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BREAKING THE FRAME:
ART IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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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.

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List of Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GNI	Gross National Income
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MFA	Master of Fine Arts
MUA	Mujeres en las Artes
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SFAI	San Francisco Art Institute
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TfD	Theatre for Development
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development