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Carolina Larrosa
El agua entre nosotros es un ser
("The Water Between Us is a Being")

Fifty pounds of water. Fifty pounds of memories.

Reflecting simultaneously on a moment, on an object and on a feeling, *El agua entre nosotros es un ser* ("The Water Between Us is a Being"), is a performative piece by Montreal-based and Miami-based interdisciplinary artist Carolina Larrosa. This inexplicable feeling is one shared by expatriates, particularly when preparing a *maleta*, a suitcase, to send off to their loved ones at home. The piece works as an installation as well as a performance and uses humble materials such as a tall wooden structure, a mop, both built by the artist, a hook scale, a bucket, water, plastic wrapper, and of course, a *maleta*. Through the materials and actions in the space, Larrosa generates familiar emotions for the Latinx audience while presenting new perspectives to the Canadian public about migration, diaspora and bodies of water.

When Larrosa places a bucket of water on the floor, she places memory, history, and culture. The water, most specifically the water of the Caribbean, carries unmeasurable significance and metaphors for those who have seen themselves, or their loved ones, crossing bodies of water to escape a harsh reality. The water is a separation, but also a connexion. It is a being, a carrier of migratory stories and lives, healing rituals and new beginnings. Like the water between Cuba and Miami, Larrosa's piece is a bridge for a multifaceted diaspora.

Measuring and weighing are mandatory procedures when travelling. There is a maximum of luggage weight per person that can be taken from and to a place. In migration instances, it becomes about the weight of a new life, how much it is worth. For instance, Cuba-Miami flights permit 50 pounds per

person; the symbolic act of balancing the *maleta* to those exact 50 pounds reflects on those tense moments every time she prepares a package.

Larrosa reverses the process and puts only water inside the *maleta* and wraps it several times as a ritual of healing and love for herself, her family and the water she respects. She remembers every time she has had to prepare a *maleta* with necessities that are not accessible or affordable nowadays in Cuba, such as soap, coffee and clothing. The familiar gestures of her performance: the lifting, the taking-out, the putting-in, the weighting, the wrapping, and the sending away reverberates within every viewer having a similar migration experience

When she thinks about materials and objects to convey her experiences as a child of immigrants, she thinks in the same way she has learned to speak: in *Spanglish*, a hybrid language which translates humbly in her pieces through objects that she builds herself. These hybrid objects are created for her to talk about complex subjects, like the multifaceted diaspora of Cubans in Miami.

To create hybrid objects as pieces of art is to think about all the things Carolina knows from her Cuban roots but do not exist in her Miami reality, and vice versa. Like *La trapeadora*, which is unique to latinx countries, cannot be found north of the Caribbean. Another presented object is the traditional travel souvenir like keychains and fridge magnets, sold in La Havana, and are typically carved in leather or wood. Visitors buy them to remember the beaches and the sun, but the only things Larrosa thinks of is the labor and poverty they stand for. She incorporated the souvenirs' aesthetic into her work by carving the recognizable merchandised branding, *Hecho en Cuba* (Made in Cuba,) into two pieces of wood that she transformed into now a hybrid *trapeadora*. This hybridized tool is used to clean the floor during the performance and to delimit the space between her and the audience.

In this piece, water serves as a being of power and meaning that transforms the gallery into a liminal space, a space of transition that becomes

a moment suspended in time for every *maleta* she has sent away to never see come back. For every immigrant traversing bodies of water, for every family looking at the blue horizon and thinking about their loved ones on the other side, this liminal space is one of no return.

When Larrosa builds the tall wooden structure to hold her hybrid object, she thinks about her father. The strong structure replaces him and honours him. He, who has taught her about resourcefulness, humility and creativity as the shadow of need, as said by the artist, is now symbolically represented by the imposing sculpture. It helps her hold the *maleta* to weigh it before sending it at its capacity to their family as an act of care. The intimacy of this memory is experienced by the audience and the artist as a suspended moment between quotidianity and (un)measurable love in the lives of the diaspora because, after all, migrating is also an act of care.