

Little México
Carlos Colín

June 21 - August 10, 2024
Writing by Danica Evering



RASPBERRY (resistencia/resistance)

Almost too tender. Ripened today, frozen tomorrow. Nearly every raspberry grown in BC is processed: individually quick frozen (IQF).¹³ Its heart—the torus—lost when the fruit is picked.

At the center of the room is a wire shelving unit with an assortment of groceries purchased from Latin Food and Products (91 James St N) and La Bodeguita (441 King St E). Across from the rack are postcards and pictures of the Pan Asia Market & Deli in Abbotsford BC, a regular supply stop for migrant workers. The store is just around the corner from The Reach Gallery Museum, where Colín showed an early iteration of this work. *Despensa (Pantry)* twists two threads of consumer culture: the grocers' (often stereotypical) offerings of the kinds of hot sauces and foods they think Mexicans might like, entwined with the nostalgia workers feel towards products. Three locations for this piece, moving over time across the country, are three pinch points tracing rising food prices. Each time, Colín purchased \$300 worth of food. Each time, the cupboard is more bare. (*Hard choices: tins of Milo, cans of Jumex returned to the grocery shelf*). Food sovereignty is an intricate web of accessibility, affordability, self-determination, and the safety of the people who produce it. *Little México* refracts this, resisting the systemic mistreatment of workers, the invisibility of their labour, but also well-meaning but harmful narratives rooted in suffering.

There are paths forward—do not lose heart.

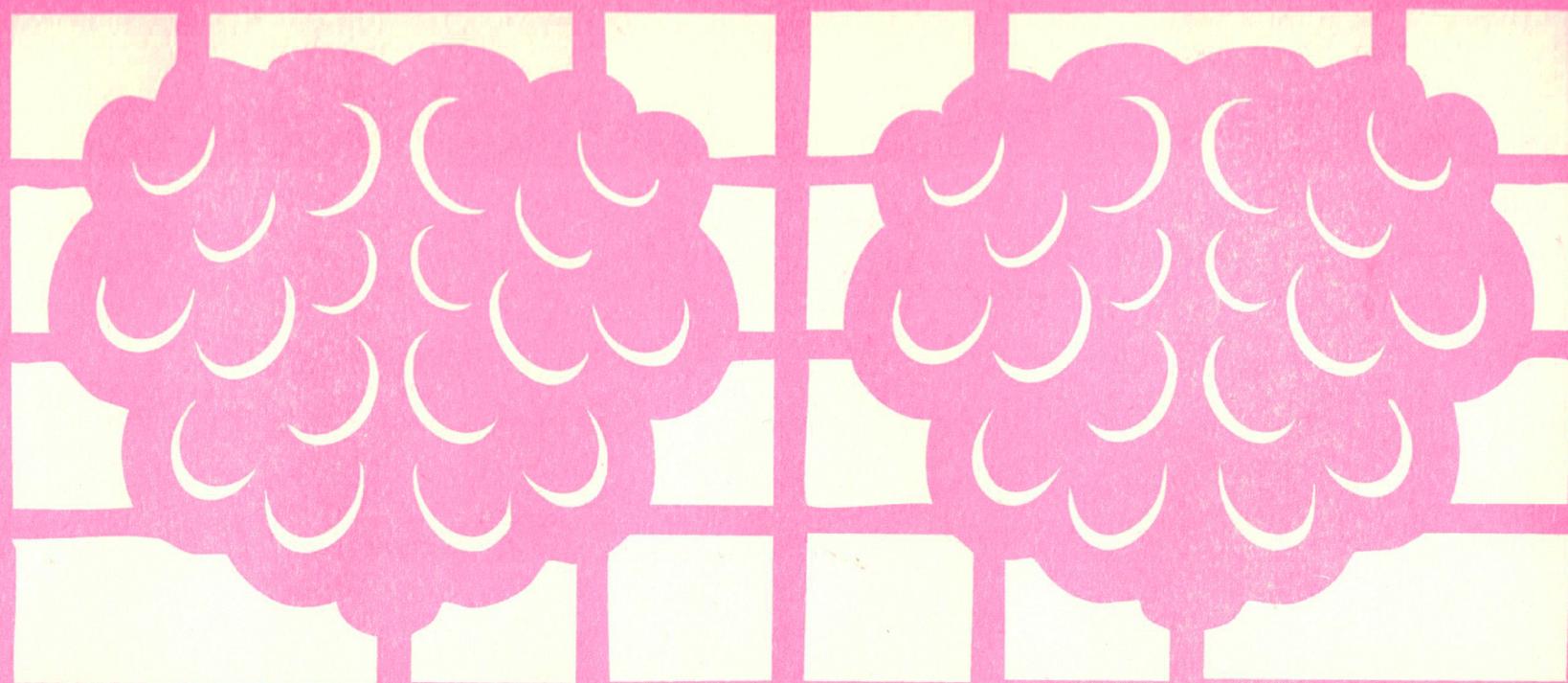
9. Dignidad Migrante. (n.d.). About Us ¿Who are we?

