that they activated²¹. Situations that motivated the fact that they were there, at that moment, in that place. And considering that these situations are nothing more than a consequence of unethical actions, aiming to consolidate a collection in search of museological prestige, the show was not really about what could we learn of the Paracas civilization from the materiality on display - to my eyes, the show was about coming up clean from a blurry past.

¹⁹ Robberies by Request, Film: <https://vimeo.com/8865328>

²⁰ Pre-Columbian ceramic object.

²¹ Jonsson, Stefan. "The Things We Share: The History of the Paracas Textiles in Gothenburg 1933-2010" (Original title: Tingen vi delar: Historien om Paracastextilierna i Göteborg 1933-2010) Gothenburg. 2010

Moment 2: Diplomacy and a gentlemen's agreement

A gentlemen's agreement

But how did all this arrive in Sweden, then?

In December 1931, a Swedish consul shipped out two boxes containing about fifty *huacos*, ten work baskets, and about 20 textile fragments. These boxes left Lima for Gothenburg at a moment that happened to be just after Peru declared that all archaeological objects needed to be formally documented and protected. From 1931 to 1935, the Swedish consul Sven Karell sent Paracas objects from Lima to Gothenburg on at least three occasions. The shipments of these objects were made with very strategic negotiations among the consul and directors of the Gothenburg Museum. Textiles were packed inside suitcases and sent as personal belongings using diplomatic immunity and even coordinating custom clearings at their destination²².

I was extremely fascinated by the way that diplomatic access was used by the Swedish consul in the thirties for smuggling heritage into Sweden. It was incredible to read the several letters that Sven Karell exchanged with directors of the Gothenburg Museum. The language used in those letters denotes such a careless attitude, that it is unavoidable not to think of these diplomats as characters fully convinced of the power of their immunity. With the level of complicity that the communications reveal, today we could be easily referring to them as high-class traffickers, or perhaps they would've been *baptised* with one of the many original nicknames that the Peruvian Police Department uses for their investigations: *Los Cuellos*

²² Letter from Sven Karell to Walter Kaudern, Lima March 24, 1933

Blancos (The White Collars), *Los Dinámicos del Centro* (The Dynamic Ones from the Centre), among others.²³

“The question is now how all this should come to you without risk, as it is of course unthinkable to obtain export authorization. I have completely unofficially consulted with our minister, but of course he sees it preferable not to be bothered in such a matter. I'm going to do my best to find someone (...).”

Letter from Sven Karell to Erland Nordenskiöld, Lima 24 August 1931

“If any or some of the sent objects would be exhibited and it would be customary to provide them with information about the donor, I may, for practical reasons, request that an exception be made for the time being for me.”

Letter from Sven Karell to Erland Nordenskiöld, Lima 15 December 1931

“Our collection of Peruvian scales is now beginning to become really considerable.”

Letter from Erland Nordenskiöld to Sven Karell, Gothenburg 4 June 1932

“It could be that the Peruvian consul in Gothenburg, Carlos Anderson, by reading the newspapers, notices the matter and maybe through the virtue of his office makes inquiries and that could result in a most delicate situation for me.”

Letter from Sven Karell to Walter Kaudern, Lima 23 January 1933

“He has commissioned me to inform you of their arrival and ask you if possible to arrange with the customs authorities in advance so that these suitcases pass as unnoticed as possible through customs to immediately be taken from there to premises deemed appropriate by you. He further requests that this matter be treated with the utmost discretion.”

Letter from Sven Karell to Walter Kaudern, Lima March 24, 1933

I must admit that I was not so familiar with diplomacy and the smuggling of heritage, but I was very provoked by such an idea. It felt all too pretentious but at the same time, I thought that most of them were just pushing the boundaries of their diplomatic duties and access. I remember that the very idea of pushing boundaries or instrumentalising our privilege and access resonated a lot during the beginning of my research. What was my position and what is my access and privilege as a visual artist, and perhaps more relevant, how can I use my context in order to maximise the effects of this privilege?

In Stefan Johnson's paper, *The Things We Share*, his analysis points towards suggesting different understandings of the value of these objects. He made the parallel between what value meant for Sven Karell, Erland Nordenskiöld, and Walter Kaudern in the thirties, when the objects needed to help with the mission of making the Gothenburg Museum a renowned

²³ ”The **Cuellos Blancos scandal** (English: White Collars scandal) or the **CNM Audios scandal** is a judicial scandal caused by the revelation of audio recordings of judges and their staff, with the most notable individual being Associative Justice.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuellos_Blancos_scandal

institution. For this the objects needed to be exoticized in order to be fully instrumentalised. Later in his paper, he refers to the potential scenario that these objects would be sent back to Peru and in that case, Peru would use them for the construction of a cultural identity²⁴. In both cases, the objects need to be celebrated in an amazing manner to be fully instrumentalised. They needed to be rare and exotic for Karell and his friends, or it needs to be a collection that might suddenly become popular for the Peruvian government - popularity based on a major exhibition at a Swedish museum, or perhaps even by having a Peruvian artist asking questions everywhere.

