

TEXT //

NATALIA VILLANUEVA LINARES

## GENERAL BIOGRAPHY NATALIA VILLANUEVA LINARES

Natalia Villanueva Linares is a multidisciplinary moment maker of French + Peruvian origins born in 1982 in Montpellier, France. She graduated from the National School of Fine Arts of Paris - Giuseppe Penone workshop and currently lives in Chicago, Illinois, USA and works between North + South America and Europe.

She exhibited at many places like the Sala Miro Quesada Garland in Peru ( 2013 ), the Collège des Bernardins in Paris and La Graineterie in Houilles, France ( 2018 ), El Lobi in Puerto Rico, the Hyde Park Art Center and the DePaul Art Museum in Chicago, Illinois, USA, the School of the Art Gallery, Manitoba, Canada ( 2023 ), La Maison de L' Amérique Latine in Paris, France ( 2024 ).

Natalia had her first solo shows with the Dohyang Lee Gallery ( 2014, France ), Wu Gallery ( 2021, Peru ) and Comfort Station in Chicago, Illinois, ( USA, 2022 ). Her solo show at the Museo de Arte de San Marcos ( 2022, Peru ) won the *Luces Award for best solo exhibition* and in 2024, Natalia was awarded the *Sculpture Fellowship* by the Illinois Art Council.

Natalia is also a cultural worker as she co-founded the non-profit organization Yaku in Peoria, Illinois, USA. She is the former director of the artist-run mini mansion High Place and founder of the magazine Ukayzine, created to promote international cultural exchanges through the visual arts. Natalia is a contributor for Sixty Inches From Center and is the Arts Coordinator at Mana Contemporary.

## GENERAL WORK NATALIA VILLANUEVA LINARES

Natalia is a multidisciplinary moment maker of French + Peruvian origins who speaks in amounts and believes in poetry made from excessive quantities, in simple objects radiating with power. With an animistic relation to certain materials, she invites others to feel the magnitude of their generosity. Her monumental pieces reveal her magnetic affection for large collections, accompanied by a notion of continuity which communicates between the immense and the minute. Natalia has developed an ongoing series of nomadic performances in which participants activate objects in communion with one another. Aiming to integrate both these objects and the experiences created and lived by many individuals into the archives of humanity, her project, *The Library of Gestures*, seeks to question the history of art and its future.

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# *The multiplying landscapes of Dual*

A solo exhibition of the works of **Natalia Villanueva Linares**

May 03rd – June 07th 2025

How to talk about the work of Natalia Villanueva Linares ? Where to begin, when everything seems to be in constant evolution, when pieces exist as both traces and becomings?

Five thousand words would not be enough. The works' structures and themes span across the numbers, repetitions, scores, the infinitely large and the infinitely small, gestures, transformations, libraries, sharing, generosity, colors, construction and, deconstruction, performances, guided by a desire to bring together multiples to become one, and ones into the many.

I vividly remember one of her first gestures in art school: she asked other students to draw with charcoal on kraft paper for ten minutes. Next each drawing was burned together in the same container. To each participant collected a small portion of the remaining ashes and stored them in small glass jars.

This gesture, both in its symbolic and material forms, reveals Natalia's questioning of the transformation of effort. It explored how, through a single ritual, individual expression could merge into a collective work and become a "we," a whole.

With this first act, Natalia sketched the foundations of her visual language.

Generosity is never one-sided: it lies both within the act of giving, and through the capacity to receive. It is a relationship, a two-way exchange, a silent duel. It is in this tension, this reciprocity, that her piece *Dual* was born. It was in her Peoria (Illinois) apartment that Natalia began to ask herself this question: "How can we talk about the continuity of an Artwork?"

After her piece *Devota*, she focused on a seemingly fragile material: tissue paper. She explored its myriad forms, its possible metamorphoses. She discovered that, when the pages are crumpled and creased, the fibers break, and this delicate paper can paradoxically become more resistant. It can be patched, reinforced, assembled by sewing. The gesture transforms the material, and the material becomes an extension of the gesture.

When she creates, Natalia maintains an intimate and absorbed, almost "hermetic," relationship with her work. Time, repetition, and the labor of her gestures are an integral part of her approach. She is immersed within the materials, the space, and the realm of sensations. For Natalia, the materials speak for themselves. "All my pieces speak of the beginning," she says — of the beginning, of the origin. Each stage of the material's transformation becomes a work in its own right. Each fragment bears traces of the past, intimate memory, and the potential for metamorphosis.

The works gathered in this exhibition are part of this continuity. Each color is a spatio-temporal unit, a measure of gesture and duration. Over time, these colors fade, revealing the pure memory of movement, like an archaeology of work: the scars of matter.

*Palette of Dual* and *Palette of Dual*<sup>o</sup> play a central role in the exhibition. These works condensed matter, gesture, color, and memory into a compact, almost intimate format, extending the gestures of the larger installations. Each is accompanied by a photograph of the original fabric, revealing the initial layers of color.

Each *Palette of Dual* is composed of bricks extracted from the transformed fabrics, reassembled by shades of color, and activated by the water of a site. The water becomes fluid memory, linking past gestures to the present, marking a temporal and geographical anchor. These palettes are sensitive cartographies of time and space. They bear witness to an effort, a collective memory, a physical engagement with matter.

In *Poématiques XL*, Natalia composes scores — not musical in the traditional sense, but like recipes, sensitive cartographies, transformations of matter.

These scores will one day become a polyphone for a giant imaginary music box. She uses paint to trace symbols, but her approach remains far removed from the traditional codes of painting.

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She even removes color from her gesture, “scalping” it, leaving only traces, ghost lines, the scars of a movement. Each score is then designed to become a sound piece, where each symbol corresponds to a sound. Like a form of sensitive mathematics.

