

ART AND THE CITY AS SPACES FOR RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a research project aimed at creating a space for citizen participation, enabling reflection and recognition of the past in a region long celebrated for its cultural and artistic heritage. It explores how social and historical phenomena were interpreted through artistic creation in collaboration with the community of San Martín (Meta, Colombia). The discussion begins with an examination of art's role in facilitating social interaction, followed by an overview of the activities conducted using a mixed methodology that combines action research and creative research. This is followed by an analysis of the artistic expressions produced by local artists. The article concludes with a consideration of the outcomes of the project, focusing on memory, history, and heritage as experienced through the creation of a collective artistic space.

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1. Introduction

The research project discussed in this article is entitled *Fostering Protective Environments through Artistic and Cultural Creation: Social Appropriation of Knowledge for Interpreting Social Phenomena Related to Memory and History in Meta*. Its aim was to support the community of San Martín de los Llanos, Colombia in reclaiming urban spaces as meaningful sites for the reconstruction of the town's historical and cultural memory. Located in the department of Meta, this region is historically recognised for its rich cultural and artistic traditions. The project focused on the need to recognise and reconstruct both the past and the present from a pluralistic and inclusive perspective, positioning urban spaces as foundational axes of memory. Specifically, it sought to create cultural spaces in which the lived experiences of the community could be made visible through artistic expression, thereby fostering dialogue around questions of history and culture.

San Martín de los Llanos is a Colombian town characterised by its heritage and ancestral legacy, where social dynamics from centuries past are revived. Since 1735, the town has held an annual cultural event with deep historical significance, known as *Las Cuadrillas de San Martín*. This event consists of a series of ten equestrian games that showcase the riders' skill. Four groups, each composed of twelve riders, take part: the Galanes (Spanish), the Moros (Arabs), the Guahíbos (indigenous peoples), and the Cachaceros (Afro-descendants). According to the artists, "The Cuadrillas are games that represent the confrontations between Indians, Spaniards, blacks, and Moors for the domination of the territory. In fact, the 'games or figures' that the horsemen perform allude to such confrontations" (Darío, leader of the Guahíbos group, 2023). These manifestations occur in locations of historical importance to the town, such as the *Parque Central*, where the rides commence; *La Concha Acústica*, home to some of the city's most significant artistic sculptures; *El Mirador*, the town's entrance; and the *Plaza de las Cuadrillas*, where the horsemen's games, the event's most important act, take place. All these sites are imbued with historical significance, forming integral parts of the town's collective memory.

Although the cultural event *Las Cuadrillas de San Martín* has endured over time and is an important part of the region's history, an earlier assessment revealed a significant lack of strategies to share and reflect on past experiences, particularly those connected to this event and the armed conflict. Residents specifically noted the absence of initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the historical events tied to the area and its physical landmarks. From this perspective, the city has been somewhat undervalued as a living repository of the past, its significance rooted in the meanings these traces hold and the historical memories they evoke.

This project sought to create a space for citizen participation, led by local artists, that would involve families from the region and support reflection on cultural heritage, memory, and history, thereby highlighting the importance of urban space. The research objective was defined as contributing to the interpretation of historical and social phenomena through artistic creation with the community of San Martín (Meta), promoting visibility and reflection on history, heritage, and territory from a pluralistic perspective. To achieve this, an art-based research approach was adopted, as this methodology prioritises direct and sensory ways of knowing, expressed through aesthetic experience and engagement with expressive materials (Ballesteros and Beltrán, 2018; Ingman, 2022).

To achieve the objective of this study, the methodology drew on elements of both action research and creative research, fostering a dialogue between critical reflection and artistic practice. This approach aimed to prioritise the interpretation of social and historical phenomena and to generate social and cultural contributions within the territories through the arts (García-Huidobro, 2020). This interplay between art and social interaction aligns with practices developed by artists working in social contexts, where the arts serve as a means to engage a group or community around a specific need or problem using participatory or collaborative methodologies (Rodrigo-Montero, 2015; Moreno, 2016). Similarly, this methodological approach contributed to shaping urban space as a meeting point for art, society, and history (Tunali, 2023). In this vein, the project structured its activities around the arts to encourage community collaboration, recognising that "a collaborative art project activates shared spaces where artistic techniques and methodologies intersect with individuals inspired by the opportunity to create new spaces of expression within their lives" (Sola, 2019, p. 262). In summary, this methodology functioned as a means to address socio-cultural issues and to develop strategies for implementing these practices across different contexts and communities, thereby expanding the social role of the arts (García-Huidobro and Freire-Smith, 2023).