We could easily suggest that the way the Swedish diplomats were operating is not much different from the social practice artistic approach, to some extent. The difference perhaps was that they were way smarter. They would put their diplomatic role on the line, and they were maximising their context in order to achieve their aims.

“It is interesting to note that an agreement made in the 1930s was still regarded as valid in the last part of the 1990s. The legacy of the administration of the collections between curators included the acceptance of the promise made when the collection arrived. I remember that when the question about the donation came up in the former Ethnographical Museum, the answer from the direction team was “the museum had and has a gentlemen's agreement”. More interesting is that outside Sweden, for example in Lima and Buenos Aires, the name of the donor was well known.”

Adriana Muñoz, *From Curiosa to World Culture*, Gothenburg, 2011

The note 83/2009

“Thus, by instruction of the Peruvian Government, this Embassy kindly requests to the Honourable Kingdom of Sweden the exercise of its good offices before the responsible Swedish authorities— especially [*sic*] those of the City of Gothenburg—, in order to return to Peru, all the textiles and other artifacts associated with the Paracas civilization, which are currently kept by the city of Gothenburg and the World Culture Museum.”

Note 83/2009 from Gilbert Chauny, former Peruvian ambassador in Sweden, to the City of Gothenburg, 2009

After the opening of the *A Stolen World* exhibition, the ambassador of Peru, Gilbert Chauny, suggested to his ministry of international affairs the reclaiming of the collection. This sparked the Peruvian government to instruct its embassy in Sweden to communicate such intentions. In the verbal note 83/2009, the ambassador made the initial claim of the material, and this unexpected gesture shook the offices of the Museum of World Culture. Gilbert Chauny was

²⁴ Jonsson, Stefan. “The Things We Share: The History of the Paracas Textiles in Gothenburg 1933-2010” (Original title: Tingen vi delar: Historien om Paracastextilierna i Göteborg 1933-2010) Gothenburg. 2010

the incarnation of Karell's fears²⁵. More than eighty years needed to pass for the conditions to align for a Peruvian diplomat to have enough motifs for such a claim. Carlos Anderson didn't seem to be bothered about it in the forties, and the Peruvian personalities of the heritage scene were completely surrendered to the circumstances that surrounded the collection in 2008. But Gilbert Chauny reacted to this, and the whole setting was very bizarre to him as well. So bizarre, that the grounds of his claim only circled around the exhibition, a sort of: "So, you looted from me, smuggled the textiles and then you make an exhibition proving how you did it?"

It was a way too big of a provocation and the fact that this was of the knowledge of Blanca Alva, director of heritage defence of Peru, and Luis Lumbreras, former minister of culture and director of the national museum, didn't sit easy with him.

The chain of events that this claim motivated started with the debate that the city of Gothenburg organised at the Museum of World Culture on 26th January, 2010. This debate gathered ambassador Gilbert Chauny, critic for the newspaper Göteborgs Posten, Torgny Nordin, critic for the newspaper Dagens Nyheter, Stefan Jonsson, museologist, Staffan Lundén, Världskulturmuseet curator, Adriana Munoz, and Björn Sandmark, head of Göteborgs Stad culture department.

Torgny Nordin was not convinced that Karell and his friends' illegal actions would overshadow Gothenburg's role as guardian and caretaker of such material for so long. He advocated the fact that if Gothenburg had not hosted these pieces with such amazing care, they could have been completely lost. He believes that the question should not be about ownership but about responsibility:

"How can we take care of these pieces the best way? How can we show them properly and to whom should we show them in order to be well researched?"

Torgny Nordin, Debate at the Museum of World Culture, 26th January 2010, Gothenburg

Nordin considers that Gothenburg has done a good job in dealing with those questions and he doesn't think that there are enough reasons for moving the collection anywhere.

Stefan Jonsson had a more neutral view, describing his research and quoting several passages of the communications that were exchanged among the Swedish consul and the museum directors. He also questioned the *access to research* argument that Gothenburg seems to have and that Nordin shares. He mentions that in all the existing bibliography in regard to Paracas, there is not a single paper that has come out of researching the Gothenburg collection²⁶.

²⁵ The magnificent piece, which is stored in a special box" - is not displayed because there is a risk that "you from here [Peru] will claim to have it reimbursed or at least find out how it came into your possession" Letter from Sven Karell to Walter Kaudern, Lima 5 July 1938

²⁶ Culture Debate about Paracas textiles, 26th January 2010. <https://vimeo.com/9021954>

The argument of the ambassador was simple, and the ironic tone that he picked for his intervention was greatly appreciated by someone like me, who believes and understands the underground intentions of it. He expressed surprise at the fact that Nordin seemed to be convinced that if this material had not come to Sweden, it would have been lost, destroyed, or stolen. He questioned in a rhetoric tone:

"I wonder why Mr. Nordin believes that we cannot take as good care of these textiles in Peru if we have as equally experienced people to do so as Swedish experts?"

Gilbert Chauny, Debate at the Museum of World Culture, 26th January 2010, Gothenburg

He also questioned Mr. Nordin about an article he published in December 2009, where he suggests that this is a political strategy by former Peruvian president, Alan Garcia. The ambassador explained that it is not the case as he has tried to keep this matter confidential, but he also mentions that that is impossible at this point.