With *Nova Dual*<sup>Lima.1</sup>, the performance unfolds on a Lima beach: the gesture takes shape, becomes part of the space, and transforms the landscape. The material is moved, shared, and activated by a collective ritual. A photograph accompanies the work, capturing the moment of the gesture and its resonance.

*Dual ICE*<sup>Storm.2</sup> condenses this dynamic into a sculptural piece composed of 26 glass jars containing melted snow. Each jar is the residue of a colored snowball collected during a recent performance. These liquid fragments become witnesses to an ephemeral and poetic activation of gesture in a winter environment.

Natalia transforms materials as much as human relationships — she weaves sensitive, lasting connections through art. Natalia leaves a lasting mark on people. Her work is a constant weaving of the intimate and the universal, the invisible and the embodied.

Natalia Villanueva Linares's work questions memory, transformation, and the relationship between the origin and the infinite. Pieces like *Sisters 1-10*, where spools of metal thread symbolize gestures bound by memory, and the film *Breathing*, which documents the creation of *Sister No.0*, testify to the importance of repetition and gesture. Through works like *Dual ICE*<sup>Storm.2</sup>, she transforms matter and time, inviting us to rethink what we preserve, what we share, and what we let disappear.

Through this exhibition, Natalia invites us to explore her multiple landscapes: fragments of gestures, time, and memory in constant transformation.

I've known Natalia for 22 years. We first met when I was 16. We were in pre-art school before we started at the Beaux-Arts de Paris. I've had the chance to be a participant and active witness to her life and practice. As a performer and gesture maker, I've been a confidant of her work since our first encounter, which occurred over a cigarette in the courtyard of the pre-art school at the Glacière Ateliers. And I don't think I've ever missed a single one of her pieces.

Today, she asked me to write the text for her exhibition: “*The multiplying landscapes of Dual*” And it was with great emotion that I accepted, without hesitation.

So, I try, as best I can, to convey a fragment of her colors through my words.

Sophie Monjaret  
Artist / Curator / Friend  
Translation by Earl Power Murphy

**TO BROADCAST IS TO SCATTER AT THE SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY, WINNIPEG,  
TEXT BY CHUKWUDUBEM UKAIGWE**

for the exhibition *To Broadcast is to Scatter*, School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba, California, USA, 2024

...Approaching the rear end of the gallery, one is confronted by an overwhelming tapestry engulfing the thirty-foot width of the wall. *Dual 11* by Natalia Villanueva Linares is made up of units of tissue paper grids sewn together with gold thread. This work indexes a process of intensive interaction with a quotidian material: tissue paper, a secondary accessory, usually accompanying gifts, and discarded after a single use. In an accumulative and repetitive procession, Linares massages an enduring softness into this material, activating its fibres and making it function as a stable fabric for asserting the monumental. This generous transmogrification of such a simple substance collapses time into the material and probes its potential for storing memory. Natalia's shape shifting gesture brings to bear the writer Saidiya Hartman's definition of beauty in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*: "Beauty is not a luxury; rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical art of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given. It is a will to adorn, a proclivity for the baroque, and the love of too much."

Each rectangular minutia of this installation exists in variations of blue, as well as its spectral derivations violet, turquoise, etc. I am forced to think about the musical tradition of the blues in response to this work; they are both concerned with stretching and transforming benign stories and everyday matter into expressions of capaciousness while standing outside standard units like time and looking for new intuitive and adjustable metrics. Linares presented a performance at the opening of the exhibition. The artist, alongside seven co-performers, dipped bricks of tissue paper into a pool of water in a repetitive ritual procession, pulling dye from the material, canning the dye, and remoulding the wet tissue paper into small, compressed bricks. The resultant jars of dye and compressed bricks were displayed on a wooden shelf and titled *Lands of Dual 11*. This new work demonstrates the abundant potential of the everyday, characterizing ways simple actions can exert multidimensional transformations...

Chukwudubem Ukaigwe

## EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTERS: AN ETHICAL GUIDE TO STUDIO VISITS

TEXT BY CHENOA BAKER

for Sixty Inches from Center, February 07th 2023

A conversation with artist Natalia Villanueva Linares about ethical studio visits.

Studio visits — crucial to arts writing, as well as artistic and curatorial practices — have a connotation of being the place where artists are “discovered.” The word “discovery” immediately feels colonial and brings to mind an inherent power dynamic and a transactional view of studio visits. This type of mindset is harmful to the artist and is contradictory to an ethical approach. As I prepare for studio visits, I begin by researching artists to establish familiarity. If studio visits are in person, I set up a Zoom call to introduce who I am (with receipts of my bio or LinkedIn), what I do, and set community guidelines for intentions. I take pressure off studio visits by allowing artists to gauge their comfort before sharing physical space. When one goes into an artist’s studio, one must remember that it is first and foremost the artist’s space — not the visitor’s — and the artist’s work and intentions have value and should come first before the visitors’ ideas of what the artist’s work is/should be.

Channeling multi-sided conversations, I sought out artist Natalia Villanueva Linares’s perspective. She is a Chicago-based, French-Peruvian artist whose work is rooted in performance, installation, interventions, and other participatory practices. She is also the founder of Ukayzine, a nomadic art magazine, and a contributor to Sixty as a translator and co-organizer of the cultural criticism program CANJE. Her interdisciplinary practice prompts a deeper connection to space and community. How can a space welcome all and be nourishing? This is a grounding question in her practice. We discuss our own experience in studio visits, each coming from different sides of the same coin (visitor and artist).