The research was conducted in four phases. The first phase focused on observation, during which a needs assessment was carried out through surveys and informal conversations with the residents of San Martín. From the results, the artists who had long been involved in organising the cultural event *Las Cuadrillas* were identified. The second phase involved planning activities to support artistic and cultural creation; during this stage, local artists were invited to participate, with the aim of providing them a space for creating and showcasing their work. Additionally, key locations within the city were identified for the installation of the artworks. The third phase centred on the creation of the artworks themselves. Finally, the fourth phase created a space for socialisation and reflection on these cultural manifestations and their impact on the community.

Building on the above, the following pages seek to answer the question: In what ways do cultural manifestations and the appropriation of urban space contribute to the interpretation of social and historical phenomena in the region of San Martín (Meta)? To explore this question, the article first reflects on memory, history, and territory as expressed through artistic creation, and then presents the community-based activities undertaken in line with the proposed methodology. This is followed by an interpretation of the artworks created collaboratively with the community. The article concludes with an analysis of the actions undertaken with the population concerning memory, history, and heritage through the establishment of a collective artistic space.

Through this process, it became evident that the community of San Martín was able to create cultural manifestations aimed at reconstructing and interpreting its history, while also appropriating urban space as an agent of memory. Moreover, the city of San Martín emerged as an anthropological site of identity for the community, enabling residents to recognise and define themselves through it, as well as to uncover traces of the past and echoes of lived experience within its spaces.

2. Artistic Languages and Social Interaction as a Method

To address the guiding question of this article, it is necessary to consider the concepts of identity, memory, and their relationship with territory. According to Augé (1994), identity refers to the notion that urban space in the city is organised according to the order defined by each individual inhabiting it, shaped by their actions, restrictions, and prohibitions. This organisation of the city, in turn, shapes the social identity of its inhabitants and their appropriation of space. In this way, identity is directly connected to the occupation and historical use of urban spaces. Similarly, the occupation of a shared space fosters a collective identity, while each element retains its distinctiveness, yet remains connected to others through ties of coexistence (Jodelet, 2010). This relationship reveals a conception of memory that binds individuals both to the collective and to history.

According to Halbwachs (2004), memory centres on the reconstruction of events as identified within the social framework of the present, which is then projected onto a reimagined past. In this respect, memory is structured on the basis of both collective and individual memory. Collective memory reshapes the past and comprises the experiences that a group can transmit to an individual or to other groups, thereby enabling socialisation. In contrast, individual memory pertains to the personal realm, serving as a necessary condition for the recognition of memories and supported by other dynamics.

In this regard, Paul Ricoeur (2010) argues that two questions arise in the reconstruction of memory: first, what is remembered; and second, whose memory it is. However, these questions converge upon the place to which the memories refer. Thus, the construction of memory and history is not simply a matter of identifying who remembers, for there is a considerable distance between defining who remembers and what is remembered, a distance that invariably invokes a specific place.

Therefore, approaching the interpretation of history requires the implementation of a methodology capable of relating society to individuals, their history, and their territory. From this perspective, the study presented here structured its methodology around action research and creative research, as this combination facilitated the interpretation of social and artistic practices (Jokela, 2019; Kaplan, 2020) and promoted continuous collaboration between researchers and participants. This collaboration aimed to position the community as the protagonist of the process, alongside the urban space, which served as the site of citizen participation (Perdomo-Vanegas and López-Pineda, 2021).

Action research is defined as a process of self-reflexive enquiry conducted by those involved in social situations to improve the rationality and justice of: (a) their own social practices; (b) their

understanding of these practices; and (c) the situations and institutions in which these practices occur (Carr and Kemmis, 1988, p. 56).

Complementing this, the methodology also incorporated creative research, as a space for reflection and creation was established with the region's artists. Creative research is a methodology emerging from the arts, understood as a set of languages and practices that, beyond generating emotions and interpretations, functions as a cultural device that fosters new events both for creators and observers (Amador-Baquiro, 2023). Furthermore, arts research entails systematic reflection on practice and experience, producing accessible, reproducible, and transferable knowledge that can inform future research processes (Asprilla, 2020; Hannula et al. 2005). Specifically, this research process was based on a method of knowledge generation, analysis, reflection, and critique concerning artistic languages and their social context (Montoya, 2018, p. 62).