10. Ali Raza. (2022, August 21). Jamaican migrant workers in Ontario pen open letter likening conditions to "systematic slavery." CBC News.

11. Edward Dunsworth. (2019, April 11). Welcome to Canada: A Story from the First Year of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. Active History.

12. Hannah Black. (2016). The identity artist and the identity critic. *Artforum International*, 54(10), 338-340.

13. Janice Elmhirst, "Crop Profile for Raspberries in Canada," Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, January 2007.



RESISTENCIA



STRAWBERRY (tierra/land)

Chlorothalonil is used as a treatment for botrytis grey mould, a cause of fruit rot.

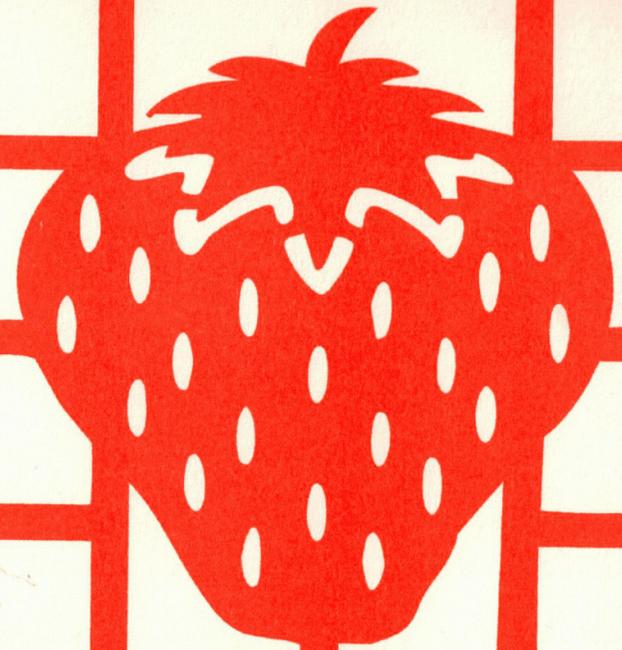
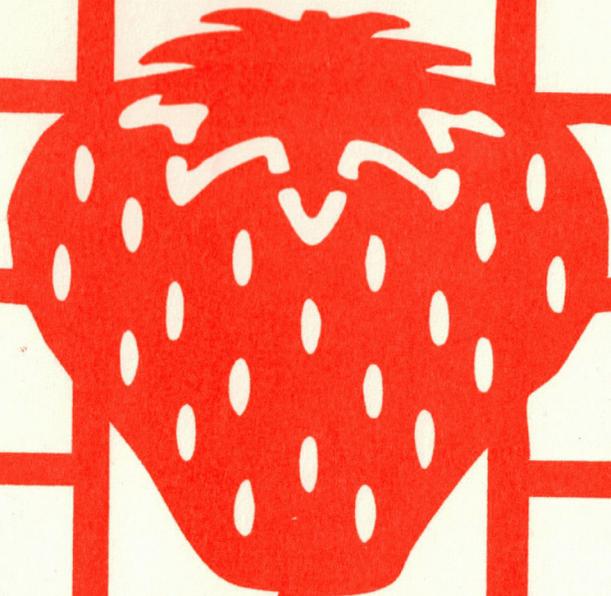
Glyphosate (roundup) targets grass and broadleaf⁶

Two pieces directly address the political organizing of migrant farmworkers. An Agriculture Migrant Workers' Rights Proclamation⁷ invites supporting signatures from gallery visitors. Nearby: a screenprint poster of Mexican revolutionary and farmer Emiliano Zapata⁸, TIERRA Y LIBERTAD-LAND AND FREEDOM-in all caps red across his face. In solidarity, workers and allies demand migrant worker's rights: that farm owners adhere to safe conditions and fair labour practices, that the Mexican Consulate of Vancouver stop blocklisting workers who address injustice, and that the Canadian government ensure both abide by our laws. This proclamation responds to seasonal agricultural workers' urgency to not be treated disposable.⁹

This is crucial work-in a recent open letter written to their labour minister, Jamaican migrant workers working in Ontario revealed their experience of inhumane conditions, including exposure to pesticides (*chlorothalonil, glyphosate*) without adequate protection.¹⁰ Since the very first year of the program workers have faced reprisal from employers and their own governments for naming injustice while Canadian authorities stand by.¹¹ If workers speak up about healthcare provision, housing conditions, or working on a holiday, they can be barred from coming back.