"This has nothing to do with Mr. Garcia. I am sure Mr. Garcia will be pleased when he learns about this. I personally have tried to maintain confidentiality, but now this is not possible anymore. Because, of course, as you have public opinion, we also have public opinion in Peru (smiles) and believe me, they get very angry, and that suits my last years in this career (laughs)."

"Mr. Karell knew exactly what he was doing. I invite all of you to read these letters that were exchanged between Mr. Karell and Mr. Nordenskiöld - I don't know how to pronounce the name, I never learned (laughs) - and with Mr. Kaudern who was the following director, where they are all perfectly aware of what they were doing, and that what they were doing was not legal. They were doing an illicit thing. [...] He is my colleague, but I am afraid he not only did a bad thing, but he exaggerated, let's put it that way, his privilege and the immunity of a foreign diplomat. To put it softly (laughs)."

Gilbert Chauny, Debate at the Museum of World Culture, 26th January 2010, Gothenburg

The way that the ambassador mastered that debate perfectly echoed my approach to the subject. I am sure the ambassador was not as amazed by the way the Swedish diplomat *exaggerated* his privilege and immunity as I was, but he did react to it, and he didn't bother about the paternalistic research access argument. Further, his reaction to the logistic/resources one had such a distance, that he made a clear insinuation that he wouldn't waste his time lowering the discussing at that level²⁷.

I was invited to be present in the debate and I was asked by the Peruvian embassy to prepare a question. It then felt as if I was part of a master plan. My search was not with the aim of

²⁷ Kulturdebatt om Paracastextilierna 20100126 <https://vimeo.com/9021954>

getting a repatriation process because I am still unsure if that is the solution to these unbalanced cultural realities in relation to looted ethnographic objects. But, there was an unbalanced reality that I had recently (2008) witnessed first-hand. The Museum of World Culture was awarded the prize for the best museum in Sweden in 2009²⁸, and this was based on this collection, while in the region of Ica, the security guards of the Paracas reserve could not follow me to the Cerro Colorado area because they didn't have budget for fuel for their only vehicle.

"I really enjoyed what you all just said, but I think that until now in the talk that we just heard, no one really mentioned the place from where these textiles come. During my research for the work I did for this museum, I had the chance to talk to the archaeologists that work in Ica, in Paracas, and there are not valuable textiles culturally feeding the area in that region [...] It has been said that these textiles are part of the culture of the world and supposed to be developing what culture is around the world, and it is good that Gothenburg can develop that, that you can show them and that people can research them here. But shouldn't this collection be improving the development of the place where they actually come from? [...] If you go to Ica, you will find that from the national budget, they only get 3500 SEK per month for the administration of more than 500 archaeological sites [...]"

Oscar Lara, Debate at the Museum of World Culture, 26th January 2010, Gothenburg

Several similar discussions took place in the local media, in Peru, and in Sweden, during the coming years (2010 – 2013) but despite all the noise, I was not convinced that this collection could be sent back. In my understanding of the administration of global culture, a Swedish museum would have many ways not to consent to a claim by a developing nation. This tracks back to the suspicious attitude, the Peruvian signature, I described before, but an obvious sign that I was not alone in this suspicion is the fact that since 2010 Gothenburg always expressed a positive attitude to the claim. Björn Sandman, the head of the culture department of the city, mentioned publicly that the difficult part was to define the logistic terms for the repatriation, but that the city was positive about sending back the collection. But apparently, to former Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, the fact that there were many positive messages but not actions, had too much Latin American flavour for a negotiation. That is why, supporting himself with Peruvian laws, on 22nd February 2012, he sued Sanne Houby-Nielsen, Director of the Museum of World Culture, and Rolf Linden President of the City Council of Gothenburg.

[...] CRIMINAL COMPLAINT for Crime Against Cultural Heritage, Crimes against Cultural Property - in its modality of "Destruction or Legal extraction of Cultural Assets, affecting the cultural wealth and the historical identity of the Peruvian people", foreseen and sanctioned in the Article 228 of the Penal Code, respectively [...]

I.- NAME OF THE DENOUNCED:

1. SANNE HOUBY-NIELSEN Director of the National Museum of the Gothenburg World Culture.

2. ROLF LINDEN President of the City Council of Gothenburg.

These people are those who without any title or foundation legal holds under domain assets that were extracted from Peru since 1931. [...]

Criminal Complaint against Sanne Houby-Nielsen and Rolf Linden, 22nd February 2012, Lima

I will start tracing the different streams I have portrayed this far into one strait, to help make the jump into the next *moment* of this text.

So, it was in this mix of me, as well as Alan Garcia, not imagining that the original textiles could leave Gothenburg, but with the restitution claim of this stolen heritage on the desk. Mixed with my newly acquired knowledge of diplomacy and smuggling, my fascination for how these diplomats were mastering the art of using their role and access. It is in this mix that the idea for the *Within Heritage Movement* project arises. I wanted to create a project where I could push my own boundaries for my role as an artist. I was asking myself: What does it mean that I am an artist with a foot in South America and another one in Europe? What is my weight and access and how could I use it for not only staging symbolic politics but instead to have more concrete effects?

