



Workers in Bangladesh (Amy Yee/For The Washington Post)

## IMPERCEPTIBLE

Daniel Cerrejón  
Irina Miga  
Claudia Peña Salinas

Curated by  
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1.

***“I made this item you are going to buy, but I didn't get paid for it.”***

This sentence was found on a tag hanging from clothes at a Zara store in Istanbul early in November 2017. The messages were left in protest by workers from the Bravo Tekstil factory, one of the outsourced manufacturers for Zara. The news appeared mainly in tabloids such as *The Sun* and *The New York Post*, and included a statement from a spokesperson from Inditex, the world’s largest fashion group whose holdings include Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, and Pull and Bear. Bravo declared bankruptcy in June 2016, and when the factory owner disappeared along with Inditex’s payment, Inditex pledged that it would create a hardship fund to compensate the unpaid laborers. In the same statement, the company reaffirms their collaboration with the International Labor Organization to improve management and working conditions in Turkey and China. Last year, the BBC reported that Syrian refugees were working illegally in Turkish factories for Marks and Spencer, Mango, and Zara. Their conditions were far below Turkey’s standards with shifts spanning more than twelve hours a day and pay averaging just \$1.22 an hour. The workers, some of them under 16 years old, were unequipped to protect themselves from the toxic products used in clothing manufacture. From a total of 11 million people displaced by the Civil War in Syria since 2011, there are approximately 2.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, 18,000 in the US, 40,000 in Canada, and a plan for the UK to receive 20,000 by 2020.

## 2.

On April 24, 2013, Rana Plaza, a five-story commercial building, collapsed in Savar Upazila, Bangladesh. 1,134 people died and approximately 2,500 were injured. It is considered the worst garment factory disaster in history. A year later, only seven of the 28 international brands who had contracts with the factories at Rana Plaza, had contributed to the compensation fund for the families.



Rana Plaza building (Sean Robertson, April 24, 2012)

### 3.

It is usually accepted that consumers have the power to decide what to buy. Citizens vote, consumers buy. This marks the pace behind each election, each selection, constituting the limited space left for human agency. We buy, we vote, and in both instances we are influenced by campaigns that appeal to a convoluted net of feelings and ideas, often contradictory, that shape the contours of our identity. Subjectivity is thus expressed in the clothes we wear, in the political choices we make, and in countless other manifestations that mark the tempo of the everyday. Each of these are intrinsically connected to a sphere of commercialism that circumscribes our activities. We express ourselves through commodities that grant us powers to demonstrate our social skills and positions of privilege. We are, in fact, co-produced through our relations with objects and the memories with which these objects resonate. By a reverse process, identities are easily disassembled. Take few elements out of the equation, and the subject in question will feel dispossessed and disoriented, such is the fine line between stability and disruption. Each of us is an ecosystem in danger of extinction, like burnt forests and dried lakes, like government agencies, or international cooperation, we are the ones living on the fringe of disappearance. We willingly participate in cycles of exploitation and pollution as consumers. For, above all, we feel helpless and dominated by a network of conflicts and economic processes that are out of reach, far too remote to fully grasp. How we can act in a world that is already acting for us?

#### 4.

In front of a crowd on a cold night Chicago on February 2008, Barack Obama delivered a speech in the wake of the Super-Tuesday primaries where he said: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” People cheered. Those days seem long gone. That rhetoric now appears vacuous, innocuous. The financial crisis started that September. Obama was elected on November. That was nine years ago. Today the world appears more ruthless and desperate. As ecological and social crises succeed each other, the space for change, for a human-scaled organization of the world, has clearly evaporated. Obama’s appealing discourse of hope and empowerment was effective in mobilizing the crowds while *sí se puede!* reverberated around the world as the mantra of a new era of civic engagement. Remember? The regulation of the market once appeared as the percept to avoid future financial crises, even Sarkozy suggested the re-foundation of capitalism and, at some point, Merkel even considered implementing the Tobin tax—the alter-globalization tool to control international transactions. Retrospectively, these were the last attempts to convince Western societies of their capacity to modify their immediate future. Somehow the promise of renewed global cooperation, has exploded in multiple authoritarian regimes. Paradoxically, we have altered the environment, accelerated the destruction of the planet, and exacerbated the extinction of species, showing that, yes, we *are* capable of modifying our existence. This modification of the earth’s patterns of life, has been produced over more than a century through the solidification of pollutants generated through industry and energy production. Alas, the contradiction again. We are tied to an economic complex that is hazardous for our future, and that is well beyond our reach. Although beyond our grasp, the effects grow more and more visible in myriad manifestations including labor conditions, climate disasters, and the isolation of anxious individuals. We recede behind the screens of our surrounding devices, constantly bombarded by what we want and what we miss. The screens are where the invisible forces of globalization become visible (Appadurai). Ours is an existence of impotence. Ours is a liminal existence. Trapped in a no-man’s land, in between large complexes that affect our

sense-perception, we tragically reproduce in our bodies, the signs of our time, we are the ones in danger of extinction. We are in the interregnum of our collective life.

**Imperceptible** signals this state of affairs, which is volatile and uncertain. Fragility emerges as a condition that defines the nature of human ecology. From working conditions to interpersonal relations, from historical legacies to environmental patterns, all are altered and precarious. Global forces too wide to be perceived, too virtual to be grasped, are deciding elections, and micro-managing unrest, they know how we move in the streets, in the supermarkets, in the museums, as well as online. They know what we like and share, they read our messages, and they listen to our voices to pick up on key words. Despite their slippery constitution (which points to the unseen of globalization), they are noticeable in their effects, in their material physicality, present in the form of slums, tax cuts, austerity measures, or hurricane devastation.

The works presented in this exhibition revolve around visibility and impermanence. They are sculptural acts that transform the fluidity of whispers, of inner motions, and of sacred stories, into composed and organized presence, using a variety of mediators, like words, brass or cotton.

**Daniel Cerrejón's** *[Whispers] X., 466 \*\*\*\*\* St.* (2017), is a sculpture in three parts based on a series of measurements. The longest represents the distance between two people, and marks the space when a whisper becomes audible. The shortest indicates the distance at which the whisper is fully understood by one of the participants. The third measurement is the subtraction of the previous two. In this case, the artist whispered to the curator in the gallery space. All measures were later translated into rope and presented in the form of a knot of distinct sizes: 3x1.5x1.5 in, 2x1.5x1.5 in, 1.5x1x1 in. While whispers are intrinsically immaterial, Cerrejón's sculpture renders them physical, materializing the specific time and circumstances of an encounter between two people.

**Irini Miga** has composed a poem that describes a chain of events, a movement through different states of matter and abstract dimensions. These transformations, from solid to fluid, are the affirmation of a shared sphere of co-production, where one element produces the other, in turn, becoming a third. The piece defines a system of relations which reflects the process behind its creation—by mixing material and existential experiences thought becomes form. The artist traces the changes of status and state as a meditation that evokes an atmospheric quality, something less tangible than what words alone might suggest. The poem will be presented in the form of a performance during the opening of the exhibition.

**Claudia Peña Salinas** draws from her research that looks at the architectural structures and mural paintings of Theotihuacán in Mexico. In this installation, she considers modernist legacies of display and introduces elements that reference Mesoamerican cultures, such as the colors associated to the Aztec deities of water, Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue. With these arrangements, the artist searches for a formal articulation of overlapping natural and social orders, one that considers the histories hidden by colonialism. This piece incorporates a woven component, in reference to the god's eye, a ritual tool valued as a symbol for understanding the unseen. The title of the installation is taken from the Nahuatl name for frog, *Cueyatl* (2017).