Consequently, this proposed methodology facilitated a process of knowledge production and fostered a dynamic of sensitivity and imagination emerging from the inclusive interpretations of the history and experiences of the region's inhabitants (Zakaria et al., 2019). This process involved spectators, artists, and other social agents in the area. In summary, grounded in action research, a practical and collaborative enquiry was developed to reflect on memory and history (Latorre, 2018, p. 24). Concurrently, drawing on creative research, artistic creation was initiated with historical references that enabled artists to establish connections between past and present, as well as to offer their own interpretations of historical events (Montoya, 2018, p. 28). Accordingly, the project's phases were implemented through this interplay between the interpretation of social phenomena and creation via artistic languages:

Observation and analysis of the social context. This phase involved mapping the needs and expectations of the region's artist population, including those from San Martín, Acacías, Granada, and Villavicencio. Data collection methods comprised conversational interviews and a semi-structured survey conducted with 50 artists, focusing on their needs related to heritage and tradition. This phase corresponded to the preparatory stage of the artistic work, during which artists identified the themes, resources, and ideas for their creations (Montoya, 2018, p. 72).

Planning. This phase aimed to engage the community in initiating the reconstruction of significant experiences through artistic creation. A call for artists from the region was issued, inviting proposals centred on three themes. Those proposals deemed to have the greatest social impact were selected for development.

Action and implementation. Together with the previous phase, this stage corresponded to the realisation of the artistic works (Montoya, 2018, p. 77). During this phase, artists received support in both the creation and installation of their works.

Socialisation and reflection. This final phase marked the completion of the creative process (Montoya, 2018, p. 81). A space was established for the socialisation of the artworks within the region, followed by an exhibition at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Bogotá (MAC). The purpose of this stage was to share the artists' experiences through the exhibition, thereby generating dialogue with the community. This gathering provided an opportunity for reflection on the interpretation of the artistic manifestations and their relationship to the socio-historical context and territory.

Based on the activities of the first stage, the group of participants involved in the study was defined, and work commenced with 50 artists who were heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, and origin. An analysis of their social and historical context was conducted with this group. Through the semi-structured survey and subsequent discussions, the needs of this artistic community were openly explored. The majority of the artists (42%) expressed a lack of support for cultural creation from governmental entities. Additionally, 20% emphasised the importance of investing resources in promoting tourism through art and strengthening urban space as a meeting point between the community and its history. 14% considered it necessary to invest in the maintenance of artworks installed in the streets and parks of the towns. 8% highlighted the need to decorate house façades with artistic murals. 6% proposed the creation of a cultural centre with greater regional impact. Finally, 4% stated that the construction of an art museum would be relevant to encourage community participation in the construction of its history. Across these perspectives, a clear interest emerged in recognising public and urban space as a key agent in the acknowledgement of heritage and memory.

The artists were also asked about the support they have received to promote artistic production at local, national, and international levels. The majority (56%) reported receiving no support, while 24% indicated support at the local level, 16% had received incentives from national organisations, and only 4% had obtained support from international entities. In this context, they expressed a sense of neglect regarding the region's heritage, with one artist stating, "We are one of the regions that contributes most to art in the country, but there is no support whatsoever. Everything is left to us alone, and we have one of the oldest events in the world in terms of cultural and historical heritage" (Edgar, artist from the group *Las Cuadrillas*, 2023).

Within the framework of the research, a call was issued to support artists from the region in the creation and dissemination of contemporary artworks that would illuminate the relationship between art, territory, history, and memory. The call aimed to encourage the interpretation of social phenomena and the expression of cultural imaginaries, facilitating a reading and understanding of the region's historical events. Artists were invited to submit creative proposals addressing one of three themes: "memory and identity", "history of violence in the region", and "body and resilience as expressions". The proposals were evaluated by the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Bogotá (MAC), the Centro de Cultura, Arte y Tradiciones de Bogotá (CCAT), and the Faculty of Education at the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO). In total, 41 proposals were received, of which 17 were selected. These selected artists were characterised according to age, gender, and place of residence.

In terms of age, the majority of the artists, 35% (6), were between 30 and 39 years old, with a notable proportion aged between 50 and 59 years, accounting for 23% (4). Only 6% (1) of the artists were over 60 years of age. These figures reflect the varying levels of experience among the artists. Regarding gender, 65% (11) of the beneficiary artists identified as male, 29% (5) as female, and 6% (1) as another gender. In terms of geographic origin, 59% (10) were from San Martín de los Llanos, 29% (5) from the departmental capital, Villavicencio, and 6% (1) each from Acacías and Granada. This characterisation, combined with ongoing dialogue with participants, facilitated an exploration of how historical memory has been consolidated in the region and its connection to cultural heritage legacies. It also helped identify the most relevant spaces for dialogue and collaboration between artists and the community (Ušić, 2024).