²⁸ <https://svenskhistoria.se/varldskulturmuseet-arets-museum-2009/>

Moment 3: Within Heritage Movements

Let's Fake Heritage!

“Oscar, keep pushing with your work, who knows, we might make them build us a museum in Paracas...”

Gilbert Chauny de Porturas-Hoyle, former ambassador of Peru, 2010.

In 2013, four years after that initial claim by Gilbert Chauny, it looked as if the city of Gothenburg was, in fact, finding ways to bypass the Peruvian intentions. There were no official responses yet and Alan Garcia was no longer president of Peru. After all this compilation of events, it was to some extent disappointing to foresee that of course, nothing will happen. A museum in Sweden still radiates as a more suitable host for this heritage and the ongoing silence was asserting that.

A grave was looted, a diplomat got his hands on rare textiles, immunity was used for taking this to Europe, a big exhibition took place where the story was told, a restitution claim was issued by an offended government, a debate for performing democracy was arranged, a president sued Swedish authorities, and nothing will happen. It was way too much for me to accept and I felt a great deal of frustration.

I don't remember the exact words I shared with my wife after reading the criminal complaint of Alan Garcia against the Swedish politicians, but I am sure it was something along these lines:

“Ok, I cannot force further action about this collection. I cannot make these textiles travel the ocean again. Could we send them fakes back to Peru then?”

It was just like that, an initial impulse, an absurdist reaction that emerged effusively, motivated by the need to provide a response. Still feeling that the constraints of the field would mitigate any substantial effect, I decided to follow the ambassador's advice: *Keep pushing with your work...*

This initial absurdism quickly moved from being just an impulse, to an impulse with a very specific method or a specific challenge. What if a Peruvian artist could manage to make Swedish textile workers fake this Peruvian heritage? Could I do that? Could an artist use his access and privilege to take advantage of Swedish resources and turn textile practitioners into heritage fakers? Or something like that. And if this were to be possible, could I instrumentalise my role once more and re-enact a diplomatic smuggle of these pieces to Peru?

These questionings revealed themselves to me in such a manner that my motivation for the articulation of an art project conveying such an idea substantially increased.

The project got some initial support from the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, and it was slowly becoming a reality. I engaged in a search for Swedish professionals who might have previous experience in making ancient textile reproductions. I was hoping to engage them in the challenge at a very early stage, to deliver them the responsibilities of building the production team and so on.

Martin Ciszuk, a researcher for Borås textile school, was the name that was proposed to me as a person with experience in the field. He brought Lena Hammarlund on board, and we set up our first meeting at the museum's storerooms.

I was very well prepared to pitch the challenge as professionally as possible. I was trying to use the *artistic research* flirt in order to get them on board. To my surprise, Lena was well familiar with the collection and Martin was already very excited about the possibility of making a replica. There was no need to convince them to engage in the task but instead, I used my time to explain the way I pictured the given item should be forged.

The tri-dimensional textile 179 ≠ 'Manto Calendario' (Calendar Mantle)

During my research in 2008, for the production of the *Robberies by Request* exhibition, I learned from the Peruvian experts that the golden piece of the Gothenburg's Collection was the *Manto Calendario* (Calendar Mantle) as it is known in Peru. Or the textile 179 or the tri-dimensional textile as they know it in Gothenburg. It is a rather small textile that has been woven in a very sophisticated way which creates a tri-dimensional effect. According to Carmen Thays, head of the textile department at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú, this piece that to the Peruvian knowledge represents an agricultural calendar,

is considered among the best textile pieces in the world because of its complicated production technique, its design and its antiquity.²⁹

All these levels of analysis for the expansive understanding of the importance of this textile were unknown to me prior to that first meeting with Martin and Lena. The only thing I knew was that I wanted to *piratear* –to pirate, to fake– the textile 179. This should be accomplished only using Swedish resources, Swedish labour, Swedish knowledge, Swedish money, as well as Swedish materials (Alpacas).

I felt that it was a big comment from my side to design a sort of inverted post-colonial labour structure, having me, the South American artist, employing Swedish people to fake Peruvian heritage. It felt like a good response to the provocation feeling I got when investigating Sven Karell's *gentlemen's smuggling* style and to my frustration at the omnipotent Western museological machinery. At the same time, it sounded like a pertinent way of using my artistic access to challenge the boundaries of my working methodology. This was the obvious fracture I was looking for and the perfect ground context in which to locate my task. Of course, the question that Ruben Garcia addressed that afternoon walking Cerro Colorado resonated much louder, and my unmistakable answer was: Why would a researcher feel the need to go to the Paracas Bay if the material is already spread all over Europe and the United States?

