

AUT GRAPH

Exhibition Audio Guide Transcript Our Bodies Have Been Bridges

1. Mark Sealy introduces the exhibition and the work of Laura Aguilar

Welcome to *Our Bodies Have Been Bridges*, a group exhibition exploring what it means to embody history. I'm Mark Sealy, Director of Autograph and co-curator of this exhibition. In this audio guide, you will also hear from two of the artists whose works are on display.

The exhibition begins with the works of the late Laura Aguilar, a Chicana artist who worked in Southern California. This is the second time Autograph have shown Aguilar's works, with the first being as part of a 1997 exhibition *Shifting Terrains* at Zone Gallery in Newcastle, alongside the work of Maxine Walker.

A mostly self-taught artist, Aguilar's photographs expand the possibilities of portraiture, centering bodies and lives rarely seen within the dominant photographic histories including those of queer, Chicana and working-class communities. Ahead of her time, Aguilar's late twentieth-century photography first exposes the visibility of underrepresented and marginalised women and communities, and then celebrates them.

Over the course of her career and particularly in her later practice, Aguilar turned the camera on herself. In works such as *12 Lauras*, *Nature Self*, *Motion*, *Stillness* and *Centre*, Aguilar looks inward, to produce nude self-portraits set within natural landscapes. These images challenge conventional ideals of beauty and underscore the profound relationship between body, land and self-representation.

Aguilar died in 2018 aged fifty-eight, when recognition of her work was gaining momentum. Since her passing, she has joined the ranks of other iconic female photographers.

2. Koyoltzintli discusses the making of *Meda*

Hi, my name is Koyoltzintli – the series of work seen here, titled *Meda*, explores indigenous and ancestral relationships to the land. It is rooted in Amerindian mythology and storytelling, particularly the origin story of the first woman who fell from the sky and the first land embedded in her body as a memory.

I began making the work that developed into *Meda* while living in New Mexico – it was a time of looking inward and thinking about my body in relation to the land and my ancestral worlds. But I didn't want this work to only reflect my experience – I think it's important to acknowledge that there is not one indigenous experience or unity. Each person has their own relationship to ancestry and place. There are multitudes within these experiences. I am interested in that difference rather than trying to make everything fit together.

So I invited other women to take part. I asked them questions such as: if you could connect with your oldest ancestor, how do you think they would touch the earth for the first time? Where would they go? What would their first reaction be? The photographs represent their responses to these questions.

The women who featured in the series came from all different cultural backgrounds. I was interested in what happened when they were given the space to think about their bodies and their relationship to space, place and the environment.

3. Bindi Vora discusses Koyoltzintli's series, *Other Stories*

Hi, I'm Bindi Vora, senior curator at Autograph and co-curator of this exhibition. Presented here are works by artist Koyoltzintli from the series *Other Stories*, *Historias Bravas*.

Drawing on and restaging memories of growing up in Ecuador, these works explore the bonds and rituals that shaped her family life. Created in collaboration with the women in her family, moments of tenderness are foregrounded through everyday moments within the home. Her images reflect the experience of migration, where family rituals, cultural traditions and spiritual practices become ways of sustaining connection across generations.

In the work titled *Mom Braiding My Hair Like Her Mother Did for Her*, the intimate act of braiding embodies the quiet transmission of knowledge between mother and daughter.

If you'd like to see more works from the series, you can buy a copy of Koyoltzintli's monograph from the reception desk by the entrance to the gallery. You will find it published under the artist's former name of Karen Miranda Rivadeneira.

4. Bindi Vora discusses Tarrah Krajnak's series *1979 Contact Negatives*

This series of work by artist Tarrah Krajnak is titled *1979 Contact Negatives*. 1979 was a pivotal year, which Krajnak returns to across her works. It marks both the year of her birth in Lima and a significant moment in Peru's history, as the country emerged from military rule into a period of political and social upheaval.

In this series, Krajnak sought to trace and visit locations of sexual violence depicted in archival Peruvian magazines, with the intention of re-photographing the location in the present day. However, the artist quickly discovered that many of the images of people and locations were fabricated and operated almost like stock imagery - the same photo accompanying a story about sexual assault in one article might be used to illustrate an entirely different story in another article.

Through this research, Krajnak became increasingly interested in the complicated role of photography as both witness and source of evidence. Rather than re-photographing the locations, Krajnak instead projected the archival images inserting her body into the scenes, printing, photocopying and re-photographing the images again.

The resulting self-portraits combine Lima's fraught history with Krajnak's own personal histories, highlighting the archive as an unstable and malleable source, and making visible the ways that violence and trauma can be held in bodies and excluded from the archive.

5. **Tarrah Krajnak discusses the making of *Senderos***

Hi, I'm Tarrah Krajnak – displayed here are a selection of works from my series *El Jardín de Senderos que se Bifurcan*, meaning *The Garden of Forking Paths*. In this work I ask the question: what does it mean to live without a deep connection to a place, homeland or community? The project began with questions around my own origins, regarding transracial adoption and orphanhood, which eventually led me back to the orphanage where I was born in Lima, Peru.

The works shown here form one chapter of a much larger project. In it, I work with found photographs, archival images, self-portraiture and images of women moving through the city. I was interested in how these photographs might hold traces of lives, histories and acts of violence that are often difficult to see or recover.

I also began meeting women I call my 'time twins' – women who, like me, were born in Lima in 1979. Their lives did not offer a simple answer to the question of who I might have been. Instead, they opened up other possible histories – parallel lives shaped by the same place and moment in time.

While making the work, I was thinking about the figure of the orphan as it appears across poetry, literature and history. At the time, I was teaching and studying poets including Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Layli Long Soldier and Robin Coste Lewis. My engagement with their work shaped the non-linear structure of *Senderos*, particularly recurring strategies of doubling and twinning.

Rather than reconstructing a single story of where I come from, the work moves through fragments, absences and contradictions. The title comes from Jorge Luis Borges' story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, in which time continually branches into different possibilities. For me, photography has become a space in which those different histories, imagined lives and unresolved questions can exist alongside one another.