

# *Neotropical Migrants and Others*

Maria Ezcurra

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**N** *eatropical Migrants and Others* by Maria Ezcurra explores the cartographic dimension of mobility, craftsmanship and ecology from a hemispheric perspective.

The exhibition forms part of a research project that highlights the intermediation of art with ornithology and bird watching. The objective of this research was to systematize the Neotropical migratory birds that reproduce north of the Tropic of Cancer, specifically in the province of Quebec, and winter south of that latitude, where the artist comes from.

Through a series of ninety drawings made on recycled packaging materials, Ezcurra presents several of these Neotropical migratory birds in the exhibition. Some of them travel to Mexico, like the double-crested cormorant, or the black tern that flies to Central America, and even the swallow that travels from one end of the continent to the other to reach South America. Although there are existing lists of Quebec birds and Neotropical species, Ezcurra's research consisted of establishing a list that combined both categories. Together with specialists—so-called birders—such as Lance Laviolette of the Nova Scotia Bird Society and Jim Harris, and through extensive field observation work, she established a new identity for a total of 153 species of Neotropical migratory birds in Quebec.

Ezcurra's work also points to the contradictions of mobility in contemporary geopolitics and transit as a paradigm of globalization. The installation includes a vast collection of Latin American crafts that the artist has been collecting at flea markets and second-hand stores in the city of Montreal. Ceramics, textiles, glass, onyx, shell, wood, *amate* paper and feather art are some materials where all kinds of bird species are represented. Faced with the global economic crisis and the tightening of migratory controls, north-south circulation is being reconfigured. But within this logic, there exist alternative channels of memory, subjectivity and affection that store these objects for those who have come and gone between one end of the continent and the other.

At the same time, the collection questions the hierarchies between the artisanal and the artistic. Ezcurra presents different types of ornaments and souvenirs (plates, jugs, necklaces, maracas, ashtrays, boxes, dividers, etc.) that delineate the space of tradition and identity. The immigrants who identify the cultural codes of these objects share a bond that they recognize and through which they are recognized. But

some of these *objets trouvés* also make reference to kitsch as a system of a tourist imaginary and a market for the masses of the North who seek a form of escape and comfort in the South, often in spite of the ecological and labor exploitation it implies.

It was in the Technoparc wetlands where the artist found her main observation field. Currently, it is a prime location for environmentalists and amateurs to observe birds, including some declining species such as the green heron that have returned to the island of Montreal. This "Silicon Valley" of Quebec, centered on high technology and innovation, which has been the site for several years of environmentalist struggles to safeguard the habitat of these birds, is located near the Montreal-Trudeau International Airport. From there, you can also watch the planes that come and go, including those that arrive from the South loaded with stories of diasporas and tourism.

Finally, the exhibition explores the political dimension of the production, distribution and marketing of textiles and clothing. The footwear industry, with its centralized factories in Asia or Latin America that impose precarious working conditions, has conquered the Canadian market. Here, recycled, cut and transformed shoes are assembled to create an immersive and sensory environment with both personal and social implications. The installation is also a nod to the work of temporary agricultural and domestic workers from the South—many of them indigenous—who represent an added value to the Canadian economy, especially in these times of social distancing which have distorted migration patterns.

From a bird's eye view, this exhibition marks Ezcurra's need to reconnect with the materiality of her environment and the circularity of the space in which her artistic practice takes place.

Nuria Carton de Grammont