Going back to my initial meeting with Martin and Lena, where I described the task in place for the project, the meeting turned very quickly into a lecture where Martin and Lena introduced me to the textile reproduction world. They taught me that what I had in mind was close to impossible. For such a mission, I would need to add at least a zero to my budget and it would be several years of work engagement involving many people. They explained to me that the 179 textile was done in such an exceptional way and with such a thin yarn that a *Western* textile practitioner cannot work more than a few hours a day because they have never been challenged by such circumstances. It would be an enormous load of stress for his/her body. Not to mention that this was not only about the weaving work nor the embroidery work, but it was also the finding of the alpaca fibres and then sorting out the spinning of the yarn. The thickness of the yarn was nothing that we can find today in commercial spinning mills. To someone who knew very little about textile making, all this information felt like a major setback. Despite all this, I knew I needed a working team and Martin brought Maiko Tanaka to the project, a master's student from Borås school. Quickly after that, several other practitioners joined the team. Sara Thorn, Ulrika Mars, Astri Sorbi, Jenny Larsson, and Maria Nordin, among others, shaped a group that started to move forward in researching the textiles we had in front of us.

I decided to contest the affirmation that the 179 textile was impossible to reproduce and for that Sara Thorn made some samples. She was the only person familiar with the *looping*³⁰ technique. Just a couple of centimetres of one of the edges of that piece took Sara about 40 hours of work, and her sample was done using a much thicker yarn, resulting in it being triple

²⁹ <https://www.nacion.com/ciencia/aplicaciones-cientificas/peru-exhibe-manto-preincaico-devuelto-por-suecia/YZTMLOFB2ZA2PKUP3YL3LIBSOY/story/>

³⁰ Martin, Lois. 1991. *The Paracas Textile* [Gallery brochure]. Brooklyn, NY: The Brooklyn Museum

the size of its original. It became clear to us that it was unthinkable to jump into that challenge. To start like that was a major disappointment but reflecting on the chain of events today I think that it was a positive disappointment. The project was no more an absurd impulse, the search for a new piece was exciting and more responsible. I already had a team of professionals who contributed to the decision based on their previous knowledge. I wanted to find a piece that could be of vast significance for the collection, and that would still demand a major challenge involving the conceivable expansion of knowledge in terms of Paracas textile making. That was why we moved into researching the biggest pieces of this collection.

The Textile 209 was, to our understanding, the obvious choice. It was huge and damaged in several parts as well, and with traces of several repairs that most likely were made in Peru, some of them, and some others in Sweden. It was a piece that was charged with a rich, intriguing narrative. It was a piece that could tell a story about looting, heritage relocation and restoration approaches.

That was the story, the project was designed based on the challenge of accomplishing a task and pushing the strategical use of the artist role. We succeeded in the task of replicating textiles 209 and 079. It took us almost four years of constant negotiations and mediation. The alpaca fibres came from two farms, one in Österlen and another one in Vallentuna; the yarn was spun in Alingsås and dyed in Stockholm; the base of the textile was woven in Gothenburg; the embroidery work was done in Stockholm and Gothenburg, and the ageing and final assembling of the pieces were done in Klipplan. There were over a dozen people engaged in the production of the project at its different stages and it was a constant internal ethical struggle of knowing that the hierarchical labour politics recreated in the project were designed and manipulated in such a strategic manner for the sake of my major aim. It was not the consolidation of a collection as when Sven Karell aligned the different actors involved at both ends, to guarantee that the pieces would arrive at their final destination, but it was to instrumentalise artistic access, privilege, and diplomacy in order to have a real effect in a specific political discourse.

The Loops of Life, by Elisabeth Hamfelt (extracts)

A Challenge....

I was greatly surprised to get a phone call from Oscar Lara in June 2017. [...] Two textiles had been produced: a mantle and an unfinished border, but the 179th had turned out too time-consuming.

Swedish alpacas had had their wool cut; the wool had been processed and woven. Yarn had been dyed and cloth embroidered. Now remained some fringes and borders of loop stitches on parts of the mantle. [...]

I tested to make fringes with a small warp, as an unattached item, but also sewn directly on the edge of a material. As a foundation for the work, I used a small, thick, and firm cushion covered in a chequered cloth. On this the threads were fastened with pins, as on a lace-pillow. (p4)

The fringe was created by twisting the yarn extra hard (using a finger, the yarn was pressed onto the cushion and turned in its twirl), then stretched and fastened with a pin, to the desired length. When 5 - 6 fringes were made, the pins were removed, and the fringes twisted together. Thus the work proceeded. The fringes were made in different colours in a recurring pattern. When the fringes were done, the loop stitches were sewn around their selvedge. On the fringes sewn directly on the material edge, the loop stitches covered the seam between fringe and material, on both front and back.

The loop stitches were patterned on the front with S shapes in different colours. It took me ca. 1 hour to make a 1 cm fringe-loop-edge. The desired amount was 3 m, distributed over different parts of the mantle. [...]

In an attempt to find a faster solution, I made a sample of a knitted strip. But, except for having a similar appearance as the loop stitches, it created other problems that did not compensate for the saved time.

Patience And Time...

I could only work for a maximum of 5 hours/day with the fringe and loop stitches. My back, shoulders, hands, and eyes could not manage more.

Sewing takes its time. It is impossible to sew fast, especially not when the stitches are small and the thread-thin. Trying to speed up only leads to ugly stitches and a tangled thread.

