

Laurence Williams
Anahi M. Arciniega
Alive memories and happy places

Ode to memory

*We no longer belong to our country, and we can never belong to our host country.
But it does not matter because we create a new identity¹.*

- Anahi M. Arciniega

Alive memories and happy places evokes the memory of a place, an ambience, a person, a sound, or a movement; it summons comforting feelings. The work is composed exclusively of woven corn husks; lianas-like shapes are suspended from the ceiling and hover over a carpet on which little baskets and a cylindrical cushion are carefully placed. Sensorially immersive, this installation invites the viewers to revisit a memory by mimicking an occurrence where one is transported back to a place and time via a stranger's familiar scent. This experience, now presented in the form of an artwork, which is lived differently by the audience, keeps these memories alive.

Anahi M. Arciniega is a multidisciplinary artist of Mexican descent based in Montreal. She is currently completing a bachelor's in visual arts at Concordia University. Before immigrating with her mother and sister to Canada, they resided in Villahermosa, situated in Tabasco state. Arciniega's artistic practice draws from her migratory experience, which resulted in holding dual citizenship. Through investigating her identity, the artist realized a world of possibilities which left her grappling with definitions of homemaking. Like many immigrants, her experiences in assimilating to a new culture, leads to fears of having to mourn her country of origin, for which she feels immense pride. Looking at the effects of living within two cultures, she works towards

¹ Anahi M. Arciniega, déclaration de l'artiste, 17 juin 2020.

demonstrating that it is possible to embody two states of being and to belong to more than one place.

Arciniega chose to work with corn husks, a medium typically associated with Mexican culture and gastronomy. Bringing families together to co-create memories, it becomes a symbol of communal life. Although the work does not reference a specific time or location, this installation was created as a space to inspire gatherings and discussions. Arciniega's piece also mirrors the setting staged by author Ursula K. Le Guin in the opening lines of *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. While Le Guin brings the reader back to prehistoric times, Arciniega recalls the tropical nature of her homeland and a modest lifestyle. Appearing alive due to the ambient air drafts, the dried lianas are swinging above the installation. Le Guin's essay suggests that the first object ever invented by humankind was a bag. Carrying fruits and vegetables, it is said that humankind has enabled several Neanderthal groups to survive and adapt.² While the baskets on display in this work are empty, they are far from meaningless. Despite their immense fragility and friability, these can carry objects of any weight. Tightly woven, the recipients are robust, resilient, and trustworthy; they are reminiscent of human kinship. Metaphorically, the bag's concept carries objects in the same way that a book carries words, and humans carry cultural baggage. As a city, Montreal brings people to experiences they might not have known elsewhere. Arciniega admits not knowing if her career as an artist would have been the same if she had stayed in Mexico. Considering the current situation in the country, she would undoubtedly have become a different person. *Alive memories and happy places* is both a love letter to the cosmopolitan city that welcomed her and a tribute to the Mexican-ness that will always define her.

² Ursula K. Le Guin, « The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. » Dans *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, transcrit par Cody Jones (États-Unis: Grove Press, 1989) Academia.
[https://www.academia.edu/17313163/The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction Ursula K Le Guin](https://www.academia.edu/17313163/The_Carrier_Bag_Theory_of_Fiction_Ursula_K_Le_Guin)

Bibliographie

Le Guin, Ursula K. « The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. » Dans *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, transcrit par Cody Jones. États-Unis: Grove Press, 1989. Academia.

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