In his artist's talk, Colín talks about balance: politics and poetry, message and human connection. Artist and critic Hannah Black mused, "I suspect that effective radical struggles have to be far more antagonistic and communal than is possible within the realm of contemporary art."¹² Yet Colín's practice entirely sidesteps these traditional pitfalls. He owns up to his investment in the work-as someone from Mexico, from a working-class background-and also what he is not-from a family impacted by what he calls sporadic diaspora. As a volunteer with Dignidad Migrante Society, he is not extractive, contributing actively as well as artistically.

Our governments work for us. Will we stand with our neighbours who feed us?



TIERRA

BLACKBERRY - (dignidad/dignity)

Chester Thornless, widest in the world

Loch Ness, standard semi-erect thornless

Metolius, good shelf life

Obsidian, winter hardiness³

Overhead, papel picado⁴ flitter with images of blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries, *Festividades en días soleados* (Festivities on Sunny Days). Courtyard air makes bright flags *shusshhhhhh*.

Baroque, ornamented, visual exuberance that blooms homesickness for holidays and celebrations—nodding to interconnected relationships with family and friends - hardiness, standing straight, names passed down across generations. Where 12 hours per day reflects labour, these papel are a dancing balance. In her open letter *Suspending Damage*, Eve Tuck entreats communities engaging with research, "to recognize that our communities hold the power to begin shifting the discourse away from damage and toward desire and complexity."⁵ *Little México* manifests dignity by not centering damage, by celebrating festivity alongside.

4. Meaning "perforated paper" - these flags were created by Alejandro Martínez Arriaga, a member of a family in Puebla who have practiced the art form for over 3 generations.

5. Eve Tuck. (2009). *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3).

6. Janice Elmhirst. (2005). *Crop Profile for Strawberry in Canada*. *Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*.

7. Carlos Colín, "Proclamación (Proclamation)," *Little Mexico*.

8. Zapata inspired and lead Zapatismo, a social movement to return land to Indigenous peasant farmers. *Tierra y Libertad* is the title of a play by Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón.



DIGNIDAD

BLUEBERRY (justicia/justice)

Tiny berries, cheeks to the ground. Giant industry - \$663M each year. 59.1% of Canada's gross fruit export (dwarfing runner-up sweet cherries at 11.6%).¹

20 ball caps in a straight line: 12 hours per day. Sweat-stained, torn in places, destroyed by the sun, they register the labour of those who wore them in a field Monday-Saturday. (Some are red with the logo of the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS), given to incoming workers when they arrive in Canada.) Hats can only be used 2-3 months before they get too itchy and are switched out. They hang at the same height as if owned by the same person, marking years of 8-month trips, making the individual universal. Peter, Colín's friend and a temporary farm worker who also worked as a vendor at Carlos' local farmer's market, gave him these hats. This project grew out of Colín's desire not to show the types of images of workers familiar in documentaries - people suffering, exhausted. *To not impose on people to pose who just want their bed.*

Colín's collaborators, Dignidad Migrante Society, an organization built by temporary foreign workers in 2006 in the Okanagan Valley, were emphatic that their faces be included. This work is critical to the Canadian economy and the food on its table. The workers remain invisible. So a projector highlights them, cycling through photos by Luz Rosas of their daily lives: cooking, celebrating, doing laundry, resting on Sundays, seeing new and old friends. Close photos, the kind we take to document each other and ourselves. Both the insistence of organizers and active consent of the photographed workers resist a longstanding dynamic of photographer-as-invader that led Susan Sontag to frame photography as a chronically voyeuristic relation to

1. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, "Statistical Overview of the Canadian Fruit Industry, 2022," June 27, 2023.

2. Susan Sontag. (2005). On Photography (First electronic edition). Rosetta Books (originally Farrar, Straus & Giroux), 16.

3. Food, M. of A. and. (2024, March 8). Blackberries—Province of British Columbia. British Columbia; Province of British Columbia. Retrieved July 13, 2024.



Writing: Danica Evering
Design: Sanaa Humayun & Carmella Dolmer
ISBN: 978-1-926454-31-3



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC.

This publication was read and adjusted with Steacy Easton, Brigitte Evering, Sanaa Humayun. Names and facts confirmed by Carlos Colín.

The images in this publication are scans of the papel picado hung in the gallery during the exhibition run. For more information, exhibition documentation, and extended biographical notes on the artist, please visit the.inc.ca/exhibitions

Writing responds to Carlos Colín's exhibition, Little México at the Hamilton Artists' Inc. The exhibition engages Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), created in 1966 between Canada and Jamaica, which expanded to Mexico in 1974. Carlos Colín (Mexico, 1980) is a visual artist and pedagogue, whose artistic and theoretical research topic explores and connects the core cultural, socio-political, and artistic manifestations through baroque's rhetorical and narrative systems as a colonial legacy in contemporary socio-political events in Latin America and its migration. Iterations of this exhibition have been held at The Reach Gallery Museum (Abbotsford, BC), the New Gallery (Calgary, AB), and now at the Hamilton Artists' Inc. (June 21-August 10, 2024).



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