So, the work proceeded slowly, even if practice makes perfect and the speed increased a bit with time.

Fringes, in several colours, were sewn onto the edge of the fabric. For me, this was the best method as it gave full control over how dense the fringes got. And this way I did not have to make a special weft to weave the fringes over, and the process of sewing the fringe onto the fabric. It was all done in one process. (p6)

If the mantle was made by many persons, it might be a good idea to make the fringe/loop stitch border separately. This way, many different stages of the production could be made at the same time, and later put together. The loop stitches were sewn over the joint between the fringe and the fabric, on both front and back, with a S or Z pattern in different colours on the front. (p7)

Let's Smuggle Heritage!

Diplomatic Pouch 08/2017

“To support Oscar Lara to accomplish the reversed process of bringing back the textile pieces (reproductions) to Peru, I am as the Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Institute of Art, asking the Peruvian Embassy in Stockholm for a sponsorship regarding the shipment. We are very grateful if this collaboration can be achieved for the research project to reach its full ambition.”

Letter from Sara Arrhenius, Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Institute of Art, to José Beraún Aranibar, Ambassador of Peru in Sweden, 2017.

The weight of the project shifted and landed on my shoulders. If I recall my initial questions of:

What if a Peruvian artist could manage to make Swedish textile workers into heritage fakers? And if this could be possible, could I manage to re-enact a diplomatic smuggle? the importance of giving a positive answer to the second one became crucial.

I find many similarities between diplomatic relationships and the art field, as I have tried to portray in this text. They both rely on the construction of solid networks that in time become by so instrumental that they are to be preserved at all costs. Like a constant exercise of performing and responding as expected, so as not to break the order of things. I feel that my practice has ended up operating parallel to that. It has become a constant exercise of contesting the artist's role and in this exercise, I have learned the different uses of my own context. I knew how to manipulate the artistic white flag, my context, and even the colour of my skin perhaps for speaking loud about edgy things, but from there to getting an embassy to ship my replicas of Peruvian heritage produced by underpaid Swedish hands to Lima, that was a grey terrain.

On 11th April 2017, the Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm issued a request to the Peruvian ambassador on my behalf. On 15th May of the same year, the director of the Museum of Art of Lima – MALI sent a similar request. From April to August 2017, I attended almost all the events that the Peruvian embassy in Stockholm organised. At one of them, I met Marirene Muñiz, the cultural attaché for Peru in Sweden. I flagged my project as a collaboration with the Museum of World Culture and ongoing research for the Royal Institute of Art. From Peruvian to Peruvian, I knew the way that my image could be making sense to her, and the possible questions that could be coming up in her mind: Why would the Museum of World Culture collaborate with this guy? How could he have the support of the rector of the Royal Institute of Art of Stockholm? Why does the embassy invite him to all these events? Or something like that. I felt that I was coding my language, speaking clean Spanish but also just trying to get to know her as we might come from very similar contexts. Marirene was very interested in my project, but she could not really understand why the other institutions that

were supporting me could not pay for the transport of my pieces to Lima, and I was not sure if I could be totally honest with her at that moment.

It was during the celebration of the Peruvian national day that I saw Marirene Muñiz again and that I managed to speak shortly with the ambassador. My aim that afternoon was to make sure that the ambassador would remember my name and last name, which meant that I introduced myself as Oscar Lara to every single person I met at that event. During a conversation with the cultural attaché, the full extent of why it was important that the embassy send the replicas to Lima was revealed. To my surprise, she was fascinated by the conceptual side of it, and she understood then why she could not stop seeing my face at all those events. It was refreshing to finally have a diplomatic affiliate supporting my mission.

On 22nd August 2017, Mrs. Muñiz sent me a message:

Oscar,
It is done!
They agreed first at a cost, then I don't know how come, but I have been informed that we will cover everything.
You need to sort out who will pick up the package in Lima!
We are very busy with a lot of official visits but at least it is done!
You don't know how happy I am that the ambassador agreed to pay for everything.
That doesn't happen normally!

On 4th September 2017, the two replicas were making their way to Lima, Peru, in the diplomatic pouch 08/2017.

“The diplomatic pouch contains official communications and documents only”
Diplomatic pouch content description, from the Embassy of Peru in Sweden to the Ministry of International Affairs of Peru. 2017

Let's build a Swedish museum inside a Peruvian museum!

In 2013, Santiago Sierra sent a proposal for the most generous prize in South America, the Premio Faena³¹. Sierra didn't win the prize and unfortunately, it is not to my knowledge what his plan was for the fifty-thousand-dollar production budget. I am assuming he would have kept the other twenty-five thousand for himself. At the end of the day, it is a very tough field and not every day that an artist has the chance to compete for that kind of sum.

³¹ “Considered one of the most prestigious art prizes in the Americas, Faena Prize for the Arts will award the the winning proposal with a \$75,000 prize, and \$25,000 in unrestricted funds will be awarded directly to the artist. The remaining \$50,000 will be allocated towards the production of the exhibition at Faena Art Center Buenos Aires, with the possibility of being adapted for Faena Forum Miami Beach. In addition to the main prize, two special mentions of \$1,000 each will be awarded to the second and third most outstanding proposals.” <https://www.faena.com/journal/faena-prize-for-the-arts-open-call-2018>

In the book, *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, by Tracy C. Davis, there is a chapter written by Shannon Jackson named *What is the “social” in social practice?: comparing experiments in performance*.