**Natalia Villanueva Linares:** I offer my studio to people in the same spirit I offer my completed works; it is an opportunity to exchange and have others respond in a way that can move me and us together. It is important to feel safe as well and make others feel welcome. I learned in American culture, since I arrived to Chicago and with Sixty Inches From Center, that it is a minimum for cultural workers to feel secure and safe. There is a balance in creating space for whoever comes in. So, I’m letting a person come into my studio, but talking about my work in my studio is incredibly vulnerable. My studio is the center of my everything. I am a very productive person. This is why I work on many pieces at the same time, and it can be overwhelming for a visitor to be introduced to every project due to the size, complexity, and temporality involved in every project. Visitors are full of their own experiences, it is important to be mindful of the amount we share with them. You need to create a balance.

**Chenoa Baker:** What are examples of studio visits that stand out?

**NVL:** I had a space for two years, and I invited around 10 people in those two years because of COVID. In my studio, my art space can be put aside and become a place for people to gather. I worked with Sixty on [our project] CANJE there.

A great visit is a perfect encounter when a person is ready to receive as much as you give. I can tell when a person is feeling like a glass that you’re filling too much and you must turn it down. It’s not a great studio visit when the person looks like they are full of their thoughts and they are trying to connect your work with something else. They’re not receiving what they’re being given or the moment we’re exchanging. They’re not there. They’re thinking: “How can I relate to you?” And that thought sometimes takes too much space and it becomes more about that. A person is a gift in your space. What I want to share with that person becomes something that can complement your life.

**CB:** Once on a studio visit with an African American image-maker working in textiles, he told me something disturbing. Before I came into his space, white curators conducted many studio visits with him because of his work gaining mainstream popularity and influencing Black communities across America since 1970. One curator that came analyzed a Cameroonian mask that appeared in his work. She mentioned that it represented a shift or departure in his practice. That offended him. He has always explored, grappled, and reckoned with masking traditions and African iconography.

**NVL:** Do you feel it should have been a question? Because what you said sounded more like a person saying that “it was a turning point,” instead of “was it a turning point?” Curiosity is important.

Since artists are busy, there must be a reason for us to meet you, or we have nothing to exchange or nourish each other. In my case, [if there is no reciprocity in the conversation or I overwhelm them with facts], sometimes that’s too much syrup for that person. While I appreciate it when a person takes time to critique, it becomes problematic when a person critiques but has no idea how. That has happened to me several times. If you feel that what you are about to

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say is not a thought process you should be diving into, don't do it. And, well, maybe let's talk about another artwork.

**CB:** What is your ideal studio visit?

**NVL:** When relationships click and the person has a sense of curiosity. It's exciting when people don't know anything about art and can be surprised. They ask you questions that no one could have ever asked.

Nourishment is when it feels like you're sharing something, when a person is taking it all in and they want to know more. An ideal studio visit makes room to receive — and be sure that you have room because if you don't, you should reschedule. If I don't have certain tools in my pocket, there are certain things I won't be able to do. Be curious about another person no matter what. Everyone has something exciting to learn/teach.

An ideal studio visit is knowing that we will see each other again. Be a person who introduces your work to other people. A person should keep growing their presence in a cultural space. Curators could consider sending other people to see these artists to keep up with them, because artists [need to] work with curators. Exchange [means] we did it together, and we kept growing together. When that person in my life [curates] a show, I send everybody to go to see their show because I know they are passionate about what they do, and they appreciate and care for the artists they work with.

**CB:** You mentioned going on studio visits as well. Do you want to share your approach?

**NVL:** [Conducting a studio visit myself is] fantastic because I try to put myself in a mindset of, "What would it be to know nothing about art?" I empty all my pockets when I knock on a door. If someone invites me, I must tell them that I am not going to be nice if I must share something. I'm going to be honest. I'm kind and sweet outside of my work, but when it's related, I like being challenged, so I offer that to another person if the moment is appropriate. I listen to a person to see what their relationship to certain materials is [and see] if I have a high familiarity with them. I try never to talk about my own experiences, I only focus on what they're telling me [so that I can] understand their relationship to what they're doing with materials [in order] to [tell] their story, where they're going, and where they are.

**CB:** What are the formats of your studio visits?

**NVL:** It depends on who's coming and what I want to do. When choosing work to share with a visitor, I discover something and a person can feel my excitement for work. I don't have specific formatting or time frameworks. [It's] more about creating a path that organizes space. Sometimes [my space] changes if one person is coming and another person is coming the next day — maybe space would change depending on how [the previous studio visit] went. If, on Monday, it was presented [in a certain] way, how did it go? Was there more freedom when I was speaking between particular artworks than others? What would happen if I switched [the order], what sounds more coherent?

**CB:** I have an organic way of doing studio visits and it depends on the person. Some people have a formula: sticking to an hour. I'm someone who can get lost in studio visits if the artist allows it, so it depends on them and their comfort. When I have studio visits with elders, I make sure to clear my schedule and give them lots of time to show respect. I see them all as unique, extraordinary experiences. None of them are identical and I don't expect them to be.

**NVL:** I always have cookies and bubble water [for my guests] because when you arrive at a studio space, you feel that a person's waiting for you — like you [are] expected to be there. You can create a timeframe, but then [you may be looking at] your watch when you're there, and [the artist] can feel that. Sometimes it can last all day. When I do studio visits, it's important sometimes to not say [I have to go] because I have something else to do. I [should be] leaving because the amount of time we spent together was excellent and now I can go.

**CB:** It reminds me of having a great meal, but it does have an end at some point. It's like, I'm full. It was wonderful, thank you so much. You must stop at some point. It's like taking in too much information and now you are being overfilled. Yeah, boundaries are hard to have and communicate. Do you have any thoughts on studio visits, discovery, and power dynamics? Framing the studio visit as a way to find talent feels like a means to an end instead of care.

**NVL:** As I said, I'm new to Chicago, but I make work in other countries [France and Peru], and when I'm there they asked me: are you an emerging artist or a mid-career artist? That depends. I've practiced for as long as a mid-career person. You must calculate it, but I just arrived here, which makes me an emerging artist.

