

KUAUTLI ACHTLI (Eagle seeds).

Action with *pesos*, clay & *mole* tamales. 2015.

This project (done within a residency at Casa Wabi, in Oaxaca, Mexico) used objects active in Mexico's daily life, but with little awareness around what they represent. I related two things whose symbolic universes embrace those who inhabit the physical and symbolic borders of Mexico: corn and currency. They both connect nature and culture, geography and geopolitics.

1. Lets consider currency in symbolic terms: the metaphor involved within the idea of an engraved metal piece that goes from hand to hand, as opposed to money as an abstraction. Currency nowadays seems doomed to disappear in behalf of electronic money. This will disappear a certain awareness of culture, since historic facts are meaningful as long as they are chronicled in collective memory. Currency set highlights and characters from a particular place. Mexican currency, in all of its denominations, repeats the image of the founding myth of this culture: the meeting of the eagle on a cactus devouring a snake. This image, ubiquitous to the point of invisibility, brings a complex web of meanings that provides identity to Mexico.

2. For some Mesoamerican cultures (Mayan and Olmec, for example) the original man was created from clay and corn. Beyond the myth, corn remains the main component of Mexican diet. Its consumption, far away from sacred rituals, remains in all cultural strata. The tamal, from náhuatl dialect word *tamalli* (wrapped), is a typical stew whose origin extends to pre-Hispanic times. It is based on *nixtamal* (a paste done from grinded corn and lime water) and is a long time tradition. This multiform dish played a key role in religious celebrations related to life-death cycles and rites. Tamales also symbolize the human torso, the pot where they were prepared (known as *comitl*) served as a feminine womb and cooking represented pregnancy. Tamales, as a ritual food, carry a metaphor around the sacrificed body consumed by those attending the celebration. Ingestion of tamales on memorials and births is still rooted in Mexico.

3. The project developed as follows: a group of students from "Emiliano Zapata" high school of Rio Grande, Oaxaca, were invited to a talk where I spoke, along with local historian Genaro Guevara, about the origins of the national emblem, its history and meaning. The talk included the importance of corn in our culture, including its daily consumption and the culinary. Then, each student was asked to make two clay tamales containing a One peso Mexican coin. This meant to symbolically integrate the myth from a primal element such as clay, in correspondence to the sculptural that involves form and content (soil-water, fire-clay and metal-currency) in conceptual terms but also symbolic relations around life cycles, the idea of earth, seed and fruit, in a symbolic and cultural way. Tamales were then wrapped in cornhusk. The final part of the action was the intake of real *mole* tamales, ending a collective ritual that included a new understanding of this two daily life objects. One of the two tamales made by the students was returned to them, once cooked. Its destiny remains a mystery.