Jackson starts with the following quote by Santiago Sierra:

“In my innermost heart, I am a Minimalist with a guilt complex.”

After following Sierra's work for the last decade, I am not sure if I agree with the way he describes himself. I have a hard time digesting the recreation of violence by the means of capital as the response to a guilt complex. I am sure he honestly believes that to expose the genitals of a group of Polish workers in a gallery to measure their penises is minimalistic, and it is a valid way to enhance the criticality of his work³². But despite the fact that I might not share a liking for his methods, I always admired his careless bravery. So, to get to know that Santiago Sierra was aiming for the Premios Faena brought up a great deal of confusion.

The Premio Faena is funded by the company of the same name, a company initiated by Alan Faena and Len Blavatnik, or Sir Leonard Valentinovich Blavatnik.³³ Sir Blavatnik is known for being an important figure in the Russian oil industry, which has contributed to making him the wealthiest person in the United Kingdom. I thought that this was common knowledge, and I cannot imagine that Sierra is not aware of where the money for this prize potentially comes from. As I said, I don't know what Sierra's plan for this prize was, and I am sure it must have been a very daring and confrontational proposal, most likely involving a mischievous capital component, and perhaps it would have had a big impact. But the potential scenario of Santiago Sierra getting a prize of seventy-five thousand dollars from the Premio Faena just intrigues me.

I like to believe that in most artistic processes, the initial interest for a specific subject is honest. I think that artists start engaging in researching certain topics because they are truly interested in them. I also believe that most artists are honest in initiating social exchanges and extremely genuine in designing their methods and strategies for activating the production of their art projects. Until this point, there is no harm done. The production process is in the making and collaborations might have been established. But then it comes to the distribution of the project, when the artist has already defined the materialisation of the process and it is planning its distribution. It is in this step where I consider most *cultural profiting* exercises are performed and the potential initial aims of the project get contradicted.

It is impossible to assert that the art field would have taken full advantage of the scenario of having artist Santiago Sierra producing an exhibition as the winner of the Premios Faena, but

³² <https://www.santiago-sierra.com/>

³³ “Since 2000, Alan Faena and his partner Len Blavatnik, a business leader with global interests in natural resources, media, entertainment, telecommunications, and real estate, have developed and transformed properties in both Buenos Aires and Miami Beach into some of the most valuable pieces of real estate in Latin America and the U.S.” <https://www.faena.com/about>

it is also impossible for me to articulate a path where such a circumstance could have resisted being so.

I might find that Sierra's distribution tactics have predictable resonance, but I do share the weight he gives to them. The public moment is what activates most of Sierra's *social experiments*; it is a sharp strategical design, an essential part of his projects.

Shifting the focus back to *Within Heritage Movements*, the first public moment corresponded to the overall logic of the project. All its chosen elements and circumstantial factors, such as the Nazca exhibition at the Museum of Arts of Lima – MALI, and the coming into effect of the second phase of the repatriation of the Paracas textile collection by the city of Gothenburg, were treated as important tools.

The MALI was in the middle of its biggest project, the Nazca exhibition, a gigantic production effort for the display of a diversified assembling of three hundred objects from the Nazca region – a geographical area that includes Paracas. The enormous expectancy that the Nazca exhibition created in the city drew an impeccable basis for the need for a public moment in the project.

Along with curator Sharon Lerner, I embarked upon the production of a strategic display that could respond to the Nazca project. In the light of suggesting the exaggerated fashion in matters of heritage display commanded by the Museum of World Culture during their *A Stolen World* experience, I decided to monumentally confront Nazca with this foreign approach. I proposed the construction of a section of the exhibition hall of the Museum of World Culture, to be squeezed into the MALI museum. Eight metres of the far end of *A Stolen World* were *cut* and squeezed inside the Peruvian museum, confronting the Nazca exhibition face-to-face. Fair reproductions of the vitrines, their lightning and psychedelic environment were replicated with paranoic perfection.

For a period of five weeks, the Museum of Arts of Lima – MALI, displayed publicly three hundred and two objects which were created by pre-Colombian subjects, or taking life in pre-Colombian times as a motif. Three hundred were of vast antiquity but two of them were newly *born*. They were presented with two rather opposite display languages, but two of them were mediated modestly enough to hide their young age.

It was a tough field, putting an experiment to the test. The target was the heritage scene and the encrypted heritage image of the Peruvian popular conscience. An unpredictable test that ignited substantial resistance from the local Cultural Heritage field, as was communicated by archaeologist Maribel Medina. A participant of the video piece of the project, the Peruvian archaeologist had travelled to Gothenburg in 2016 to coordinate the transportation conditions for an eventual repatriation of the textile collection.

“I am sorry to communicate that the head of my department doesn't agree with my participation in such a project anymore. I would appreciate if you could take away my contribution from the film. I am very sorry about this.”