When I lived in a smaller part of Illinois, I didn't think about [the power dynamics]. It happens to me more in other countries than it happens to me [in Illinois] because I didn't live in a space where these conversations happened. I created conversations in that city. I haven't experienced it in Chicago, but in general, there's weight, expectation, and opening doors for conversation. Some conversations being done during studio visits should just be done at a coffee



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shop later. [Every conversation is] not [always] something to share in a space that is so personal and intimate for an artist. I prefer talking about collaborations outside of studio spaces, when you have something clear in hand [and with the approach that] you didn't "discover" something that has 10 years of existence — in my case, more than 10.

**CB:** Instead of saying "I found," or "I discovered," like you said, [you could shift to] "I met" or "I witnessed." On a linguistic level, how can people shift?

**NVL:** "I was introduced," "I felt," or "that touched me" feels better. A curator once introduced my work to another person as: "this artist's work has made me cry a few times." It was more about sharing their feelings [instead of] telling. [I] create that relationship with every studio visit I have. If that type of relationship doesn't come out, I'm not interested. What relationship do you want to create? How long are we willing to stick with the feeling for a person? Do I like [the artwork] because it fits my projects? How does a long-term relationship look?

**CB:** Does a studio visit begin a relationship or is it in the middle? Some curators have relationships with an artist for several years before entering a studio, and others have no relationship. A step in a studio could blossom a relationship or end one. I am close friends with most people I have studio visits with or collaborate with them in some capacity. I learn about them through social media, a meeting at an opening, a colleague telling me about their work, or seeing their work in an exhibition prompts me to reach out. Since I am a writer and curator, I prefer to work with people as a writer because those relationships are fluid and there's always potential for curating, but once you've exhausted that possibility, relationships change.

Chenoa Baker

## A SHOWCASE OF CREATIVE CONNECTIONS, TEXT BY MAE GILLILAND WRIGHT

for Peoria Magazine, 2019

### Cross-Pollinating Artists

Over the past decade and a half, the PCA has hosted more than 200 artists from around the world. Their annual alumni shows—curated in recent years by Ken and Barb Hoffman (both former residents)—have historically showcased regional artists. “But this year we wanted to pull more people back in and reconnect them with the Prairie Center,” Joe explains.

“I just got an email from an artist from Bogotá, Columbia, who asked if he could come back,” he continues, referring to Jeronimo Villa, a former resident who left behind one of his intricate wire sculptures. Chuckling, he adds, “I said, of course he could!”

Until 2014, out-of-town residents like Villa stayed in a five-bedroom home in Germantown Hills owned by the Richeys. “We had composers, writers, visual artists, sculptors... a lot of different media forms,” Michele notes, “which made it really interesting.”

This diversity fosters a unique cross-pollination of creativity—which fine art painter Sherri Burritt looks back upon fondly. “One of the benefits for me was interacting with the other artists,” she affirms. “It fueled my fire for creating that only an artist group can.” Fiber artist Dana Baldwin—who, the Richeys note, is currently working on an exciting project (“No photos!”)—feels similarly. “There were many opportunities to engage in intellectual conversations with peers on topics surrounding art production... which helped me grow personally and as an artist.”

While maintaining a house for the artists eventually became cost-prohibitive, Joe and Michele do all they can to accommodate those who need a place to stay. “We have an artist coming from Paris this summer,” Joe says of sculptor and installation artist Martin Monchicourt, whose wife was a resident in 2013. “When we get interest and they need housing, we look to see what we can find.”

The Richeys do these things because they see the benefits of bringing in artists from outside the Peoria area. The camaraderie they build often leads to collaboration—and sometimes on a grand scale. Monchicourt, for instance, will be staying with former resident artist Natalia Villanueva Linares and her husband Earl Power Murphy, who have spearheaded Yaku, a collective of young Peorians working to repurpose the Hale Memorial Church into an international culture center.

“We are trying to get him and Natalia to do an outdoor installation for the show,” Michele notes. “We’ll see what happens,” Joe responds. “You never know when you get Natalia involved!”

The couple bursts into laughter, their shared memories conjuring unmitigated joy. “She goes big!” Michele exclaims, referring to Villanueva Linares’ large-scale installation work. Soon, they’re chatting about logistics... a familiar conversation for the couple who has showcased the work of so many artists in Peoria...

Mae Gilliland Wright

## ART GOES OUTDOORS DURING TERRAIN BIENNIAL, TEXT BY LESLIE RENKEN

for Peoria JournalStar, 2019

PEORIA — Art will be happening in yards, porches and on a church during Terrain Biennial 2019 Oct. 1 through Nov. 17.

A unique type of art festival, Terrain Biennial is designed to spark conversations between neighbors and to bring contemporary art to people who might not otherwise see it. Homeowners partner with artists to get art out of the galleries and into neighborhoods.

Conceived by the late Chicago artist Sabina Ott, Terrain Biennial began in 2011 with monthly installations in the artist's yard. Today the exhibition is held all over the country.

In Peoria, the artist organizations YAKU and Project 1612 are curating exhibits for the event.

"This year's subject is 'what is your terrain, and how does the landscape affect you?' said Natalia Villanueva Linares, a co-founder of YAKU who is curating exhibits at 423 High Street and the nearby Hale Memorial Church.

Linares invited Chicago artist Jesse Meredith to exhibit his work at 423 High Street. "Not What You Think" is a series of yard signs, which usually direct people into some kind of action, like voting for a particular candidate.

"It's a public re-configurable poem," said Linares. "You will create your own dialogue with the work."

Also at 423 High Street is a flag by Martin Monchicourt, a French artist who recently finished a residency at the Prairie Center for the Arts. The flag is a monochromatic mixture of all the colors in the U.S. flag, which ends up being a pale, vaguely purple pink.

"For every country he visits he makes a flag," said Linares.

