

SEEDS OF OUR ANCESTORS

Hugo Bernilla and Maria Luisa de Villa

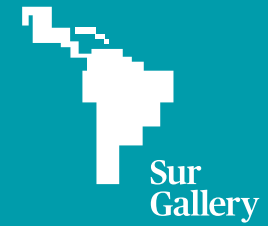
Curated by Tamara Toledo

October 1 – November 28, 2026

This exhibition is presented in partnership with
Hemispheric Encounters and Hispanic Canadian
Arts and Cultural Association



Sur
Gallery



Sur Gallery is Toronto's first gallery space dedicated to the implementation of art projects, which showcase and promote contemporary Latin American and Latinx art practices. Initiatives are aimed to critically engage, providing opportunities of national and international relevance in order to develop global networks of exchange. Sur Gallery is a project of Latin American Canadian Art Projects, LACAP.

We acknowledge

Sur Gallery is placed on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been caretaken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region. Today, the meeting place of Tkaronto is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are very grateful to have the opportunity as immigrants and settlers to this land to work and present here.

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Latin America as a construct fulfills a modernity project to homogenize a region full of contradictions and layered histories. It is composed of a multitude of cultural, ethnic, political, social, economic, histories, and experiences, with fewer commonalities than differences. It is also a region marked by colonialism and neocolonial tendencies, continuously under threat by imperialist interests. This imposed construct is marked by centuries of violence, with the intention of erasing Indigenous presence. How can we celebrate Latin American Heritage Month in October, far away from the region, without challenging, questioning, and shifting this paradigm?

The exhibition *Seeds of Our Ancestors* invites viewers to question, reflect, and understand the nuances behind the construction of heritage and identity and instead seeks to draw attention to what has been ignored, erased, and neglected. The artists Hugo Bernilla and Maria Luisa de Villa search for wisdom from the land they come from, honouring Andean and Mesoamerican ancestral knowledge from those territories. Their artistic explorations and processes reclaim ancestral food technology and agricultural knowledge as critical to understand their Peruvian and Mexican identity, linking embodied memory and their connection to land. Celebrating and honoring millennial knowledge as integral and living within their own identities and heritage, these artists develop an aesthetic language that recognizes that food is heavily tied to land, memory and life.

Restoring relationships and recognizing value in Indigenous knowledge from Abya Yala, these artists recover and highlight the interconnections, purposes, and relationships that thrive despite colonial and imperial attempts to deny and erase.

– Tamara Toledo

Hugo Bernilla
detail *An Ancient Staple Food*
2025.





HUGO BERNILLA

HUGO BERNILLA is a Peruvian-born Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist, educator and researcher. Born in Lambayeque, northern Peru, and raised in the capital, Lima, his artistic practice explores the interconnections between living things (seeds), objects (culture), and human beings (society). His research-creation practice is shaped by his personal history and intergenerational narratives that are connected to his homeland, his education in Peru, and his experience as an immigrant living in Canada. Bernilla holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art, Media and Design from OCAD University, Toronto; an MA in Art and Media Practice from the University of Westminster, London; a BFA in Painting from the National Autonomous University of Fine Arts of Peru, Lima; and a B.Ed. in Arts and Humanities Studies from San Ignacio de Loyola University, Lima. His work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions in Peru and internationally, including in Taiwan, Germany, Italy, Israel, Poland, England, Austria, and Canada.

The artworks presented for the exhibition *Seeds of our Ancestors* by Hugo Bernilla highlight and honour ancestral staple foods developed by Indigenous cultures of the Andean region. Corn (choclo), potatoes (chuño) and lima beans (pallares) are essential to Peruvian gastronomy. Today, these foods maintain their Indigenous names and people follow this millennial ancestral knowledge to harvest, prepare, and cook them. However, with the arrival of colonial settlers to the region, this knowledge has been appropriated and commodified, exporting these staple foods worldwide. Today, Peruvian cuisine is highly praised but its history and Indigenous knowledge seldomly acknowledged. Using found objects, non-traditional materials, drawing, assemblage, artifacts, and installation, Hugo Bernilla's research creation practice explores the idea that food generates identity and serves as a connection to roots and to land. Far away from his own, food has become a source of inspiration that not only triggers smell and flavours but also allows the artist to understand, question, and challenge what has been ignored and erased.

