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BREAKING THE FRAME:

ART IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Development Studies

at Massey University, Turitea,

New Zealand.

by

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Abstract

In the last 15 years, development donors have begun to fund the arts in the South in response to development’s ‘cultural turn’ that urged a more holistic approach to development practice. However, conceptions of art’s agency in the context of development remain highly varied. Donors with an instrumental approach claim that the arts contribute to such extra-artistic outcomes as post-conflict peace-building, effective communication of educational messages, and economic growth through cultural tourism and through the creative industries. Other donors argue that the cultural sector provides a critical public space important to the development of more just and democratic societies. Some postcolonial critics go further, arguing that the critical agency of art in the South lies in its ability to stand as an alternative imaginative space to development, one not reduced to development’s crises and deficiencies, and one from which alternative cultural imaginings can be constructed by those usually framed as the ‘subjects of development’. This thesis responds to this latter claim by exploring the possibilities of this somewhat paradoxical question: to what extent can development funding support artistic processes that construct an alternative imaginative space to development itself?

This question is explored through a grounded case study of one highly dynamic contemporary artist-led initiative based in Managua, Nicaragua, but operating throughout Central America. The organisation, called EspIRA/La ESPORA, was founded in 2005 and has received almost all of its funding from development donors to date. In all of the claims for art’s agency listed above, the voices of artists themselves are missing. The close examination of EspIRA/La ESPORA reveals the range and complexity of the agency that these artists claim for their own practices, in relationship to context(s) that they conceive as multi-scalar. It also reveals the practices through which donors appear able to support the resistant and constructive forms of agency suggested by postcolonial critics, as well as the practices and policies through which donors reinscribe development’s dominance as a signifying framework. Finally, the thesis draws out particularly productive tensions in the relationship between art and development that emerge from this analysis, and that offer opportunities to deepen the donor community’s critical engagement with art and with artists in the South.
Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed either directly or indirectly to the production of this thesis, and I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have taken the time and the care to support this work. In particular I acknowledge here my deep gratitude to Patricia Belli, founder of EspIRA/La ESPORA, for her warmth and openness towards myself and the idea of this research. Her clarity of insight and incisive humour have been constant sources of inspiration, challenge and enjoyment. If I had half a million dollars to buy her a building, I’d do it tomorrow. In a different capacity I want to acknowledge the tremendous support of my parents Angela and Peter, and sister Nina, whose tireless and devoted support has helped me in many ways to meet the considerable demands of solo-parenting and thesis completion. Warm thanks to my final two supervisors Brennon Wood and Glenn Banks who helped me to define, refine and solidify my argument. Finally, profound thanks to my daughter Clara for her sheer joy, and for reminding me, every day, of what fresh thinking really is.

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I must also, sadly, acknowledge the recent passing of David Craven and Virginia Pérez-Ratton – two outstanding documenters and promoters of Central American art, whose ideas this thesis dialogues with. Their untimely passing is a tremendous loss.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AECID</td>
<td>Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross National Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IADB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Master of Fine Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MUA</td>
<td>Mujeres en las Artes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NORAD</td>
<td>Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZAID</td>
<td>New Zealand Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFAI</td>
<td>San Francisco Art Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TfD</td>
<td>Theatre for Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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