Color is a theme explored in some depth by the 13 local artists Linares invited to create a work for the Hale Memorial Church for Terrain Biennial. For "The Most Talkative Gesture," Villanueva's instructions were concise — using a simple gesture (a rectangle) show us the colors you use in your art practice.

The results are amazingly diverse, and reveal the personalities of each artist. Participating are Blair Clark, Bill Conger, Brenda Gentry, Jaci Musec, Jessica Ball, Sarah Nesbit, John Seckler, 8-HSD, Keller Anderson, Alexander Martin, Duncan Katlack, Dan Ossandon, and LRAE.

"I was eager to see what they would do," said Linares. "They really brought it to life."

Most of the artists had difficulty staying within the lines — they splattered, oversprayed and dripped beyond the borders. One didn't fill the rectangles, instead finger painting squiggles of color within pencil-marked lines. Another eschewed paint in favor of colored tape, and yet another covered the board with white vinyl embossed with diamonds, an approach which delighted the curator.

"I was excited when Bill agreed to be in the exhibit because I knew he would surprise me," said Villanueva.

Though the opening for YAKU's exhibit was held during the October First Friday, the exhibit will be up through Nov. 17. Everyone is invited to stroll down historic High Street and around the corner to Hale Memorial Church. Recorded interviews with many of the artists, which can be heard at [www.yakupeoria.org/terrain-biennial-2019](http://www.yakupeoria.org/terrain-biennial-2019), will give viewers a deeper understanding of the display.

On Oct. 13 from 5 to 8 p.m. Project 1612 will hold the opening celebration for their contribution to Terrain Biennial. Projects by four artists will be displayed at 1100 N. Underhill in Peoria. They include a participatory performance and sculptures by Jam Lovell of East Peoria, a window installation by Venise Keys of Chicago, a time-based installation by John Steck Jr. of Chicago, and an intricate woven carpet in Point 1612 by Sage Dawson of St. Louis.

For Jessica Bingham, co-founder of Project 1612, Terrain Biennial is exciting because of how many people are working toward a common goal.

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“It’s a collaboration between many people who never meet,” she said. “They are working on the same goal, to make Terrain Biennial successful. I love collaborating, and talking about ideas, and seeing these kind of dreams makes it into reality. Since Sabina (the founding artist) has passed recently, this is the first iteration that’s happened without her here. It’s wonderful to see so many people support her idea — this is the largest Terrain Biennial yet.”

Leslie Renken

## MOMENTS HERE AND THERE, TEXT BY BETH WEIMER

for Peoria Magazine, November - December 2018

*Natalia Villanueva Linares is a maker of moments—physical and emblematic gestures both immense and minute.*

“I build moments with monumental feel for color and volume,” she explains. “I also create very detail-oriented situations or smaller art pieces charged with an intense metaphorical spirit.” Many of her installations and performances (which often feature 20 or more participants) involve “the destruction of an object using repetitive gestures to produce transformations and open the object to others.”

Peoria has been the fortunate host to most of her work since becoming her home seven years ago. This year, the French-Peruvian artist had the opportunity to spend eight months in Paris, during which she added five performances to her library of gestures titled *Solutions* (a series of related performances spanning years and continents) and participated in the exhibitions *The Poetry of Gestures* and *Devenir*.

For *Devenir*, she was one of 10 artists chosen for the residency and extended, collaborative exhibition through the Collège des Bernardins. Meaning “to become,” *Devenir* occupied the former monastery’s breathtaking sacristy in three distinct phases representing past, present and future. One of Villanueva’s contributions for the second phase was the installation *La Desmedida* (the Immeasurable), an “immeasurable gesture” to complement the piece *A3* by Alban Denuit, a close friend who died in the Parisian terrorist attack in 2015.

Denuit’s work was inspired by the “norms and standards of measurement living at the heart of our daily life,” Villanueva explains, and his piece consisted of stacking hundreds of blueprints of rooms to form a structure unto itself. She assembled hundreds of used clothing patterns (collected from thrift stores in central Illinois) with straight pins over the course of a month, raising the 50’ by 20’ piece into the arches of the sacristy as she worked. The process inspired visitors to share memories evoked by the patterns and “transmitted the continuous potential of the material.”

One important aspect of Villanueva’s work seeks to connect Peoria with international arts communities. Her most recent performances occurred simultaneously, with the local event projected live on the wall of the venue in Paris. “I feel an instinctive need to create bridges,” Villanueva says. “Cultural exchanges are enriching, giving a stronger sense to humanity. They help us welcome and feel welcome.”

Although she plans to return to Europe for upcoming exhibitions, she’s committed to cultivating the arts here in Peoria. Villanueva co-founded the nonprofit Yaku Peoria in 2011 with her husband Earl Power Murphy to repurpose the historic Hale Memorial Church as a multicultural arts center. As Yaku’s artistic director, Villanueva is excited to promote their art magazine, UKAYZINE; support program development and SNAX (Small Nomadic Artistic Experiences) events; and establish branches of the organization abroad.

For Villanueva, creating is an instinctive, evolutionary process. “Art envelops my everything; it is a state of constant becoming,” she explains. Sharing that energy with others is how she builds community and momentum for the arts. a&s

Leslie Renken

## A MIDWESTERN MECCA, TEXT BY DOUG AND EILEEN LEUNIG

for Free Community World, October 31st 2016

When Rocco Landesman, chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), came to Peoria in 2009 to kick off his national campaign “Art Works,” he was giving the citizens of central Illinois the possibility of becoming a benchmark for a concept that became known as “Creative Placemaking.” Creative placemaking means involving members of a community—private, public, nonprofit—to shape our city with the goal of making it more livable, safer, inclusive for all, and an inspiration.

