



Ernesto Cabral de Luna, La Piñata y La Locura II, 2024. Billboard at 180 Shaw Street, Toronto. 8 x 8 feet square.

Piñatas and The Permanence of Memory **Ernesto Cabral de Luna**

Essay by Kay Rangel

It all begins with a celebration. Uncle Pelon disappears for an instant while children run, scream, and play. The adults are drinking, smoking, and discussing the country's current political involutions. Pelon comes back with a big and colourful piñata in hand. He is now standing on a high surface while his brother, Luis, holds the other end of the jute from the window on the second floor at abuela's house. The adults stop talking and the children scream and run to get in line. They're pushing each other, and baby Maru starts crying. Yet it all stops once the startling dancing piñata is

in the air. Adults, children, and even stray dogs know that this is one of the most anticipated activities of the day—and so they sing:

¡Dale!, ¡Dale!, ¡Dale!

No pierdas el tino

Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead / Do not lose your aim. Marta, the youngest, hits it first. Then Magdalena, then Ime, then Pepe Chuy, and after many, Rafis, the oldest and biggest of them all.

Porque si lo pierdes

Pierdes el camino

Because if you lose it/You'll miss your way. The kids are eager to see it fall but each wishes that they will be the one who gets to destroy it in hopes of getting the most candy.

¡Dale!, ¡Dale!, ¡Dale!

No pierdas el tino

Mide la distancia, que hay en el camino

No quiero oro, ni quiero plata

Yo lo que quiero es romper la piñata.

Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead / Do not lose your aim / Size up the distance that remains on the road / I don't want gold, nor do I want silver / I just want to break the piñata.

The piñata breaks.

Peanuts, hard candy, oranges, sugar canes, jícamas, tejocotes, and sharp pieces of the broken clay pot fall from the sky as the kids hurry to grab as many treats as their little hands can carry. The piñata has now ceased to exist.

The only purpose of a piñata is to be destroyed. This cultural artifact is meant to be as striking, eye-catching, and brightly coloured as the piñatero can make it, in anticipation that the most curious kids will pick it out of the many on offer at el mercado. Its awaited destiny is to shatter into pieces. Yet, here is a hazy red piñata that became permanent despite having been broken several years ago.

Ernesto Cabral de Luna is a Mexican lens-based artist working in Toronto. He uses archival imagery to create still images that alter one's perception through manipulation—providing new ways to experience recognizable imagery in an unconventional manner, outside of their intended purpose. In *La Piñata y La Locura II* (2024), the artist took an object whose existence typically remains short and captured an image that made it permanent. Cabral de Luna plays with memories and found imagery from family archives. He challenges materials, suspending not only memory, but also our common understandings of objects, as he also revokes the purpose and intention of a piñata. Traditionally made out of round clay pots, piñatas are easily breakable in nature, yet Cabral de Luna has transferred the memory onto corrugated metal—a stiff, hard, and permanent material.

And as piñatas break, so too does time. Looking at this piece, I think of memory as composed of permanent fractions of significant events, which linger on. The piñata stands as a vibrant symbol of celebration, embodying the essence of familial bonds and communality. In an interview over beer and smokes, Cabral de Luna spoke about his most recent visit to Cholula, Puebla, and mentioned listening to kids screaming with laughter during las fiestas. Before moving to Canada at the early age of ten, the artist recalls the rowdy parties he got to experience when he was younger—the big cakes, enormous party rooms, the entertainers, and games such as las sillas musicales. The artist is fond of his own memories and his mom's stories of growing up in Mexico. Such stories inspired him to gather fragments of a collective memory and build his own recollections from an immovable past. Su tía Ime, adorned in a brown skirt, y su abuela, also named Ime, in the green dress, are in the picture. When a relative's identity is hard to recognize (for example, when someone has been captured in the photograph from behind or perhaps only the bottom part of their body is shown) the artist speculates and creates his own narrative based on what is visible in the picture. Cabral de Luna's speculative recollections suggest that the man holding the jute string, suspending the piñata, could be either his great-uncle or his grandfather, Luis. Despite these uncertainties, the artist recognizes his family within the frame, encapsulating a profound celebration of familial bonds, communal spirit, festivity, and the essence of memory.

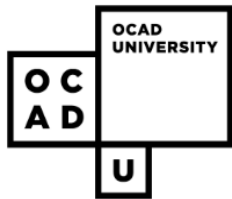
KAY RANGEL
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Editing by Alison Cooley. Cover photo by Aman Deshmukh.

About the OCAD U Career Launcher Recipients

Ernesto Cabral de Luna is a Mexican lens-based artist interested in exploring themes of exile, diasporic identity and immigration. Altering perception through analog and digital image manipulation, he utilizes his own photographs and family archives to create still images and short animations emphasizing the multi-dimensionality and materiality of the image. Ernesto received his BFA in Photography at OCAD University, and has worked with brands such as the Toronto Raptors, Coors Light and Walmart Canada.

Kay Rangel is an emerging artist and curator from Mexico City, currently working towards a BFA in Criticism & Curatorial Studies from OCAD University. As a curator, she's had to rely heavily on words, and as an artist, she pushes the viewer to navigate the written language within the visual realm. She recognizes that both visual and textual language share a sacred bond that keeps them tied perpetually, meaning one will never be able to breathe without the other. By subtly guiding the viewer into looking deeply at what they are experiencing, she encourages presence to be part of the work.



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Since 2016, Critical Distance has programmed the Billboard outside our former home at 180 Shaw Street between Dundas and Queen streets. Thank you to Youngplace for their continued support and participation in this long-running public art initiative.