Hugo Bernilla
The Sound of a Childhood Memory
2026.





MARIA LUISA DE VILLA

Born and raised in Mexico City, MARIA LUISA DE VILLA has been living in Canada since 1961. With over 50 years in the arts, she is recognized for her lifelong contribution to Spanish speaking communities in Canada. She received her BFA from York University in 1986, an MFA from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 2000, and has studied with various artists including: Francisco Toledo, José Luis Cuevas, Gilberto Aceves Navarro, Ted Bieler, Tim Whiten, Carl Schaeffer, Norval Morrisseau, and David Blake. Multiple group and solo exhibitions in Canada and Mexico include: the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2022); La Mano Mágica Gallery, Oaxaca (2021); Art Gallery of Ontario (2012); Yukon Arts Centre (2009); Art Gallery of Sudbury (2009); Museo Diego Rivera (2004); Maison de la culture Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal (2003); Hart House Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, University of Toronto (2003 and 1998); and McMichael Museum of Canadian Art (1992); among many others. Recipient of countless grants and awards, Maria Luisa de Villa's artworks are part of various private and public collections mostly in Mexico and Canada.

The artist's creative practice explores relationships between nature and humans and how intricately connected they exist within the universe. Weaving culture, tradition, and diasporic identities to create poetic representations of life, the artist's work investigates both cultural and embodied memory while also understanding its connection to the ancestors. Guided by Indigenous teachings and wisdom, her work is informed by where she comes from and inspired by where she lives. Maria Luisa de Villa's research creation artistic practice examines the properties of minerals, seeds, and foods on unceded Indigenous lands in both Mexico and Canada.

Using natural pigments, paper, fibres, dyes, minerals, water, seeds, and plants, she draws from nature and cultural references to assemble artworks that preserve tradition and honours the environment. By printing corn leaves, drawing traditional garments, and creating ceremonial site-specific performances, Maria Luisa understands that heritage and identity are intricately connected to land and to ancestral knowledge.

Maria Luisa de Villa
detail *Huipil a flor de maíz y gran collar*
(*Huipil Dress with Flowering Corn and Grand Collar*)
from the series *Huipiles de papel*. 2014.





TAMARA TOLEDO

TAMARA TOLEDO, Ph.D. is a Toronto-based art historian, curator, writer, and artist. Her essays, reviews, and exhibition texts can be found in various publications including ARM Journal, C Magazine, Fuse, Canadian Art, Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture Journal of the University of California, and Concordia University Press. Toledo is co-founder of LACAP (Latin American Canadian Art Projects) and the multidisciplinary Allende Arts Festival (2003-2011). She conceived and developed the Latin American Speakers Series (2008-2025); ARCHIVO (a digital archive of Latin American, Latin-Caribbean, Latinx and Indigenous artists from the Latin American region, based in Canada); and Positionality: A Symposium on Latin American and Latinx art in Canada (2022). She has worked in collections, programming, and curatorial research roles at A Space Gallery, Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Toledo has presented at conferences in Canada, the United States, Colombia, and Mexico and is currently the Director/Curator of Sur Gallery, the only art space dedicated to contemporary Latin American and Latinx art in Canada.

SEEDS OF OUR ANCESTORS PROGRAMMING

Opening Reception

Thursday, October 1, 5-8pm

Artist Tour

with Hugo Bernilla and Maria Luisa de Villa
Saturday, November 14, 3-4pm

Curator Tour

Saturday, November 28, 3-4pm

*All events take place in person at Sur Gallery



VISIT SUR GALLERY

Hours

Thursday noon-6PM
Friday noon - 6PM
Saturday 11AM - 5PM

For alternate hours, you may book
an appointment by emailing
operations@surgallery.ca

Location

100-39 Queens Quay East, Toronto

For information contact

416-654-7787
operations@surgallery.ca

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Cover image

Maria Luisa de Villa,
still from performance/video
Capulla Atl: vida y memoria,
(*Cupulla Atl: life and memory*), 2022.
Photo by Mary Beth Wallace.



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