“Apologies for asking, but did you manage to edit the video? Have you taken away my part? If so, I am greatly thankful.”

“I just saw that last version; I think it is ok.”

Maribel Medina Castro, Messages from the 6th – 9th September 2017, Lima

Moment 4: A Fourth Life?

“...Towards a fourth life in Peru?

The Peruvian government's reaction to the exhibition *A Stolen World* should have been easy to anticipate. Suddenly, exactly what Karell, Nordenskiöld and Kaudern feared happened. Peru Ambassador to Sweden demanded that the textiles be returned to Peru. The argument is just as strong as clear. "Have you yourself proved that you stole these textiles from Peru? Now give back what you stolen!"[...]

In other words, Peru's claim means not an opportunity for the textiles to return to their true home where they can regain their first and therefore authentic meaning. Peru's claim rather means that the Paracas collection is written into another system of meaning, the nationalist, rather similar to the ideology that once made it important for Karell, Nordenskiöld and Kaudern to smuggle the collection to Sweden and Gothenburg. At that time, the fabrics we saw were used to construct the identity and reputation of Gothenburg. Eighty years later, the Peruvian government wants to use them to construct a domestically viable cultural identity for Peru.

There is today a large literature on such cases, a handful of precedents as well guidelines developed by UNESCO, like the majority of the world's archaeologists and museums joined. There are also good examples of how all parties involved can solve cultural heritage conflicts of this kind so that they benefit everyone and - above all - so that the right to cultural heritage falls into the right hands. But whose hands are they? ...” (Tingen vi delar, Stefan Jonsson, 2010)

A Fourth Life? This is the title of this writing, as during my time looking back to reflect on my engagement with this heritage, I became convinced that the instrumentalization of this material had reached a cyclical point, existing in a realm of no return when it comes to cultural profit.

I aimed to conclude this writing by positioning my work in relation to Stefan Jonsson's inquiries and unfolding my project *Within Heritage Movements* across its four lives: its creation process in Sweden; the smuggling reenactment to Peru and the exhibition at the *Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI)*; its time resting at the *Museo Nacional de Antropología, Historia y Arqueología del Perú* under the caring hands of conservator-restorers managing some of the finest Paracas pieces in the world; and finally, its *Fourth Life* as the project returns to Sweden for the exhibition at *GIBCA* at the *Museum of World Culture*, eventually resting on the same shelves where the original pieces were once hosted.

Furthermore, I sought to weave from that positionality a thread of parallel narratives surrounding the current status of the original pieces, now back in Peru, where they are embroiled in a cultural-political dispute centred around a new national museum, *MUNA*, constructed in the deserts of Lima. Despite expert warnings regarding its unsuitable location—due to its proximity to underground water—this political decision carries significant implications. These textiles arriving from Gothenburg should be strategically utilized to validate the new institution's existence.

Although there is much to discuss along these lines, I sense that this would shift the focus of my engagement with this collection and the purpose of my artistic strategies. If there is such a thing as *A Fourth Life* for this material, grounding it in this writing may echo the bracketing that ethnographic museums use to defend Western approaches to collecting and archiving. But what if we understand *A Fourth Life* as an open-ended question mark? What if the concept of a potential fourth life can be universally applied as a means to explore a better future?

Incapable of further developing this initial plan in completing this paper, I decided once more to rely on artistic practice and on the collective methodological processes I have built over the years, with which I now feel comfortable. I needed to open this analysis by embracing a collaborative process, allowing others to exercise agency within my creative route. The written word felt final for exploring the introduction or interpretation of these ideas, but what if this extensive journey of my engagement with this heritage could navigate the fluid realm of two-dimensional cartoon illustrations? What if new creative perspectives could emerge, laden with representations that could bend into a universe of fictional narratives and historical facts?

Still reluctant to abandon a written, two-dimensional format for completing this piece, I considered a cartoon-graphic novel approach. I envisioned involving political Peruvian cartoonist Jesús Cossio, who could take ownership of a narrative line of his choice. By co-creating a script based on our discussions, we could provide him with full creative freedom over the illustrative content. This collaboration was my way of suggesting how the concept of *A Fourth Life?* could be embodied, proposing that the narrative can evolve and transform, always leaving an open door for multiple perspectives and interpretations.

The 31 cartoon pages co-created by Jesús Cossio and me aim to function as a meta-level framework, encapsulating the potential directions this research project might take. In this sense, the narrative does not conclude with a final line or a closing page; rather, it opens up a continuous dialogue that may extend for as long as I inhabit this world, or perhaps even as long as Jesús does. Much like the bodies that once rested within these textiles, now reduced to mere

representations of cultural artefacts, our project invites reflection on the complexities of cultural identity and ownership.

I am convinced that *Within Heritage Movements* is now as relevant to the Gothenburg context as it is to the Peruvian one, and I believe it will continue to generate new meanings and may be further instrumentalized for unforeseen aims with or without my mediation. But while I find myself unable to bring this writing to a definitive close, I am excited to share the next chapter of this journey with you.

I hope you enjoy our honest attempt: *A Fourth Life?* The Comic.

Thanks for following me this far.