3. Analysing Artistic Manifestations as Historical Interpretations

The results of the study emerged from activities related to artistic creation and the socialisation of experiences. Of the 17 artworks resulting from the call (see Table 1), eight were sculptures or installations, five were created on canvas or wood, two were murals, one was a musical composition, and one was a circus performance. Seven works were framed within the theme of memory and identity, with artists celebrating aspects of the region's customs, notably the tradition of *Las Cuadrillas de San Martín*, as well as significant places, figures, and moments in history. Another seven works were inspired by the history of violence, clearly expressing the intention to recover parts of that memory which people often prefer to avoid discussing. The remaining three pieces alluded to the region's heritage through themes of the body and resilience. It is noteworthy that all the works engaged with urban space as a starting point for community gathering and dialogue. This underscores the importance of urban territory as a fundamental element within the fabric of history and society, contributing to the configuration of each artistic manifestation as a trace of the past. According to Halbwachs (2004), such traces must be reintegrated to facilitate understanding of present events and the construction of the future. All experiences of the past, whether revived or reconstructed, enable the creation of communal identities.

Table 1. Characteristics of artistic works

Title of the work	Technique	Subject
<i>Plumaje Guahíbo de las Cuadrillas de San Martín de los llanos (1)</i>	Sculpture	
<i>La impronta africana en las Cuadrillas de San Martín (2)</i>	Acrylic on canvas	
<i>Herencia (3)</i>	Mural	

Trilogía de tradición y progreso (4)	Sculpture	Memory and identity (Fig. 1 and 2)
Las garzas de mi llano (5)	Sculpture	
Danza de los centauros (6)	Sculpture	
Siembra (7)	Digital collage on ceramic mural	
Somos bosque (8)	Sculpture	
Desaparecido (9)	Lime, minerals, and cement on wood	
Memoria utópica (10)	Oil on canvas	
Barracudas sobre cóndores (11)	Sculpture	
Dumar Aljure (12)	Sculpture	History of violence in the region (Fig. 3, 4 and 5)
Lo que el agua se llevó (13)	Assemblage of oil on canvas	
Opuestos (14)	Acrylic painting on wood	
La historia del llano a través de sus trajes (15)	Miniature costumes	
Amor por lo nuestro: cultura, leyenda y tradición (16)	Circus act	Body and resilience as expressions (Fig. 6)
Los zamuros (17)	Professional recording	

Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

The first group of works, those themed around “memory and identity”, was developed in response to the idea that memory involves the act of preserving and recalling past events (Ricoeur, 2010, pp. 125–130). In this sense, the artworks created in the region offered artistic configurations of the past, each inspired by a specific historical reference. These pieces also engaged with cultural identity, as they highlighted the most relevant and autochthonous characteristics of the region. The artworks referenced the territory as a unique and expressive place, imbued with personality and significance, and prioritised the recognition of heritage as intrinsic to that territory (Cepeda, 2018).

In these works, heritage was configured as a foundational pillar for the construction and reflection on cultural identity. Accordingly, the artists chose to pay tribute to emblematic figures and places from the region. One such example is *Plumaje Guahíbo de las Cuadrillas de San Martín de los Llanos* (Fig. 1, 1), which symbolically highlights the traditional dress and weaponry of the Achagua people. The featured headdress is crafted from peacock feathers and adorned with bones, tusks, *pionía* seeds and other elements from daily life. It is a ceremonial object used by Indigenous groups to cover their heads. The sculpture is strategically located at a central site of communal activity and marks the point where the *Cuadrillas* cultural event begins. Historically, this area was an Indigenous settlement, with restricted access limited to native peoples. In this way, the work reactivates urban space as a site of memory connected to ancestral knowledge and territory.

The piece *La impronta africana en las Cuadrillas de San Martín* (Fig. 1, 2) foregrounds the importance of African heritage symbolised through the *Cuadrillas* masks. These masks are semiotic representations that “allude to a cosmogonic story, to the mythical-religious essence of a continent left behind” (Oswaldo, artist and author of the work, 2023).

Similarly, the mural *Herencia* (Fig. 1, 3) explores memory and identity by depicting three central figures: the *Cachacero*, representing the *Cuadrillas* tradition; the woman, as a key organiser and bearer of the cultural legacy; and childhood, as an inheritor seeking to ensure the region’s cultural continuity. This mural is located between two educational institutions on a site marked by violence during the armed conflict, where a terrorist attack claimed the lives of many children and young people. The artwork proposes that this space should not solely be remembered for its violent past, but also for the cultural life and traditions of its inhabitants.

Collectively, this group of works engages with historical memory by preserving the physical spaces where past events occurred. All three pieces are situated along the traditional route followed by the *Cuadrillas* horsemen, a route that remains in use during the contemporary event. These spaces

transcend their temporal context and remain emblematic markers of the values, beliefs, and ideas once defended there.