Examples abound in Peoria with CIAO First Fridays, Sculpture Walk Peoria and other programs like ArtsPartners’ ArtPop Peoria, but not all creative placemaking is art. In fact, some of the best examples don’t look like art at all. They look like people. They look like Natalia Villanueva Linares and Earl Power Murphy, the founders of Yaku.

Yaku is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization charged with the great task of restoring and re-purposing the iconic Hale Memorial Church located on the corner of Main and High Streets in Peoria. The building exists to nurture and house a growing 60+ member community of artists and art groups from around the world. In addition to restoring the church, the mission of Yaku, which means “water,” is to curate contemporary art experiences designed to engage local and global audiences through international exchanges.

The heart, soul, and spirit of Yaku lives in its founders Earl and his wife, Natalia, and in the local and international artists who are the blood of the organization. “Art is to do die for,” Natalia says. “Art is something to battle, to protect. It’s like a child that you would die for, that you would give everything to protect.”

For Earl, “Art has the ability to reestablish human nature in the present and when done well art can encourage people to step out of their understanding of themselves, society, and the world. And stepping out of that they find themselves in this colorful, beautiful, abyss where you are just alive.”

To realize the Yaku mission there is a seemingly impossible amount of work to be done in renovating the derelict space of the Hale Memorial Church. “A little over a month ago we had a feasibility study done on the building by Farnsworth... with that in hand, we will go into the capital campaign. This will be a community effort.”

Part of the effort to raise funds will be through UKAY-zine, an arts and culture magazine with local as well as international stories. As Earl described, there are two primary areas of content. The first is, “To connect the international world interested in Peoria with Peoria’s treasures. There is a plethora of things to share. The other part of the magazine is the international body of artists interested in Peoria. This is a way to introduce Peoria to the artists who will be coming.

“The artists are now part of the project and they will become our new ambassadors of Peoria.” Natalia said.

Yaku is a growing, vibrant part of our city’s creative placemaking and you can join in. Like them on Facebook. Donate to the nonprofit organization. Volunteer. Spread the word. Buy the magazine. Attend Yaku’s First Friday pop-up events, and add your name to the growing list of names who yearn to make Peoria the place to die for.

Doug and Eileen Leunig

ARTIST NATALIA VILLANUEVA FINDS HER MEDIUM — PAPER BAGS  
TEXT BY LESLIE RENKEN

for the exhibition *The Taste of Others*, Galerie Fernand Léger, Ivry sur Seine, France, February 02nd 2015

Long before Natalia Villanueva knew she was an artist it was apparent to others.

“People used to tell me, just because of the way I dress, the way I thought, you are an artist, right?” said Villanueva. “I was just 9 or 10 years old.”

Villanueva spoke on Monday morning while sitting in the Prairie Center of the Arts, where she is exhibiting her artwork along with the four other artists in residence there.

Villanueva, who moved to Peoria three years ago, grew up in France and Peru. She began drawing and painting at a young age because she thought that’s what being an artist meant, but she never really connected to the medium.

“I didn’t have the patience for it,” she said. “You have to be in love. I believe a painter is born a painter, and I was definitely not born to be a painter. I was really not in love with it.”

It was not until Villanueva was grown and attending school in Paris that she found her medium.

“They told me to just go find materials and build stuff — they had no idea what they were giving me,” she said. “I started just working and working and I never stopped until today.”

Villanueva later attended the National School of Fine Arts in Paris where she was guided to find her own identity as an artist.

“It is not about pleasing others. It’s about working in a very intimate, personal way until the work is ready to be shared with others,” said Villanueva. “About half of it is for my pleasure, spending time with these materials. And then I am done, and it can be seen by others.”

Villanueva has used a variety of materials to create artwork — envelopes and construction paper, water, ashes, fabric, needles, spools of thread and metal boxes.

“The materials I use are very simple,” she explained. “They are always something that speaks to people, something from their past or their work.”

Villanueva, who uses the name Geamoon (earth moon) when presenting her work, is an installation artist. She creates large, ephemeral artwork that often dominates the room it’s in. “Devota,” the piece currently on display at Prairie Center of the Arts, fills about three-fourths of one large side gallery. Because her work is so large and requires a lot of materials, Villanueva chooses to use things that don’t cost a lot.

“The Dollar Store is one of my favorite places in the world. It’s not very expensive. I was walking around there when I saw them,” she said of a package of brown paper bags.

To Villanueva, the little bags evoke a whole world of symbolic meaning. In the U.S. they are lunch bags, often packed by mom and filled with nourishment. Packing a lunch in those types of bag is a very American custom — in France, people eat at cafeterias, and in Peru, people pack their lunches in re-usable containers because they cannot afford to purchase disposable bags, said Villanueva.

“When I saw those materials, I thought people here are going to be very connected to them,” she said.

The bags also spoke of Peru to the artist. Their texture reminded her of the adobe walls in the tall, ancient temples that dot the landscape. She recalls visiting temple ruins as a child and wondering about the archeological digs where large areas were roped off and inaccessible to visitors, as scientists tried to distill history from the decay.

“It’s very intense, when you grow up in a beautiful place, and you can’t climb them, especially when you are a child,” said Villanueva, who “roped off” her lunch bag temple with a sea of randomly placed paper bags. Some parts of the display are not visible from where visitors stand, leaving room for speculation.

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About 12,000 bags were used in “Devota.” Other than a few well-placed daubs of glue at the corners, there is no support structure for the nine-tiered temple — it is composed solely of paper bags, stacked one layer on top of the other.

“I worked from the inside out,” Villanueva explained. The piece was assembled over four long days with help from friends and her husband, Earl Power Murphy.