Figure 1. Artworks themed around “memory and identity”:

(1) *Plumaje Guahíbo de las Cuadrillas de San Martín de los Llanos* by Darío Manrique; (2) *La impronta africana en las Cuadrillas de San Martín* by Oswaldo Leal; (3) *Herencia* by the artistic collective Casa Camoa



Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

The same group of works also includes *Trilogía de la tradición y el progreso* (Fig. 2, 4), which alludes to territory and heritage. The horse, the bull, and the heron form an inseparable trio that represents both the tradition and the everyday life of the *llanero*. As the artist explains, “This sculpture is a contribution that highlights the importance of our space, both rural and urban, as well as the responsibility of the *llanero* to care for it, respect it, and protect it in these times of environmental crisis” (José, artist and author of the work, 2023). Similarly, *Las garzas de mi llano* (Fig. 2, 5) pays homage to nature and affirms its significance in the region. Herons have long accompanied the inhabitants of San Martín and are widely regarded as symbols of progress.

Danza de los centauros (Fig. 2, 6) commemorates the sacrifices made by the people of the plains during the War of Independence. The sculpture’s base symbolically evokes the Vargas Swamp, the historical site of this battle. As the artist states, “The sculpture is offered in service of memory and history, as a time capsule that preserves both historical events and the locations where they unfolded” (Diego, artist and author of the work, 2023).

Finally, the piece *Siembra* (Fig. 2, 7) is a tribute to elderly women, figures who symbolise the women of the plains, the act of sowing, and the fertility of the land. Her hands are marked with dark holes, evoking the scars of regional conflict, while a sequence of moons rises from her forehead, signifying traditional cycles of planting.

In these artistic expressions, collective memory becomes a framework through which territory and heritage are imbued with meaning. According to Halbwachs (2004), such memory reconstructs the past through place and through a consistent dialogue between current concerns and inherited ideas

Figure 2. Artistic works themed around “memory and identity” 2: (4) *Trilogía de la tradición y el progreso* by José A. Pinzón; (5) *Las garzas de mi llano* by Nubia Forero; (6) *Danza de los centauros* by Diego González; (7) *Siembra* by Katherin Ramos.



Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

These works exalted the importance of memory and identity in relation to both territory and people, given that “because of its materiality, stability and fixity, space is a device used to mark memory” (Trachana and Șerbănoiu, 2020, p. 604). The artists’ contributions enabled the construction of a form of collective memory in which the past was restructured through individual recollections and their spatial anchoring in the territory (Halbwachs, 2004, p. 26). This creative exercise fostered memory as an intersubjective construct, shaped by the participants’ freedom to engage in the active construction of their own memories. It also positioned memory as lived experience, generating meaning through the artists’ relationship with their environment and territory (Trachana and Șerbănoiu, 2020). In this sense, the artistic languages initiated a process of denotation, rooted in subjectivity and freedom of expression, which acquired a function of social interaction. Through the experiences of the community and the territory, these artistic expressions contributed to the recognition and affirmation of identity.

The second group of works was framed around the theme of the region’s “history of violence”. This theme was chosen because the population has been directly affected by the armed conflict, yet the community has had limited opportunities to share or represent their lived experiences (Perdomo and López, 2021). As a result, a space for artistic participation was created to make these experiences visible. The works *Somos bosque* and *Desaparecido* seek to honour the victims of the conflict, those who lost parts of their bodies or their lives at the hands of armed actors.

Specifically, *Somos bosque* (Fig. 3, 8) portrays figures of men and women who have suffered such losses in war. It was installed in a space established by the community itself: *El Bosque de la Memoria de*

San Martín (BOSMEVISAN), designed to commemorate the forgotten victims of the conflict. However, as the artist explains, “this space has been abandoned, since a large part of the population seeks to forget that part of the city’s history” (Esteban, author of the work, 2023). For this reason, the artist sought to reactivate the meaning and purpose of the site, using personal memory as a pathway to collective remembrance. Since the installation of the piece, the community has resumed gatherings at BOSMEVISAN to engage in dialogue about their experiences and memories.

Initially, there was resistance to recognising the space as a site of memory. This is consistent with the observation that the denial of the importance of memory is based on the idea that the city can become a place of liberation, creativity, and individuation (Jodelet, 2010). Nevertheless, the work helped to reframe the space as one where memory could be confronted, shared, and potentially transformed.

Similarly, the work *Desaparecido* (Fig. 3, 9) represents the victims of the armed conflict who were never found, those who, in silence, cry out not to be forgotten and for symbolic reparation. The piece evokes the absence and unresolved grief that continues to shape the memory of the region.

In contrast, *Memoria utópica* (Fig. 3, 10) reflects on the incursion of guerrilla groups, paramilitary forces and the national army into the region, during a period in which violence manifested under multiple names and affiliations. In this painting, the interplay of colours “symbolises the contrast between the illumination generated by art and heritage, and the darkness into which the region has been plunged by violence” (Lina, artist and author of the work, 2023). Through this contrast, the work gestures towards hope and resilience, while acknowledging the enduring shadow cast by conflict.

Figure 3. Works themed around “history of violence” 1: (8) *Somos bosque* by Esteban Machado; (9) *Desaparecido*, by Bladimir Machado; (10) *Memoria utópica*, by Lina Hernández



Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

Also included in this group is the work *Barracudas sobre cóndores* (Fig. 4, 11), inspired by *Victoria de tres cordilleras y dos océanos*, a painting by the Colombian artist Alejandro Obregón. This new work offers a reflection on the reality of violence in Colombia: a large barracuda looms menacingly over a defenceless and subdued condor, symbolising the persistent repression of the people by political elites and upper social classes. As the artist explains, “The one above and the one below. The leaders of the country, those who sponsor the war, and the people always subdued” (Wilmer, artist and author of the work, 2023).

In the same thematic line, the piece *Dumar Aljure* (Fig. 4, 12) pays tribute to one of the earliest guerrilla militants of the 1950s, a revolutionary of Lebanese origin. Although recognised as a pioneer of the movement, Aljure was ultimately betrayed by his own party and executed by the ruling government. This work reflects on the internal fractures and betrayals that have shaped the history of armed resistance in the region, highlighting the complexities of political violence and memory.

Figure 4. Artworks themed around “history of violence” 2: *Barracudas on Condors*, Wilmer Corredor (11), *Dumar Aljure*, Edgar Cardona (12).

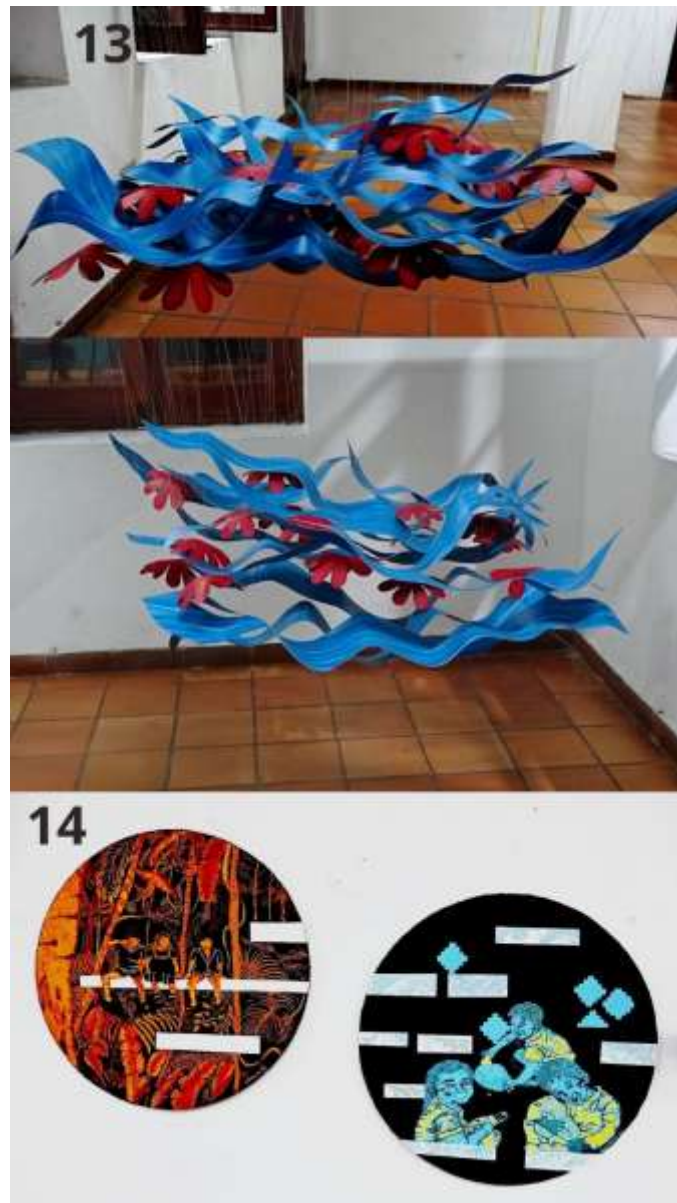


Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

Continuing with the second group, the work *Lo que el agua se llevó* (Fig. 5, 13) symbolises the bodies of victims of the conflict that floated down the river each morning in the region. In this regard, the artist states, “At that time, the rivers became a kind of mass grave; we children looked out every morning to see how many corpses were coming down the river” (Diana, artist and author of the work, 2023).