Villanueva has exhibited artwork in major cities around the world, including Paris, Los Angeles, Madrid, Chicago and Lima, Peru, but exhibiting in Peoria has special meaning. She moved here three years ago after marrying Murphy. The pair made news last spring when they set up a Indiegogo fundraiser to help restore Hale Memorial Church at the corner of High and Main Streets. Shortly after getting married four years ago the couple purchased the dilapidated church with the plan of creating an international arts center where artists from all over the world could exhibit their work.

“In some ways ‘Devota’ is connected with what’s coming,” said Villanueva. A distillation of impressions from two countries where the artist has lived, the sculpture is the first of many international exhibits Villanueva and Murphy plan to host.

“We hope to bring many artists to Peoria with things that people have not yet seen here,” said Villanueva.

Leslie Renken



YAKU: A NEW FLOW , TEXT BY STEVIE ZVEREVA

for Peoria Magazine, September - October 2014

*A young couple's repurposing of an old church is poised to fuel an international art movement.*

When Earl Power Murphy decided to buy the old Hale Memorial Church at Main and High Street, he had big dreams. A Bradley University undergraduate student at the time, he walked regularly past the stately old church, enamored by its grandiosity and presence. After seeing the potential of the indoor space—and meeting a girl—a grand scheme emerged.

Natalia Villanueva was a third-year student at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France, when Murphy arrived on a two-week study abroad program. When their paths crossed, the connection was immediate. Though it rained every day for the remainder of his visit, the two spent each afternoon walking the city, happily soaked, hand in hand.

“Then... he left,” Villanueva recalls. She jokes of attempts to fit herself in his luggage, but the couple was realistic; he had goals to achieve in life, and I had mine, she explains. As a student immersed in the visual arts, her program was demanding. “Maybe later we’d meet again.”

#### Long-Distance Romance

Just a few weeks after he left, an opportunity arose when Villanueva discovered she could apply for an exchange program abroad. At first set on Japan or New York City, Villanueva shifted gears to follow her heart, settling on the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for its proximity to Peoria. The two reconnected there for a semester, then the relationship turned to Skype.

“It was seven months apart, three months together, then five months apart,” Villanueva details. “We kept that up for two years.” During that time, Murphy pitched his idea.

“He showed me a picture [of the church] and asked, ‘What do you think of buying this with me?’” While some might have thought him mad, Villanueva—an artist to the core—absolutely loved the proposal. Murphy suggested she could make giant installations, joking that she could have the entire space to herself. Whether inspired by that crazy idea or their crazy love, the happy couple married in 2010, and after another year apart—during which Villanueva worked on two extensive exhibitions in the Palais des Beaux Arts, a museum in the heart of Paris—she made the move to Peoria.

#### Diamond in the Rough

“When we bought it, we didn’t really think, ‘Oh, let’s make a cultural center!’” Villanueva explains. But the idea to fill the space developed over time. “It evolved [from] an understanding of a space... for celebrating music, friends and community,” adds Murphy, “into the entire spectrum of the creative experience.”

The church’s layout would seem conducive to the idea. A small stage in the basement is “meant for music,” says Villanueva; the main floor’s great room is ample for large crowds and artwork; and a sizeable balcony serves as additional versatile space—a magnificent locale for a grand cultural center. But peeking into the church today, this vision might seem a stretch from its current state. For starters, it needs a new roof. Two years ago, a large fire ripped a gaping hole through the floor, while birds and other former tenants have also left their mark. “There’s a bunch of debris that just needs to go,” Murphy explains.

With that in mind, the couple’s primary goal is to “bring the building itself to life”—rehabilitating it into a “functioning, welcoming, safe and habitable” state. Last May, they launched a campaign through indiegogo.com to raise funds for restoration and maintenance work. With over \$9,000 raised, they have enough to get started. A company and bid are already secured for the roof, and the pair is now assessing next steps for repairing the floors and doors. “Right now, it’s a shell,” Murphy says. “I like the term ‘repurposing’ rather than ‘restoring.’ It will be a historic building that functions and operates on today’s standards.”

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## Fostering an International Community

The next goal is to fill the space. “Since the beginning of the project, we’ve been creating a collective—a community of artists,” Murphy says. As Villanueva has shared her work around the world, from Paris and Madrid to Lima and Los Angeles, she’s also kindled passion for the church. “We’ve invited many of these people to Peoria. They believe in our project.” Indeed, the artist Coralie Maurin came to Peoria from France to create a short film for the Indiegogo campaign, while others have created a range of art to support the project. The enthusiasm of this community, both locally and abroad, is the impetus behind the organization’s name: Yaku, a Quechuan word meaning “water.”

“We like to think of the church as a seed,” Murphy explains. “All the people who join us are like the water that helps it grow... The organization itself is really just a collective of people—that is the water that, when functioning together, creates this life. This life will primarily take form within the building.”

But first, they must stop the water from flowing into the building—literally. “There’s already too much yaku!” laughs Villanueva, describing the holes in the roof. But once the building is ready, Yaku plans to host two major festivals a year—one inspired by local themes and one sharing an international perspective. The local festival will feature stories of found objects told in new ways, highlighting different perspectives of what is already known locally.

Meanwhile, the international festival will be fueled by a call for proposals from artists around the globe to come to Peoria, learn from our culture and present their work at the church. Villanueva and Murphy envision Yaku as a bridge for developing a cultural and creative exchange of perspectives. “We want to invite people who... don’t know the Midwestern mentality,” Murphy explains. “Bringing [them] here to participate in events that introduce people to these other ways of seeing life through the creative experience... whether it be giant installations that fill the whole building... or a musical movement, performance, or something you physically participate in... There’s a broad spectrum of mediums we can use to facilitate that exchange.”

Villanueva is enthusiastic about the potential for launching an international artist residency program—an idea she recently pitched to a receptive team at her alma mater in Paris—and they’re excited by the prospect of sending artists from France to Peoria each year on two-month student visas. “They’d have a place to live and work, and bikes to get around the city,” she explains. “They’d leave with a taste of the city... and they will always talk about it.” That could have lasting benefits, she suggests. “The business world knows Peoria for Caterpillar, but... we want to make the international art world know Peoria through the church.”