Conversely, the first sphere of the work *Opuestos* (Fig. 5, 14) represents the children who have been kidnapped and forced to participate in the armed conflict. They are seated on a white space symbolising the absence of the state in the face of this terrible scourge. The second sphere of the same work depicts three children playing the traditional game of *piquis* or *bolinchas* in their safe environment, within their community. This scene is interrupted by fragments of jungle, which represent the danger of the conflict to which thousands of children worldwide are exposed.

Figure 5. Artworks themed around “history of violence” 3: *Lo que el agua se llevó*, Diana Zoraida Hincapié (13), *Opuestos*, Johanna L. Guevara (14).



Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

In general, this group of works captures a plural and collective perspective of history, imbued with a metaphorical nuance that fosters a more symbolic vision of the history and memory of the armed conflict. The creation of these artistic expressions prompted reflection on the historical and collective memory of the region, grounded in dialogue, the visibility of key actors in the armed conflict, and the recognition of the territory across past, present, and potential future. To this extent, both the arts and the territory were consolidated as tools for remembrance, healing, and the construction of an autonomous historical narrative.

Finally, the works related to the “body and resilience” propose a relationship between the body and the territory to symbolise everyday activities, subsistence, and affectivity (Salduondo and Etchecoin, 2019, p. 35). These artistic manifestations convey experiences and knowledge derived from living in the territory, reflecting diverse places and characters typical of the plains. In this regard, the work *La historia del llano a través de sus trajes* (Fig. 6, 15) highlights the evolution of clothing styles in the plains and their associated festivities; within this manifestation, the artist emphasises the importance of gender in the plains’ tradition. Similarly, the work *Amor por lo nuestro: cultura, leyenda y tradición* (Fig. 6, 16) celebrates the body language, dances, and musical characteristic of the region, particularly through the mythical figure of “Juan Machete”, who, according to legend, was a man who made a pact with the devil, offering his wife and children in exchange for wealth, cattle, and land. According to the

artist, “This work is a journey through the Colombian plains, highlighting the biodiversity of the Macarena Mountain range and the importance of protecting our environment” (Mauricio, author of the work, 2023). Finally, the work *Los zamuros* (Fig. 6, 17) is a sound piece and dance performance whose narrative centres on violence and is interwoven with the folklore of the plains as a unifying theme, serving as a transversal element through which to explore the aesthetics of sound and corporeality.

Figure 6. Artworks themed around “body and resilience”: *La historia del llano a través de sus trajes*, Omar Baquero (15); *Amor por lo nuestro: cultura, leyenda y tradición*, Mauricio Serrato (16); *El vaquero y la bola de fuego*, *Los zamuros* (17).



Source: Authors elaboration, 2023.

These final three works reconstruct the body as a producer of memory and meaning in relation to space. The sensory dimension evoked by the artistic creations established a link between memory and space, which was crucial for the reconstruction of the past (Von Meiss, 2012). In this regard, the interaction between space, the body, and social practices enabled the construction of memory and informed the artists' interpretations of past events. More specifically, this interplay gave rise to a sensorial dimension in which embodied experiences served as a way to relive and reinterpret the past.

In summary, the artistic manifestations intertwined individual and collective memory, thereby imbuing space with historical significance. Likewise, the call resulted in a group of works that celebrated the cultural traditions of the region and its history, particularly relating to past experiences and the customs surrounding the event of *Las cuadrillas de San Martín*. These customs extend beyond mere

cultural expression, being internalised by participants in their daily lives and in relation to the physical environment.

Furthermore, within the framework of socialising these artistic and cultural manifestations, a series of meetings were organised to discuss the intentions behind the works and their connections to the past and emblematic sites of the region. These gatherings, rooted in community initiatives, took place in the parks, forests, and streets of the city. From these dialogues, it was possible to understand artistic processes as spaces for observation, conceptualisation, creation, critique, and engagement, thereby linking spectators through the interpellation of their subjectivities (Ghiso, 2010).

Consequently, particularity, subjectivity, and memory emerged as defining characteristics of history. Memory thus confers a criterion of personal identity to each individual and, simultaneously, a collective meaning.

Thus, these spaces for citizen participation contributed to the processes of interpreting social phenomena related to cultural heritage and history. They revealed an interest in addressing past events from a broader perspective, not limited solely to the armed conflict. In this regard, several inhabitants expressed disagreement, noting that most previous experiences related to memory had been confined to the armed conflict, thereby neglecting ancestral knowledge and history. Nevertheless, the participants themselves brought together those reluctant to discuss these issues. Those who took the initiative in sharing their experiences encouraged others to do the same.

These encounters acquired symbolic value for this research, as they became opportunities to connect the ancestral past with recent history, making the community's reflections on its past visible through awareness-raising, dialogue, recognition of the territory, and artistic creation. To this extent, urban spaces were configured as sites of collective participation where personal, collective, and historical memories converged. Consequently, the artistic configuration of past experiences enabled a deeper understanding of one's own and others' actions (Huerta, 2022). Similarly, the narratives created through these works represented facets of regional realities, such that the context of each participant consolidated a relationship between knowledge of the past and its metaphorical and symbolic expression. The discourses accompanying these works evidenced a clear relationship with history, memory, and the urban territory (Ušić, 2024).

In summary, the artistic creation process revealed a clear intention to remember the most significant figures, spaces, and events in the region, those with notable cultural and historical impact, alongside a persistent concern about forgetting or a fear of recalling the violent actions that occurred in the city. Concurrently, citizen participation was consolidated within urban spaces, where ongoing dialogue between artists and the community emphasised the importance of promoting strategies to make visible past events that have affected the region, including certain traditions and the attacks perpetrated by violent groups against the civilian population in specific locations.

To this extent, these initiatives opened up opportunities to reflect on memory, the region's past, the significance of urban space, and particular experiences related to the armed conflict. In other words, these spaces also became venues for dialogue, where empathy and the exchange of experiences fostered a sense of collectivity. Consequently, activities rooted in artistic practices and socially engaged spaces were understood as effective methodologies for reflection and memory work. They allowed all participants to express themselves freely, drawing on their individual capacities and particular experiences, and responding to both personal and collective memories through sensory engagement.

These experiences turned inward to become reflective, critical, and analytical, while simultaneously projecting outward with a commitment to social transformation (Acaso and Megías, 2019; De Pascual and Lanau, 2018).

4. Conclusions

Following the study, it can be affirmed that the appropriation of urban spaces and processes of artistic creation fostered reflection, dialogue, and the construction of both individual and collective memory. This conceptual approach to memory proved useful for the research, as it enabled recognition of the subjective and collective nature of the artistic experience and its relationship to physical space. Similarly, it highlighted that in developing processes of memorial reconstruction through art, the aim was not to ascertain an objective truth about a particular event, since the past may be understood through multiple perspectives.

To this extent, the research contributed to interpreting social phenomena through interaction with the community, linking the arts and the territory with memory. Ultimately, a dialogue of knowledge was achieved, revealing lived experiences and imagined social practices concerning the past (Lazarín et al., 2023). These dynamics are evident in the daily lives of the region's inhabitants, as the practices represented in the *cuadrillas* transcend the artistic act and permeate community customs, illustrating that the use of geographical spaces, the formation of friendship groups, and work relationships depend on the particular *cuadrilla* with which individuals identify.

Regarding the methodology, the interplay between the creative process and social interaction led to the creation of spaces for citizen participation, fostering reflection on the relationship between art and memory. This, in turn, gave rise to proposals for the creation of artistic works addressing memory, the armed conflict, and identity. The construction of these artistic and cultural manifestations took shape as acts of memory that contributed to the discovery of alternative forms of communicating experiences, diverse interpretations of reality, and intersubjective processes (Debord, 2005).

Such forms include the narratives accompanying visual creation, as discourse "makes the city a narrative that overlaps with the constructed, and sometimes subverts its function. The narrative results from the way in which the inhabitants live and construct the city, through their uses and their gaze" (De Certeau, 1990, p. 129).

In other words, the community engaged in generating new knowledge through their own initiatives, which included artistic works crafted with natural elements characteristic of the region, forests serving as meeting places for dialogue, guided walks through the most emblematic sites, and discussions centred on past artistic works that constitute a memory route.

In this regard, the implementation of the research did not proceed in a homogeneous manner, as it did not follow a specific order or hierarchy, nor did it entail a univocal relationship, but rather encompassed multiple possibilities of interaction between the social, the creative, and the investigative (Gannon and Naidoo, 2020). Consequently, the contributions of artists and the community had the capacity to renew interpretations of historical events and their societal impact (Ballesteros and Beltrán, 2018; Hernández, 2014).

Thus, the research was not confined to a single strategy but incorporated knowledge, experience, intuition, creativity, innovation, and other facets, which collectively served as means to facilitate the appropriation of knowledge within the population (Jokela, 2019). Accordingly, this study can be understood as a structured process aimed at connecting artistic creation with the social and historical context (Asprilla, 2020; Mesa, 2018; Morris, 2016).

Ultimately, the research enabled a deeper understanding of history and the armed conflict through artistic creation, consolidated within the urban space, and the construction of a collective memory in which participants recreated aspects of their individual histories and symbolised some of the region's most representative figures and events.

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