## Up for the Challenge

The enormous task of launching Yaku isn’t daunting to Villanueva and Murphy, who both seem to thrive under the weight of fulfilling lofty dreams. As a child growing up in Peru, Villanueva’s artistic ambitions weren’t always understood.

“For some people, being an artist meant being a painter,” she smiles. “It meant being Leonardo da Vinci or Rubens or Picasso. It was like, ‘Oh, you’re going to be Picasso? Hahaha. You’re going to be a starving artist.’” Still, she held onto her “outlandish” dream—to attend fine arts school in Paris—and worked hard to make it happen. At the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, she specialized in visual arts, developing an understanding of space.

“The types of work I do, I would call them ‘moments,’” she says. “I create giant or tiny moments... most of the time I use materials you can find in your everyday life. I transform them with repetitive gestures and effort to awaken the viewer’s curiosity.”

Villanueva’s work is primarily installation-based, Murphy explains. “If you think of an art gallery, it’s usually white walls, white ceiling, grey floors and sterile lights. The space is pretty much erased. Then on the wall, there’s a painting, or something like a sculpture in the middle of the room... In installation work, the piece is built to the space. So rather than... focusing on one element, the entire space becomes the element.”

Some of Villanueva’s previous installations were large enough to take over a room and consume all perception, physically enveloping viewers so they become a part of the piece themselves. “You have to consider everything as space—the weather, the people, the smells, the colors, the size... and the works are made related to the space,” says Villanueva.

Murphy, too, enjoys a challenge. At District 150’s Woodruff Career and Technical Center, he teaches a classroom of K-3 students who were all asked to leave their former classes for disciplinary reasons. His passion for teaching runs deep; future plans include a PhD with a focus on curriculum and school development. Describing how their plans fit

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with what's become a second full-time job with Yaku, he explains, "We're happy to be the founders and organizers and bridgers... but the idea is that Yaku is a community-organized foundation." While they will stay closely involved, the couple hopes community engagement will lead to a multi-generational platform, with infrastructure and values easily passed on to others as leaders and participants.

## Engaging the Flow

Villanueva and Murphy are busy with plans for a series of "teaser" installations before Yaku holds its first large festival in a few years. The two are purposefully vague on the details of upcoming artwork, adamant that everyone experience the moments for themselves, but they promise that "when it happens, it will leave quite an impression."

They hope these teaser installations will give Peoria a taste of what Yaku plans to offer and build credibility for long-term support. "We have the people, we have the place, we have the will... We just need the financial support," says Villanueva. "[Yaku] already has international support... We want to create a balance so people in Peoria know about it, too."

Murphy says one of Yaku's greatest challenges is how best to introduce this new international spirit and arts movement to Peoria. Numerous efforts continue to help their cause—from the growth of First Fridays to the redevelopment of the Warehouse District to recent projects along Main Street. "A lot of it has the same goals in mind," he says.

"The local community has been very supportive," adds Villanueva. "They always create room for this project because it's a building that's been a part of their lives... They want to see it happen. They know, too, that the organization is bringing something that's never existed in the city.

"Not everyone's attached to art, and not everyone has art in their lives—that is who we are working for. We want to create an environment that is welcoming to all, one that makes the creative and aesthetic experience inviting. We know there's a large amount of people who would like to participate, but don't know how. We're building a platform for people who really want to engage in the evolution of culture in their city." a&s

Stevie Zvereva

## LES SOEURS AIGÜES DU GRAND COLORIAL

A solo show of the artworks by **Natalia Villanueva Linares**  
March 15th – April 26th 2014

Geamoon (Natalia Villanueva Linares), born in 1982, is a French-peruvian artist, graduated from the ENSBA. She lives and works in Paris and Peoria, ILL (USA) where, since 2011, she transforms an abandoned church into a cultural center.

Exhausted materials: ashes, dust, powders, and others travel through the work of Geamoon; they are shared as traces of objects that she will not let us see. Her exhibition, mysteriously titled, "The High pitch sisters of the great Colorial" does not escape her constant oscillation between revelation and concealment.

We would be deeply mistaken if we would try to find in the objects used by the artist – needles, thread spools... – a sign of a passion for homemaking; these materials are all primarily reflections on loss, repetition, and accumulation. In *Sister n°0*, focusing attention on the fragile, fine materials, seemingly of grand simplicity, she tries, in a balancing perspective, to combine the progressive stripping of spools, towards the colorless heart of wood or plastic, with the unveiling of their cottony substance. Undoing what has been done, she patiently redefines; cutting after cutting, strand by strand, a new history is written as the little things are slowly exhausted.

The idea of reading is also at the origin of High pitch, whose title refers both to the threading of needles in the creation of the work and the subdued violence they imply. On the blank journals pages, words have been stitched by the artist, aided by thousands of metallic needles, those usually used to sew on a button. All the similarities and all the differences, each pierces the light and frail-looking paper; stitch after stitch the paper curls and carries on unspoken. By their sides, a little metal box presents the epilogue of High pitch: hundreds of quarrelling needles, seemingly untidy, are waiting to reinvent the story that is written here, without spool or seam.

Boxes occupy a special part in the works of the young artist; she does not hesitate to hide her work away from her own view, locking up her *Mood/Bad/Drawings* in wooden cases once completed. In the exhibition, *Sisters 1-10* also plays with our ability to accept the unseen; from each colored metal box emerges about ten colored threads uniting above at one unique point. At eye level, no spool can be seen; Geamoon is undoubtedly a sorceress, she is one who cuts silk threads in front of our eyes only to return them to us as whole, and leaves them to unwind endlessly.

Camille Paulhan, translated by Lrae